

Families and children in Britain: findings from the 2008 Families and Children Study (FACS)

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The 2008 Families and Children Study (FACS) is the tenth in a series of annual surveys, which investigate the circumstances of British families with dependent children. FACS is a refreshed panel survey, with both a cross-section and longitudinal element. This report uses the cross-sectional element of the study to present descriptive findings about all families with children in Britain in 2008. The report is divided into a number of chapters, each of which looks at distinct features of family life. The first part of the report focuses on the circumstances of the family unit and covers topics including family characteristics; health; education; work; income; benefits and tax credits; social capital; money management; housing and material deprivation. The second part of the report focuses on the circumstances, conditions and lives of children and covers topics including child characteristics; health; schooling; activities and leisure; childcare and child maintenance.

Key findings

The picture for families with children remained largely stable between 2006 and 2008:

- Almost one-quarter (23 per cent) of children lived in a lone parent family. Lone parent families were more likely than couple families to live in social housing, and to be in the lowest income quintile.
- Four out of five families had at least one parent working 16 or more hours per week. Fifty-five per cent of lone parents worked 16+ hours per week and 57 per cent of couple families had both partners doing so. Forty-one per cent of lone parent households were workless compared with five per cent of couple households.
- One in six children (16 per cent) lived in a household where no one worked over 16 hours per week. The majority of these (11 per cent of all children) were in lone parent households.
- Forty-nine per cent of lone parents working less than 16 hours per week reported running out of money before the end of the week or month. Thirty-six per cent were worried about money 'almost all the time'.
- Over half (58 per cent) of children with working mothers were placed in childcare. Use of informal childcare (44 per cent) was more prevalent than formal childcare (31 per cent).
- Perceptions of the affordability and quality of childcare remained more positive than negative. However, a quarter of mothers reported that there was 'not enough childcare' (25 per cent) and that childcare was 'not at all affordable' (27 per cent) in their local area. Mothers were more positive about the quality of childcare – over a half (59 per cent) said it was 'very' or 'fairly' good.
- Over half (56 per cent) of families where at least one child had a non-resident parent had an order or agreement for child support in place; and 38 per cent had an order or agreement in place and had received some maintenance payments.
- One in ten mothers had a limiting long-term illness or disability (ten per cent). They were more likely to be lone parents than couple mothers, live in social housing than owner occupiers and to be in a lower income quintile.
- Lone parent families were more than three times as likely as couple families to belong to the lowest income quintile (35 per cent and

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11 per cent, respectively). The working status of the family had a strong association with the probability of having a low income.

- Lone parent families, families where no one was in work of 16 or more hours per week, and families in the lowest and second income quintile were, on average, more likely to be deprived than other families.
- Nearly all lone parents received a benefit or tax credit (other than Child Benefit), as did around three-quarters of couple families.

Summary of research

Characteristics of families

In 2008, a quarter of families with children were lone parent families. Lone parent families were more than three times as likely to live in social housing as couple families, and nearly seven times as likely to have a total family income in the lowest income quintile. Families that contained no one working 16 or more hours per week were more likely to be in the lowest income quintile than those that contained at least one parent who worked for 16 or more hours per week. Nearly half of families in the lowest income quintile were lone parent families where the parent did not work 16 hours or more per week. The majority of couple families had two or more dependent children whereas the majority of lone parent families had one dependent child.

Health, lifestyles and participation

One in ten mothers described their health over the last 12 months as 'not good'. Lone mothers were nearly twice as likely to describe their health as 'not good' compared with mothers in couple families. Just over one-quarter of lone parents had a longstanding illness or disability, compared with one-fifth of mothers in couple families. Lone parents, social tenants and mothers in the lowest income quintile were the groups of people most likely to smoke. Conversely, alcohol consumption was highest for mothers in work or living in owned (or mortgaged) accommodation.

Education and training

Most families contained at least one parent with an academic or vocational qualification. In general, lone parents were less qualified than those in couple families. Families with one or more disabled member were more likely to have no qualifications than families with no disabled members. Mothers who were social tenants were more likely to have no qualifications than mothers who lived in owned or mortgaged accommodation.

Work

As in previous years, four out of five families in 2008 had at least one parent working 16 or more hours per week. However, over two-fifths of lone mothers worked no hours compared with over one-quarter of couple mothers. Mothers in couple families who worked were more likely to be in highly skilled jobs than working lone parents.

Total family income

Lone parent families were more than three times as likely as couple families to belong to the lowest income quintile (35 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively) based on equivalised income before housing costs. The working status of the family was seen to have a strong association with the probability of having a low income, with families with no parent in work or working less than 16 hours per week particularly likely to be in the lowest income quintile.

Benefits and Tax Credits

Just over three-quarters of families received either a benefit or a tax credit, other than Child Benefit. Nearly all lone parents received a benefit or tax credit, as did around three-quarters of couple families. The benefits families were most likely to receive (excluding Child Benefit) were Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit or Income Support. The median amount of income received from all benefits and tax credits was £70 per week.

