



COHORT '08  
JUNE 2024

# Growing Up in Ireland



## Key Findings from the Self-Complete Survey with Cohort '08 at 13

This Growing Up in Ireland report is a supplemental analysis to the previous publication *Key Findings: Cohort '08 at 13 years old* (2023). This supplement discusses the findings emerging from the *self-complete online module* from that survey (Cohort '08 at 13), whereas the initial report was concerned with an analysis of information from the *main telephone interviews* with participants at that time. The self-complete surveys, and therefore this report, cover more sensitive topics such as relationships, mental health and substance use; which participants may not have felt comfortable discussing over the telephone. There were separate modules for 13-year-olds and their parents.

Like the first publication, this report presents findings from the latest wave of the study conducted in 2021/22 and describes outcomes by key socio-demographic indicators such as gender, household income, parental education and family structure. Many of these outcomes have immediate policy relevance, as well as being of interest to wider Irish society.

Growing Up in Ireland is the national longitudinal study of children and youth designed to inform policies from birth to (currently) early adulthood. The original study followed two cohorts of children, born roughly a decade apart. The families of Cohort '08 (the focus of this report) were first interviewed in 2008/2009, when the child was 9 months old. Since then, they were re-interviewed (face-to-face) when the child was 3 years, 5 years, and 9 years old (in 2017/18). In addition, the Primary Caregiver took part in a postal survey when the child was 7/8 years old, and both the child and Primary Caregiver took part in a special online COVID-19 survey in December 2020 (around age 12). Cohort '98, in contrast, were mostly born in 1998 and recruited into the study when they were 9 years old in 2007/8 (and

are now in their mid-20s). In 2023, a third cohort was launched: these children (known as Cohort '24) will be infants who are aged 9 months in 2024/25.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the planned in-home interviews for Cohort '08 at 13 years had to be replaced with remote data collection methods. After completing their main interview by telephone, participants were sent a link to the online survey to answer more sensitive questions; however, not all those who received a link completed the online module. This means that the number of completed 'sensitive' interviews is less than the number of main interviews (see end notes). It is also worth noting that, for some participants, there was a break of several weeks between the completion of their telephone and online surveys.

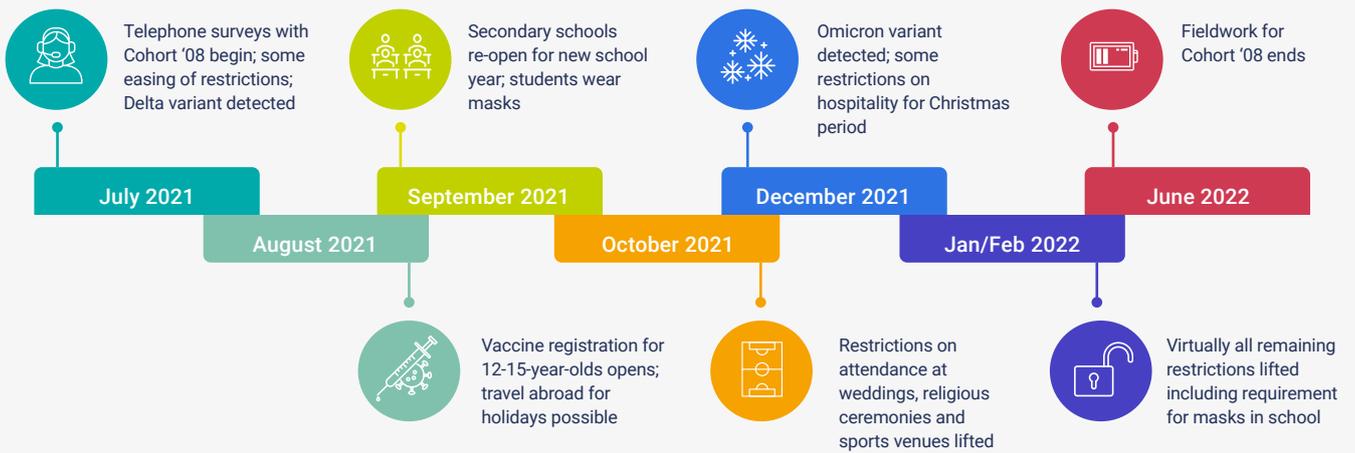
There are two important notes regarding the timing of this particular wave of Growing Up in Ireland fieldwork. First, the surveys took place between July 2021 and June 2022: over this time period there were fluctuations in the level of public health restrictions associated with COVID-19 culminating in an almost-complete lifting of restrictions at the end of January 2022. Secondly, virtually all 13-year-olds made the transition to secondary school during the pandemic, and the surveys were scheduled to maximise the number of Young People already in secondary school at time of interview.

This supplemental Key Findings report draws mainly on information provided by the Cohort '08 13-year-old and their Primary Caregiver (typically the mother) as part of their respective self-complete web surveys. For ease of reading, the Primary Caregiver is referred to in the rest of this report as 'the mother', and that person's resident partner as 'the father' (as most were). The analyses presented here are based on completed web surveys by 3,128 Young People, 3,963 Mothers and 2,445 Fathers.

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## Timeline: Cohort '08 Fieldwork during the Pandemic





## Physical Health

Early adolescence is characterised as a time of self-discovery and new experiences; this can include experimentation with risky health behaviours like smoking, vaping and drinking alcohol. The self-complete module asked 13-year-olds whether they had tried any of these. Participants were also asked to self-report their height and weight.

### Smoking

All study participants (13-year-olds, their mother and father) were asked about smoking cigarettes and e-cigarettes/vapes. In total, just 3% of 13-year-olds reported having ever smoked a cigarette. For parents, 18% of mothers and 15% of fathers were current smokers (either occasionally or daily).

*Table 1 Percentage of 13-year-olds who reported ever smoking a cigarette*

		%
<b>Total</b>		3%
<b>Gender</b>	Boys	3%
	Girls	3%
<b>Either parent smokes</b>	Yes	6%
	No	2%

**13-year-olds were more likely to have tried smoking if they had a parent who smoked.**

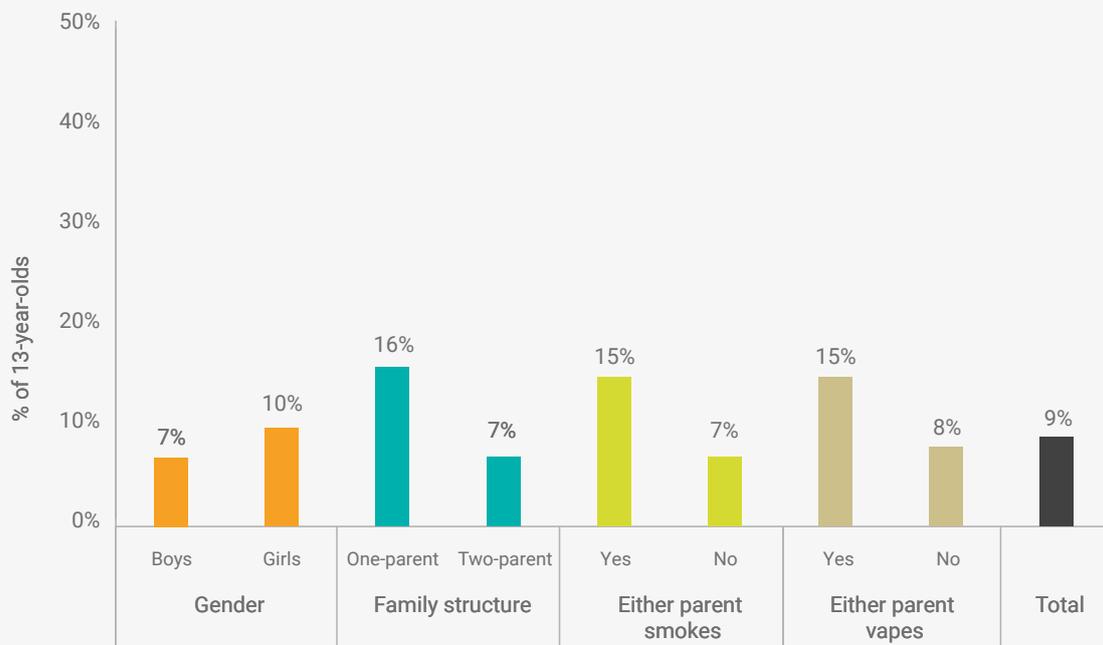
The likelihood of the 13-year-old having had a cigarette was associated with parental smoking habits: they were three times more likely to have ever smoked if either of their parents currently smoked (6% vs 2%; Table 1). This association was observed for both maternal and paternal smoking. No differences in smoking among 13-year-olds were noted according to gender or any social background indicators (family structure, family income, maternal education; not illustrated).



## Vaping

Vaping (i.e., using an e-cigarette) was substantially more prevalent amongst 13-year-olds than smoking: 9% of Young People had ever used a vape. There were different patterns according to the child's gender with girls more likely than boys to have vaped (10% vs 7%; Figure 1). There were also differences by family structure: those from one-parent households were more likely to have vaped than those from two-parent households (16% vs 7%). It is worth noting that there was substantial overlap between vaping and smoking for 13-year-olds; the total number of 13-year-olds who had either vaped or smoked was 9% (indicating that almost all those who had smoked had also vaped). Similarly, 3% of 13-year-olds reported having both smoked and vaped.

**Figure 1 Percentage of 13-year-olds who reported ever using a vape, according to gender, family structure and parental smoking/vaping behaviour**



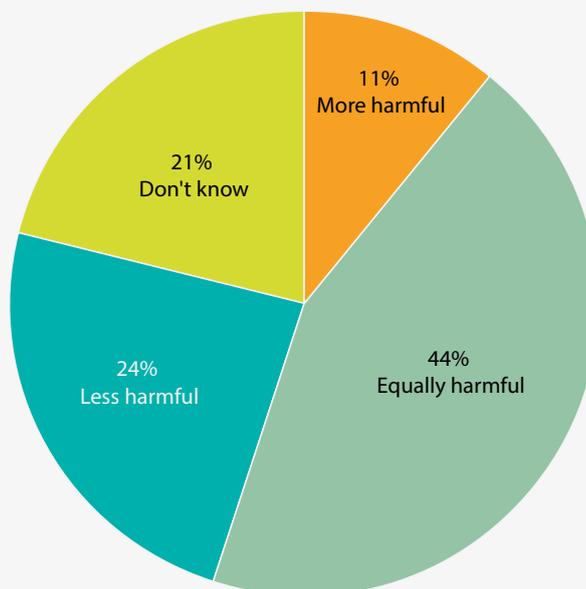
**Just 3% of all 13-year-olds had ever smoked a cigarette. However, 9% had used a vape.**

Figure 1 further illustrates an association between parental smoking and vaping, and the likelihood that the 13-year-old had tried vaping: it was more common if either parent currently smoked (15% vs 7%) or vaped (15% vs 8%). Those from less advantaged families, in terms of maternal education, were also more likely to have vaped (13% for those where the mother had a Junior Certificate or less vs 8% for those where the mother had a degree or higher; not illustrated).

The 13-year-olds were asked whether they thought vaping was more or less harmful than smoking cigarettes. Opinions were mixed; 11% of 13-year-olds thought vaping was *more harmful* than smoking cigarettes, 24% thought it was *less harmful*, while 44% thought it was *equally harmful* (Figure 2). The remaining 21% said they didn't know.



**Figure 2 Responses from 13-year-olds about whether they thought vaping was more or less harmful than smoking cigarettes**



**Over half of 13-year-olds thought vaping was equally, or more, harmful as smoking.**

Comparing the data across both cohorts (that is, compared to Cohort '98 at age 13, with data collected in 2011-2012), smoking was less common among 13-year-olds in Cohort '08. When Cohort '98 were age 13 years, 9% had ever smoked a cigarette,<sup>1</sup> but this fell to 3% for Cohort '08 at the same age. However, this good news is offset by the prevalence of vaping among Cohort '08, which 9% of 13-year-olds had tried. There are no equivalent vaping data for Cohort '98 at the same age.



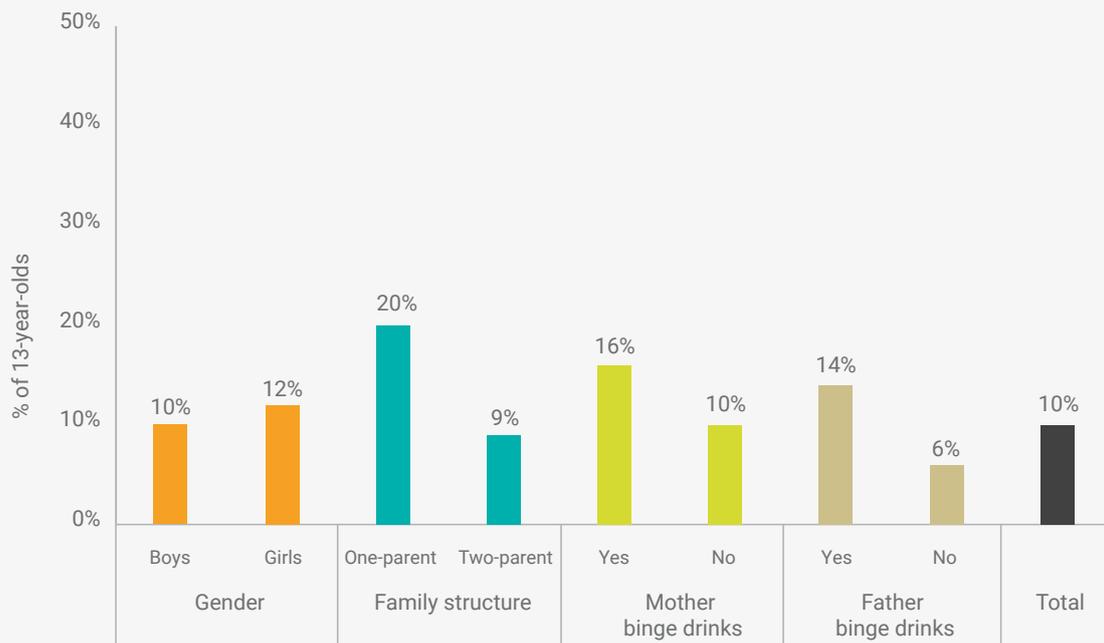
<sup>1</sup> The Lives of 13-year-olds – <https://www.growingup.gov.ie/pubs/Lives-of-13-Year-olds-report.pdf>

## Drinking

The 13-year-olds and their parents were asked about drinking alcohol. In total, one-in-ten 13-year-olds (10%) reported ever having an alcoholic drink (i.e., 'more than just a few sips'). Twelve per cent of those Young People who had tried alcohol said they drank alcohol on a regular basis (at least monthly), equal to just 1% of all 13-year-olds. Amongst parents, 17% of mothers and 22% of fathers reported binge-drinking<sup>2</sup> at least once per month. Almost one-quarter (24%) of 13-year-olds had at least one parent who binged on alcohol regularly.

Among 13-year-olds, girls were more likely to have drunk alcohol than boys (12% vs 10%); as were Young People in one-parent households (20%) rather than living with two parents (9%). There were also trends by parental drinking behaviour; the Young Person was more likely to have tried alcohol if their mother (16% vs 10%) or father binged on alcohol at least monthly (14% vs 6%; Figure 3). No differences were observed according to family income or parental education.

**Figure 3 Percentage of 13-year-olds who ever had an alcoholic drink, according to gender, family structure and parental drinking behaviour**



**10% of 13-year-olds had ever had an alcoholic drink. The rate was higher for Young People in one-parent households or where a parent regularly binge-drank.**

Comparing these results to those for Cohort '98 at age 13, substantial change can again be observed. Whereas 10% of Cohort '08 13-year-olds had had an alcoholic drink (interviewed in 2021/2022), that figure was 16% for Cohort '98 at age 13 (interviewed in 2011/2012). Boys were also more likely to have had an alcoholic drink in Cohort '98, the opposite trend to that observed for the current cohort.

<sup>2</sup> Binge-drinking is defined here as having 6 (for a female) or 8 (for a male) drinks on one occasion



## Height and weight

Previously in Growing Up in Ireland, height and weight measurements have been taken by a trained interviewer during a home visit. These measurements were then used to calculate body mass index (BMI), allowing researchers to categorize study participants as having overweight or obesity.<sup>3</sup> However, the survey was conducted remotely for Cohort '08 at 13 so participants were asked to self-report their height and weight. It is important to consider the potential implications on the validity and accuracy of these self-report measurements, as outlined in detail in the associated design report for this wave of fieldwork.<sup>4</sup>

Young People were categorised as having overweight, obesity or neither using their self-reported physical measurements, and age- and sex-specific cut-off points. Almost one-quarter of 13-year-olds were classified as overweight or obese: 17% overweight, and a further 7% obese (Table 2). Parents were similarly categorised based on self-report measurements. Levels of overweight and obesity were much higher among the adults; 36% of mothers were classified as overweight and a further 25% as obese, while 50% of fathers were overweight and another 27% were obese (also Table 2).

Additionally, Table 2 presents rates of overweight and obesity among Cohort '08 at age 9 and Cohort '98 at age 13. For Cohort '08, overall rates of child overweight and obesity were similar between the ages of 9 and 13. Figures for Cohort '08 were also broadly similar to those observed for Cohort '98 at age 13 (measured in 2011-2012); when 20% of Young People were overweight and 6% were obese.

**Table 2 Levels of overweight and obesity for the Young Person and their parents**

	COHORT '08 AT 13YRS			C'08 YP (AT 9YRS)*	C'98 YP (AT 13YRS)*
	YP	MOTHER	FATHER		
<b>Non-overweight</b>	76%	39%	23%	77%	74%
<b>Overweight</b>	17%	36%	50%	18%	20%
<b>Obese</b>	7%	25%	27%	5%	6%

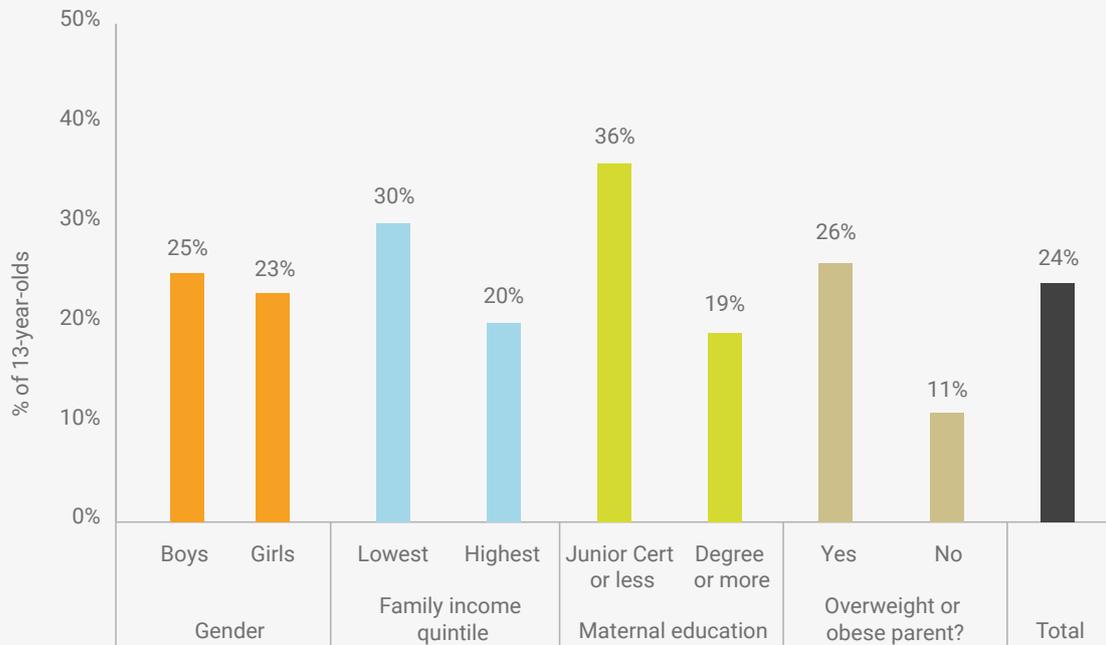
\* based on physical measurements recorded by a trained interviewer

Focussing on the 13-year-olds in the current wave of the study, significant differences in the likelihood of being classified as overweight or obese were observed according to numerous indicators of socio-economic disadvantage, including family structure, family income and mother's education, with lower rates in more advantaged families (Figure 4 over the page). Almost one-third (30%) of Young People living in the lowest income families were classified as overweight or obese, compared to 20% for those from the highest income families. The gap was more pronounced according to maternal education: combined levels of overweight and obesity were 36% for those 13-year-olds whose mother had the lowest education level (Junior Cert or less), compared to 19% for those from families with the highest maternal education (degree or more).

