



Family Life in Scotland

Main findings of a survey of Scottish adults for

Parenting Across Scotland

MORI
SCOTLAND

Introduction

Parenting Across Scotland (PAS) is a multi-agency project financed by the Scottish Executive and led by CHILDREN 1ST with a remit to research the concerns and issues affecting parents and to identify gaps in the support available to parents. It does this by bringing together agencies that provide support to parents and families, sharing good practice and promoting a positive image of parenting.

PAS commissioned MORI Scotland to undertake a short survey of adults in Scotland. The survey was designed to collect information on family life in Scotland and involved interviews with a nationally-representative sample of 1,000 adults across Scotland conducted by MORI's specialist telephone interviewing centre in Edinburgh.

Key findings

- 1 in 5 households in Scotland currently contain children under the age of 16 years.
- Including children of all ages, over two-thirds of adults have a parental role.
- 1 in 10 households contain step-children, adopted children or other children.
- A majority of people think that children can be brought up just as well by one parent.
- Just over half said there was someone other than their parents who had an important influence on their upbringing.
- Over two-thirds of adults think it is harder to bring up children now than it was when they were young.
- Over half of parents of children under the age of 16 years worry about how good a parent they are.
- A majority of all adults agree that there is too much emphasis on punishing parents rather than supporting families in bringing up children.
- 1 in 5 parents of teenagers said they had experienced problems with their children and they thought they needed help.
- Over two-thirds of adults were not aware of any organisations that provide advice and support to parents.
- Over two-thirds of adults agreed that balancing work and home life puts too much pressure on people.

Family structures

The survey found that almost 70% of adults in Scotland have a direct parental relationship with either children of their own, step-children, adopted children or grandchildren living in their home. Eighty-six per cent of these adults only have children where they are the natural parent. The remainder have step-children,

adopted and other children along with children they are the parent of. Just over 10% of households with any children under the age of 16 years have a mix of birth, step-, adopted and other children within them.

Extended families living in the same household are very rare, only 1% of respondents were living in a household with three or more generations i.e. grandparent, parent and child.

The traditional nuclear family – parents with their own children – represents the large majority of households containing dependent children (aged less than 16 years).

Changes in families over time

Respondents were asked to think back about their living circumstances when they were 12 years old. Since respondents varied in age, this fixed point provides an indication of how things have changed over time. Some respondents would have been 12 before or during WW2, others would have been 12 years old in more recent periods. The proportion saying they were living with both of their birth parents at the age of 12 years declines from over 80% of adults who were 12 before 1970 to around 60% of adults who were aged 12 within the last 10 years.

Among those who were not living with both birth parents, the most common situation was to be living with their mother. Overall, 69% of those not living with both birth parents were living with their mother. This has changed substantially over time. Among those who were 12 years old before 1962, 60% were living with their mother. Among respondents who were 12 years old after 1981, this rose to 83%. The increasing proportion living with their mother is accompanied by a decline in the proportion living with their grandparents from 24% to 6%.

As well as the people they lived with when they were 12 years old, respondents were asked about other important influences on their upbringing. This could involve another relative or someone outside the family such as a neighbour or teacher. Just over half of respondents said there was someone who had had an important influence, with half mentioning a family member such as a grandparent, aunt or uncle. Outside the family, school teachers were the most commonly mentioned influence although while 16% of the oldest respondents mentioned a school teacher only 3% of the youngest respondents did so.

Pressures on family life

Over two-thirds of respondents thought that, compared with when they were young – 12 years old – it is now more difficult to bring up children. This varied substantially depending on the period during which respondents were 12 years old, with respondents who were young during and in the period after the Second World War most likely to think that it is harder to bring up children now than it was then.

The reasons why people think it has become more difficult also varied substantially. Older respondents – those most likely to think that it had become

more difficult to bring up children – were more likely to explain this in terms of children not respecting adults' authority, being opinionated and argumentative. The main reason given by younger respondents – those who were aged 12 in the 1960s, 70s and 80s – was that parents are under more pressure to buy things now than they were when they were young.

