

# Child cohort studies, North and South, and their messages for parents

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Parenting NI

Parents' Week 2011

# Child Cohort Studies

- Following a sample of children over time
- Often but not always representative of the whole population
- Generate important information about how children are faring, how and why children change, what influences their development and outcomes
- Answers questions about why some do well and some less well

## Examples of child cohort studies

UK:

1946 National Survey on Health and Development

1958 National Child Development Study

1970 British Cohort Study

2001 Millennium Cohort Study - first to include Northern Ireland

1992 Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children

Belfast Youth Development Study

Effective Pre-school Provision in NI

Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (not child-focused)

And internationally...

# Growing Up in Ireland

- *Growing Up in Ireland* is the national longitudinal study of children in Ireland.
- Funded by the Department of Health & Children through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in association with the Department of Social Protection and the Central Statistics Office.
- Carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin.



# Growing Up in Ireland

## Two cohorts:

8,500 nine-year-olds  
now being  
interviewed  
at age 13

11,100  
nine-month-olds  
who have just  
been assessed  
at age 3

And their parents!



# Children of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Millennium Cohort Study

First survey of c 19,000 9-month-olds in 2000-1

Age 3

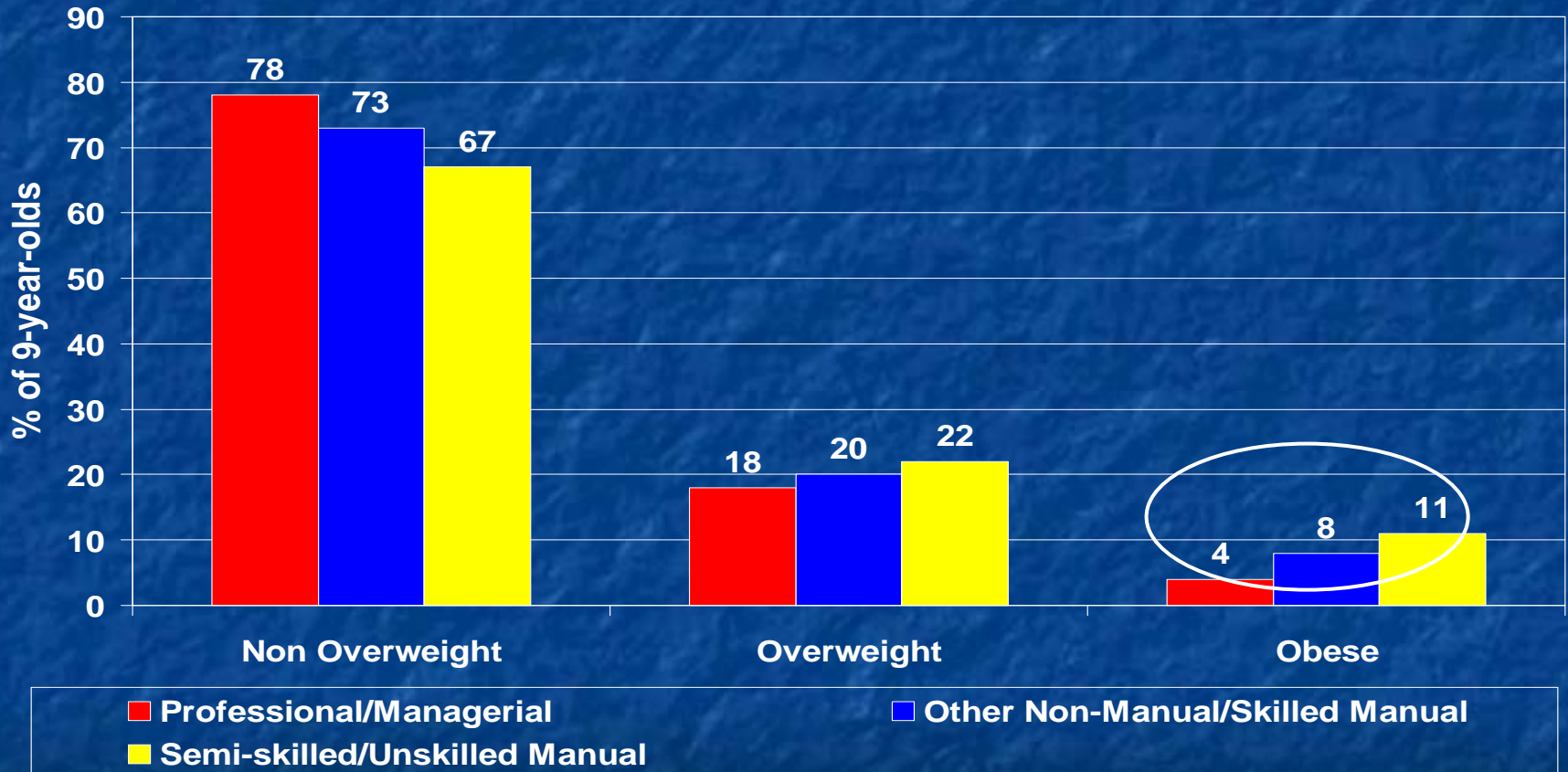
Age 5

Age 7 in 2008

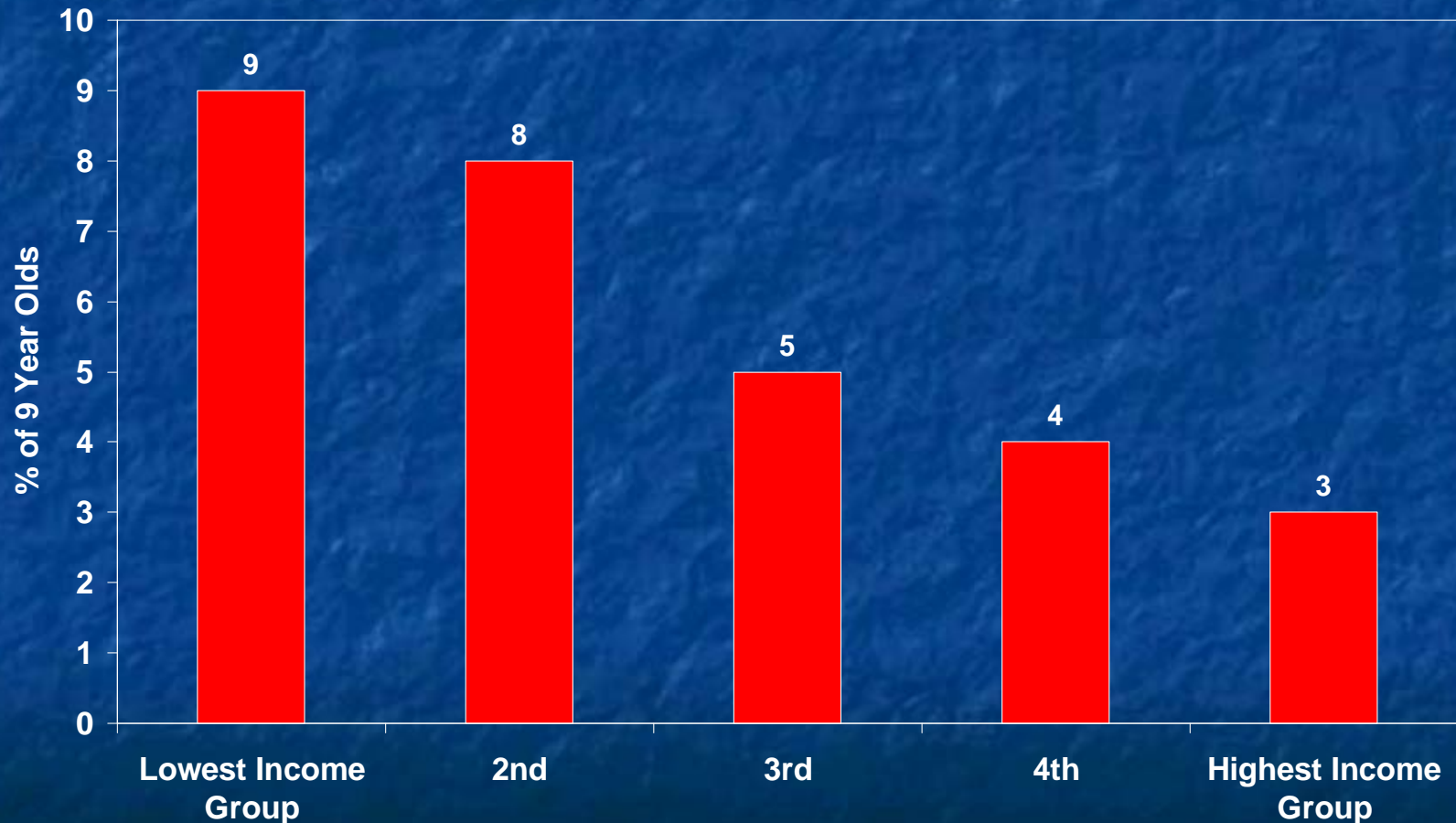
Age 11 to be carried out in 2012

1,955 children and families from NI

# Child's weight and BMI at age 9



# Poverty and disadvantage: the example of household income and child chronic illness



# Children of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Millennium Cohort Study

23% of 3-year-old children overweight or obese

Factors associated with overweight:

Heavier at birth

Black (but Indian children less prone)

Solid foods before 4 months

Watched one hour plus TV per day

Lone parent and lower SES

Parents overweight

Mother overweight in pregnancy

Mother smokes

Live in Wales or Northern Ireland

Modifiable vs. unmodifiable factors

# Children of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Millennium Cohort Study in NI

## Age 3

Mothers in NI reported lowest level of behavioural problems in children at 3

Mother less likely to suffer from chronic ill health

Mothers most likely to be employed full-time (22%)

29% families below poverty line (Wales 30%, Scotland 21%)

NI mothers more likely to describe home life with three-year-old as 'calm'

## Age 5

NI children higher scores on cognitive and academic tests and general health

BUT NI children most overweight (25.4% vs 21% average)

More households below poverty line

# Children of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Millennium Cohort Study in NI

The consequences of childhood disadvantage in NI at age 5  
(Sullivan et al. 2010) Report to OFMDFM

