



Directors summary

We are very excited to release the first results from *Growing Up in New Zealand*, the 21st century longitudinal study of New Zealand children and their families. The information collected from families before their children are born clearly paints a picture of a changing New Zealand.

The participants of this longitudinal study are being born into a culturally and structurally diverse New Zealand, with many of their parents having moved here only in their adult years. Our children also have diverse socioeconomic realities (with many being born into families and neighbourhoods that experience high levels of deprivation), and their parents have varied intentions for their care arrangements in the future.

Cutting across the diversity of the families in this study are remarkably similar aspirations of parents for their children. They hope that their children will grow up healthy and happy in New Zealand. They want their children to be able to follow their dreams in a society that they will contribute to, and which in turn will respect and value their diversity.

Information from the first of many interviews in this study challenges much of our traditional rhetoric about growing up in New Zealand. These early findings also challenge us all to consider how we can ensure that these children will be able to achieve their dreams as they grow into our future adults.

We would like to thank the government for their foresight in terms of enabling this new study to begin and for supporting it throughout its early phases. Our ongoing partnership with multiple agencies is especially important to ensure that the stories of all our families are represented at the policy table.

Summary of study approach

Growing Up in New Zealand is a longitudinal study that provides an up-to-date, population relevant picture of what it is like to be a child growing up in New Zealand in the 21st century. It is the first longitudinal study of its kind that has recruited and collected information from both mothers and their partners from before children are born. It is unique in terms of its capacity to provide a comprehensive picture of child development across

multiple domains of influence for all current children born in New Zealand, and for including significant numbers of our Māori, Pacific and Asian children as well as our European and other New Zealanders.

There are clear inequalities in health and education-related outcomes within our population, with poorer outcomes in general for our Māori and Pacific children and their families and for those living in socioeconomic deprivation. Despite attempts to remediate these differences in outcomes over several decades, inequalities often remain and in many cases they have widened. It is not enough to simply describe these differences. The information provided by our families in *Growing Up in New Zealand* over time is designed to give us a more complete picture of the pathways that lead to differential outcomes, and to provide much better evidence for the development of strategies to reduce inequalities and to improve outcomes for all children.

From its inception the study has been explicitly designed to follow children from before birth until they are young adults, to understand 'what works' for our children and families (rather than primarily focusing on negative outcomes) and to consider pathways of development across multiple domains of influence. This will allow a much better understanding of the complex interplay of all the factors that lead to child outcomes including their growth, their health, their behaviours and their cognitive development. The model of child development shaping this study is always child-centred, but never forgets that children develop in dynamic interactions with their families, communities, environments and societal contexts over time. This conceptual approach to the study acknowledges the growth in our understanding of early child development in the last few decades, with an increasing recognition of the importance of the antenatal period and the first few years of life for shaping future developmental pathways for our children.

The drive for a new longitudinal study to provide up-to-date, population relevant evidence about our children growing up in New Zealand, to understand the developmental environment for our increasingly diverse population, and to build on the success and proven value of earlier New Zealand longitudinal studies, has been championed by the Ministry of Social Development.

This Ministry, together with those of Health and Education, the Treasury, and the Families Commission, originally sought a research group to develop a new longitudinal study in late 2004. Throughout the development phase (2005-2007) and since the 2008 launch of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* study, several other agencies have also contributed to the study sustainability. These include the Ministries of Justice, Pacific Island Affairs, Te Puni Kokiri, Research Science and Technology, Housing New Zealand, Sport and Recreation New Zealand, the Children's Commission, New Zealand Police, Statistics New Zealand, the Department of Labour and the Office of Ethnic Affairs. The research team has worked with all these stakeholders (and many other policy development agencies) to ensure that this study has been designed and implemented appropriately to inform effective and efficient cross-sectoral policy that addresses the specific needs of our population now and into the future. This engagement with policy makers from the outset is also a novel feature of this longitudinal study.

Focus on the Antenatal Data Collection Wave

The recruitment of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* children and their families, and the collection of baseline information from before the children's births has established the foundations of a valuable resource with both immediate salience and future potential.