Money management and savings

The majority of families had a current or savings account. Two-fifths of families with children were saving regularly. Couple families were twice as likely as lone parents to save regularly. Almost half of all families had borrowed money (excluding mortgages) over the past 12 months, with over a quarter borrowing via a bank overdraft. Low income families, social tenants and families where no one worked for 16 hours or more a week were less likely to save regularly and more likely to be behind with at least one bill or loan repayment.

Housing

Just over two-thirds of families either owned their property outright or were buying it with a mortgage, whereas one-fifth of families were social tenants. Families that owned or were buying their property were more likely to be couple families than lone parent families. The average (mean) gross weekly housing cost was £125. The majority of families felt that their housing was in a 'very good' or 'excellent' state of repair. Those most likely to report having housing in a 'fairly poor' state were families (both lone parents or couples) not working 16 or more hours per week.

Material deprivation

Lone parent families, families where no one was in work of 16 or more hours per week, and families in the lowest and second income quintile were, on average, more likely to be deprived than other families. Thirty-nine per cent of families were unable to afford one or more leisure items.

Child characteristics

Around one-quarter of children lived in a lone parent family and the remaining three-quarters of children lived in a couple family. Over one-tenth of children lived with a lone parent who worked 16 hours or more per week. A further 11

per cent lived with a lone parent who was not in work or worked fewer than 16 hours per week. Two-fifths of all children lived in a couple family where both the mother and her partner worked 16 or more hours per week. Around one-third lived in a couple family where one parent (or partner) worked 16 or more hours per week. Few (five per cent) children lived in a couple family where no one worked 16 or more hours per week. Children living in lone parent families were more likely than those living in couple families to be an only child, have a mother aged under 25 years, live in social housing, be in the lowest income quintile, and belong to a family that includes at least one child with a disability.

Child health and wellbeing

The vast majority of mothers described their child's health as good. Children living in a lone parent family were more likely to have their health described as 'not good' compared to those in a couple family. In just over one-third of cases in which a child had a reported longstanding illness or disability, this illness or disability limited the child's ability to attend school. This was less common among those children living in couple families with both parents working 16 or more hours per week.

Schooling

Over two-fifths of children walked to school, one-fifth used some form of public transport (including public bus, school/local authority school bus and train), and most of the remaining children travelled to school in a car. Walking was the preferred mode of transport where children lived within half a mile of their school. Just under half (48 per cent) of children, aged five to 15, from families in the highest income quintile were perceived by their parents to be 'above average' in the three core school subjects (Maths, English and Science). Just under three-quarters (74 per cent) of children aged 14 to 16 in the highest income quintile had a parent who hoped they would have attended university by mid-20s. These proportions are

significantly higher than for children in the remaining income quintiles. Boys were more likely than girls to report having been punished at school. Older children were more likely to report skipping school than younger children.

Children's activities and leisure time

Around six in ten children aged 11-15 were reported to do three or more hours of physical activity per week, whilst few (five per cent) were reported to do nothing. Physical activity was more common in boys than girls and also became less common with age. Nearly all children aged 11 to 15 reported that their family had a computer at home. Few parents reported that their children (aged eight to 18) had experienced problems with smoking, drinking or taking drugs. Smoking was most common amongst older children and those in the lowest income quintile.

Child maintenance

Over half the families where at least one child had a non-resident parent had an order or agreement for child support in place; and 38 per cent had an order or agreement in place and had received some maintenance payments. The median weekly amount of maintenance was £46. Families with a voluntary maintenance agreement were more likely to receive all their payment on time compared with those with a Child Support Agency assessment. Contact between children and their non-resident parent varied between two extremes. Nearly one quarter of children had no contact with their non-resident parent, while over two-fifths saw their non-resident parent at least once a week.

Childcare

Over half of children with working mothers and a third of children with non-working mothers used childcare. Just over three-quarters (76 per cent) of children aged nought to two years old with working mothers and 84 per cent of children aged three to four years old with working

mothers were placed in childcare. Childcare then declined as children got older. Informal types of childcare (such as care provided by family, friends or neighbours) predominated for all types of family circumstances. Formal types of childcare were used principally for pre-school and, to a lesser extent, young school-aged children. Families working more than 16 hours per week were more positive about the overall quality of childcare and those with younger children were more likely to express that the quality of childcare was 'very good' or 'fairly good'. Over half of families reported that the information available about childcare was 'about right'. Mothers from families where at least one parent worked were more likely to say that childcare was 'very' or 'fairly affordable' compared to families where no-one worked. Families with at least an adult and a child who had a disability were less likely to say that childcare was affordable.

The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 84712 774 7. Research Report 656. July 2010).

You can download the full report free from: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

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