3 The World Obesity Federation BMI cut-offs for children were used in this instance (Cole & Lobstein, 2012). These cut-offs are both gender- and age-specific.

4 Design, Instrumentation and Procedures for Cohort '08 of Growing Up in Ireland at 13 Years Old (Wave 6). (2023). Murray, A., Watson, D., Nolan, et al. Available at [https://www.growingup.gov.ie/pubs/Cohort08\\_at\\_13\\_design\\_report\\_for\\_web.pdf](https://www.growingup.gov.ie/pubs/Cohort08_at_13_design_report_for_web.pdf)

**Figure 4 Combined levels of overweight and obesity for 13-year-olds, according to gender, family income, maternal education and parental obesity**



**13-year-olds were more than twice as likely to be overweight or obese if they lived with an overweight or obese parent.**

Parental weight status was also a significant predictor of weight status for the Young Person (Figure 4); those 13-year-olds with at least one overweight/obese parent were more than twice as likely to be classified as overweight or obese themselves, compared to those who had no overweight/obese parents (26% vs 11%). No significant difference in levels of overweight or obesity were observed between genders.





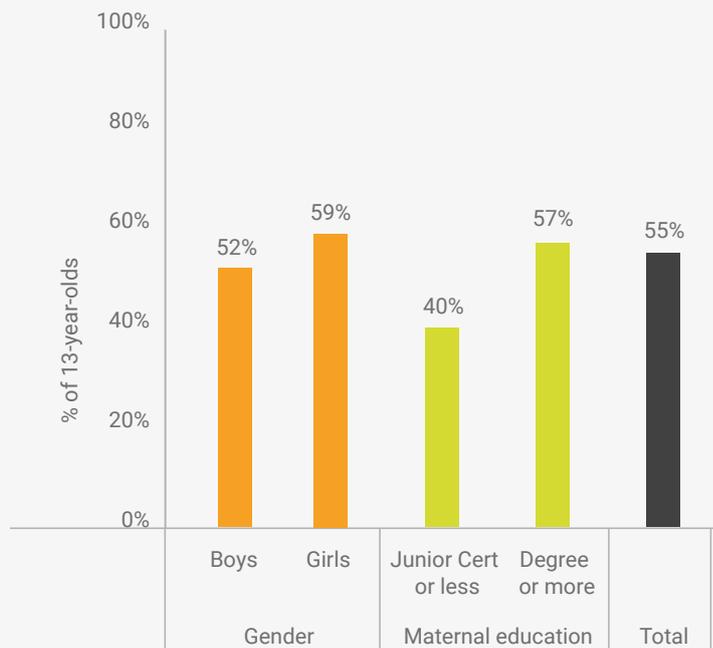
## Learning About Sex and Relationships

### Discussing sex and relationships – the Young Person's perspective

Just over half (55%) of 13-year-olds in Cohort '08 had discussed sex and/or relationship issues with a parent. Girls were more likely to have done so than boys (59% and 52%, respectively; Figure 5). A bigger difference was observed in relation to maternal education: 40% of Young People whose mothers had the lowest level of education said they had discussed sex and/or relationships with their parents, in contrast to 57% for those whose mothers had the highest level of education.

For Cohort '98, 46% of 13-year-olds reported discussing sex and/or relationships with a parent, with a similar gender difference to that of Cohort '08 also observed.

**Figure 5 Percentage of 13-year-olds who had ever discussed sex and/or relationships with a parent, according to gender and maternal education**

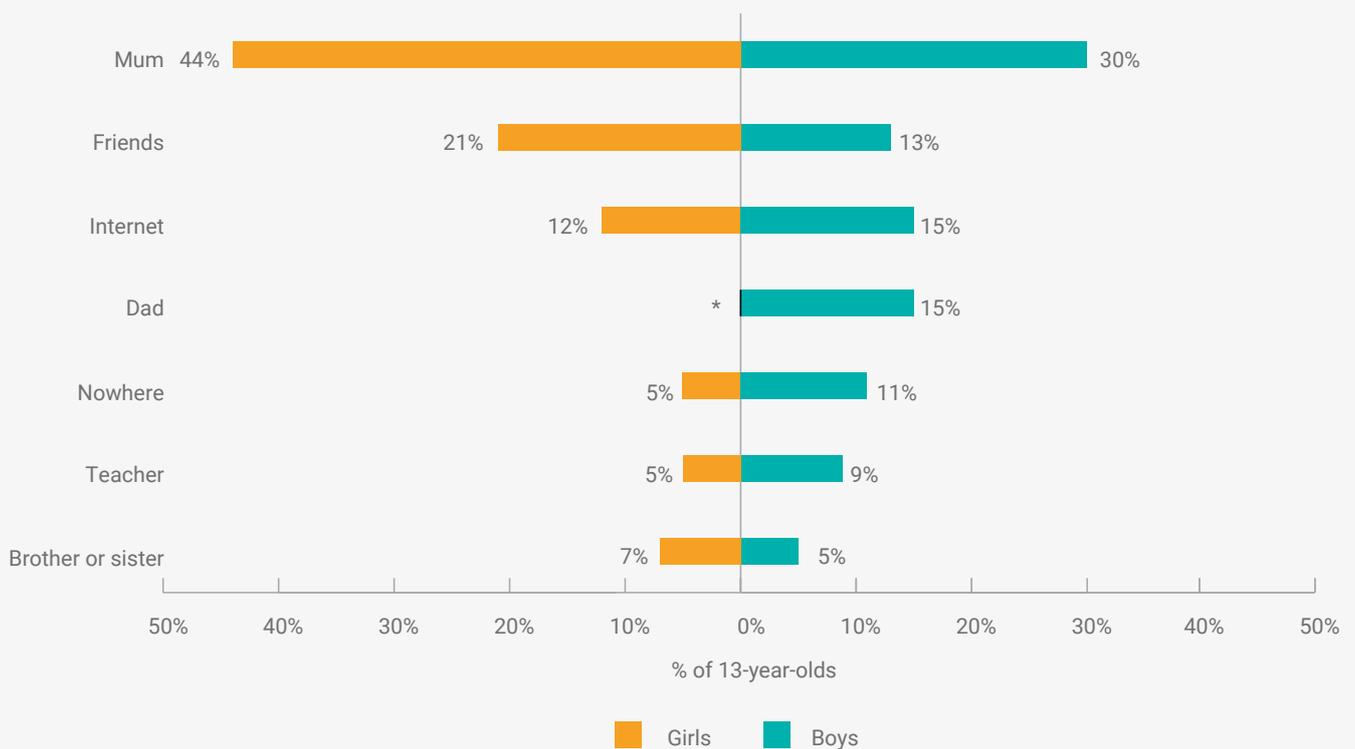


**13-year-olds whose mother had third level education were more likely to have discussed sex and relationship issues with a parent.**

Separately, the 13-year-olds were asked whom they would be most likely to go to for information or advice about sex and/or relationships. They had to choose one option from a set list. The most popular response overall was *mum* (37%); followed by *friends* (17%), *the internet* (13%), *nowhere* (8%), *dad* (8%), *teachers* (7%) and *brother or sister* (6%).

Figure 6 shows the gender differences in responses to this question. Girls were more likely than boys to seek advice or information from their *mother* (44% vs 30%) or *friends* (21% vs 13%). Boys were more likely than girls to seek advice/information from *the internet* (15% vs 12%), their *father* (15% for boys, the percentage for girls was too low to report), *teachers* (9% vs 5%), and to not seek advice at all (11% vs 5%).

**Figure 6 Gender differences in terms of the 13-year-old's most popular sources of advice/info about sex and/or relationships**



**Girls were more likely than boys to seek advice about sex or relationships from their mother or from friends.**

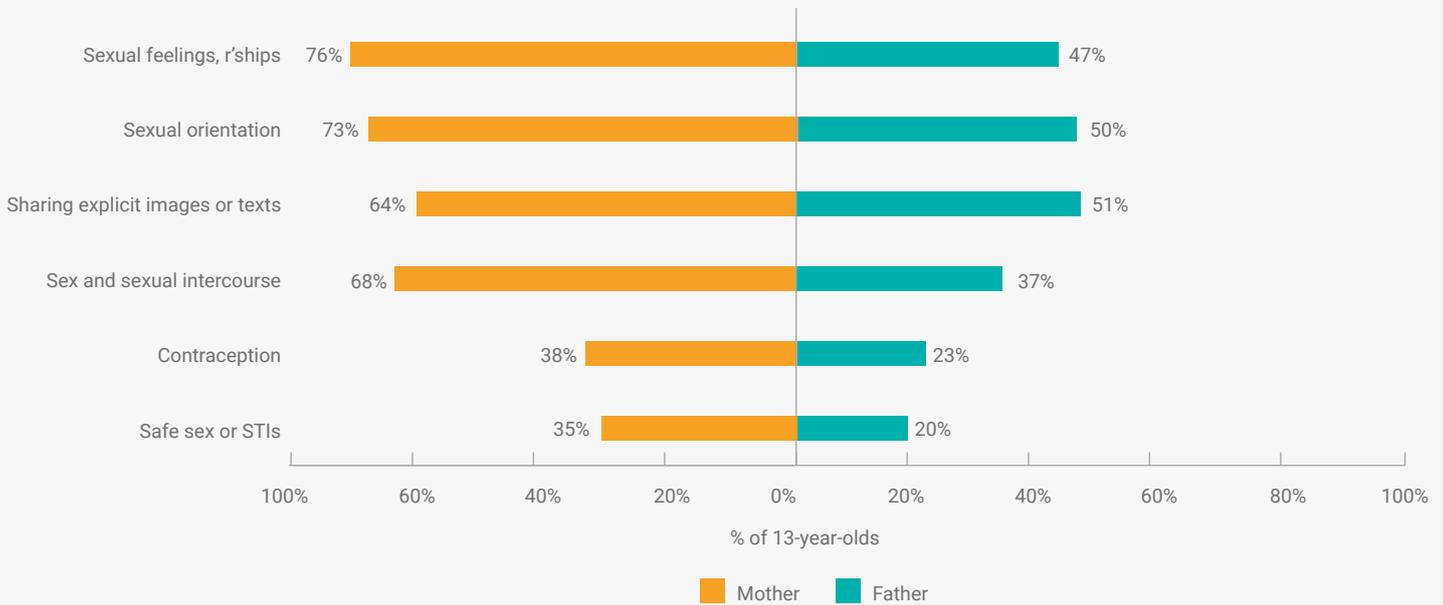
## Discussing sex and relationships – the parental perspective

In their self-complete modules, parents (both mothers and fathers) were asked whether they had ever spoken to the 13-year-old about a range of sex and relationship issues, ranging from feelings to contraception. Figure 7 shows that for all sex and relationship issues, the mother was more likely than the father to have discussed them with the 13-year-old.

Over three-quarters of mothers (76%) and just under half of fathers (47%) had discussed *sexual feelings and relationships* with their son or daughter. The pattern was similar for discussion of *sexual orientation* (73% and 50% for mothers and fathers respectively). *Safe sex or sexually transmitted infections (STIs)* was the issue least likely to be discussed (35% of mothers and 20% of fathers).



**Figure 7 Most commonly discussed sex and relationship issues according to parents**



**Mothers were more likely than fathers to have discussed sex and relationship issues with the 13-year-old. A majority had not discussed contraception or safe sex at all.**

Looking at each parent and issue individually, boys and girls had different patterns of discussion with mothers compared to fathers (Table 3). Mothers were more likely to have discussed sexual intercourse, feelings and relationships, sexual orientation, and the sharing of sexual texts or images with a 13-year-old daughter than with a son.

In contrast, fathers were more likely to have discussed sexual intercourse, feelings and relationships, contraception, safer sex and STIs, and sexual orientation with a son than with a daughter. However, it should be noted that for both boys and girls, all issues were more likely to have been discussed with their mother than their father.

**Table 3 Gender differences in discussion of sexual issues between parent and child**

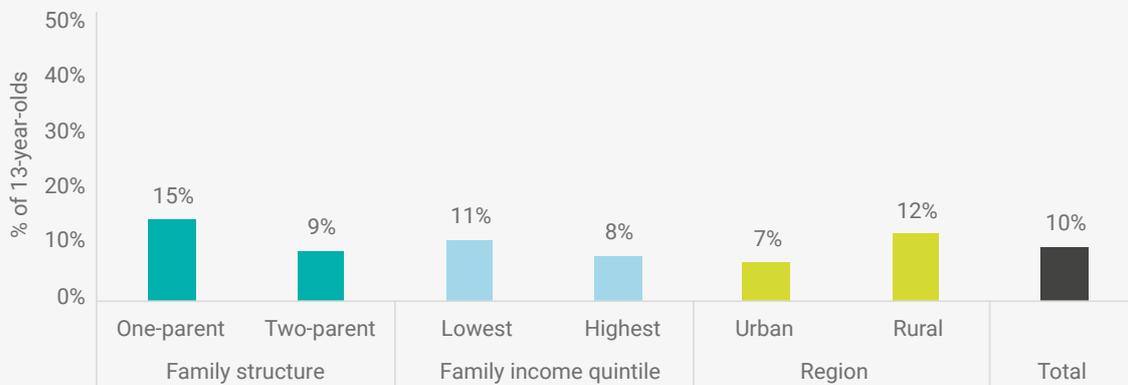
Issues Discussed with 13-year-old:	MOTHER		FATHER	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Sex and sexual intercourse	64%	73%	46%	26%
Sexual feelings, relationships & emotions	74%	78%	53%	41%
Contraception	38%	39%	31%	14%
Safer sex or STIs	35%	35%	25%	14%
Sexual orientation	71%	76%	53%	45%
Sharing sexual texts or images	62%	67%	53%	48%

## Romantic relationships with, and feelings towards, peers

### *Having a boyfriend or girlfriend*

The 13-year-olds were asked if they currently had a boyfriend or girlfriend, with 10% saying they did (Figure 8). No differences were observed according to gender. However, significant differences were observed according to family structure, family income and region. Young People from one-parent households were more likely than those from two-parent households to have a boyfriend or girlfriend (15% vs 9%, respectively). There were also differences, albeit less marked, for 13-year-olds from the lowest income families (11%) compared to the highest income (8%); and for rural (12%) rather than urban (7%) teenagers.

**Figure 8 Percentage of 13-year-olds who had a boyfriend or girlfriend, according to family structure, family income and region**



**10% of 13-year-olds said they had a boyfriend or girlfriend; and it was more common among Young People in one-parent, low income or rural households.**





**Developing feelings of sexual attraction to others**

All 13-year-olds were asked a new question about what gender they were attracted to (if any). The responses are split by the gender of the Young Person in Table 4 below.

**Table 4 Overview of romantic attraction for 13-year-olds**

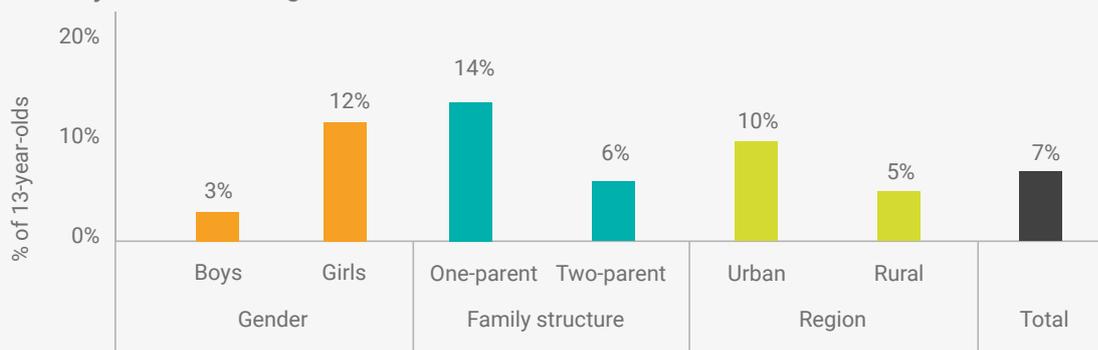
	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
<b>Are you attracted to...</b>			
<b>...girls?</b>	87%	3%	47%
<b>...boys?</b>	2%	67%	33%
<b>...both?</b>	2.8%	12%	7%
<b>...not attracted to anyone?</b>	4%	3%	4%
<b>...not sure?</b>	2.2%	11%	7%
<b>...prefer not to say?</b>	1.8%	3%	2.3%

**87% of boys were solely attracted to the opposite sex compared to just two-thirds of girls.**

Two-thirds of girls said they were attracted only to boys, 12% were attracted to both boys and girls, 11% were not sure, while 3% were solely attracted to other girls. The vast majority of boys said they were solely attracted to girls (87%), with a further 4% reporting that they were not attracted to anyone, 2.8% were attracted to both boys and girls, and 2% were solely attracted to other boys. In total, 80% of 13-year-olds were attracted to either girls or boys (but not both). A minority, 7%, were attracted to both genders, while a further 7% were not sure, and 4% were not attracted to anyone.

There were some notable differences between Young People on the response option of being attracted to both boys and girls (7% overall; Figure 9). It was a more common response for girls than boys (12% vs 3%) but there were also differences according to family structure and region. More 13-year-olds in one-parent households said they were attracted to both genders (14%, compared to 6% of those in two-parent households). It was also a more popular response among 13-year-olds living in urban (10%) rather than rural areas (5%).

**Figure 9 Percentage of 13-year-olds attracted to both boys and girls, according to gender, family structure and region**



**Girls were much more likely than boys to say they were attracted to both boys and girls.**

### Puberty

Pubertal development was estimated according to the 13-year-old's self-report. There were separate questions for boys and girls. Girls were asked if they had started their periods, which is a well-established indicator, and most (90%) had already done so. This is a higher figure than for Cohort '98 (73%), although given age of first period is typically around age 12, the exact timing of the interviews may impact the comparability of these results.

Boys were asked if their voice had changed, which is a less objective indicator of puberty than the start of periods for girls. Almost one-third (31%) of boys said their voice had *totally changed*, 45% said it was *occasionally lower*, and 14% said it was the *same*. These indicators suggest that 13-year-old girls were generally more advanced in their pubertal development than boys of the same age.





