

Growing Up in Scotland – 2009 – Topic Research Findings

Growing Up in Scotland (GUS): Multiple Childcare Provision and its Effect on Child Outcomes Summary Report

The Growing Up in Scotland Study

The Growing Up in Scotland Study (GUS) is an important longitudinal research project aimed at tracking the lives of a cohort of Scottish children from the early years, through childhood and beyond. The study is funded by the Scottish Government and carried out by the Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotCen). Its principal aim is to provide information to support policy-making, but it is also intended to be a broader resource that can be drawn on by academics, voluntary sector organisations and other interested parties. Focusing initially on a cohort of 5,217 children aged 0-1 years old (birth cohort) and a cohort of 2,859 children aged 2-3 years old (child cohort), the first wave of fieldwork began in April 2005.

Background to Report

This document is one of a series that summarises key findings from the third sweep of the survey which was launched in April 2007.

It presents key findings from the Growing Up in Scotland study (GUS) report *Multiple Childcare Provision and its Effects on Child Outcomes*. The report uses data from the first three sweeps of GUS to explore families' experiences of using childcare for children under the age of five years. The study provides an unparalleled source of evidence to improve

our understanding of early years childcare provision and are from the perspective of parents. The report focuses particularly on families' use of multiple childcare providers, using the data from the first three sweeps of the Growing Up in Scotland study, examining the nature and extent of multiple use and the potential effects of early multi-provider care on later child outcomes at age 34 months and 58 months.



Introduction

The early years childcare policy model that has evolved over the last decade is that of maternal care for the first year, supported by up to one year of maternity leave and, since April 2007, nine months of maternity pay, and a mixed economy of childcare, including informal, voluntary, private and statutory providers, and culminating in universal funded part-time pre-school education for children aged 3 and 4. Scotland made early moves to expand nursery provision and has sought to achieve an ambitious, comprehensive cross-sectoral integration of early years services. The complex patterns of childcare use evident amongst families with young children have led to some concern around the 'fragmentation' of childcare and its potential effects on child outcomes and parental satisfaction with arrangements. Thus it is important to assess the impact of these policies and patterns of provision, not least through robust evidence of the experience and views of users, and to consider the issues these raise.

Prevalence of childcare

At each sweep of fieldwork, parents are asked about any regular childcare they use for the cohort child. Childcare is defined as care provided by anyone other than the respondent or his or her partner. Trends in use of childcare, and in differences in multiple provision were explored using this data.

- Most families use childcare in the early years and a sizeable minority of parents in both cohorts report using multiple childcare providers at each sweep.
- In the birth cohort, use of multiple providers increased as the child aged. At age 0-1, 27% of families using childcare used two providers and 4% used three or more. At age 2-3, 34% used two providers and 8% used three or more.
- Amongst the child cohort, peak use of multiple provision coincided with the child's attendance at their statutory pre-school place at age 3-4. At age 2-3, 32% of families using childcare used two providers and 7% used three or more. These figures rose to 39% and 20% respectively at age 3-4.
- Parental employment in itself, and in combination with family type, affects use of multiple providers. Households where the child's mother was employed are more likely to use multiple childcare providers than those where the mother is not employed. Lone parents where the parent works report higher use of multiple provision than do unemployed lone parents and couple families where both parents work.

- Use of multiple providers over time is fairly common. Amongst those who had ever used two or more providers, 72% in the child cohort and 65% in the birth cohort had done so at any two or more sweeps including 38% and 29% who reported use of 2 or more providers at all sweeps.

Characteristics of childcare provision

A range of details are also collected about childcare arrangements. These include: the type of provision (e.g. nursery, childminder, grandparents), the number of hours and days per week the child attends and cost. This information was combined to explore differences in the characteristics of childcare experienced by children attending different numbers of providers. Parents' satisfaction with their arrangements, and their perceived degree of choice in choosing childcare was also explored according to the number of providers being used.

