

# LIFE AT AGE 12: INITIAL FINDINGS FROM THE GROWING UP IN SCOTLAND STUDY

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# Introduction

This report presents some initial findings about the lives of 12-year-old children living in Scotland. It uses data collected from Birth Cohort 1 (BC1) of the Growing Up in Scotland study (GUS). GUS is an important longitudinal research project aimed at tracking the lives of Scottish children from birth, through their childhood, into adolescence and beyond. The study is funded by the Scottish Government and carried out by ScotCen Social Research.

BC1 is comprised of a nationally representative sample of 5217 children living in Scotland when they were 10 months old and who were born between June 2004 and May 2005<sup>1</sup>. This report draws on data collected from 3419 families in 2017/18 when the children were aged 12 and most were in the second term of their first year at secondary school. Both data from interviews with parents and children themselves is used.

This report covers, in brief, several varied aspects of children's lives including:

- Experience of school and educational aspirations
- Relationships with parents and peers
- Social media and use of the internet
- Involvement in risky behaviour
- Healthy weight and perceptions of body weight
- Life satisfaction

For each of these areas, the experiences of boys and girls are compared. Some comparisons are also made between children living in the most and least deprived areas in Scotland and also between children whose parents have different educational qualifications. Relationships between some of the types of experiences themselves are also explored. Only differences which were statistically significant at the 95% level are commented on in the text.

The authors would like to thank all the families who have given up their time to take part in the study.

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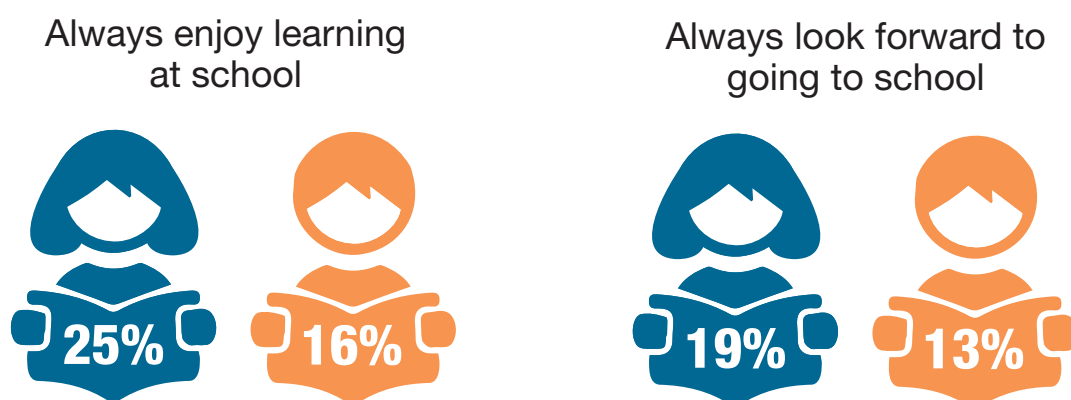
1 In 2018, an additional 502 families with a child in the same age range were recruited to the cohort and have been included in the sweep 9 analysis. For further details please see the User Guide accompanying the age 12/sweep 9 dataset, available from the UK Data Service.

# Enjoyment of school

With information collected during their first year at secondary school, GUS data allow some consideration of how much children enjoy their new school experience. Enjoyment of school was measured using several questions, some exploring school or learning in general and others asking about enjoyment of specific school subjects.

Just over half of children said they often or always looked forward to going to school (53%) whilst many more said they often or always enjoyed learning at school (68%). Girls were more likely than boys to say that they always enjoy learning at school (25% compared with 16%) and that they always look forward to going to school (19% compared with 13%).

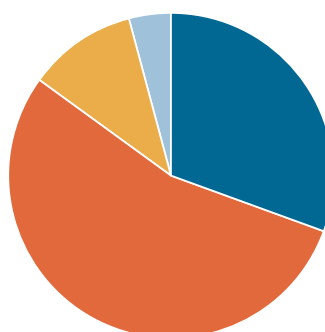
## Girls were more likely than boys to say that they:



When asked how pressured they felt by the schoolwork they had to do, 30% of children said they didn't feel pressured at all, just over half (55%) felt a little pressured, 11% quite a lot and 4% a lot. There was no statistically significant difference between boys and girls.

## Seven out of ten children felt a little or more pressured by schoolwork

**55%**  
felt a little pressured



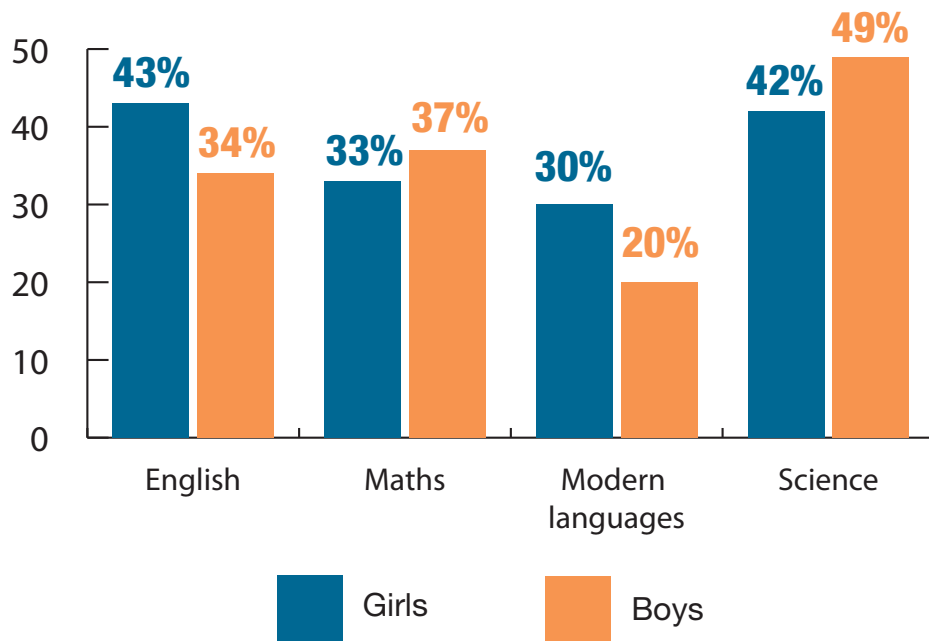
**30%** didn't feel pressured at all

**11%** felt pressured quite a lot

**4%** felt pressured a lot

Boys and girls reported some differences in how much they liked certain subjects. Girls were more likely than boys to say they liked English and modern languages a lot (43% and 30% compared with 34% and 20% respectively). In contrast, boys showed a greater preference than girls for science, with 49% of boys saying they liked science a lot compared with 42% of girls. The difference in the proportion of boys and girls who liked maths was not statistically significant.