Attempting to unpack the effects of poverty  
Factors most associated with poverty tend to be related:  
parental social class, level of education, family size,  
family structure and age of mother.

Predictors of childhood disadvantage  
*broadly the same* as in UK generally (and Ireland)

Poverty linked negatively to all child outcomes (as in GUI)  
General health and BMI less strongly socially patterned  
than cognitive and educational outcomes

# Messages for parents?

Identify and nurture what is going right  
and correct where evidence of negative influences  
Some lessons for the State, some parents can act on:

MCS

Breastfeeding

Overweight

Smoking

Home learning environment

Regularity

Father involvement

# Messages for parents

## GUI:

Children emphasise importance of family

*Time* with mothers and fathers

Good understanding of healthy lifestyles -  
but often not put into practice

Wanting more safe places to play

# UNICEF:

## *'An Overview of Child Well-being in Rich Countries' 2007*

Used 40 indicators:

Average rank for Ireland	10.2
Average rank for UK	18.2

### Ireland

❖ Material Well-being	19
❖ Health and Safety	19
❖ Educational Well-being	7
❖ Family and Peer Relationships	7
❖ Behaviours and Risks	4
❖ Subjective Well-being	5

# Is child well-being under threat?

**UK** 'Long term underinvestment' and  
' a dog eat dog society' Jonathan Bradshaw

**UK and USA** increasing rates of depression, anxiety and  
anti-social behaviour.

'Modernity's paradox' Affluence does  
not bring increased well-being

Are the factors supporting children's well-being being  
undermined? Toxic childhoods etc.