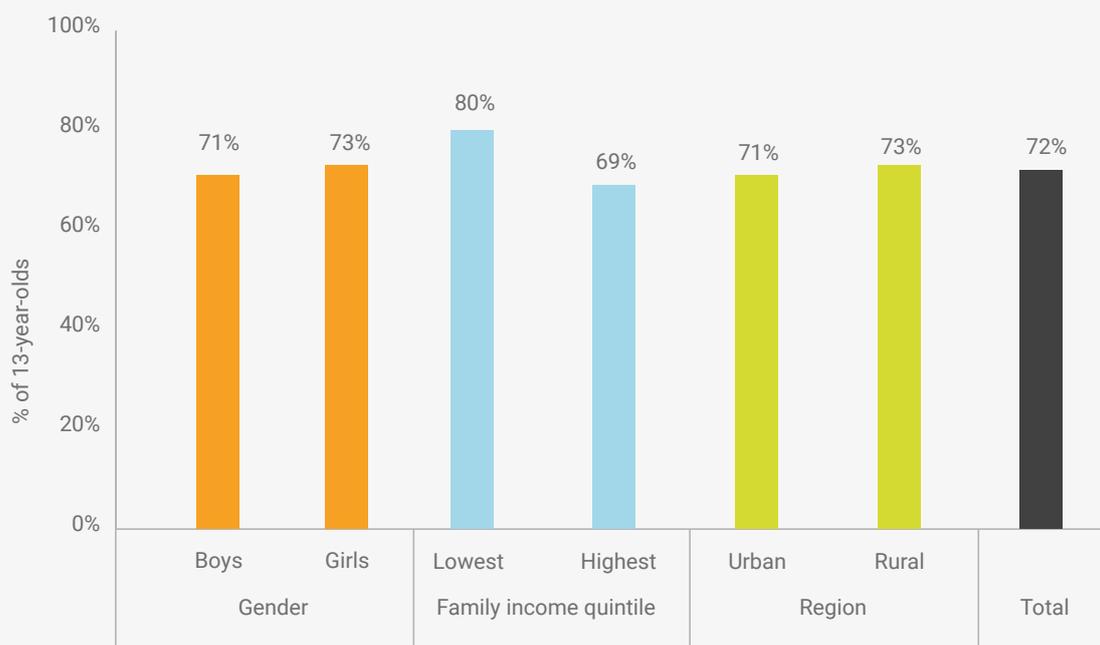
## Education on relationships, sexuality and well-being in the school setting

At the time of interview, nearly all 13-year-olds had made the transition to secondary school. They were asked if they had been taught about *relationships and sexuality education (RSE)*, *how to stay healthy* and *how to feel good about myself and my life in this school year*.

### Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

This is an important time for 13-year-olds to receive education on relationships and sexuality as they negotiate puberty and consider romantic, and possibly, sexual relationships with their peers.<sup>5</sup> Nearly three-quarters (72%) of 13-year-olds said they had received RSE in school this year (although data collection was spread over several months so some may have been due to receive it later in the school year). Figure 10 shows that 13-year-olds living in families with the lowest income were more likely to have received RSE (80%) than their peers in the highest income quintile (69%). This was, however, the only significant difference among the socio-economic indicators explored for this particular question.

**Figure 10 Receipt of education on 'relationships and sexuality (RSE)' this school year according to the 13-year-old**



**While most 13-year-olds had received RSE this school year, it was more common for Young People in the lowest family income quintile than those in the highest.**

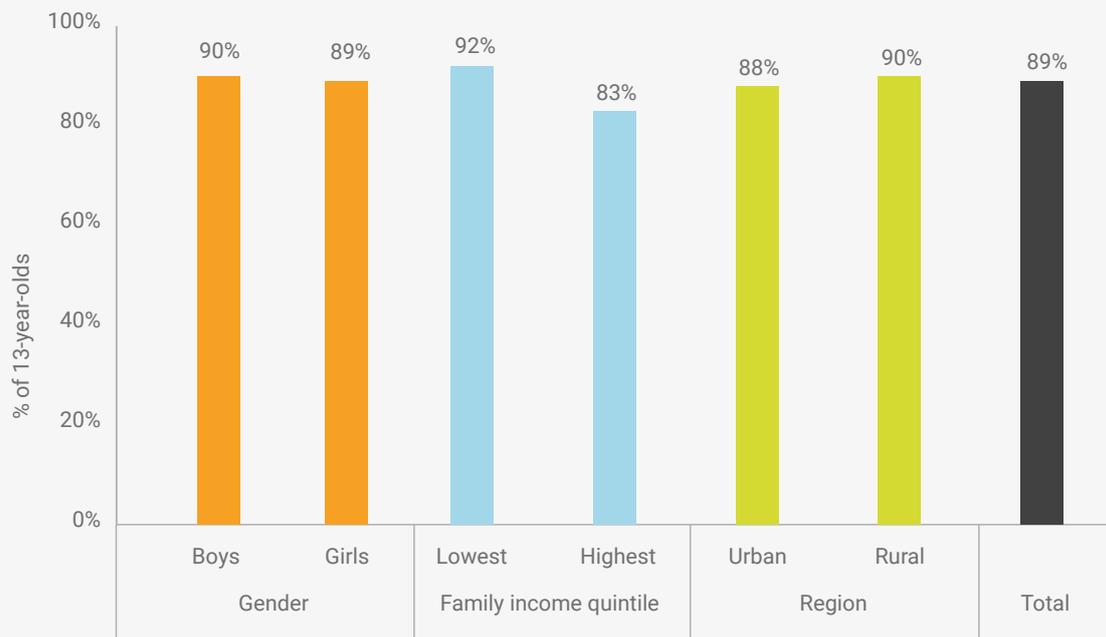
<sup>5</sup> The age of sexual consent in Ireland is 17 years.

**Education on how to stay healthy**

Most 13-year-olds (89%) said they had received education on *how to stay healthy* in this school year (Figure 11). Similar to the question on RSE, the biggest socio-demographic difference in receipt of education on staying healthy related to family income: 92% of 13-year-olds in the lowest income quintile had done so, compared to 83% of those in the highest quintile of income.

There were no gender or regional differences for this particular variable.

**Figure 11 Receipt of education on 'how to stay healthy' this school year according to the Young Person**



**Nearly 9-out-of-10 13-year-olds had received information on how to stay healthy in 'this school year'.**



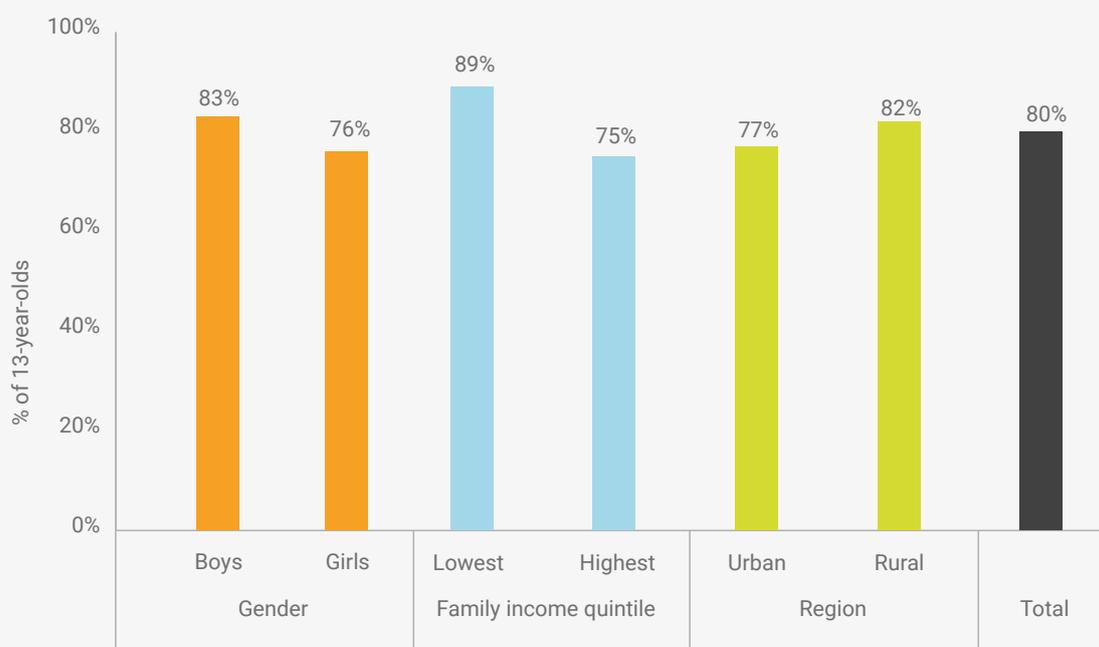


### Education on 'how to feel good about myself and my life'

A majority (80%) of 13-year-olds said they had received education on *how to feel good about myself and my life* in this school year. In contrast to the two previous items (education on RSE and health), there was a gender difference (Figure 12): boys were more likely to confirm education in this area (83%) than girls (76%).<sup>6</sup> Education on feeling good about oneself was observed at somewhat higher rates in rural over urban areas (82% and 77% respectively).

In common with the items on RSE and health discussed above, the largest socio-demographic difference was in relation to family income quintile. Again, 13-year-olds in the lowest income quintile were more likely to have received education on feeling good about oneself than their peers in the highest income quintile (89% and 75%, respectively).

Figure 12 Receipt of education on 'how to feel good' this school year according to the Young Person



**While most 13-year-olds had received education on how to feel good about themselves, there was more socio-demographic variation than for previous education questions.**

<sup>6</sup> A check on difference based on single sex versus co-ed schools indicates type of school was not the reason for the gender differences

## Socio-emotional Well-being and Behaviour

### Anti-social behaviour

Young People were asked about their engagement in different types of anti-social behaviour 'in the last year' (when they were 12 to 13 years of age). As well as being socially undesirable, this type of activity is risky for a 13-year-old both in terms of their physical well-being (e.g. injuries from fighting) and risks to their education as a result of being suspended from school (for example), or encounters with the Criminal Justice System.

There were eight different categories of anti-social behaviour included in the Young Person's self-complete module; ranging from not paying the correct fare on public transport to carrying a weapon (see Table 5). The 13-year-old was asked if they had participated in each type of anti-social activity, *never*, *once*, or *more than once* in the last year.

*Table 5 Frequency of anti-social behaviours in the last year according to the Young Person*

BEHAVIOUR	NEVER	ONCE	MORE THAN ONCE
	% of 13-year-olds		
Hit, kicked or punched someone on purpose in order to hurt or injure them	79%	11%	11%
Taken money or something else that didn't belong to you from home without permission	81%	12%	8%
Behaved badly in public so that people complained and you got into trouble	89%	8%	4%
Not paid the correct fare on a bus or train	90%	5%	6%
Taken money or something else that didn't belong to you from school	92%	6%	2%
Taken something from a shop or store without paying for it	93%	4%	3%
Written or sprayed paint on things that do not belong to you	94%	4%	3%
Carried a knife or weapon with you in case it was needed in a fight	97%	3%	

Notes: (a) Responses for carrying a weapon once or more often are combined due to low cell sizes;

(b) values may occasionally sum to more than 100% due to rounding

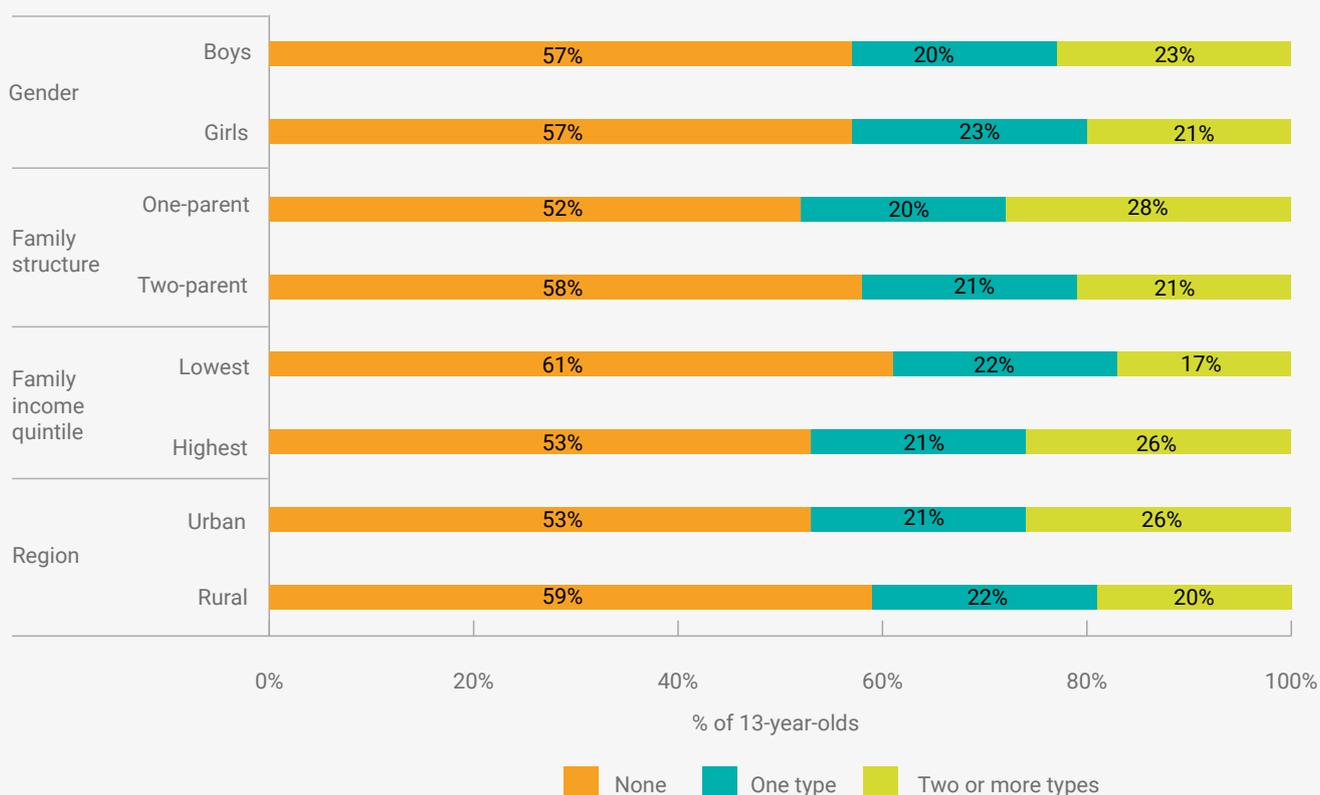
**The most frequent form of anti-social behaviour was to have 'hit, kicked or punched' someone: 11% once in the last year and another 11% more than once.**



Over half (57%) of 13-year-olds had not engaged in any of the behaviours in Table 5 over the last year. Of the remainder who had (43%), 21% reported engaging in one type of anti-social behaviour and 22% had participated in more than one type. The most common self-reported behaviour among Young People was a physical assault ('hit, kicked or punched someone on purpose in order to hurt or injure them'): 11% on one occasion and a further 11% on multiple occasions in the last year. The least common was 'carrying a weapon in case it was needed in a fight': just 3% of 13-year-olds said they had done this. The prevalence was too low to separate single and multiple occasions. A small number of Young People (just under 3%, approximately 80 individuals) were categorised as engaging in anti-social behaviour solely on the basis that they did not pay the correct bus or train fare (i.e. their only anti-social behaviour was fare evasion).

Boys and girls had similar overall rates of engaging in some anti-social behaviour (Figure 13) but there were gender differences for some specific categories: girls were somewhat more likely than boys to have not paid the correct fare (12% vs 9%) or written/sprayed graffiti (8% vs 5%) whereas boys were considerably more likely to have hit, kicked or punched someone (26% vs 16%) – not illustrated.

**Figure 13 Percentage of 13-year-olds engaging in no anti-social behaviour, one type, or two or more types by gender, family structure, family income and region**



Note: Values may occasionally sum to more than 100% due to rounding

**Engaging in more than one kind of anti-social behaviour was more common for Young People in families who were in the highest income quintile, headed by one parent or in an urban area.**

Comparing anti-social behaviour on some other indicators of socio-economic disadvantage shows some interesting contrasts (also Figure 13): 13-year-olds in one-parent households were more likely to self-report engaging in two or more kinds of anti-social behaviour (28% vs 21% in two-parent households). Similarly, more Young People in urban areas had participated in multiple kinds of anti-social behaviour (26% vs 20% in rural areas). There was a big urban/rural difference in the incidence of not paying the correct fare on public transport: 18% of urban Young People had done this in contrast to just 5% of those in rural areas; although this was likely to relate to a lack of public transport in the latter.

When comparing groups on the basis of family income, Figure 13 shows that Young People in the highest income quintile were more likely to report multiple kinds of anti-social behaviour (26%) than were 13-year-olds in the lowest income quintile (17%). From Figure 13, it can be observed that the percentage engaging in one type of behaviour is relatively consistent across the groups – around 21% – and differences tend to be in relation to multiple types of anti-social behaviour.

In a separate question, 3% of 13-year-olds reported that they had 'been in trouble with Gardaí' in the last year. This is a lower percentage than reported by 13-year-olds in Cohort '98 (just under 8%), although it is possible that this difference is due in part to the pandemic restrictions which overlapped with the fieldwork period. While cell sizes are too small to conduct meaningful group comparisons within Cohort '08 at this stage, this will be a useful reference point in exploring trajectories in anti-social behaviour and contact with the Criminal Justice System in later adolescence and early adulthood.

## Mental health of the Young Person

### *Depressive symptoms*

Young People in Cohort '08 at 13 completed a short (13-item) measure of depressive symptoms called the 'Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire' (SMFQ; Angold et al. 1995). Participants were asked to rate whether each statement (e.g. 'I cried a lot') was *true*, *sometimes true* or *not true* for them in the past two weeks, and answers were summed to give a total score.

The mean score for 13-year-olds in Cohort '08 was 6.1 and scores ranged from 0 to 26, with higher scores suggesting greater severity of depressive symptoms. In previous work, a threshold of 8 or more on the SMFQ has been used to identify an 'at risk' group.<sup>8</sup> Applying this criterion to the current participants would place 31% of them in this 'at risk' group.<sup>9</sup>

The same measure, with the same 8+ cut-off, was previously used with Cohort '98 at age 13. In contrast to the current cohort, just 16% of Cohort '98 were then flagged as 'at risk'.<sup>10</sup> This is suggestive of a substantial upwards trend in the experience of depressive symptoms, particularly for girls, even if some methodological differences<sup>11</sup> require caution in a like-for-like comparison between cohorts.

7 The Lives of 13-Year-Olds <https://www.growingup.gov.ie/pubs/Lives-of-13-Year-olds-report.pdf>

8 Angold, A., Costello, E.J., Messer, S.C., & Pickles, A. (1995).

9 A later paper by the SMFQ authors suggests an alternative cut-off of 11+ to signal Young People 'at risk'. Using this alternative cut-off would place 21% of Cohort '08 13-year-olds in the 'at risk' group. However, the original 8+ cut-off is used here to facilitate comparisons with Cohort '98 at 13.

10 Nixon, E. (2021). Social-emotional and behavioural outcomes in early adolescence.

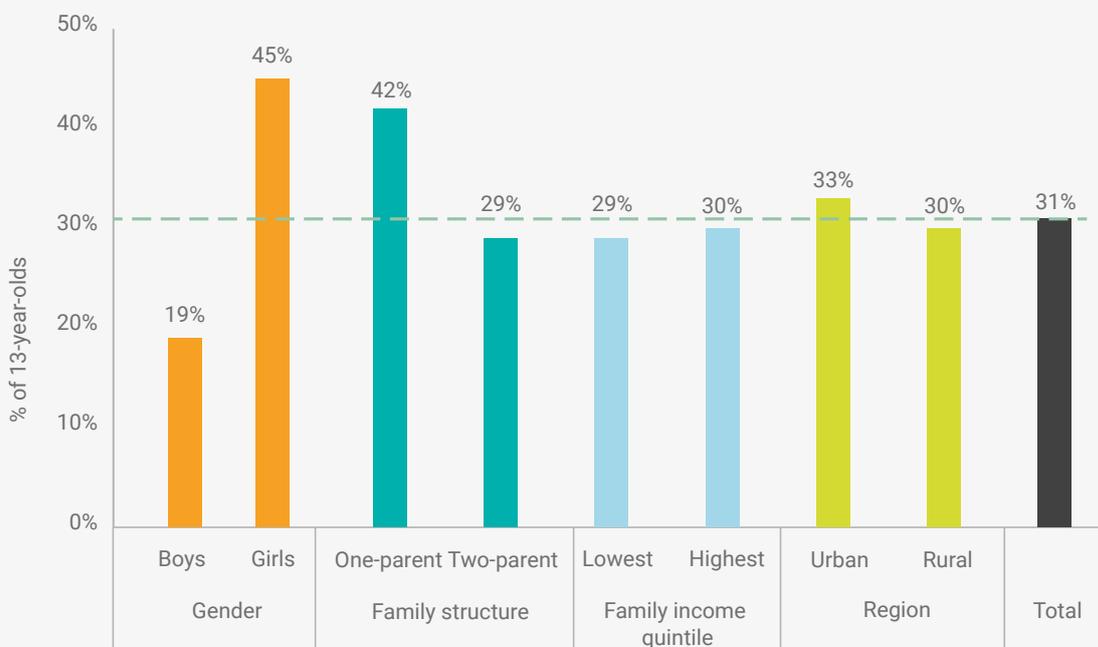
11 Cohort '98 were selected through sampling of schools initially while Cohort '08 were selected through the Child Benefit Register. The age 13 phase was only the second wave of participation for Cohort '98 but the sixth wave for Cohort '08 (although still only the second wave where the child was surveyed directly). Both cohorts self-completed the SMFQ on a computer, although Cohort '08 did it online on a mix of devices whereas all of Cohort '98 did it on the interviewer's laptop while the interviewer was in the home.



