

Vulnerability in early life: How are New Zealand children faring?

SEPTEMBER 2015

THE FOCUS

This *At a Glance* highlights findings from the *Growing Up in New Zealand* publication *Vulnerability Report 2: Transitions in exposure to vulnerability in the first 1000 days of life*. The report focuses on children's exposure to vulnerability in early life and factors associated with transitions into and out of vulnerability. It also explores how the timing and duration of children's exposure to risk factors are linked to early life outcomes.

About *At a Glance*

Superu's *At a Glance* series uses infographics to illustrate research findings or key information about a priority topic.

RISKS EXPERIENCED IN EARLY LIFE WERE LINKED TO POORER OUTCOMES AT AGE TWO



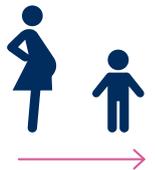
Children exposed to high vulnerability risk before birth OR at nine months were

7-8 times

more likely to experience behavioural difficulties by age 2

compared to children with no risk factors

Of the 12 risk factors associated with early life vulnerability, those that children were most commonly exposed to in their first 1000 days included: living in an area of **high deprivation** (25%); living in **overcrowded housing** (18%); and, living in households where mothers were receiving an **income-tested benefit** or living in a family with **financial stress** (16%).



- High deprivation area
- Income-tested benefit (mother)
- Social housing
- Overcrowded housing



- Financial stress
- Unemployment (mother)
- Mother without a current partner
- Mother with no secondary school qualification



- Maternal depression
- Poor maternal physical health
- Maternal smoking
- Teen mother

THE PROPORTION OF CHILDREN IN EACH RISK GROUP WAS CONSISTENT OVER TIME

Children were classified as **more** or **less** vulnerable according to the number of risk factors they experienced at any one time point.



The proportion of children in each vulnerability risk group remained the same across the three time points in the study. On average, **42%** of children were in the low risk group, **45%** in the medium risk group and **13%** in the high risk group. Although the overall *proportion* of children in each group did not change, *individual* children (more than 1 in 4) moved between different risk groups over time.



A SMALL GROUP OF CHILDREN REMAINED IN THE HIGH RISK GROUP THROUGHOUT THEIR FIRST TWO YEARS

During their first two years, nearly one-third of all children in the study were consistently in the low risk group, one-quarter of children were in the medium risk group and **6% of children were consistently in the high risk group.**

Several maternal and family characteristics were associated with stability of exposure to vulnerability. These included mothers with an unplanned pregnancy, born outside of New Zealand, with a disability, or with higher relationship stress.

Children born in New Zealand 1994–2010



Using the figure of 6% from the *Growing Up in New Zealand* study, we can estimate that around 3,800 of the 63,900 children born in 2010 may have experienced four or more risks during their first two years of life.

SOME CHILDREN EXPERIENCED INCREASING OR DECREASING RISK



28% of children moved from one vulnerability risk group to another during the *first nine months*. Most movement between vulnerability risk groups was due to an increase or decrease of only one of the 12 risk factors. Of the children who experienced changes in risk:

▲15%
experienced
increased risks

▼13%
experienced
decreased risks

Increased risk: Children in the low risk group who experienced increased risk between pregnancy and nine months were more likely to experience:



Poor maternal physical health



Financial stress



Overcrowding

Decreased risk: Children who moved into the low risk group at nine months were more likely to experience improvements in:



Financial stress



Maternal depression

SOME RISK FACTORS WERE MORE PERSISTENT THAN OTHERS



72% of children remained in the same risk group between late pregnancy and nine months. Some risk factors were more persistent than others during this period.

Percentage of children experiencing a risk factor in late pregnancy who were still experiencing it at nine months.

Risk factors **least** likely to change

**80%
and higher**

- Maternal smoking
- Social housing
- Living in an area of high deprivation

Risk factors that **may** change

40%-79%

- Overcrowded housing
- Mother on an income-tested benefit
- Mother without a current partner

Risk factors **most** likely to change

**39%
and lower**

- Financial stress
- Poor maternal physical health
- Maternal depression
- Unemployment (mother)

Our purpose

To increase the use of evidence by people across the social sector so that they can make better decisions - about funding, policies or services - to improve the lives of New Zealanders, New Zealand's communities, families and whānau.

What we do

We work across the wider social sector to:

- **promote** informed debate on key social issues for New Zealand, its families and whānau, and increase awareness about what works
- **grow** the quality, relevance and quantity of the evidence base in priority areas
- **facilitate** the use of evidence by sharing it and supporting its use in decision-making.

Related Superu publications:



At a Glance: Early vulnerability and health outcomes for New Zealand children (June 2015).

At a Glance: About Growing Up in New Zealand (June 2015).



Source reports:

Morton et al. (2014). *Growing Up in New Zealand: A longitudinal study of New Zealand children and their families. Vulnerability report 1: Exploring the Definition of Vulnerability for Children in their First 1000 Days*. Auckland: Growing Up in New Zealand.

Morton et al. (2015). *Growing Up in New Zealand: A longitudinal study of New Zealand children and their families. Vulnerability Report 2: Transitions in exposure to vulnerability in their first 1000 days of life*. Auckland: Growing Up in New Zealand.

ABOUT GROWING UP IN NEW ZEALAND



SAMPLE OF NEARLY

7,000

CHILDREN

Growing up in New Zealand (GUINZ) is a longitudinal study following nearly 7,000 children in New Zealand from before birth to adulthood. GUINZ provides a contemporary picture of what it's like to be a child growing up in New Zealand in the 21st century.