In particular:

- *Growing Up in New Zealand* has recruited a unique cohort of children and their families that is able to provide population-relevant contemporary information about what it is like to grow up in New Zealand in the 21st century. No other study or data source is able to do similarly;
- the recruited cohort represents the diversity of our current New Zealand families having children. In particular it reflects their economic and socioeconomic diversity;
- *Growing Up in New Zealand* has recruited more fathers (and partners) from the outset than any previous longitudinal study from before birth;

- the recruited cohort of children is broadly generalisable to all the children currently being born in New Zealand.

The findings of these first antenatal interviews thus provide an accurate snapshot of the context which all our babies are being born into, and the hopes and aspirations of New Zealand parents for their children born today. This multidisciplinary evidence collected from the families is a treasure, and over time with the increasing involvement of the children themselves, this study will allow for the development of strategic policies and interventions that are effective, efficient, and truly targeted to the needs of our current population.

Key findings from before birth

The key findings summarised here are also detailed throughout the report, and illustrated with common quotations from interview participants.

Of greatest salience is the increasing diversity of our families, and their children, who will become our adult New Zealanders in less than two decades. These families are very different from those of previous generations, and vastly different from those families involved in earlier longitudinal studies undertaken in this country.

In particular:

- the mean age of mothers and fathers having children is increasing. Whilst we continue to see a high rate of teenage pregnancy in New Zealand, the average age of parents having children in New Zealand (first or subsequent) is now greater than 30 years;
- 1 in 3 of our children is born to at least one parent who did not grow up in New Zealand themselves and who may have only been in New Zealand for a short time before their child is born;
- whilst 90% of the relationships between mothers and fathers of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* children are stable during pregnancy, just 60% of all relationships are legally binding. For 1 in 10 children the relationship between their parents will change significantly between the beginning of the pregnancy and their birth;
- most mothers are living with another adult during their pregnancy, usually their partners (80%), but increasingly our children are being born into varied family structures including mothers living with extended families (nearly 24% overall and more than half of all Pacific families), with non-kin (3% overall but greater than 10% for Asian mothers) or without other adults (3% overall but 7% for Māori mothers).

The home environments that the children are being born into are also increasingly diverse. Specifically:

- only 80% of the households that our children are being born into use English as their primary language for everyday conversations. The remaining 20% use a wide range of languages for everyday conversations, although the majority of parents are also able to converse in English;
- 1 in 3 of the homes where children will grow up has at least one parent who is multilingual;
- only 1 in 20 of the children's parents are able to converse in te reo Māori which raises concerns about maintenance of this unique resource for our future generations.

Household resources for families of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* children are often limited. Four out of every 10 of our children are being born into a family living in the most deprived areas of New Zealand (NZDep2006) categories 8 through 10). This is not just a feature of this cohort but is typical of all families currently having children in New Zealand according to the most recent routine birth statistics. In addition:

- almost half of all families are living in rental accommodation when their child is born;
- perhaps in part related to housing tenure, our families are highly mobile with over half of all families moving more than twice in the last five years;
- the majority of the mothers of the children being born are in paid employment towards the end of their pregnancy, regardless of whether this is their first or a subsequent child, and most intend to return to work after their child is born;
- both mothers and partners would like to take more leave than they feel they are able to take in the first months after their child is born. Mothers would like their leave to be twice as long as the 8 months (on average) they are able to take, whereas partners would like to take a few extra weeks;
- many parents in the most deprived areas were not aware of either Paid Parental Leave or Working for Families tax credits. This is disappointing given that these are the families who probably require this additional support most.

In terms of the pregnancies themselves for the mothers of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* children, 60% were reported to be planned and over half of the children in

the cohort will have older siblings, with the overall size of the families they are born into most likely to have 2 or 3 children including them, rather than 4 or more. During pregnancy most mothers were able to find a Lead Maternity Carer reasonably quickly in their pregnancy and few had problems registering with their first choice of maternity carer.