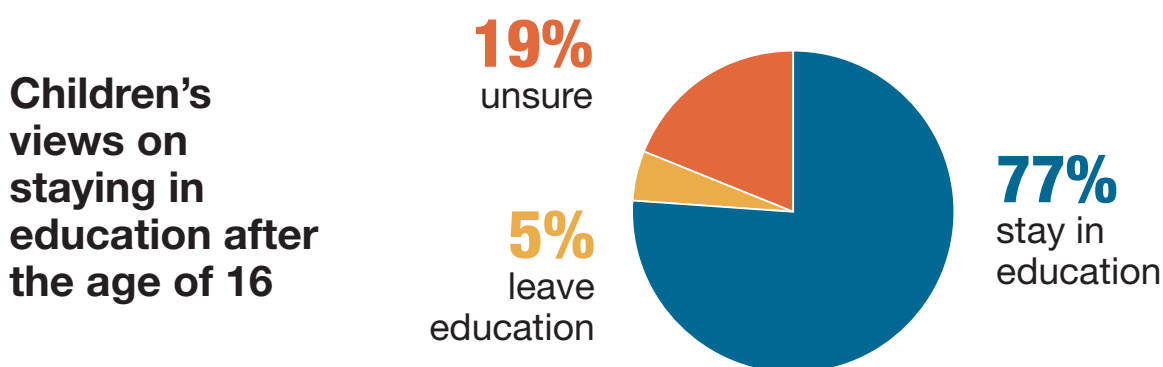
### Proportion of girls and boys who like each subject a lot



# Educational aspirations

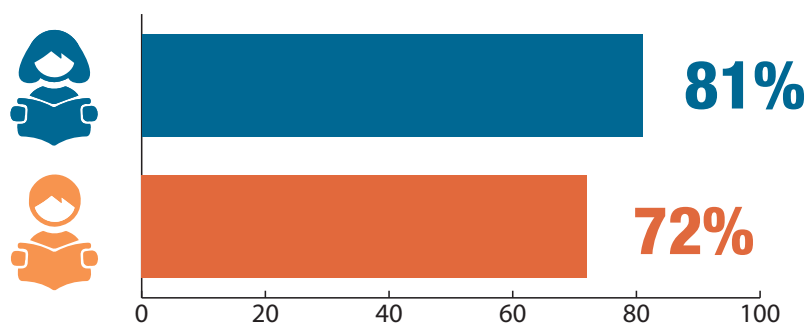
Parents and children were both asked questions measuring educational aspirations. Children were asked whether or not they wanted to stay on in education after they turn 16. Parents were asked how far in school, further or higher education they would like the child to go, with response options ranging from obtaining National 4 or 5 qualifications to attending university. Parents could also say they didn't really mind.

Most children (77%) were keen to stay in education after the age of 16. Only 5% said they wanted to leave education at 16, whilst 19% were unsure.



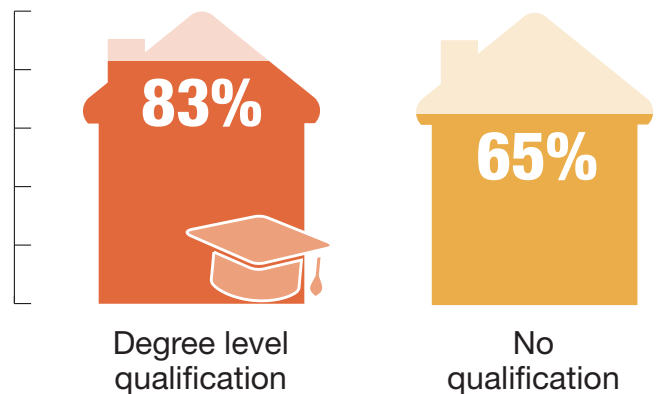
Girls were more likely than boys to want to stay in education after the age of 16 (81% compared with 72%) and boys were more likely than girls to want to leave (6% compared with 3%). Boys were also more likely than girls to be uncertain – 22% said they were unsure compared with 16% of girls.

## Girls were more likely than boys to want to stay in education after the age of 16



Children's views about staying in education were associated with parental education. Those living in a household where at least one parent had degree level qualifications were more likely than those whose parents had no qualifications to want to remain in education after the age of 16 (83% compared with 65% respectively).

**Children living in a household where at least one parent had degree level qualifications were more likely to want to remain in education than those whose parents had no qualifications**



Most parents said they would like their child to attend university (61%) whilst a significant minority said that they didn't really mind what their child did (15%). A smaller proportion indicated they wanted their child to stop their education after achieving school level qualifications (13%). Parents of girls were more likely than parents of boys to want their child to attend university (67% compared with 56%). Parents of boys were more likely than parents of girls to report that they didn't really mind (18% compared with 13%).

**Parents of girls were more likely than parents of boys to want their child to attend university**



Wanting their child to attend university was the most common response amongst all parents, regardless of their level of education. Parents with degree level qualifications were the most likely to express a desire for their child to attend university (74%).

Most children (77%) expressed a desire to stay on in education after 16, regardless of their parent's aspirations for them. Children whose parents aspired for them to attend university were the most likely to express a desire to stay on in education after age 16 (84%).

## Association between child and parental educational aspirations

Parents aspired for university:



Parents aspired for National 4 or 5 levels:



Child wants to stay in education after age 16

Child wants to leave education after age 16

Child is unsure

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# Relationships

Children were asked about their relationships with their peers and with their parents.