- Higher durations of weekly childcare are associated with use of more childcare providers. In the birth cohort at sweep 1, whereas 25% of those using childcare for between 9 and 16 hours per week receive that care from two or more providers, the same is true for 38% of those who use childcare for between 17 and 40 hours.
- Longer durations do not always necessitate multiple provision and neither do shorter durations necessarily result in single provision. In some cases, families using short durations of weekly childcare rely on several providers and those with longer durations use only a single provider.
- At each sweep, the majority of children who have 3 or more childcare arrangements experience a mix of informal and formal provision in these arrangements with the proportion experiencing this mix increasing as the children age (in the birth cohort, 56% at sweep 1, 78% at sweep 2, 85% at sweep 3).
- Parents who use more than one provider are more likely to pay for at least some of their child's childcare than parents using one provider. This reflects the greater likelihood that multiple users will use formal provision which requires payment, unlike many informal arrangements which are 'cost free' to parents. However, parents using multiple providers do not necessarily incur higher childcare costs overall owing to the particular mix and duration of provision and use across all families.

- Levels of satisfaction with their main childcare provider, preferences for changing the main provider, and perceptions of the level of choice when choosing a childcare provider do not vary significantly amongst parents who use different numbers of childcare providers.
- There were no significant differences either between how easy users of one or multiple childcare providers had found it to arrange suitable childcare for the cohort child in the last year

Effects of multiple childcare use on child outcomes

The vast majority of the existing research literature on the impact of childcare and early years education on child outcomes has focussed on outcomes within two broad developmental areas: language and cognitive development; and social, behavioural and emotional development. Using data from the two cohorts of Growing Up in Scotland, it is possible to explore outcomes in the pre-school years in each of these areas. For the birth cohort, information is available on cognitive ability at age 34 months whereas for the child cohort, data on social, emotional and behavioural development is available at ages 46 months and 58 months.

For the birth cohort, analysis was undertaken to explore the independent association between various features of childcare arrangements experienced at age 10 months, including use of multiple providers, on cognitive development at age 34 months whilst controlling for key socio-economic characteristics which are known to influence cognitive ability in the early years.

- The analysis shows that of the various childcare characteristics at age 10 months considered, only weekly duration of non-parental care had any statistically significant association with the child's cognitive ability at age 34 months after controlling for key family socio-economic and demographic factors; non-parental care of between 17 and 40 hours per week was found to have a significant positive impact on a child's knowledge of vocabulary specifically amongst girls.
- The characteristics of childcare arrangements in the first year of life which could be considered to describe 'childcare fragmentation' – exposure to multiple providers, a greater mix of provision, and less time with any single provider – do not impact positively or negatively on child cognitive development at age 34 months.

For the child cohort, the association between childcare features at age 34 months and behavioral development at age 58 months was explored.

- The analysis showed that after controlling for key family characteristics such as parental education levels and parental employment, experiencing 40 hours or more of care per week at age 34 months was detrimental to children's behavioural outcomes as they approached their fifth birthday. Further analysis suggested this relationship was significant particularly for girls and for children whose mothers were under 25 at the child's birth. No other childcare features were significant.

Conclusion

The picture presented by the data of childcare use by parents of young children in Scotland does suggest a degree of 'childcare fragmentation'; use of multiple providers is fairly common, as is use of a combination of formal and informal provider types and using different providers for different durations of care. Furthermore, all of these arrangements do change over time for some families.

This complex pattern of childcare arrangements may suggest some cause for concern, however there is no data to suggest either that parents are particularly dissatisfied with their arrangements - parents who use different numbers of childcare providers were no more likely to be dissatisfied with their main childcare provider, nor to have a preference for changing their main provider, or to perceive they had less choice when choosing childcare provider than did parents using just a single provider - nor that experiencing multiple provision or a mix of provision per se has any particular positive or negative impact on child cognitive or behavioural outcomes at 34 and 58 months.

In fact, children's experience of non-parental childcare in the early years appears to be generally beneficial to their cognitive development on the basis of the outcome measures used in GUS, although the effects are not large.

Further information on the Growing Up in Scotland study can also be found at: www.growingupinscotland.org.uk

If you wish further copies of this Research Findings or have any enquiries about the GUS project, please contact:

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Or visit our Website: www.scotland.gov.uk/insight

The research findings and the main report can be viewed on the Internet at:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Research/by-topic/children-and-young-people/publications>

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