Figure 14 contrasts groups of 13-year-olds on this 'at risk' measure of depressive symptoms (using the 8+ cut-off). The most marked difference was in relation to gender, with more than twice as many girls (45%) in the 'at risk' group as boys (19%). There was also an increase in being 'at risk' associated with living in a one-parent household (42%) compared to two parents(29%).

Young People in urban areas were somewhat over-represented in the 'at risk' group (33%) compared to those in rural areas (30%) but the difference was not statistically significant after accounting for other socio-demographic characteristics. There was no difference in risk between the lowest and highest income quintiles (29% and 30%, respectively).<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 14 Percentage of 13-year-olds above the 'at risk' threshold on a measure of depressive symptoms, according to child gender, family structure, family income and region (dotted line indicates total % above 'at risk' threshold)**



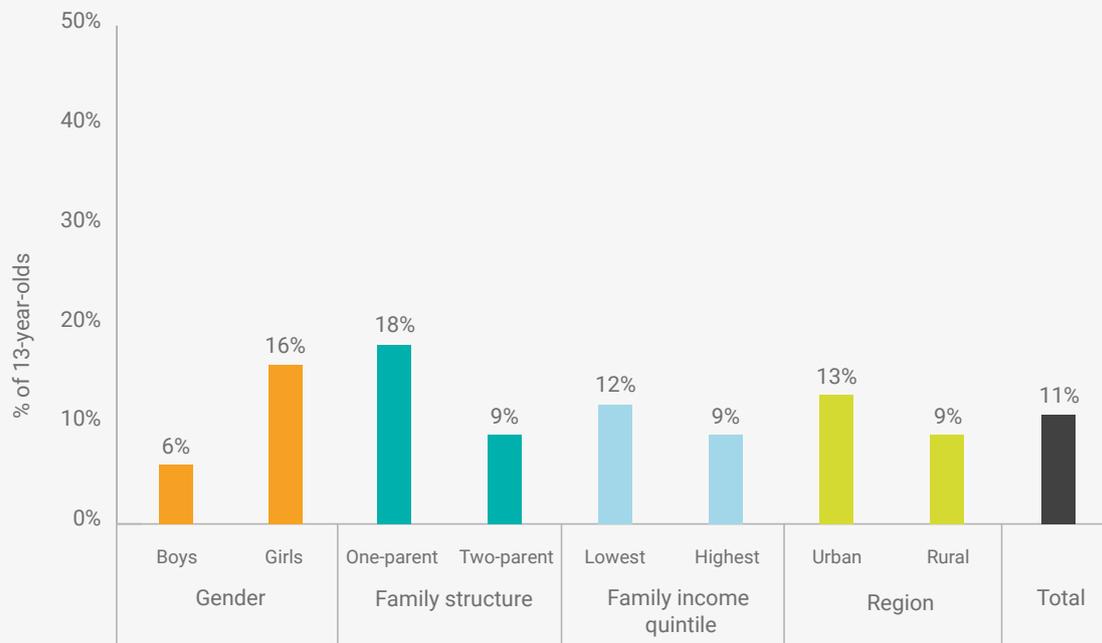
**Girls were much more likely to be in the 'at risk of depression' category. Young People in one-parent households were also at increased risk.**

<sup>12</sup> Note the same trends by gender, family structure, income and region are also observed when using the 11+ cut-off.

### Combining the SMFQ and Mental Health Inventory 5

The Young People in Cohort '08 at 13 years uniquely completed two measures reflective of their mental health: the SMFQ on the self-complete, online module – as already outlined – and the Mental Health Inventory 5 (MHI-5) during their telephone interview.<sup>13</sup> All participants completed the MHI-5 with an interviewer first and self-completed the SMFQ online sometime (possibly weeks) later. This arrangement opens up the possibility of exploring how many Young People were flagged as 'at risk' by both measures, using their respective cut-off points. Arguably this approach should give a more robust estimate than a single measure at one point in time, although conclusions are constrained by the fact that the time-lag between completing the two measures varied between participants.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 15 Percentage of 13-year-olds flagged as 'at risk' by both SMFQ and MHI-5, according to gender, family structure, family income and region**



**Girls and Young People in one-parent households were more likely to be in the 'at risk' category on two different measures of mental well-being.**

Using this combination of measures, 11% of 13-year-olds were flagged as 'at risk' on both the SMFQ and MHI-5 (Figure 15). Again, being female was a stand-out predictor of mental health risk: nearly three times as many girls as boys were in this 'dual-risk' group (16% vs 6%). Similar to the SMFQ alone, proportionately more Young People from one-parent households were 'dual-risk' (18% vs 9% two-parent households) whereas there was no significant difference between the lowest and highest income quintiles.

<sup>13</sup> The MHI-5 is a somewhat more general screen for emotional disorders than the depression-oriented SMFQ; it includes some positively-framed items such as 'felt calm and peaceful' as well as negatively-framed items.

<sup>14</sup> Some Young People could have completed both measures in the same week, which would effectively be the same reference period; whereas others might have had several weeks between the two modules.



## Parental mental health

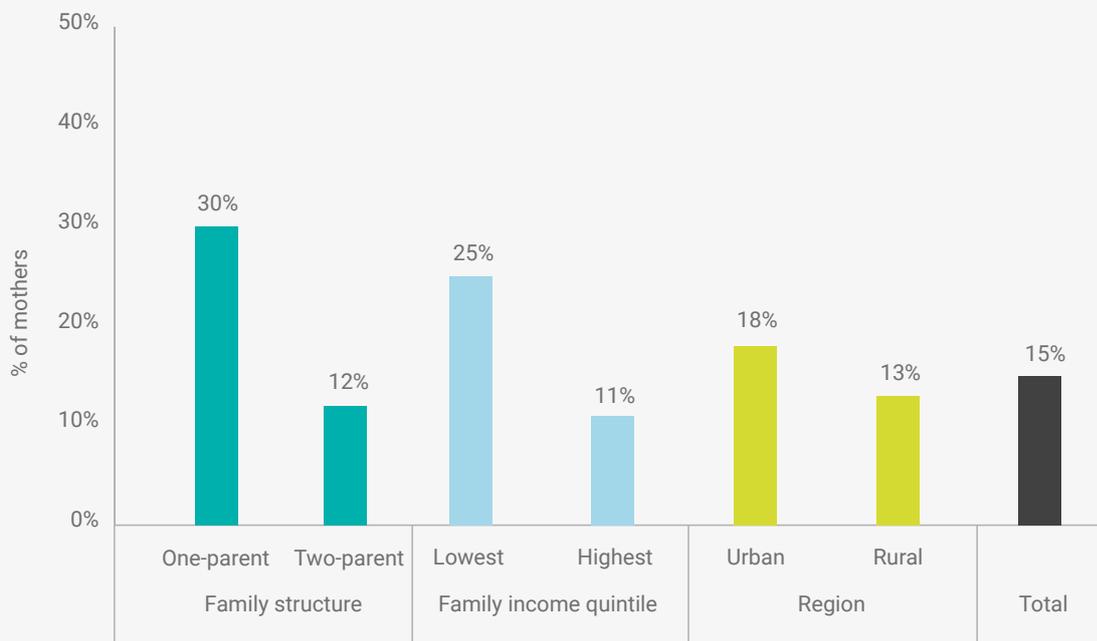
### Depressive symptoms

Both mothers and fathers completed a short measure of depressive symptoms called the CESD-8 (Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression) as part of their self-complete module online. Parents were given eight statements about their wellbeing, such as 'I felt depressed', and asked to indicate how often they had felt that way in the past week. The scores were then combined to give a total score, and a cut-off was applied to highlight people at risk of depression.

Among mothers, the mean score was 3.2 on a range from 0-24, and 15% were categorised as 'at risk of depression' using the same cut-off score of 7+ as previous waves of Growing Up in Ireland. Among fathers, the mean score was 2.1 and 7% were categorised as 'at risk'. Because a smaller number of fathers participated, and those who did had a lower risk of depression, further exploration by socio-demographic characteristics is included for mothers only.

Figure 16 shows that mothers who were lone parents and/or were in the lowest income quintile had notably higher rates of being categorised as 'at risk of depression'.<sup>15</sup> The contrast for mothers in one-parent compared to two-parent households is particularly marked (30% and 12%, respectively). Mothers in urban areas were also somewhat more likely to be in the 'at risk' category (18%) than their rural counterparts (13%).

Figure 16 Maternal depression risk by family structure, income and region



**Mothers who headed one-parent households and/or were in the lowest family income quintile were much more likely to be in the 'at risk of depression' category.**

<sup>15</sup> As presented in the first Key Findings for Cohort '08 at 13, 38% of one-parent households were in the lowest income quintile compared to just 8% of two-parent households. Therefore, some of the same individuals will be represented in the graphs in both the 'one-parent' and 'lowest income' categories.

Comparing mothers who were categorised as ‘at risk of depression’ based on their scores in the CESD-8, with those who were below the threshold, suggests an association with the Young Person’s experience of depressive symptoms (see earlier section). Nearly half (43%) of mothers in the ‘at risk’ range on the CESD-8 measure had a 13-year-old who was flagged as ‘at risk’ on the SMFQ measure of depressive symptoms.<sup>16</sup> This contrasts with 28% among Young People whose mothers were not at risk of depression. However, it is not possible to comment on the directionality of the association (with this level of analysis) and may also reflect a shared stressful environment (such as living in poverty).

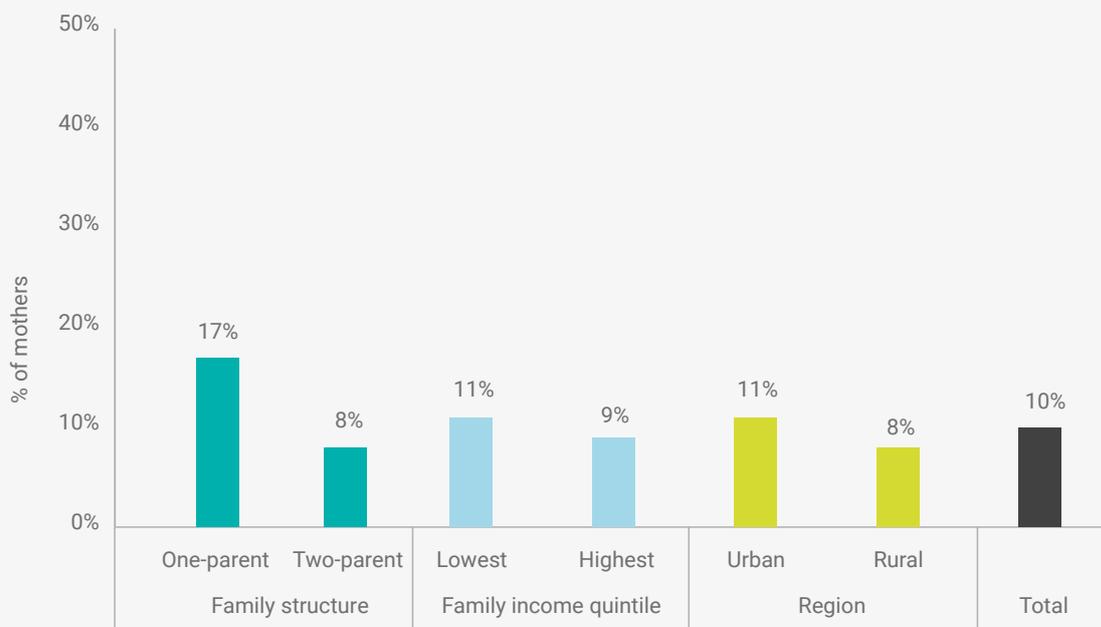
### Parental stress

Both mothers and fathers completed a set of items about the stressors associated with being a parent – as distinct from stress from other sources such as work (Berry & Jones, 1995). The measure comprises six items such as ‘having my child has been a financial burden’ and parents answered on a 5-point scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Scores ranged from 6-30 and the mean score for mothers was 13.4, while for fathers it was 12.5, in the context of higher scores indicating greater stress.

To examine patterns among parents with the highest stress levels, those with scores in the top decile (10%)<sup>17</sup> of the stressors scale are compared in more detail. Due to the smaller number of participating fathers, comparisons for the highest-stress parents will focus on mothers only to maintain sufficient cell sizes.

Figure 17 shows that, similar to the measure of depressive symptoms, mothers who were lone parents had a much greater likelihood of being in the highest-stress group than mothers in two-parent households (17% and 8%, respectively). In contrast to the trend for depressive symptoms, however, mothers in the lowest and highest income quintiles had a similar risk of high levels of parental stress (11% and 9%, respectively). Mothers in urban areas were somewhat more likely to be in the highest-stress group (11%) compared to rural mothers (8%).

**Figure 17 Percentage of mothers in the highest-stress decile by family structure, family income and region**



**Mothers heading one-parent households were much more likely to be experiencing high levels of parental stress.**

<sup>16</sup> There was also a trend for a higher rate of YP ‘at risk’ scores where the father was categorised as ‘at risk of depression’ by the CESD-8, but the numbers involved were relatively small given the lower number of participating fathers and their lower likelihood of being categorised as ‘at risk of depression’.

<sup>17</sup> Note that due to the distribution of scores, there are actually 11% of mothers in the top decile



## Bullying

Being a victim of bullying is potentially detrimental to the physical and emotional well-being of the Young Person. It is of particular interest at this stage of the life-course as the 13-year-old would have recently made the transition from primary to secondary school; mixing with many more, older young people and not having the continuous supervision of one teacher. There are additional concerns about the impact of electronic and cyber bullying which can 'follow' young people at home as well as at school.

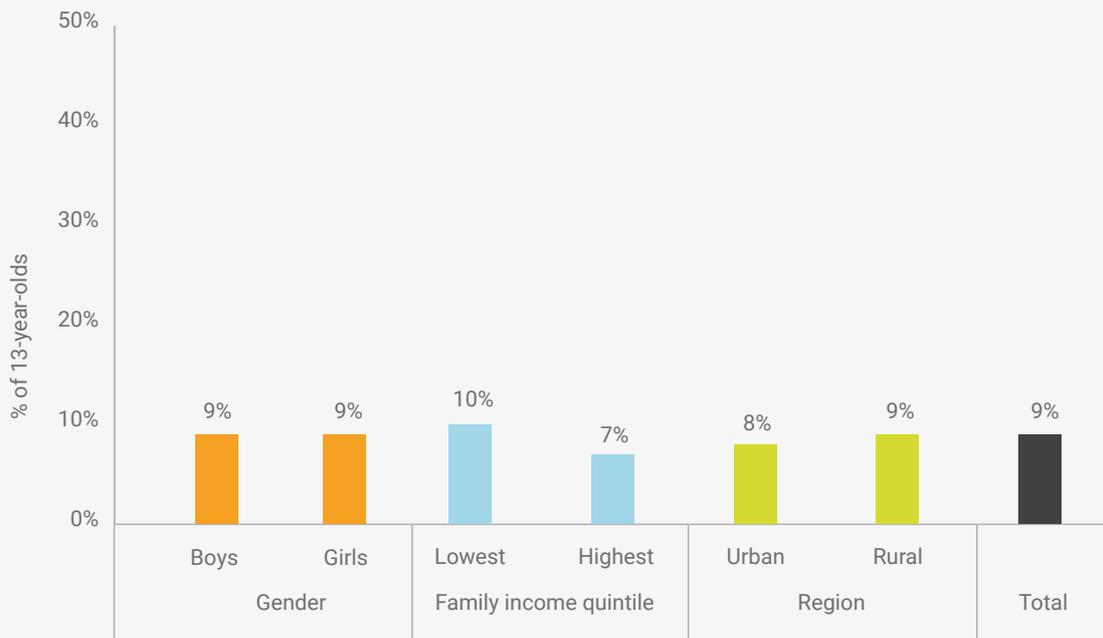
There was a change of procedure to questions about the experience of bullying for 13-year-olds in Cohort '08 compared to Cohort '98 at the same age. For Cohort '98, there had been an initial question framed as 'have you been bullied in the last 3 months'. Questions about being subjected to specific bullying behaviours (e.g. shoving, name-calling) were only asked if the 13-year-old answered 'yes' to the initial question. By the time the questionnaire for Cohort '08 at 13 years old was being constructed, there was a concern that the previous format may have led to an underestimation of the extent to which Young People were being subjected to bullying behaviours, either because individuals were reluctant to admit to being bullied, or did not recognise themselves as victims of bullying in the initial question.

Therefore, for Cohort '08 at 13 years old, while the section on bullying started with the same question on 'being bullied in the last 3 months' to facilitate a comparison with Cohort '98, all Young People were subsequently asked about their experience of specific bullying behaviours (regardless of their answer to the initial question).

### Young Person's report of being bullied

Just under 10% of 13-year-olds in Cohort '08 answered yes to the question of whether they had been 'bullied in the last 3 months' (9%; Figure 18). This is virtually the same as the rate reported by Cohort '98 at age 13 using the same question (10%).

Figure 18 Frequency of experience of bullying according to the Young Person



**Just under one-in-ten 13-year-olds answered yes to a question about being bullied in the previous 3 months.**

Figure 18 also shows that generally, differences between 13-year-olds (in Cohort '08) on socio-demographic characteristics were small. Young People in the lowest family income quintile were bullied more often than those in the highest (10% vs 7%). There was no difference between boys and girls, a trend which is also in keeping with patterns among Cohort '98 at age 13.

### *Experience of specific bullying behaviours*

As noted earlier, 13-year-olds in Cohort '08 were asked about their experience of ten specific bullying behaviours (in the last three months) even if they had not described themselves as a victim of bullying. These behaviours included physical, verbal, online and social forms of bullying. The frequencies for each form of bullying are given in Table 6.

*Table 6 Frequency of experience of different bullying behaviours according to the Young Person*

HAVE YOU...	NEVER	ONCE	MORE THAN ONCE
...been hit, kicked or punched?	77%	12%	11%
...been pushed, shoved or slapped?	70%	15%	15%
...experienced name-calling, hurtful slagging?	68%	13%	20%
...been sent a hurtful message by text, email or other message app?	85%	8%	7%
...had something hurtful posted online about you?	91%	6%	3%
...experienced someone circulating an upsetting note or photo or video or graffiti about you?	94%	4%	2%
...experienced someone taking or damaging your possessions?	82%	12%	6%
...experienced exclusion (being left out)?	66%	17%	17%
...experienced gossip, spreading rumours about you?	78%	13%	9%
...been threatened or forced to do things you didn't want to do?	90%	6%	4%

Note: Behaviours are presented in the order they were listed on the questionnaire

**The most frequently reported bullying behaviour was 'name-calling and hurtful slagging'.**

The most common bullying behaviour experienced was being excluded or left out, which was experienced at least once by 34% of 13-year-olds. This was closely followed by name-calling/hurtful slagging (33%), and being pushed, shoved or slapped (30%). The most frequent repeated-behaviour was name-calling/hurtful slagging, with 20% of Young People experiencing this at least twice in the previous three months. The least frequent behaviour was the circulation of an upsetting note, photo, video or graffiti: 4% experienced this once and 2% multiple times in the reference period.