## Peer relationships

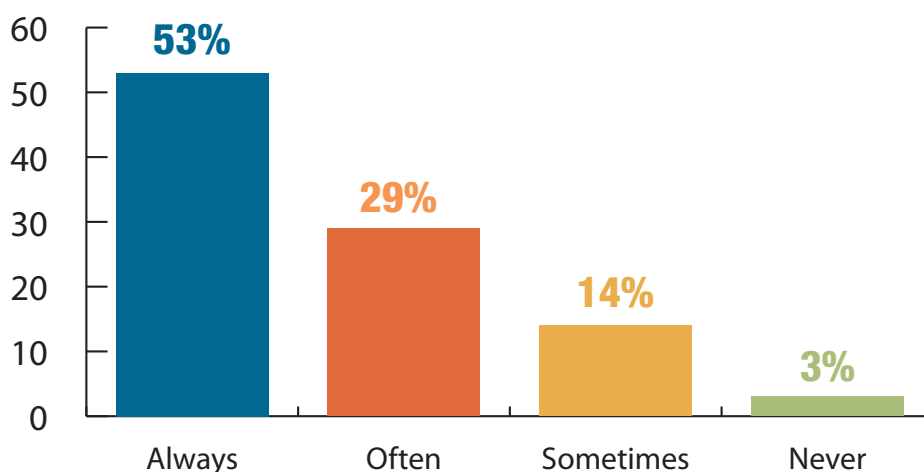
At the time of data collection, children had recently moved from primary school to secondary school. When asked about their experience of making new friends at secondary school, 85% of children said they had found it quite or very easy. Boys were more likely than girls to have found making new friends easy (88% compared with 82%).

**Boys were more likely than girls to have found making new friends at secondary school easy**



On the other hand, girls were more likely than boys to say they could always count on their friends when they have a problem (62% compared with 45%). Overall, 53% of children felt they could always count on their friends and 29% felt they often could.

**“I can count on my friends to help me when I have a problem”**



Four questions on children’s experience of getting picked on or bullied were asked:

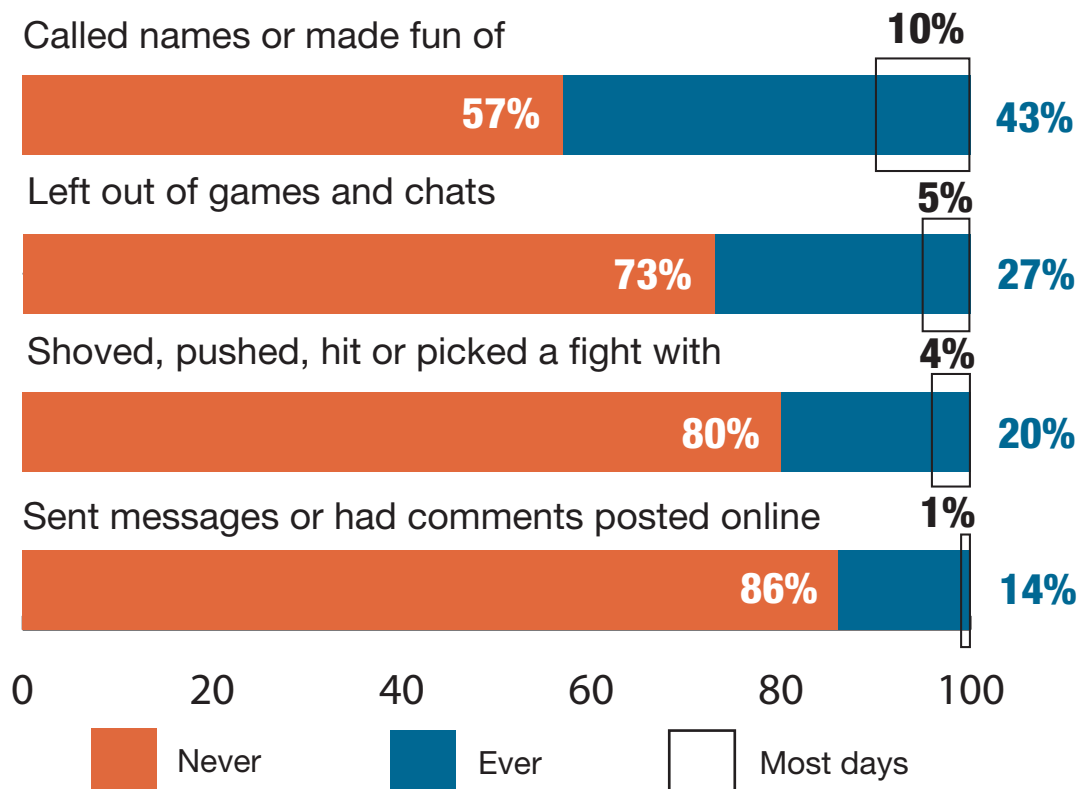
- How often do children pick on you by calling you names or making fun of you in a way that you don’t like?
- How often do children pick on you by leaving you out of games and chats?
- How often do children pick on you by shoving, pushing, hitting or picking a fight with you?
- How often do children pick on you by sending messages or posting things online?

For each question, children were asked to indicate whether they had experienced the behaviour described most days, at least once a week, about once a month, every few months or never.

Bullying was a relatively common experience with a significant minority of children experiencing it in some form on a regular basis. The most common behaviour children experienced was being called names. Forty-three percent said they had ever experienced this, including 10% who said they were being called names or made fun of most days. There was no notable difference between boys’ and girls’ experience of being called names or made fun of.

Girls were more likely than boys to be picked on by being left out of games and chats (30% compared with 24%) whilst boys were more likely than girls to get picked on by shoving, pushing or fighting (17% compared with 24%). The vast majority of children (86%) had never been picked on via messages or online posts, though 14% had experienced this to some degree. This form of bullying was more common for girls than boys (17% compared with 12%).

## Experiences of bullying



## Relationship with parents

Children were asked about their relationships with both resident and non-resident parents.<sup>2</sup> Results for resident mothers (including mother figures) and resident fathers (including father figures) are reported separately, whereas results for non-resident parents are combined (as the very small number of non-resident mothers does not allow their results to be separated out).

Most children reported a strong relationship with their resident mother and resident father, though mother-child relationships were a little stronger. Seventy nine percent felt they could always count on their resident mother to help them if they had a problem and 65% felt they could always count on their resident father. However, 21% of children did not feel they could always count on their resident mother if they had a problem and 35% did not feel they could always count on their resident father. There were no statistically significant differences between boys and girls on either measure.