In terms of behaviours in pregnancy there are an increasing number of guidelines provided to mothers. However, it is clear that not all mothers follow all the guidelines, especially with respect to food and drink. In particular:

- over 90% of mothers did make changes to their diet in pregnancy, most frequently avoiding alcohol, caffeine and raw or highly processed foods. However, a considerable number continued to eat these items and consume alcohol in pregnancy;
- mothers who reported their pregnancies were unplanned were less likely to take folate in the first trimester of their pregnancy than mothers with a planned pregnancy. However, 16% of all mothers did not take folate at any time before or during their pregnancy;
- despite a reduction in smoking rates overall during pregnancy, more than 1 in 10 mothers continued to smoke, with an over-representation of smokers in mothers who identified as Māori and those who lived in the most deprived areas;
- mothers who were physically active prior to their pregnancy were most likely to continue to exercise throughout their pregnancy whereas mothers who were not physically active prior to pregnancy were highly unlikely to take up exercise at any time during their pregnancy.

The diversity of behaviours in pregnancy (relating to diet, alcohol, smoking, and physical activity) across all mothers will allow us to determine what effect adherence and non-adherence to specific guidelines have on children's outcomes at birth and as they grow up over time. We also asked partners independently if they made similar changes to their behaviours during their partner's pregnancy, which has not been done previously. This provides unique additional information to determine whether shifts in partners' behaviours assist mothers to make lifestyle changes during pregnancy.

As well as asking about parental background, current family structure, and describing the neighbourhoods and environments that our children would be exposed to after

birth, we were also interested in parental plans for their babies after they were born. In particular we asked about plans for early feeding, childhood immunisation, early care of children, and how parents expected their children to identify themselves. Specifically:

- parental intentions for the ethnic identity of their children were more diverse than the ethnic identities identified by the parents themselves. This largely reflects the mixed ethnicity of the parents and their wishes for their children to identify with all the ethnicities that they identify with. The evolution of ethnic identity will be a key trajectory that is followed for these children over time, and the children will be able to express their own opinions about their own identities as they grow up;
- the majority of mothers and partners intend that their child will be breastfed until they are at least 6 months of age. This would translate into higher rates of breastfeeding than we currently see in our population, so there are likely to be mitigating factors that influence future practice. We will be able to determine these factors further over time;
- the majority of mothers and partners reported that they intend to fully immunise their child after they are born. Again, the intended rates of immunisation were higher across all groups than the rates we know are currently achieved in our population. The longitudinal information from *Growing Up in New Zealand* will be critical to determine the additional encouraging or discouraging factors that influence practice.

A key advantage of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* study is that this information has been collected in pregnancy so it will not be biased by asking about the pregnancy after the child is already born. In this way it will be possible to assess whether parents have been able to fulfill their intentions postnatally, and if so, what has enabled this to happen, or if not what barriers can be addressed to optimise development.

Despite the diversity of the parents of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* children, most parents shared common aspirations for their children to grow up happy, healthy and well-educated. They also expressed the hope that their children would play an active role in their society and that the society that they belonged to would in turn value their place in it.

Overall, the information collated from the first interviews with the parents of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* children indicate that New Zealand is changing rapidly.

Our children are becoming more diverse and the environments they will experience as they grow up here are also changing rapidly. These children are our future and this evidence is critical to ensuring that we make that future the best it can be for all our young New Zealanders.

The first data collection wave for *Growing Up in New Zealand* has provided a detailed snapshot of the developmental influences on the next generation in this country. There has been considerable investment in setting up this new longitudinal study and this investment can now begin to be repaid.

This study has immediate value in terms of its ability to provide cross-sectional information about the families and environments that our current New Zealand children are being born into today. The detail and depth of information from the mothers and partners themselves, and the timely manner in which it is available, provides evidence that is not available for our population from routine statistics or from any other data collection.

The information in this report also describes the foundations for future longitudinal analyses of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* cohort. Clear and comprehensive investment in building this foundation has ensured there are appropriate study methodologies for the research and for recruitment, and that effective partnerships have been forged to ensure this study is sustainable and delivers valuable evidence for decades to come.

We are delighted to present the collective voices of families currently having children in New Zealand in this report, and we greatly appreciate their participation.

Growing Up in New Zealand is privileged to be able to contribute to the lives and wellbeing of our children and families, now and into the future.



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