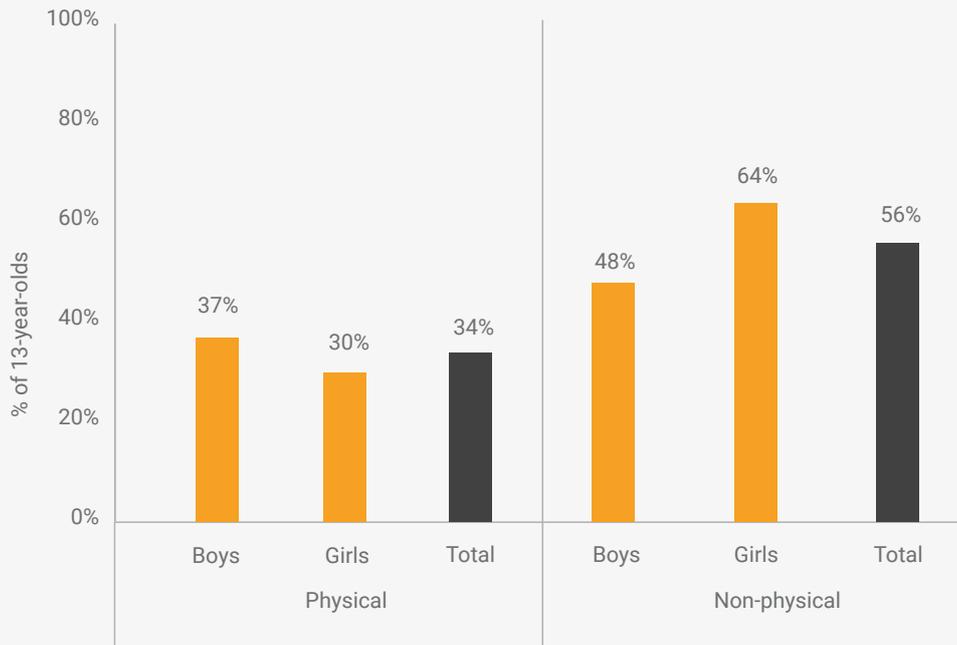


**Patterns of physical bullying behaviours**

The Young Person’s responses to the question on experience of different bullying behaviours (see Table 6) were grouped into experiences of physical bullying and non-physical bullying. Physical bullying included being ‘hit, kicked or punched’, ‘pushed, shoved or slapped’, and ‘someone taking or damaging your possessions’. The remaining behaviours were grouped together as non-physical.

Figure 19 shows that over one-third of 13-year-olds (34%) had at least one experience of a physical bullying behaviour in the three months prior to the survey. Over half (56%) had experienced a non-physical bullying behaviour, such as name-calling, on at least one occasion. Non-physical bullying was more common for both genders, taking into consideration that a greater number of experiences were categorised as non-physical. There were some notable gender differences amongst Young People who reported having experienced a bullying behaviour: boys were more likely to report having experienced a physical bullying behaviour (37%) than girls (30%), while girls were substantially more likely to have experienced a non-physical bullying behaviour (64%) than boys (48%).

**Figure 19 Frequency of physical and non-physical bullying by gender according to the Young Person**

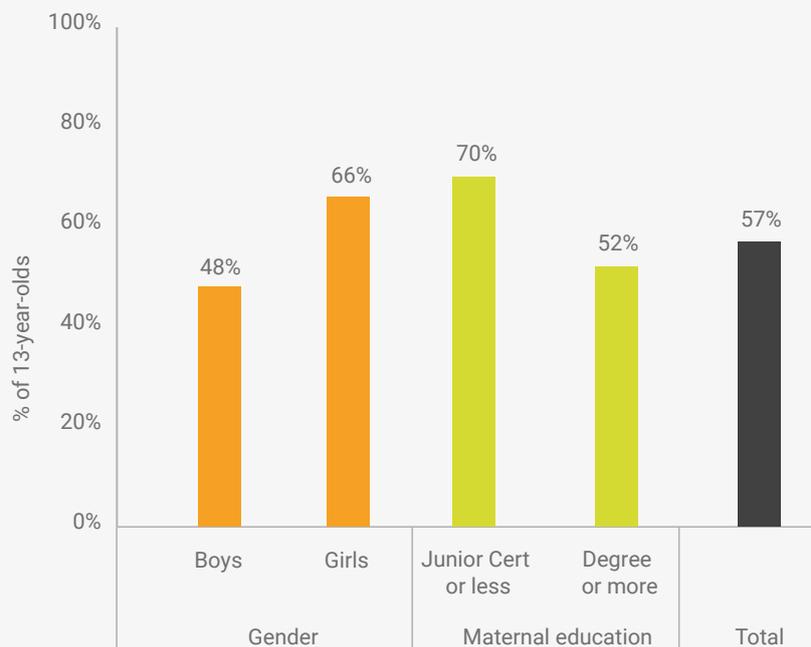


**Boys were more likely to experience physical acts of bullying such as being ‘hit, kicked or punched’.**

### ***Being bullied by the same people on multiple occasions***

Young People were asked if their experience of bullying involved the same person or people on more than one occasion. This was asked both to Young People who answered *yes* to the direct question on having been bullied and to those who answered *no* to the direct question but indicated that they had experienced at least one bullying behaviour from the list in Table 6 (which means that 41% of 13-year-olds were asked the follow-up questions).

**Figure 20 Frequency of being bullied by same person or people on more than one occasion according to the Young Person**



**Over half of 13-year-olds who experienced some bullying behaviours said it was the same person / people on more than one occasion.**

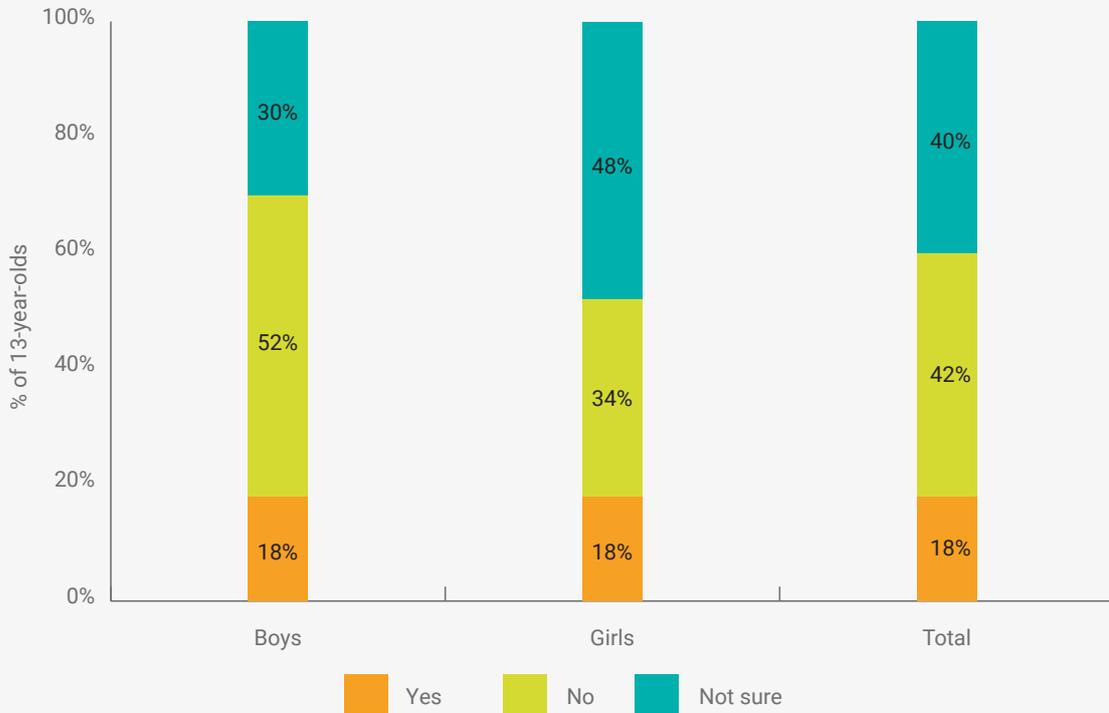
Over half of 13-year-olds (57%) who experienced some form of bullying (by either answering 'yes' to the direct question or 'yes' to any of the individual bullying experiences) said it involved the same person or people on more than one occasion. Two-thirds of girls who were bullied said it was by the same person or people, compared to just under half of boys (48%). Young People living in a household with a mother with lower educational attainment were also more likely to say they were bullied by the same person/people multiple times (Figure 20).

### ***Perceived intention to be hurtful***

The Young People who had experienced bullying behaviours were also asked if they believed that the person or people bullying them had intended to be hurtful.



Figure 21 Frequency of whether the bully intended to be hurtful according to the Young Person



**Boys who had experienced bullying behaviours were more likely than girls to believe it had not been intentionally hurtful.**

In total, 18% of 13-year-olds reported that they believed the other person intended to be hurtful, while 38% were unsure of their intention (Figure 21). Boys and girls were equally likely to believe that the other person intended to be hurtful (18%), while boys were more likely than girls to believe it was not intentionally hurtful (52% and 34% respectively).



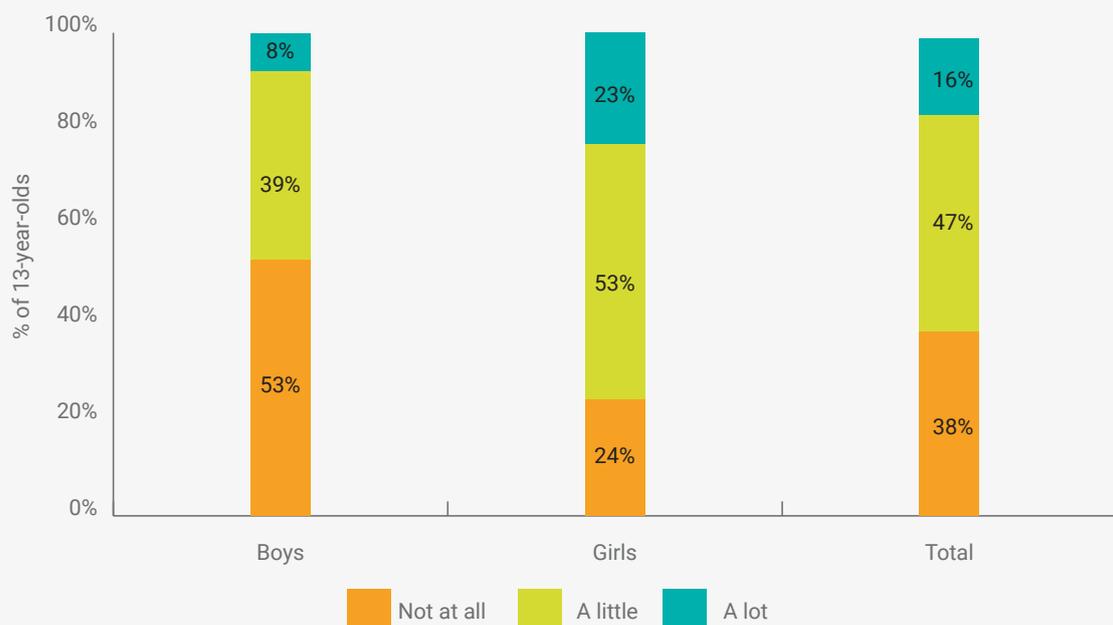
### Emotional impact of bullying

The Young Person was asked if the experience of a bullying behaviour made them feel 'upset', 'afraid' or 'angry' (as separate questions). The possible responses were *not at all*, *a little* and *a lot*. Due to small cell sizes, the *a little* and *a lot* categories were combined for analysis on the question about feeling afraid. As before, these items were asked of the 41% of 13-year-olds who answered yes to the direct question on being bullied or answered *no* to the direct question but indicated that they had experienced at least one bullying behaviour.

#### Being upset by bullying experiences

Nearly 40% of 13-year-olds who had experienced bullying behaviours said it did not upset them *at all* but 16% felt *a lot* upset (Figure 22). The remaining 47% were upset *a little*. Boys were over twice as likely to say they did not feel *at all* upset (53%) compared to girls (24%). Girls were much more likely to have been upset *a lot* by the experience (23%) compared to boys (8%).

Figure 22 Frequencies of feeling upset after experience of bullying according to the Young Person



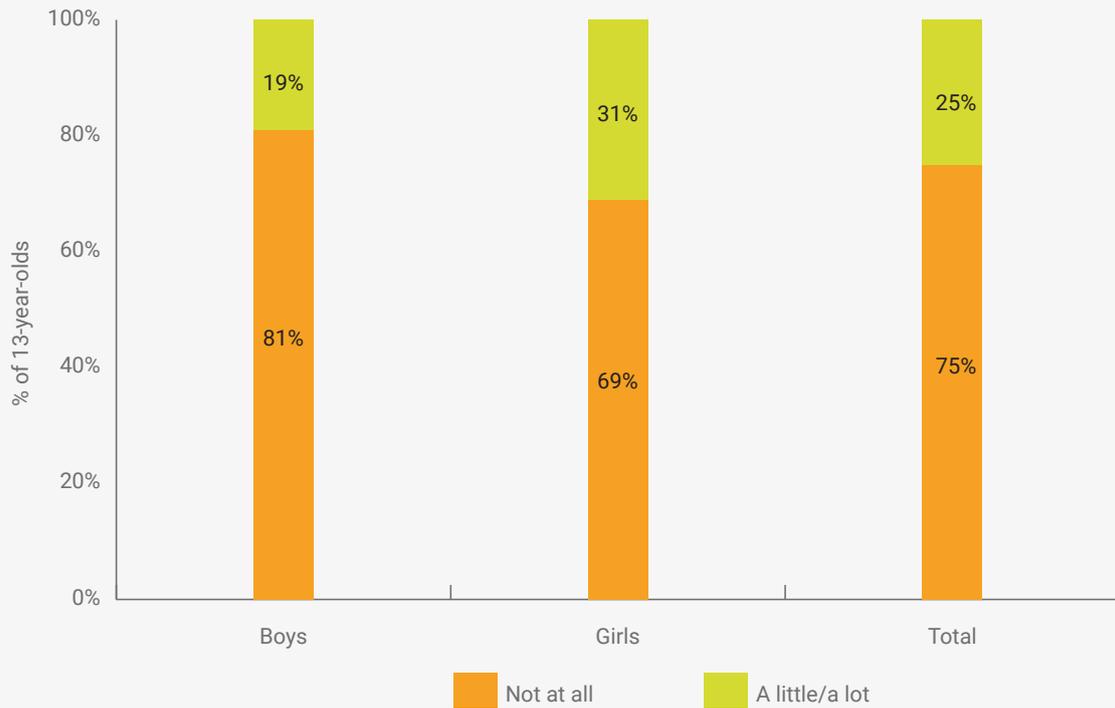
**Girls who had experienced bullying behaviours were more likely than boys to say they had been upset by it.**



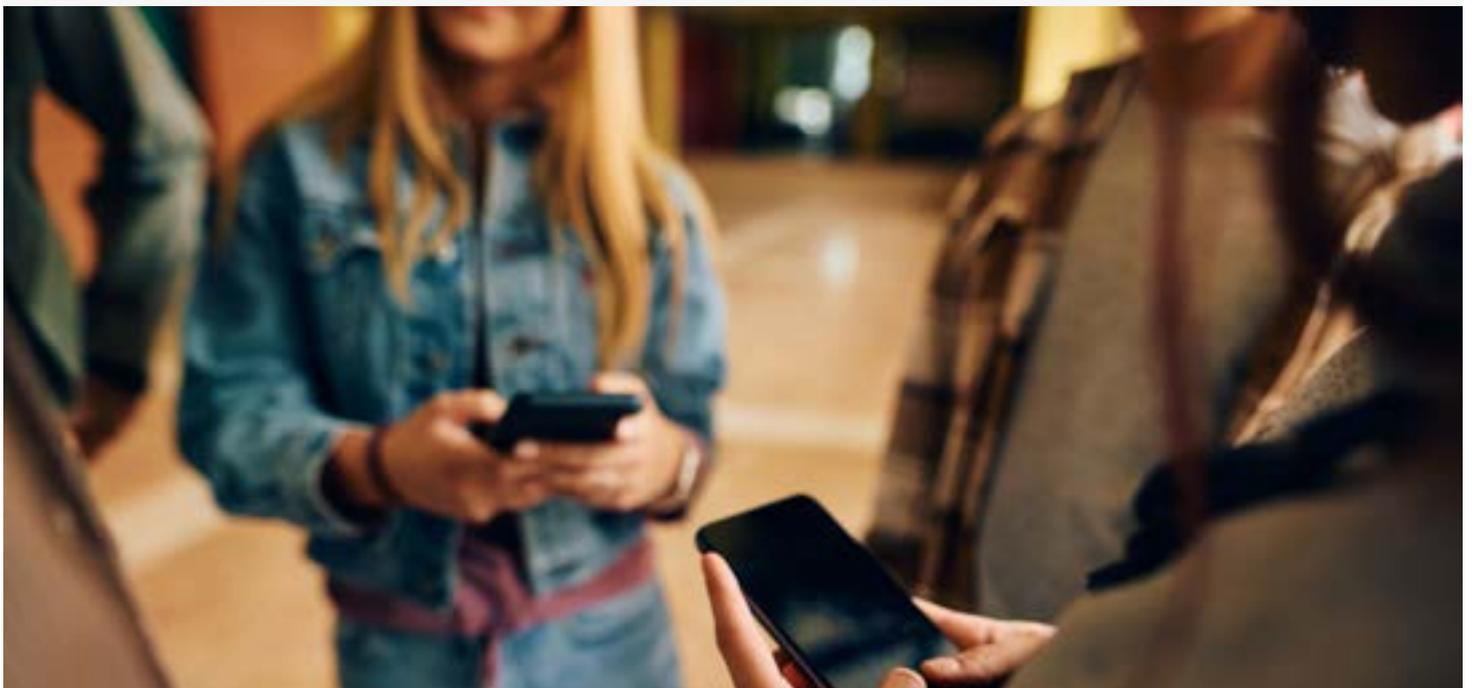
### Feeling afraid due to bullying experiences

For the question on feeling afraid, three-quarters of 13-year-olds who had experienced bullying behaviours said they did not feel afraid at all (Figure 23). Boys were more likely to respond *not at all* than girls (81% versus 69%).