### Children reported that they could always depend on their...



**79%**  
resident  
mother



**65%**  
resident  
father



**50%**  
non-resident  
parents

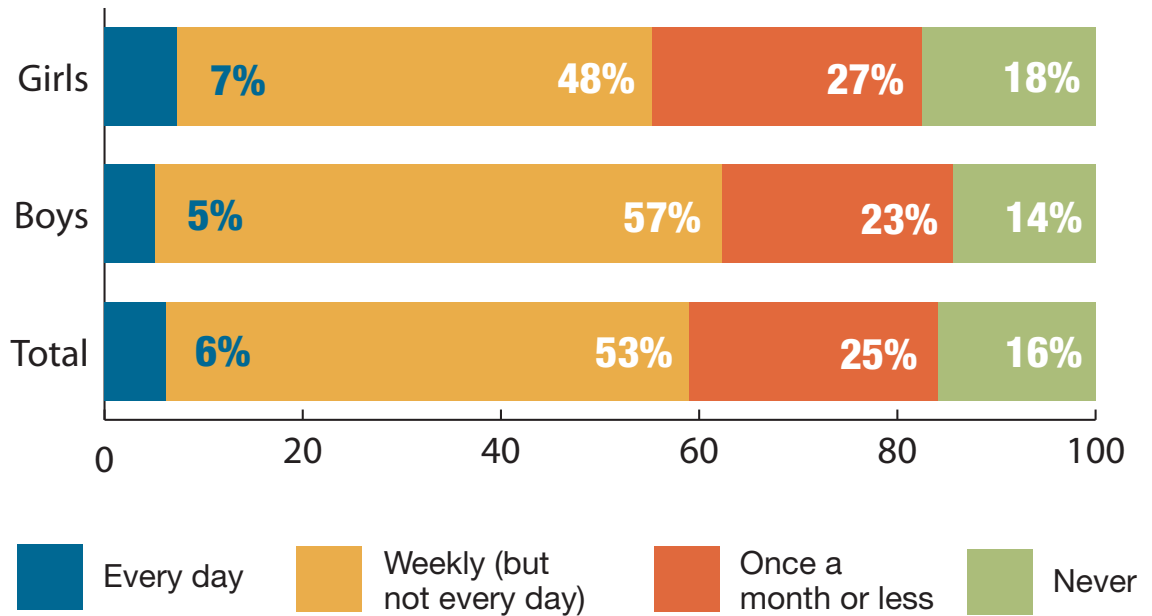
Relationships between children and their non-resident parent were weaker than those with resident parents. Half of the children (50%) who had a non-resident biological parent felt they could always count on them if they had a problem. Although similar proportions of boys and girls said this was always true, boys were more likely than girls to say it was often true (25% compared with 16%) whilst girls were more likely than boys to say that this was sometimes true (19% compared with 14%). This very tentatively suggests that boys with a non-resident

<sup>2</sup> Resident is used to denote a parent living with the child in the household where the interview took place. Non-resident is used to denote a parent living elsewhere. A child may also spend time living with their non-resident parent.

parent tend to have a better relationship with that parent than girls do.

Most children with a non-resident parent had some kind of contact with that parent. Eighty-four percent saw them in person, including around 29% who did so several times a week. In addition, 82% had contact via telephone, text or email, or via apps like FaceTime or WhatsApp, including 28% who did so daily.

### Face to Face contact with non-resident parent<sup>3</sup>



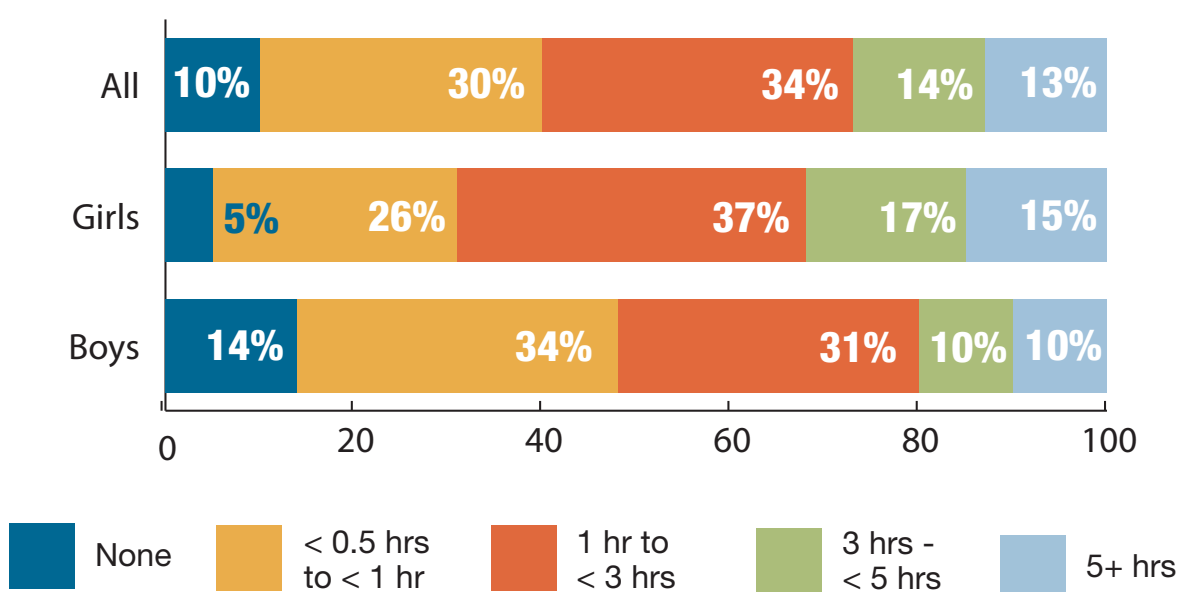
<sup>3</sup> Note, due to rounding, totals may not equal 100%

# Social media and internet use

To measure social media and internet use, children were asked about how much time they spent online on an average school day and how much they knew about protecting themselves and their personal information online. Children were also asked how much they thought their parents knew about what they did online. Information about parental knowledge of what the child does online was also collected directly from parents.

On an average school day, most children (57%) spent less than two hours on social media or messaging people via text, Instagram, Snapchat, or online games. Overall, boys spent less time on social media than girls. For example, boys were more likely than girls to report not spending any time on social media on an average school day (14% compared with 5%). In contrast, girls were more likely than boys to spend five or more hours per school day on social media or messaging people (15% compared with 10%).