## Toxic childhoods?

- Generally children doing well, better than in the past
- But some worrying trends:
  - Obesity
  - Sedentary lifestyle
  - Hurried and stressed parents
  - Consumer culture
  - Stuff and electronic media vs human interaction
  - Lack of contact with nature/outdoor play

## Child characteristics associated with competence and resilience (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998)

Good intellectual functioning

Appealing, sociable disposition

Self-efficacy

Talents

Close relationship to caring parental figure

Authoritative parenting

Socioeconomic advantages

Supportive family network

Bonds to prosocial adults and organisations

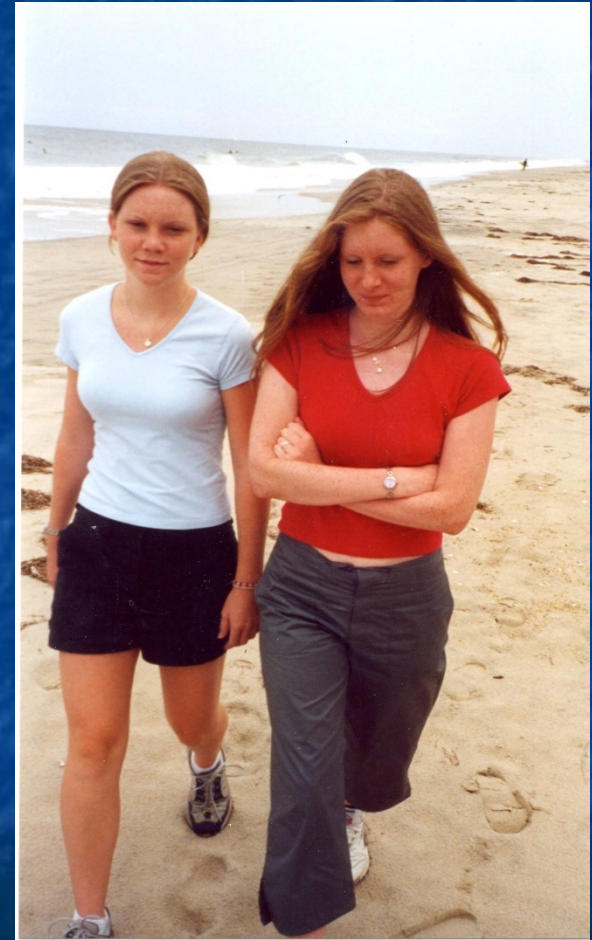
Attending good – effective - school

## The view of young people themselves

What do you think are the most important things that make life good for young people?

11,000 14-16 year olds in England (2006)

1. FAMILY
2. FRIENDS
3. LEISURE
  
8. MONEY



## Tips for parents (Centre Forum 2011)

- Read for 5 minutes
- Play on the floor for 10 minutes
- Talk for 20 minutes with TV off
- Praise and be positive
- Give child nutritious diet

## Good Childhood Inquiry (2008)

- Love
- Respect
- Evidence

## Children's wellbeing in UK, Sweden and Spain (Ipsos Mori, 2011)

Differing meanings of time,  
materialism and inequality



# Parents cannot do it alone

- Focus on parents and parenting can provide useful distractions from other factors contributing to child ill-health, educational failure and psychological and behavioural problems
- Such as: inequality in resources and opportunities; poor housing; lack of play and leisure facilities; advertising of consumer goods; powerful food and drinks industries
- BUT parents can say no and put pressure on politicians

# Comparing GUI and MCS

Data on nine-month-olds available from both studies. Archived and accessible.

Data on three year olds available from MCS and will be available from GUI by end of year

On this small island what differences in children's lives and experience are brought about by the different legal, policy and cultural contexts?



For more information  
on GUI and MCS:

[www.growingup.ie](http://www.growingup.ie)

[www.cls.ioe.uk](http://www.cls.ioe.uk)

[www.nisra.gov.uk](http://www.nisra.gov.uk)