Figure 23 Frequencies of feeling afraid after experience of bullying according to the Young Person



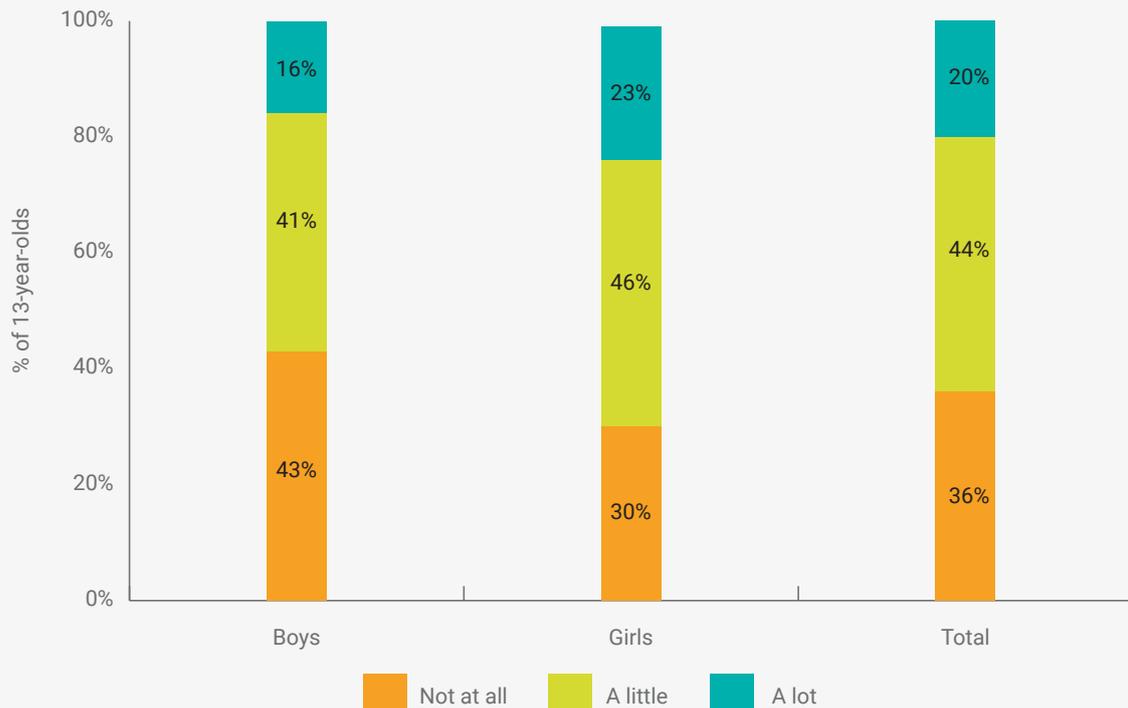
**Girls who had experienced bullying behaviours were more likely to say it had made them feel afraid; although a majority did not.**



*Feeling angered by experience of bullying*

Over one-third of 13-year-olds were *not at all* angry about their experience of bullying behaviour (Figure 24) but 20% felt a *lot* angry. Boys were once again more likely to answer *not at all* angry (43%) than girls (30%), and were less likely to say they were angered a *lot* (16%) than girls (23%).

**Figure 24** Frequencies of feeling angry because of bullying behaviour according to the Young Person



**Girls who had experienced bullying behaviours were more likely to say it had made them feel angry.**

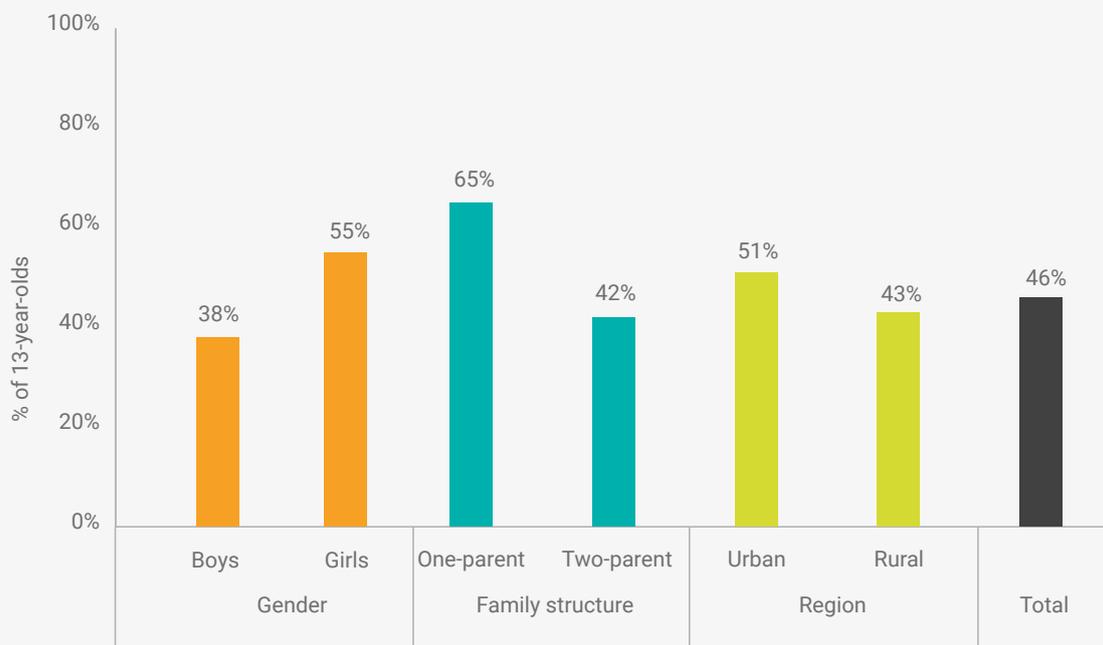




**Telling a parent or teacher about bullying**

Young People who had been bullied (i.e. they had either responded yes to the direct question, or had experienced a bullying behaviour) were asked if they had informed a 'parent, teacher or other adult' about it. Fewer than half of 13-year-olds who had experienced bullying told an adult (Figure 25). Girls were more likely to tell an adult than boys (55% and 38%, respectively). Young People living in a one-parent household were more likely to tell someone (65%) than those living in a two-parent household (42%). There was also a trend towards more 13-year-olds living in an urban area telling an adult about their experience (51%) compared to 43% of 13-year-olds living in a rural area, but this difference was not statistically significant.

**Figure 25 Frequency of telling an adult about being bullied, according to the Young Person**

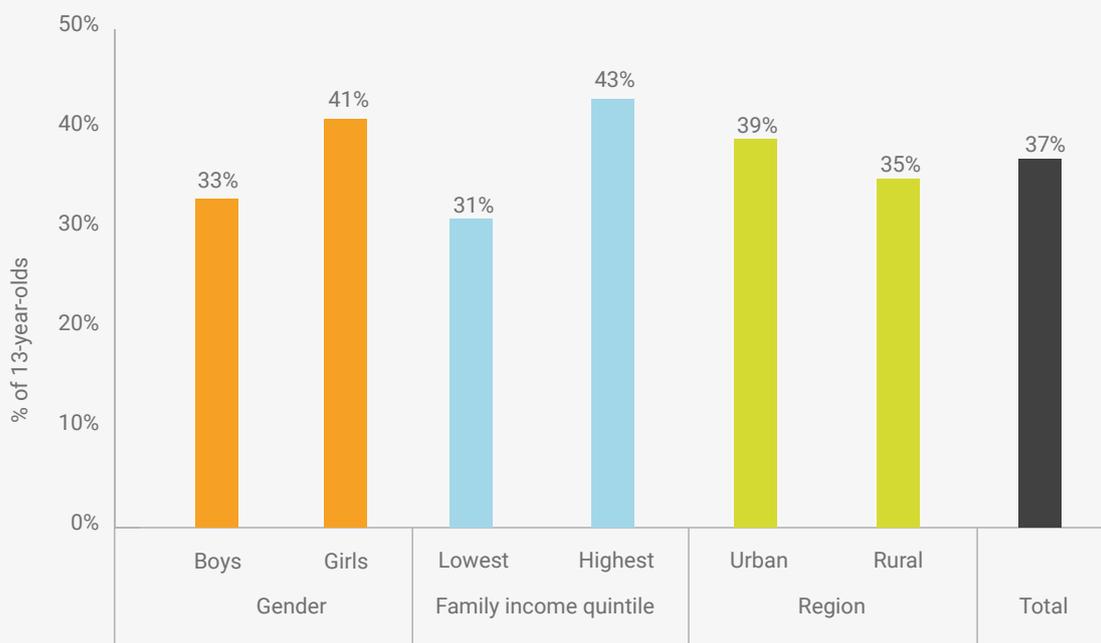


**Girls and/or Young People in a one-parent household were more likely to tell an adult if they had been bullied.**

### *An alternative definition of being a victim of bullying derived from reported experience*

The 13-year-olds' responses to the items on experiencing specific bullying behaviours were used to construct an alternative definition of bullying victimisation based on whether the Young Person had experienced any of the individual bullying behaviours multiple times.<sup>18</sup> This allows for a comparison between the number of Young People who self-describe as victims of bullying compared to how an observer might describe them based on their experiences.

**Figure 26 Frequency of experiencing at least one bullying behaviour repeatedly, according to the Young Person**



**When bullying is defined as repeated experience of a specific act of bullying – such as name-calling – over a third of Young People could be described as bullying victims.**

Over one-third of 13-year-olds (37%, Figure 26) had experienced at least one kind of bullying behaviour multiple time in the previous three months. This is a considerably larger estimate of potential bullying victims compared to the number who answered yes to the direct question, 'have you been bullied in the last three months' (9%). Girls were more likely than boys to be categorised as a victim of bullying using this alternative approach (41% compared to 33%).

Young People in the highest quintile of family income were also more likely to be categorised as a bullying victim (43%) than those in the lowest quintile (31%) – which is a somewhat different pattern than was observed for responses to the direct question about being a victim of bullying. There was a small but significant difference between Young People in urban areas (39%) compared to rural areas (35%).

<sup>18</sup> There are, of course, other ways in which researchers may wish to use the data to operationalise an alternative categorisation of being a victim of bullying.



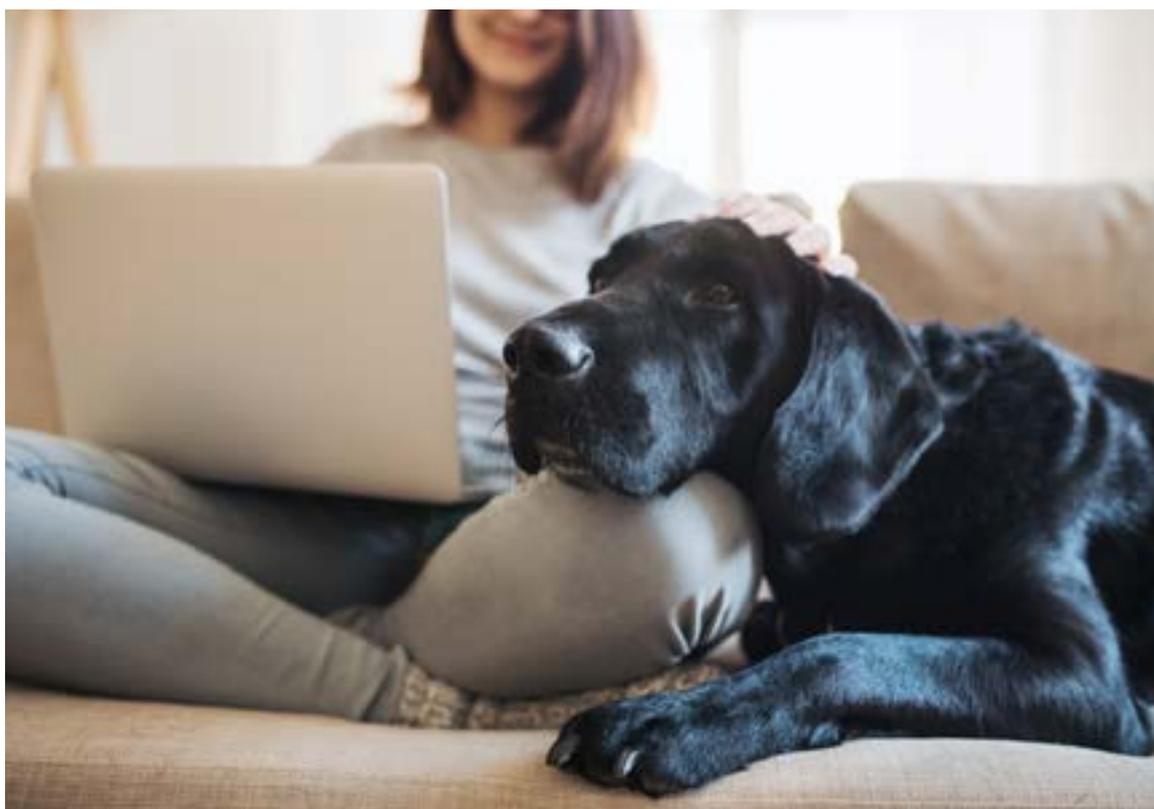
### Parental awareness of bullying

The mother of the Young Person was asked (in their main telephone interview) if they were aware if their child had been a victim of bullying 'in the last 3 months'. Overall, 9% of mothers said they were aware of the child being bullied. For the subset of mothers whose 13-year-old also completed a sensitive questionnaire, the relevant percentage is 10%. These maternal responses were then cross-referenced against the Young Person's reports in Table 7.

Table 7 Frequency of parental awareness about bullying

	TOTAL	OF WHOSE MOTHERS WERE AWARE	OF WHOSE MOTHERS UNAWARE
<b>Number of 13-year-olds who answered yes to question on being bullied</b>	9%	34% (3% of all YP)	66% (6% of all YP)
<b>Number of 13-year-olds who experienced at least one bullying behaviour two or more times</b>	37%	17% (6% of all YP)	83% (30% of all YP)

Comparing the responses for individual parent-child pairs, of the 9% of Young People who described themselves as being bullied (in answer to the direct question), 34% of their mothers were also aware of it. When the definition of being bullied is extended to the 37% of children who experienced a particular bullying behaviour at least twice, 17% of their mothers were aware (6% of all Young People). These figures suggest that quite a high proportion of mothers were unaware of what their 13-year-old was experiencing in this regard.

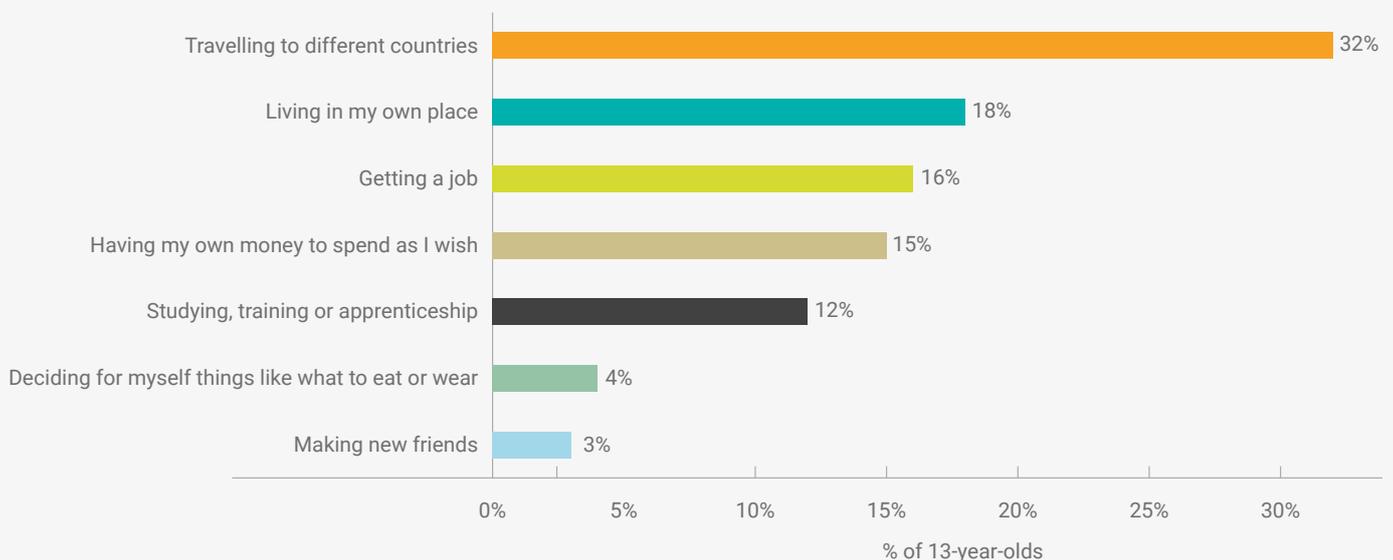


## Looking forward to being an adult

The last question that 13-year-olds answered before finishing their self-complete questionnaire online was, 'Thinking ahead to when you will be an adult, which of the following do you most look forward to [tick one]?' This was a new item, constructed by the Study Team, intended to help Young People finish on a more optimistic note after answering questions on some intensive topics elsewhere in the module.

The full list of choices, and the percentage of Young People who chose each one, are presented in Figure 27.<sup>19</sup> As Figure 27 shows, the most popular choice from the list was *travelling to different countries* at 32%. This was followed by *living in my own place* at 18%. The least popular item was *making new friends* which just 3% of 13-year-olds chose as the thing about adulthood they most looked forward to.

**Figure 27 What 13-year-olds were most looking forward to about being an adult (choose one)**



**Travelling to different countries was the most popular aspect of adulthood that 13-year-olds were looking forward to.**

There is a rich pool of data to explore with this question in terms of preferences by different socio-demographic categories. For the purposes of this report, we focus on three likely options immediately after school: travel (32%), getting a job (16%) and study/training (12%). Figure 28 considers each of these aspirations according to the Young Person's gender and the family's income quintile (lowest vs highest quintile).

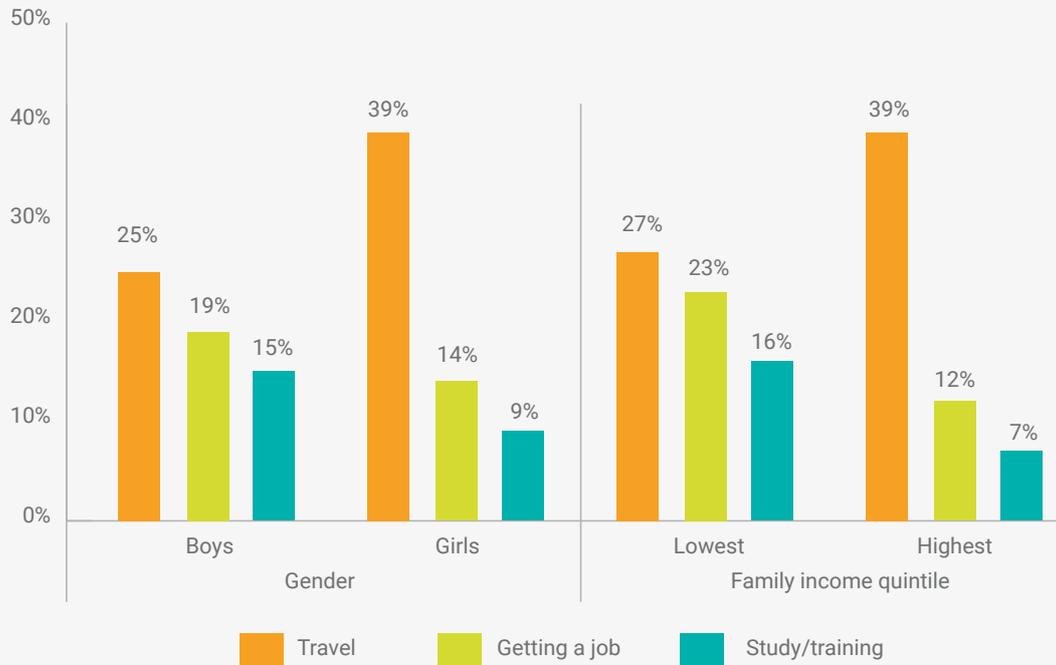
Travel was the most popular choice for both genders, and both the highest and lowest income quintiles; however, a higher proportion of girls chose it relative to other options than did boys (39% vs 25%). There was a similar contrast between Young People in the highest and lowest family income quintiles with the former choosing travel more often (39% vs 27%). In contrast, 13-year-olds in the lowest income quintile chose 'getting a job' as their main aspiration nearly twice as often as their peers in the highest income quintile (23% vs 12%). Those in the lowest income quintile were also more likely to put 'study/training' as their top choice (16% vs 7%).

There were gender differences for choosing a job or study/training as well, both of which were more favoured by boys, but less marked than differences by income.

<sup>19</sup> Young People could choose just one item from a pre-determined list; there were no open-text options on the self-complete questionnaire. This means that some of the Young People may not have seen their actual preferred option on the list.