## Time spent on social media by gender<sup>4</sup>

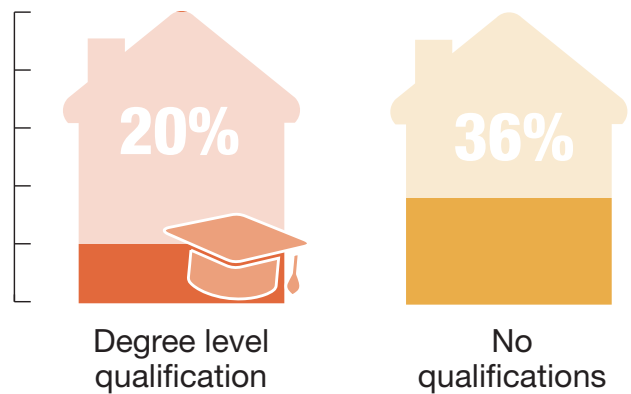


Children living in households where at least one parent had a degree level qualification were less likely than those whose parents had lower qualifications to spend a lot of time on social media. Twenty percent of children in households with a parent with a degree level qualification spent more than 3 hours per day on social media or messaging people compared with 36% of those in households with parents with no qualifications.

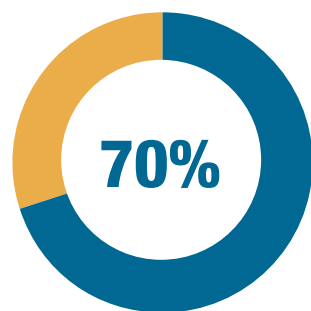
<sup>4</sup> Note, due to rounding, totals may not equal 100%

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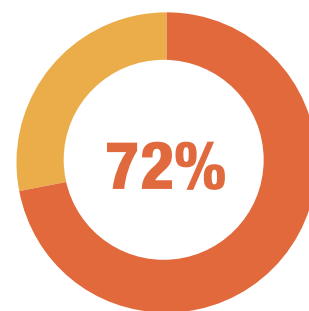
## Children who spent 3 or more hours on social media by household educational qualification



Most children stated that they knew a great deal about protecting themselves online and about protecting their personal information online (70% and 72% respectively). Of the remainder, most said they knew quite a lot about protecting themselves and their personal information online (27% and 26% respectively). Almost no children (1%) said they knew nothing at all about these issues. There were no significant differences between boys' and girls' views on protecting themselves and their personal information online.



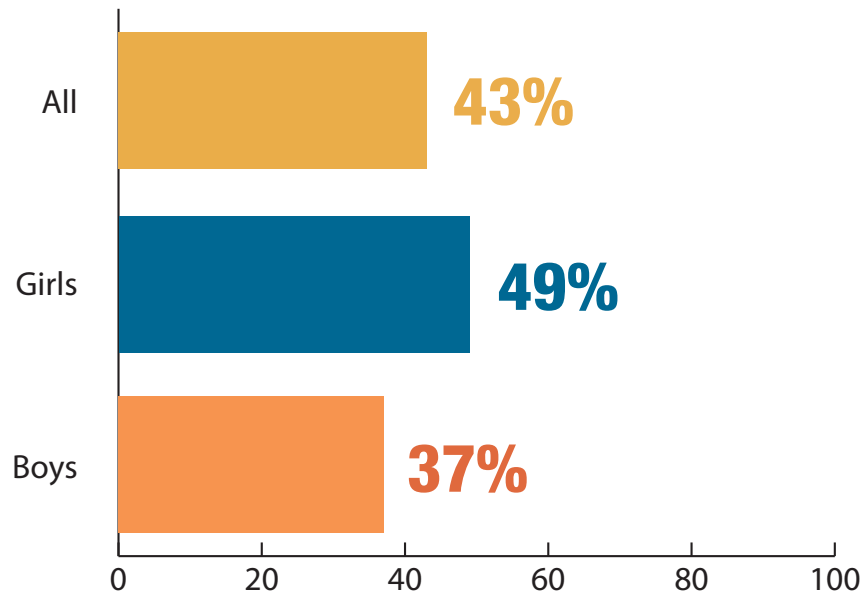
of children said they knew a great deal about **protecting themselves online**



of children said they knew a great deal about **protecting their personal information online**

Forty three percent of children thought that their parents knew almost everything about what they were doing online. Thirty eight percent said that their parents knew quite a lot, 15% that they knew just a little and 4% almost nothing about what they do online. Children's perceptions about what their parents knew about their online activity was associated with the child's gender. Girls were more likely than boys to believe that their parents knew almost everything about what they were doing online (49% compared with 37%).

## Proportion of children who believed their parents knew almost everything about what they were doing online by gender



More than half (56%) of parents said they knew quite a lot about their child's online activity. Unlike children's views, parental perceptions did not vary according to their child's gender. However, parents' views did vary by their level of education. Parents with no educational qualifications were more likely than parents with degree level qualification to state they knew almost everything about their child's online activity (33% compared with 23%). In contrast, parents with degree level qualifications were more likely to say they knew quite a lot compared with those with no qualifications (59% compared with 40%).

## Proportion of parents who said they knew almost everything about what their child does online by household educational qualifications