Broadly, four identifiable themes of materialism and financial pressure, discipline, children's safety and work-life balance represent the main reasons why people think it has become more difficult to bring up children.

A relatively small proportion of respondents – 17% – felt that it had become easier to bring up children compared with when they were young. Two main reasons were given: families' economic circumstances have improved (they have more money, there is less unemployment) and there are more options for childcare and other forms of support for families.

Overall, the things that respondents felt were most important in bringing up children well were stability in their family life, love and affection and discipline.

Bringing up children is a major source of anxiety for parents. While it might be expected that parents will worry at some time about how good a parent they are, 39% said they worry 'all the time' or 'quite a lot' about how good a parent they are. Over half of parents of children under the age of 16 worry 'all the time', 'quite a lot' or 'sometimes' about how good a parent they are.

When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements about society's attitudes towards and support for parents, the survey found that a majority agree that there is too much emphasis on punishing parents rather than supporting families in bringing up children. Almost all agreed that 'love is the most important ingredient in family relationships'. A majority of all adults (59%) agreed that children can be brought up just as well by one parent as two, with a higher proportion, 68% of lone parents themselves agreeing with this. There was also widespread support for the statement that 'balancing work and home life puts too much pressure on people', with 71% of all adults and 75% of parents agreeing with this.

Parents' experience of problems with their children

Respondents with some kind of parental responsibilities were asked if they had ever experienced problems with their children when they (or their partner) felt they needed help. Of respondents with teenage children, 21% said they had compared with 18% of all parents and 10% of parents whose children were now over 16 years.

Although the teenage years represent the main period during which parents experienced problems where they thought they needed help, sizeable proportions also experienced problems at other periods, mainly in the period when their children were under 10 years of age.

The problems that respondents had experienced when they thought they needed help can be classified into six broad themes of which the most significant was physical or mental health problems, followed by problems of schoolwork, bullying or truancy and drinking, using drugs or involvement in crime.

Broadly, respondents sought help from professionals such as doctors, teachers, social workers and health visitors. The prevalence of medical problems explains why 26% sought help from a GP/doctor. Similarly, 19% sought help from a teacher. On other issues, however, respondents experiencing problems with their children sought help from other family members or friends. Almost 1 in 10 did not seek help at all.

Support organisations were accessed by 7% of respondents experiencing problems, 3% mentioned a counsellor and 1% mentioned each of a spiritual advisor or a helpline.

When asked how they might seek help in similar circumstances in the future (or if such a situation arose in the future) the respondents who had experienced problems in the past were more likely to seek help from professionals such as doctors, teachers, social workers and health visitors. Respondents who had not previously sought help would turn to family members, particularly parents and siblings. Support organisations, counsellors and help lines were mentioned by only 4% of respondents in this context.

When asked specifically if they were aware of any organisations that provide advice and support to parents, 71% were not aware of any and only 24% could name any organisations. There were few mentions of any individual organisation.

When presented with options for different ways in which support could be provided to parents there was widespread agreement that each would be of benefit. There is a clear tendency for parents who had experienced problems to seek help within their immediate family and friendship network or through specific types of professional help. It may be fair to assume that those who had not experienced problems would also be expected to use these forms of support. There is a general lack of awareness of parental support organisations but the support expressed in these questions indicates a demand for accessible services appropriate to the needs, ages and location of families across Scotland.

	Very useful	Fairly useful	Not at all useful	Don't know
A telephone helpline	47	35	15	3
An internet site giving information and advice	29	39	24	9
Booklets or leaflets	22	53	22	2
A service providing face-to-face advice and information	49	40	9	3
A service providing support and counselling for parents	43	43	10	4
Organised activities to occupy children and young people	68	24	5	3
Specialist services for children and young people in need	66	25	4	5