**Figure 28 Gender and income differences in choosing travel, a job or study as the thing 13-year-olds were most looking forward to about adulthood**



**Travelling to different countries as an adult was more important to girls, and Young People from families in the highest income quintile.**



## Family Relationships

The emotional quality of the relationships within the family is an important part of the Young Person's immediate context during their development. This includes relationships between the parents as well as the interactions between individual parents and the Young Person. If one of the biological parents lives elsewhere (i.e. 'non-resident' or 'own household parent;'), then the frequency of contact and receipt of financial support are potentially important features of the family dynamic.

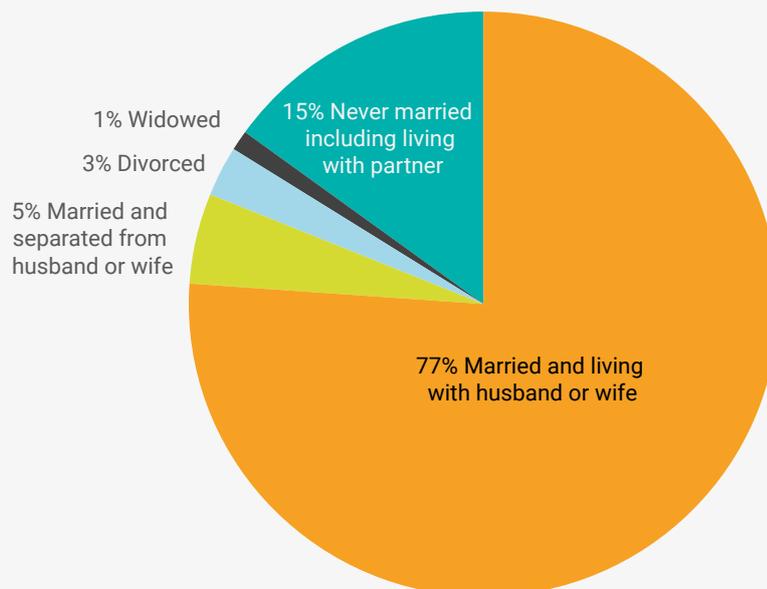
### Relationship between resident parents

#### *Marital status of the mother*

A large majority of 13-year-olds were living in households with a married couple (77%; Figure 29). The next most frequent category was where the mother was 'never married' (but may have been cohabiting,<sup>20</sup> 15%). Smaller proportions of mothers described their legal marital status as 'married and separated' (5%), 'divorced' (3%) or 'widowed' (1%), but these individuals may have been living with someone other than their original spouse. Just under 8% of Young People lived in a household with a couple who were not married to each other. The majority of couples (88%) had been living together since before 2008, when most of the Young People were born.

A new question for Cohort '08 at 13, not used in previous waves of the study, asked mothers who were not living with someone as a couple if they were in a relationship with someone outside the household. Such a person may be a significant presence in the life of the Young Person even if they do not live with them. Just under 20% of mothers who were not living with someone as a couple were in a relationship with someone outside the household, equal to 3% of the overall sample.

**Figure 29 Current marital status of the 13-year-old's mother**



Note: One-third of those who were not 'married and living with spouse' were living with someone else as a couple (8% of the total sample)

**Three-quarters of 13-year-olds lived in a household with a married couple.**

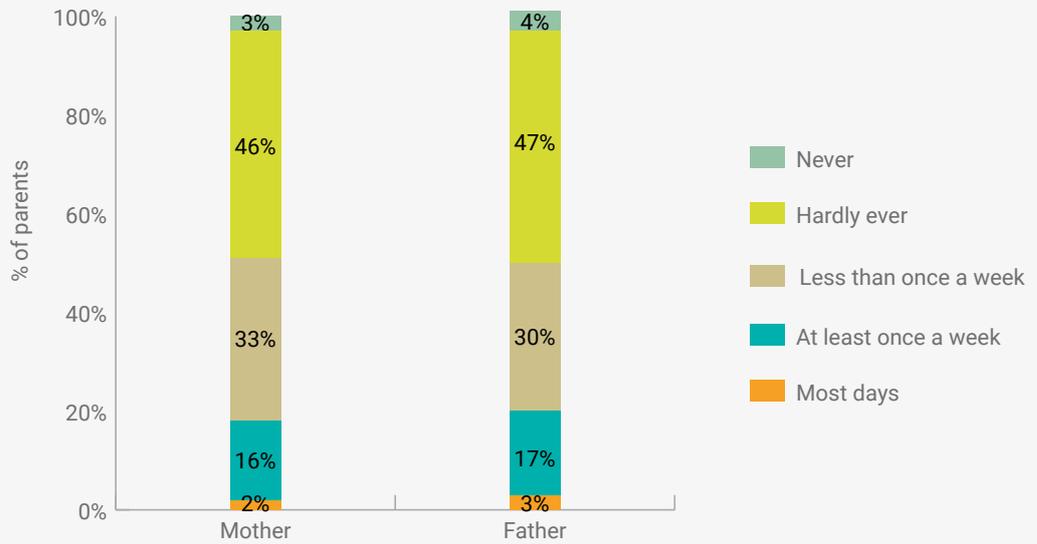
<sup>20</sup> In the questionnaire, 'never married (including living with a partner)' was the original response option



**Quality of relationship between resident parents**

In two-parent households, both mothers and fathers were asked to describe the emotional quality of their relationship as a couple. As shown in Figure 30, the overall reports of how often couples argued were very similar between mothers and fathers (although not necessarily consistent within individual couples). Nearly half of parents (both genders) said they ‘hardly ever’ argued, and an additional one-third argued ‘less than once a week’. The relevant percentages were almost identical for mothers and fathers. There were small percentages at either end of the frequency spectrum (‘never’ and ‘most days’). Note, however, that not all resident fathers completed an interview, so their percentages are based on a smaller group than those of the mothers (and we do not know if they would have given the same pattern of answers as fathers who did participate).

**Figure 30 Mothers’ and fathers’ reports on how often they argue with their resident spouse/partner**

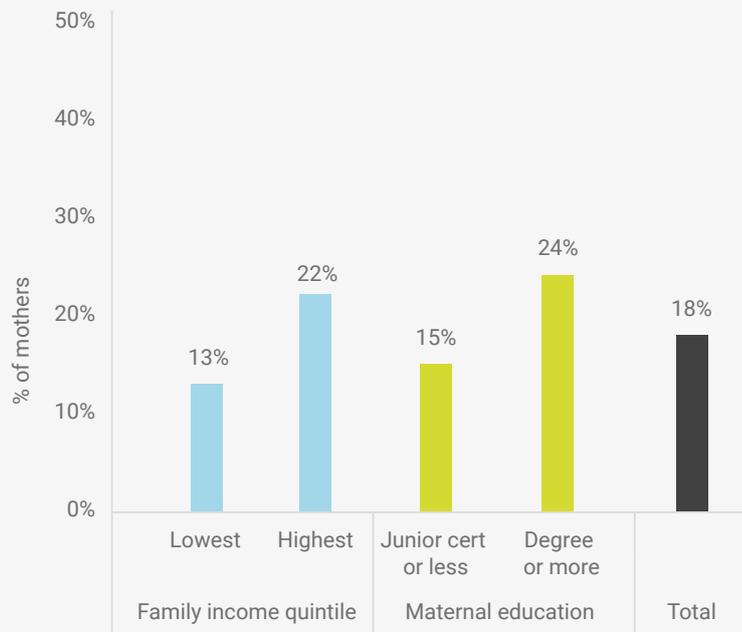


**Just over half of parents living as a couple said they ‘hardly ever’ or ‘never’ argued.**

The following analysis looks at the mother’s report<sup>21</sup> of frequently arguing with her spouse/partner (i.e. ‘most days’ or ‘at least once a week’; 18% overall). Figure 31 shows that mothers who were in the highest income quintile or had the highest level of education were more likely to report frequent arguing with their spouse/partner than their peers with the lowest income or lowest education. Specifically, 22% of mothers in the highest income quintile frequently argued with their partner compared to 13% of mothers in the lowest quintile; and 24% of mothers with degree-level education had frequent arguments compared to 15% among those with Junior Certificate education or less. Frequency of arguing was not patterned by the child’s gender or living in an urban versus rural location (not illustrated).

<sup>21</sup> There were too few cases of frequent arguing based on the father’s report to break these down further

**Figure 31 Percentage of mothers living with someone as a couple who frequently argued (i.e. 'at least once a week' or 'most days') with their spouse/partner, according to family income quintile and maternal education**



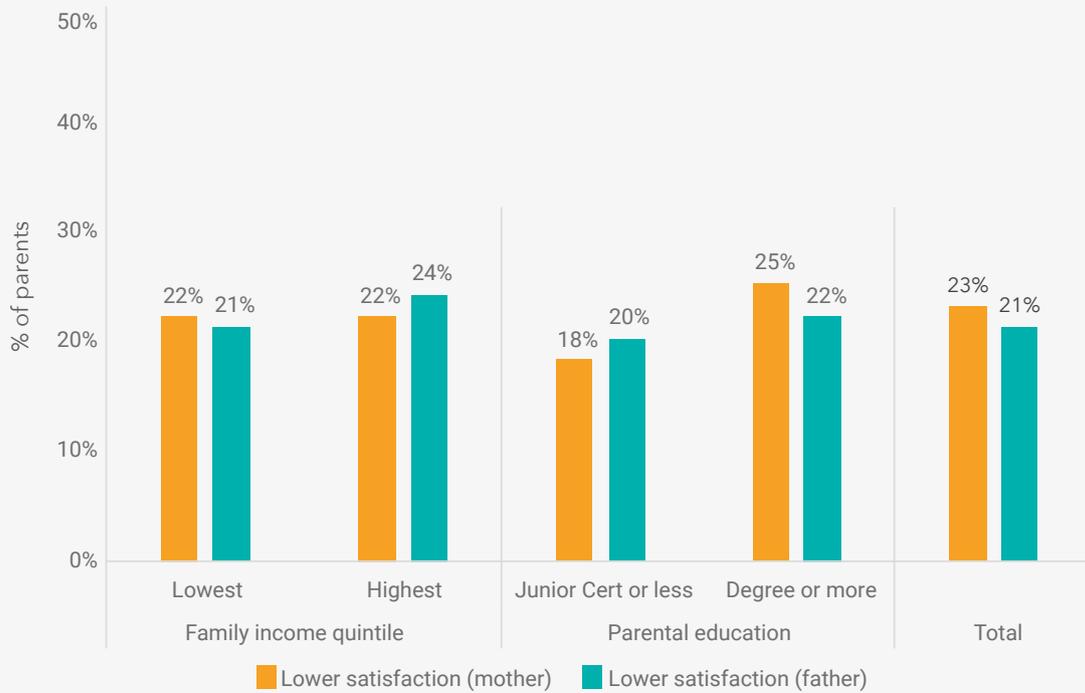
**Mothers in the highest income quintile and/or with degree-level education were more likely to report frequent arguing with their partner.**

Couples were also asked to complete a four-item measure of marital satisfaction called the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). A sample item from the scale is 'you think that things between you and your partner are going well'. Scores ranged from 0-21, where higher scores reflected greater satisfaction. Both mothers and fathers had similar mean scores at the group level: 16.4 for mothers and 16.6 for fathers. To explore socio-demographic patterns further, a 'lower satisfaction' group was created based on scores in the lowest quintile of the DAS measures (i.e. the lowest fifth).





**Figure 32 Percentage of mothers and fathers living as a couple whose marital satisfaction was in the lowest quintile, according to family income quintile and parental education**



Note: Parental education refers to maternal education for lower satisfaction among mothers, and paternal education for lower satisfaction among fathers.

**Mothers with degree-level education were more likely to report lower relationship satisfaction but there were no significant differences for fathers.**

Figure 32 shows that, as was the case for frequency of arguing, mothers who had the highest levels of education were more likely to be in the 'lower satisfaction' group (25%) than mothers with a Junior Certificate or less (18%). In contrast to the pattern for frequency of arguing, there was no significant difference by household income (22% for each of the highest and lowest income quintiles). Nor was there a difference by household income or paternal education for lower satisfaction among fathers (also Figure 32).



## Relationship with a non-resident father

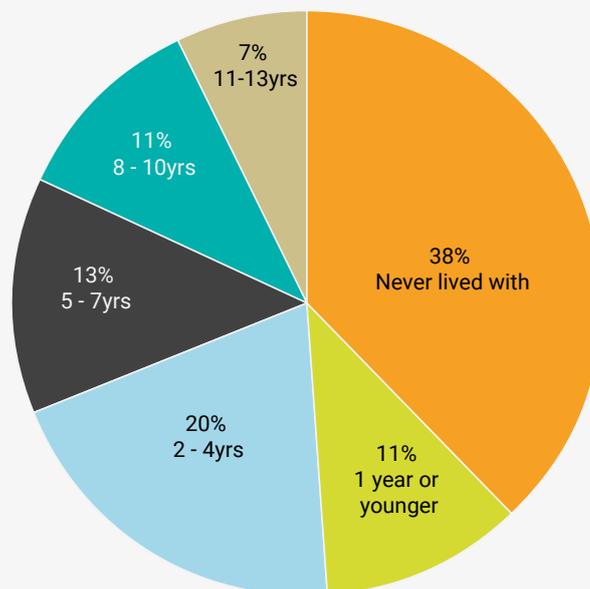
One-fifth of mothers who completed the online module described the Young Person's other biological parent as 'living elsewhere'. Those mothers were then asked some further questions about their and their child's relationship with that non-resident parent (typically the father). The percentages discussed in the rest of this section refer to just those 13-year-olds with a non-resident parent (unless otherwise specified), and based on information provided by the resident mother.<sup>22</sup>

### Timing of separation

Nearly 40% of households with a non-resident parent had never lived with that person.<sup>23</sup> The remainder were split almost equally between those who had previously been married to the (now) non-resident parent (33%) and those who had previously lived with, but had not been married to, them (30%).

Figure 33 summarises what age the Young Person was when their biological parents separated. Nearly half had never lived with the non-resident father (38%) or only when they were an infant (11%). An additional 20% of Young People with a non-resident parent experienced that separation between the ages of 2 and 4 years. The separation had been comparatively recent (since the age of 11 years) for 7% of relevant Young People.

Figure 33 Age of Young Person at time of the biological parents' separation



**Over two-thirds of 13-year-olds with a non-resident parent had been 4 years old or younger at the time of separation.**

<sup>22</sup> It was not feasible to attempt to survey non-resident parents at this wave; it should be noted that some international research finds differences in responses to questions between resident mothers and non-resident fathers (e.g. Kitterod & Lyngstad, 2014, [www.jstor.org/stable/26348222](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26348222))

<sup>23</sup> It is assumed for this analysis that if the resident mother never lived with the child's other biological parent, then neither did the child

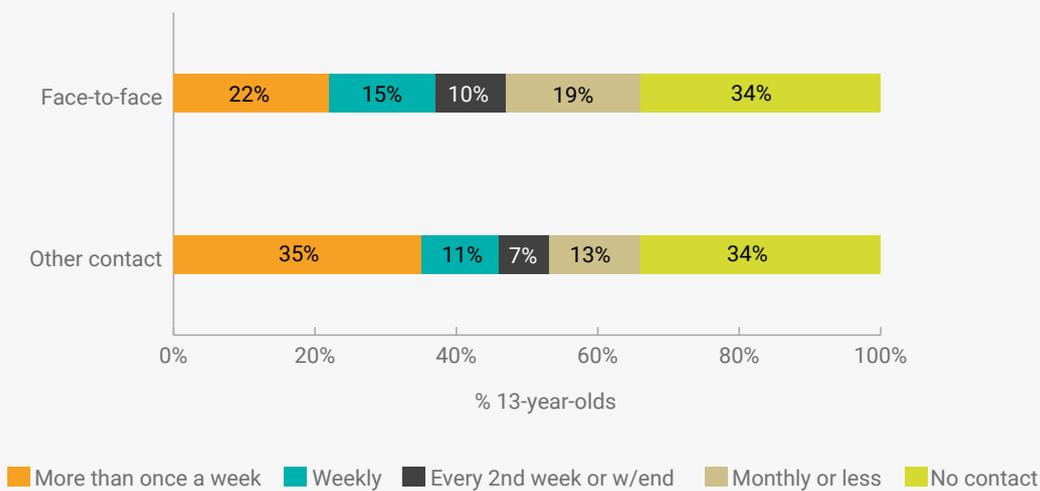


### Frequency of contact between Young Person and the non-resident parent

Figure 34 illustrates how often the 13-year-old had (a) face-to-face contact and/or (b) other forms of contact with their non-resident parent. Note that this is reported by the resident mother rather than the Young Person.

In terms of face-to-face contact, 22% of 13-year-olds met their non-resident parent *more than once a week*. At the other end of the spectrum, over a third (34%) had no face-to-face contact at all. There was similar diversity in the amount of other forms of contact (not face-to-face): 35% had remote contact *more than once a week* (inclusive of 16% who had daily contact) and a similar proportion who had no contact (34%).

**Figure 34 Patterns of face-to-face contact and, separately, other forms of contact between the 13-year-old and the non-resident parent**



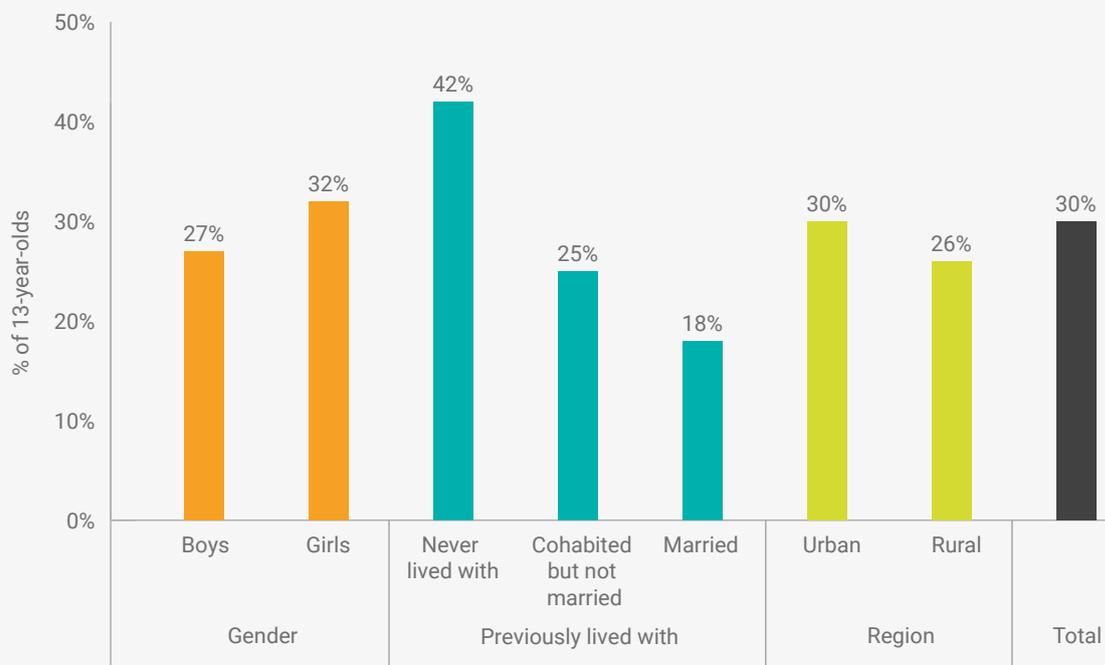
**There was considerable variation in the amount of contact between 13-year-olds and their non-resident parent; however, one-third had no contact.**



Just under a third (30%) of 13-year-olds had no contact at all with their non-resident parent – neither face-to-face nor by other means. Figure 35 explores some associations between this “zero contact” group and other characteristics. Some of the biggest differences were observed between Young People who had previously lived with that parent and those that had never lived together. Over 40% of 13-year-olds who had never lived with their other biological parent were in the “zero contact” group compared to just 18% whose parents had previously been married to each other, and 25% whose parents had lived together but had not been married.