**33%**  
parents with no  
qualifications



**23%**  
degree-educated  
parents



**27%**  
all parents



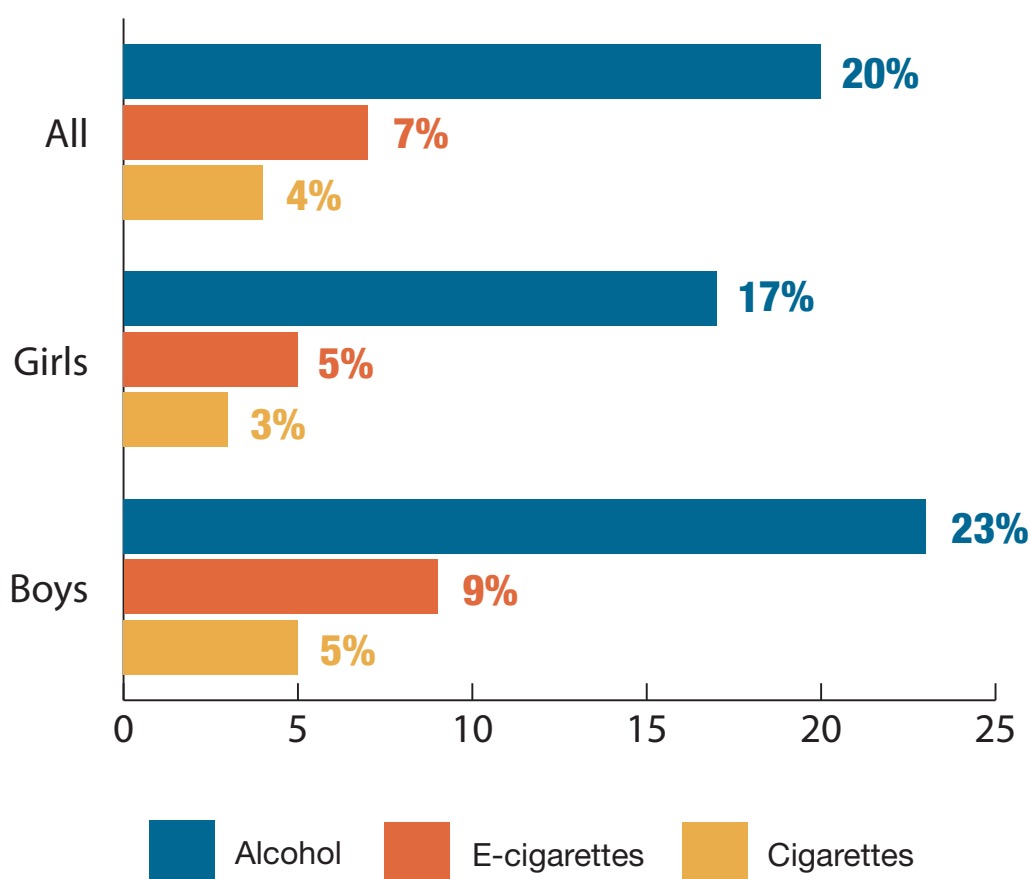
# Risky behaviours

Children were asked about the extent to which they had participated in a range of 'risky behaviours'. These included health-related behaviours - such as smoking cigarettes and e-cigarettes and drinking alcohol – and anti-social behaviour such as vandalism or shoplifting.

## Smoking & alcohol

Four percent of children had ever tried a cigarette and 7% had ever tried an e-cigarette or vaping device. Boys (9%) were more likely than girls (5%) to have tried an e-cigarette but there was no statistically significant difference in the proportion who had tried a cigarette. Children living in the most deprived areas were more likely than those living in the least deprived ones to have tried cigarettes (8% compared with 1%) and e-cigarettes (13% compared with 3%). Finally, there was a clear relationship between trying a cigarette and trying an e-cigarette. The majority (72%) of those who had tried a cigarette had also tried an e-cigarette, compared with only 5% of children who had not tried a cigarette. Four in ten (39%) of the children who had tried vaping had also tried a cigarette.

## Proportion of children who had ever tried alcohol, a cigarette or an e-cigarette by gender



Twenty percent of children said they had ever drunk alcohol. This was higher amongst boys than girls (23% compared with 17%). However, only 1% of all children said they had been drunk. Experience of drinking alcohol did not vary significantly by area deprivation.

Children who had smoked were significantly more likely than those who had not smoked to have also drunk alcohol. Seventy percent of those who had tried a cigarette had also drunk alcohol while 18% of those who had not tried a cigarette reported having drunk alcohol.

## Children who had smoked were more likely to have also drunk alcohol



**70%**  
of those who had  
tried a cigarette  
had also drunk  
alcohol



**18%**  
of those who  
had not tried a  
cigarette had  
drunk alcohol

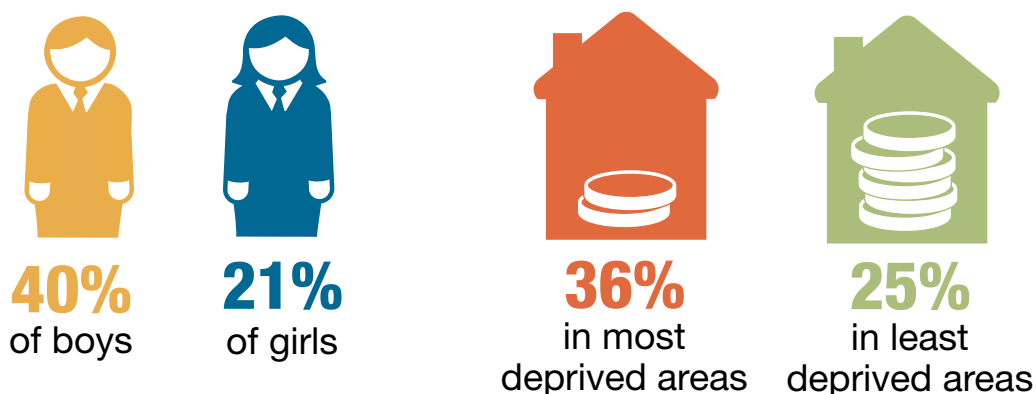
## Anti-social behaviour

To measure their involvement in anti-social behaviour, children were asked whether they had ever done any of the following:

- Taken something from a shop or store without paying for it
- Been rowdy or rude in a public place so that people complained or they got into trouble
- Stolen money or other things that someone else had left lying around
- Deliberately damaged or destroyed property
- Broken into a locked place to steal something
- Written things or sprayed paint on property
- Carried a knife or weapon in case it is needed in a fight
- Used force, threats or a weapon to get money or something else from somebody
- Hit, kicked or punched someone with the intention of hurting or injuring them

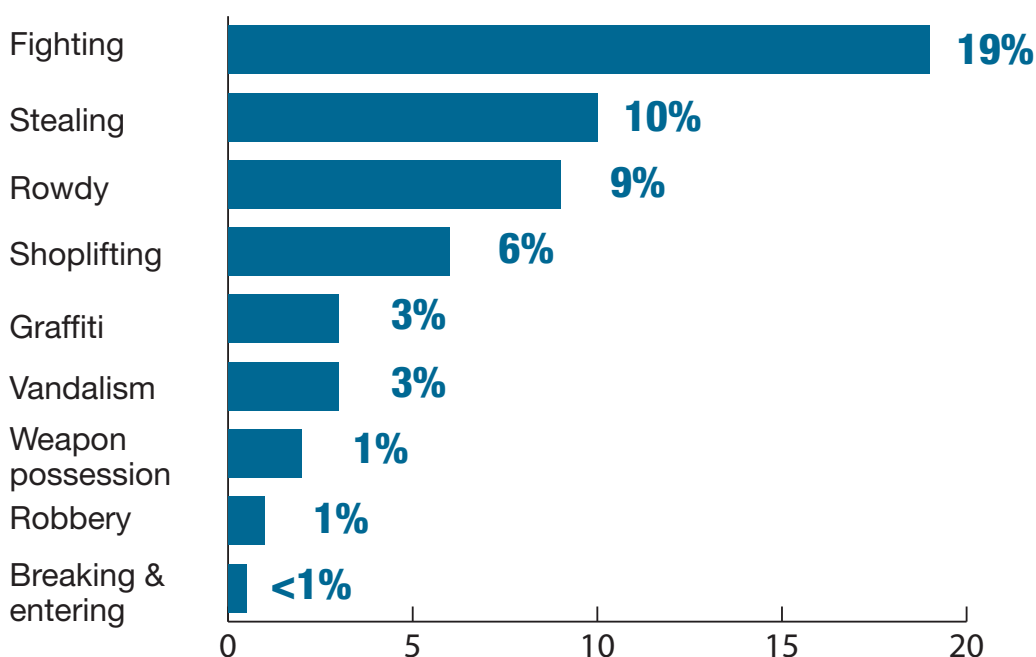
Thirty percent of children reported being involved in at least one of the activities listed, with boys more likely than girls to have done so (40% compared with 21%). Children who lived in the most deprived 20% of areas were more likely than those living in the least deprived areas of Scotland to have been involved in some form of anti-social behaviour (36% compared with 25%).

### Boys and children living in the most deprived areas were more likely to have reported involvement in anti-social behaviour than girls and children living in the least deprived areas



The most common anti-social behaviour reported was fighting, with 19% of children saying they had done this. Boys were more likely than girls to have been in a fight (29% compared with 9%). Similarly, children living in the most deprived areas were more likely than those from the least deprived areas to have been in a fight (22% compared with 15%).

### Involvement in anti-social behaviour



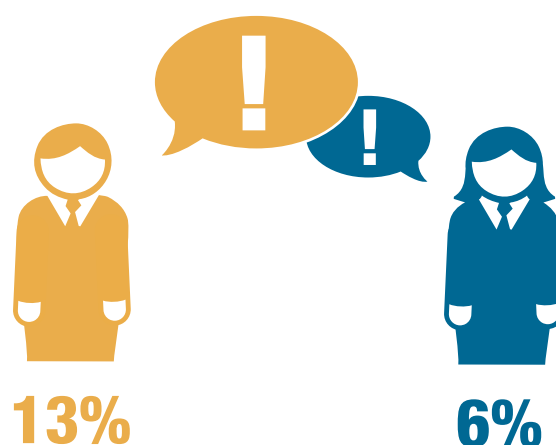
Six percent of children said they had taken something from a shop or a store without paying for it. More than twice the proportion of children from the most deprived areas than from the least deprived areas reported having done so (10% compared with 4%). There were no statistically significant differences by area deprivation in the proportion of children who reported any of the other theft-related offences (i.e. stole money or other things that someone left lying somewhere; used force, threats or a weapon to get money or something else from somebody; broke into a locked place to steal something).

### **Children from the most deprived areas were more likely than those from the least deprived areas to report taking something from a shop or a store without paying for it**



Nine percent of children said they had been rowdy or rude in a public place to the extent that they got into trouble. Boys were twice as likely as girls to report this behaviour (13% compared with 6%). Similarly, children living in the most deprived areas were twice as likely as those living in the least deprived areas to say they had been in trouble for being rowdy in public (14% compared with 7%).

### **Boys were more likely than girls to have been rowdy or rude in a public place to the extent that they got into trouble for it**



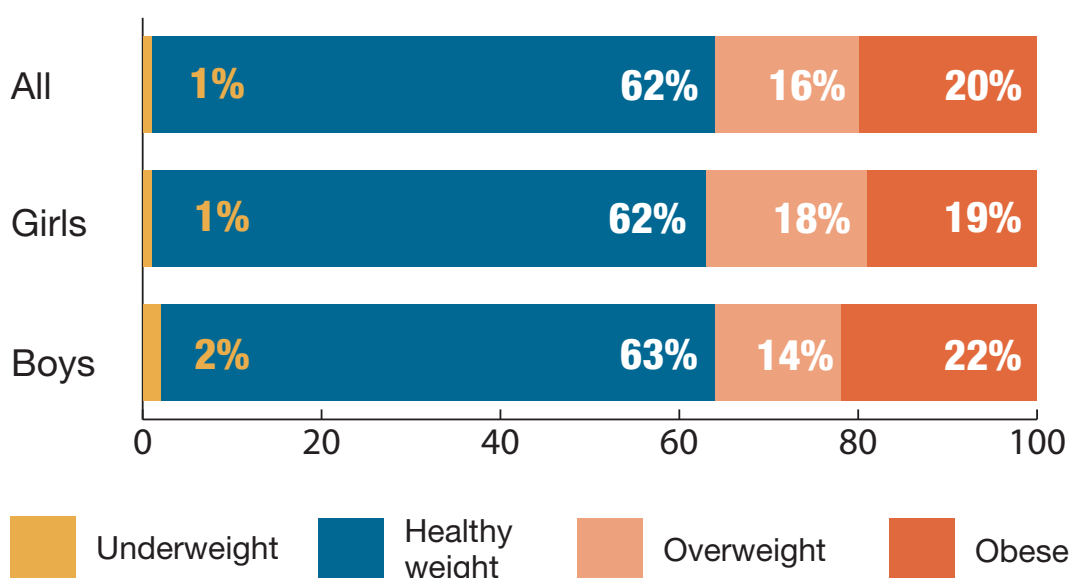
# Healthy weight and perception of body weight

In GUS, children’s height and weight are measured by interviewers as part of the household visit. This information is used to calculate body mass index. The classification of children’s body mass index (BMI) used here has been derived from BMI percentiles of the UK 1990 reference curves referred to as the national BMI percentiles classification. These thresholds are widely used to describe childhood overweight and obesity prevalence trends in the UK – including in previous analysis of GUS data - as follows<sup>5</sup>:

- At or below 2nd percentile: at risk of underweight
- Above 2nd percentile and below 85th percentile: healthy weight
- At or above 85th percentile and below 95th percentile: at risk of overweight
- At or above 95th percentile: at risk of obesity

Sixty-two percent of children were healthy weight whilst 36% were overweight including 20% who were obese. Only a very small proportion of children (1%) were underweight. There was no statistically significant difference between boys and girls in any of the categories.