Girls were more likely to be in the “zero contact” group than boys (32% versus 27%), but statistical significance was marginal. There was no significant difference in likelihood of no contact between Young People in urban compared to rural areas.

**Figure 35 Percentage of 13-year-olds who had no contact at all with their non-resident parent, by the Young Person's gender, region, and whether they had ever lived with the other parent**



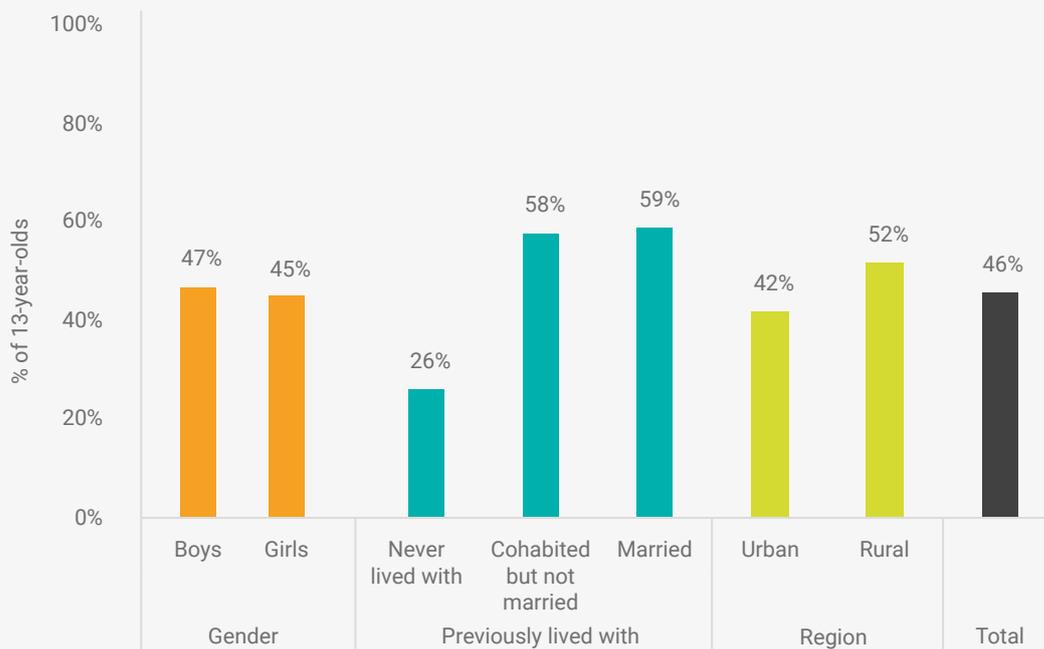
**The likelihood of there being no contact at all between the 13-year-old and their non-resident parent was much higher if the biological parents had never lived together.**



**Financial support from the non-resident parent**

The mothers of Young People with a non-resident parent were almost equally divided between those who received a regular payment from that parent (46%) and those who received nothing at all (43%). Smaller numbers received 'payments from time to time' or said the other parent paid for some things for the Young Person but did not make a direct payment (6% in each group).

**Figure 36 Receipt of a regular payment from the non-resident parent according to Young Person's gender, region, and if the parents had ever lived together**



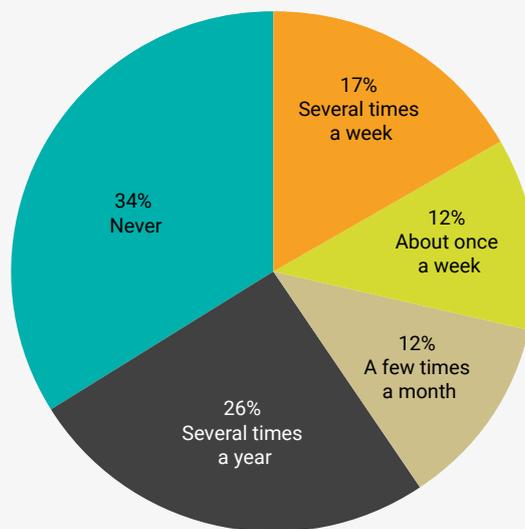
**One of the most important factors in the payment of regular financial support by the non-resident parent was whether the parents had ever lived together.**

Figure 36 shows that non-resident parents who had never lived with the mother were the least likely to make a regular payment (26%); in marked contrast to those who had lived with the mother, whether married to them or not (59% and 58%, respectively, making a regular payment). Families who lived in rural areas were also more likely to receive a regular payment (52%) than those in urban areas (42%), although it is not clear why this might be the case. Note that the urban/rural categorisation refers to the area where the Young Person lives and not necessarily the non-resident parent. The Young Person's gender did not make a difference to the likelihood of there being a regular payment (47% for boys and 45% for girls).

**Contact between the resident and non-resident parents**

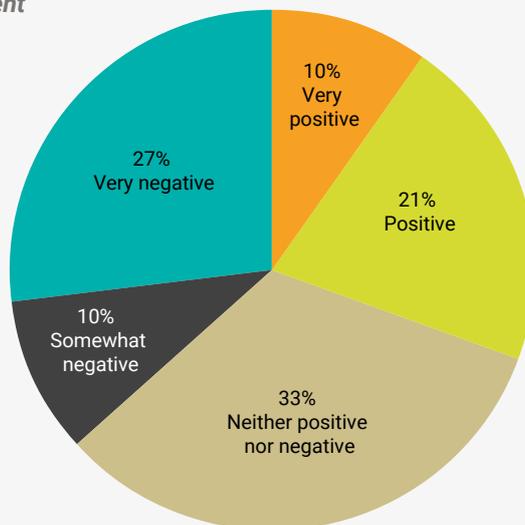
One-third of resident mothers said they never spoke to the Young Person’s non-resident parent (34%) about their 13-year-old (Figure 37). However, some mothers frequently spoke to the other parent about the 13-year-old: 17% *several times a week* and a further 12% *about once a week*. There was similar variation in the resident mother’s rating of the quality of her own relationship with the Young Person’s non-resident parent: 31% described it as *positive* or *very positive* but 37% said the relationship was *somewhat negative* or *very negative* (Figure 38).

**Figure 37 How often the Young Person’s resident mother talks to the non-resident parent about them**



**A majority of resident mothers spoke to the non-resident parent about their 13-year-old at least a few times a year, but one-third never spoke to them.**

**Figure 38 The resident mother’s rating of the quality of the relationship between her and the other biological parent**



**There was considerable variation in the quality of the relationship between the resident and non-resident parent.**

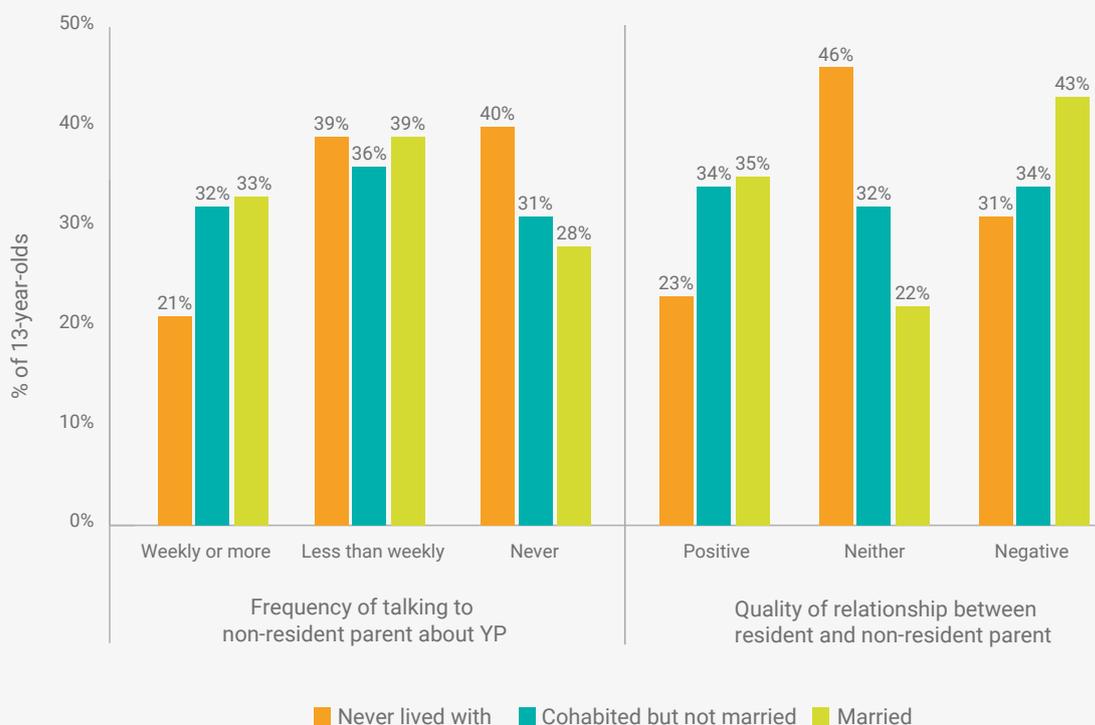


As with other characteristics of interactions with the non-resident parent, the resident mother was more likely to have frequent contact with that person – and to describe their relationship in positive terms – if they had previously lived with them (in contrast to never lived with them; Figure 39).

Talking to the non-resident parent about their 13-year-old at least weekly was more likely between parents who had previously lived together; 33% and 32% for married and co-habiting, respectively, reducing to 21% for those who never lived together. On the other end of the spectrum, however, almost a third of parents who had lived together *never* spoke to each other about the Young Person (28% and 31% for married and cohabiting, respectively). The percentage who *never* spoke increased to 40% among those who had not lived together.

Around a third of mothers who had been married to, or had lived with but were not married to, the non-resident parent said their relationship was *positive* or *very positive* (35% and 34%, respectively); compared to just 23% of those who had never lived together. However, mothers who had been married to the Young Person's father were also the most likely to describe the current relationship as *very* or *somewhat negative* (43%), compared to 34% for previously cohabiting (not married) and 31% for never lived together.

**Figure 39** The resident mother's report of how often they spoke to the non-resident parent about the Young Person, and the quality of the relationship with that person, according to whether they had ever lived together



**Mothers who had been previously married to the non-resident parent were the most likely to describe their current relationship as 'positive' but also the most likely to say it was 'negative'. No contact between parents was more likely when they had never lived together.**

## Young Person's perspective on their relationship with the resident parent who 'usually looks after' them

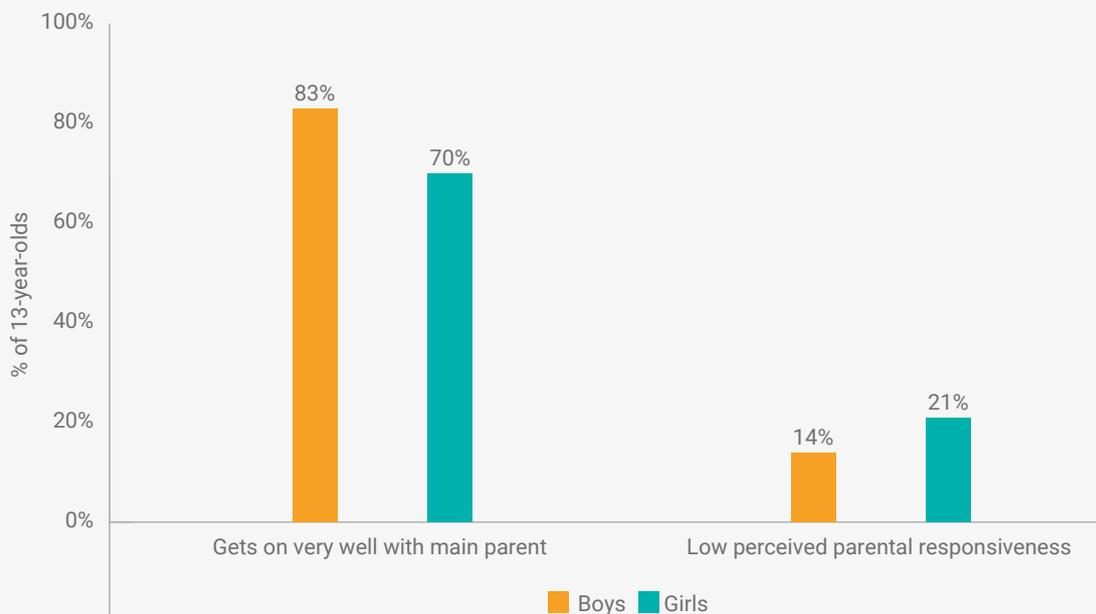
To cater for variations in family type in the online self-complete module, the Young Person was asked about their relationship with 'the parent or guardian whom you live with and usually looks after you' rather than about a mother or father specifically. Most of the parents who described themselves as the 'primary caregiver' for the purposes of the parent interviews were the 13-year-old's mother. Therefore, she was likely to be, but not necessarily, the person about whom the Young Person answered the questions in this section.

### 'Getting on' together

Three-quarters of 13-year-olds (77%) said they got on *very well* with the parent who usually looks after them (referred to just as 'the parent' for the rest of this section). Most of the remainder (22%) said they got on *fairly well* with their parent, with just 1% saying *we do not get on*. Cohort '98 at age 13 had reported on interactions with 'mothers' and 'fathers' separately but a similarly small percentage said they did not get on with each (1% and 2%, respectively).<sup>24</sup>

Back to Cohort '08 at age 13, girls were less likely than boys to get on *very well* with their parent (70% vs 83%, respectively; Figure 40). There was no significant difference between Young People in one-parent compared to two-parent households, with 74% and 77%, respectively getting on *very well*; nor was there a difference between the highest (78%) and lowest income quintiles (80%) on this measure (not illustrated).<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 40 Gender differences in the Young Person's ratings of 'getting on very well' with their parent, and rating them in the lowest quintile for 'responsiveness'**



**Girls were less positive than boys about their relationship with the parent who usually looked after them; being less likely to say they got on very well and more likely to rate their parent as relatively low on responsiveness.**

<sup>24</sup> Taken from Growing Up in Ireland Child Cohort at 13 – Key Findings No. 4: The Lives of 13-Year-Olds – Their Relationships, Feelings and Behaviours <https://www.growingup.gov.ie/pubs/OPEA115.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> There was, however, a trend for the middle income group to be somewhat less likely to say they got on well with their parent (71%)



### *Parental responsiveness*

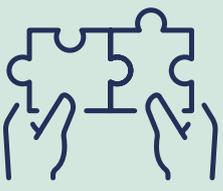
After the general question on how well they got on with their parent, the Young Person answered a set of five items about how responsive that parent was. The five items were added together to give a total parental “responsiveness” score. A sample item is ‘I can count on my parent to help me out if I have a problem’. The mean score was 21 out of a maximum of 25, suggesting that most 13-year-olds felt their parent was responsive to their needs.

To compare groups of Young People on this indicator of the parent-child relationship, the scores were divided into approximate quintiles with a focus on parents in the lowest quintile (17%). These parents were described by their children as being less responsive to their needs, although that should be considered in the context of high scores overall.

Consistent with the gender differences seen for the question on getting on ‘very well’, girls were more likely to rate their parent in the lowest responsiveness quintile (21%) than were boys (14%) – also Figure 40. Similar to the previous question, there were no significant differences by income (15% each in the lowest and highest income quintiles) or family structure (19% and 17% for one and two-parent households, respectively).



## Highlights

<p><b>Health</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While just 3% of 13-year-olds had smoked a cigarette, 9% had tried vaping. Young People whose parent smoked or vaped were more likely to have used vapes.</li> <li>• Almost a quarter of 13-year-olds were either overweight (17%) or obese (7%).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sex and relationships</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10% of 13-year-olds said they had a boyfriend or girlfriend at the time of the survey.</li> <li>• 'Mum' was the most popular choice in response to a question on where the 13-year-old would go for information on sex and relationships (37%). The next most popular options were 'friends' (17%) and 'the internet' (13%).</li> <li>• Just over half (55%) of 13-year-olds said they had discussed sex and relationship issues with a parent.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Socio-emotional well-being</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Almost a third of 13-year-olds in Cohort '08 (31%) had scores in the 'at risk' range on a measure of depressive symptoms, a big increase compared to Cohort '98 at the same age, using the same measure. Girls were at a much higher risk (45%) than boys (19%).</li> <li>• Just under 10% of 13-year-olds reported that they had been bullied in the previous three months. However, almost 40% had experienced bullying behaviours on multiple occasions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Family relationships</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over three-quarters of 13-year-olds said they 'got on very well' with the parent who usually looked after them. Just 1% said they 'do not get on' with that parent.</li> <li>• One-in-five 13-year-olds had a biological parent living elsewhere (i.e. a non-resident parent). There was considerable diversity in patterns of contact between Young People and their non-resident parent: 22% saw them face-to-face 'more than once a week' but 34% never saw them face-to-face. Almost a third had no contact all (neither face-to-face nor remotely).</li> </ul>



## Notes

### About the Study

Growing Up in Ireland is the national longitudinal study of children and young people designed to inform policy affecting children, young people and their families. Up to and including the age 13 wave of Cohort '08, the study was carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute and Trinity College Dublin. Since January 2023, it has been conducted and funded by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in association with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. There are currently three cohorts in the study: Cohort '08 (the focus of this report), Cohort '98 (who were also surveyed at age 13 in 2011/12) and a new Cohort '24 who will be recruited this year.

### TIMING OF 'AGE 13' IN EACH GROWING UP IN IRELAND COHORT

Cohort '98	Cohort '08	Cohort '24
2011/12	2021/22	2037/38

### About this age 13 wave

Although originally planned as a face-to-face interview, the pandemic necessitated a switch to a shorter and remotely administered survey. The main questionnaires for parents (mothers and fathers) and the 13-year-old were conducted over the telephone by an interviewer. Participants who completed a telephone interview were subsequently invited to self-complete an additional online survey covering more sensitive topics. This report focuses on this online module only. A separate report, published in July 2023, describes the findings from the main telephone interview. Interviews took place between July 2021 and June 2022.

Because there were a substantial number of participants who completed the telephone interview but did not do the additional online module, separate statistical weights were applied to the analyses in this report to account for this attrition. The table shows the number of invitations issued and response rates for both the telephone and online modules. In this set of Key Findings, the analysis is based on all valid responses with a statistical weight applied (that is, including the 13-year-old's responses even if their mother did not respond and vice-versa). Unless otherwise noted, findings that are highlighted in the text of this report are statistically significant. Graphs may include some non-significant results for information or comparison.

**Table 8 Response rates and attrition between telephone interview and online self-complete module**

RESPONDENT	TARGET SAMPLE	NO. (%) OF TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS COMPLETED	NUMBER OF SELF-COMPLETE MODULES COMPLETED ONLINE		
			N	% OF PHONE INTERVIEWS	% OF TOTAL TARGET SAMPLE
Mother	9,723	6,655 (68%)	3,963	60%	41%
Father	8,952	4,805 (54%)	2,445	51%	27%
Young Person	9,723	6,375 (66%)	3,128	49%	32%

Table reproduced from Table 2.3 in Design, instrumentation and procedures for Cohort '08 at 13 (Murray et al. 2023)

### Acknowledgments

The authors are particularly grateful to the thousands of families and Young People from all over Ireland who participated in this survey. We acknowledge the work by the original Growing Up in Ireland Study Team based at the ESRI in undertaking the survey in challenging circumstances. We also thank colleagues in the CSO who programmed and hosted the online part of the survey on their platform, and who subsequently made the data available for analysis. Thank you to internal and external reviewers for their helpful comments. Results in this report are based on analyses of data from Research Microdata Files provided by the Central Statistics Office (CSO).