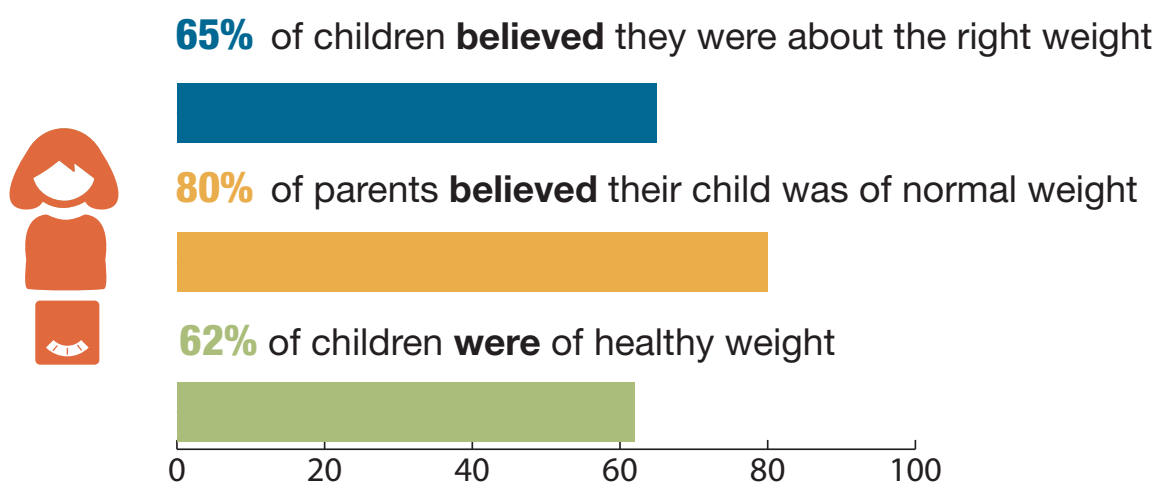
## Children’s BMI classifications



<sup>5</sup> GUS uses a method developed by ISD Scotland and similarly applied on the Scottish Health Survey to plot the exact ages of the children in the sample against the reference population data. While children’s exact age was used to calculate the BMI grouping prevalence rates (based on the interview date and the date of birth), results are presented using grouped ages based on age at last birthday.

To measure perceptions of weight, children were asked whether they thought their body was much too thin, a bit too thin, about the right size, a bit too fat or much too fat. Similarly, parents were asked how they would describe their child's weight from four categories: underweight, normal weight, somewhat overweight or very overweight. Around two-thirds (65%) of the children considered themselves to be about the right size. Similarly, a large majority of parents (80%) believed their child to be of normal weight.

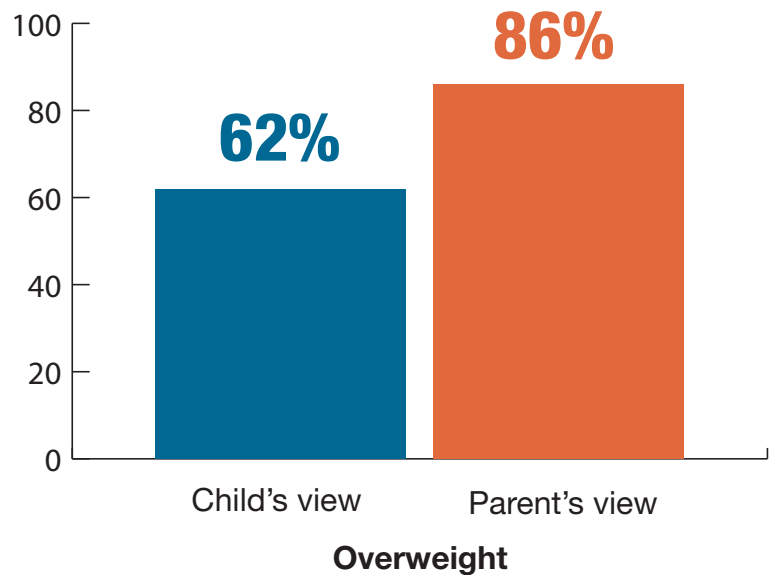
## Perceptions of children's weight and actual weight



There were few notable differences in children's and parental views on weight based on the child's gender. Boys were more likely than girls to consider themselves a bit too thin (11% compared with 4%). Similarly, parents of boys were more likely than parents of girls to consider their child underweight (7% compared with 3%) despite there being no significant difference in the percentage of boys and girls who were underweight.

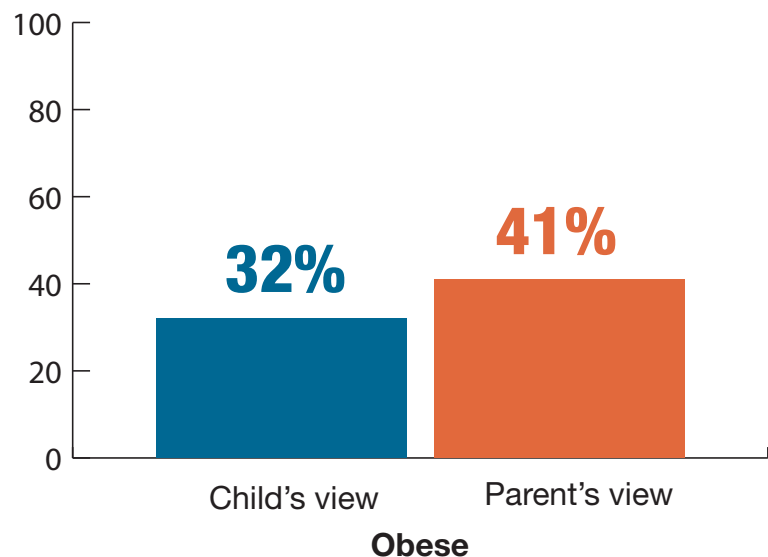
Whilst parents were more likely than children to recognise healthy/normal weight, they were less likely to recognise overweight/obesity. When comparing parent and child perceptions of weight and body size to BMI measurements, 78% of healthy weight children believed themselves to be about the right size and 92% of their parents described their child's weight as normal. This means a significant minority (22%) of healthy weight children do not recognise their weight as being about right. Around half of these children (11%) believed they were a bit too thin and a similar proportion (10%) thought they were a bit too fat.

**62% of children who were overweight perceived themselves to be about the right size and 86% of parents whose children were overweight perceived their child's weight as normal**



The discrepancy between actual and perceived weight increased significantly amongst children who were overweight (not obese) - 62% thought they were about the right size and 86% of their parents thought their child's weight was normal. Similarly, amongst children who were obese, 32% believed they were about the right size and 41% of parents thought their child's weight was normal.

**32% of children who were obese perceived themselves to be about the right size and 41% of parents whose children were obese perceived their child's weight as normal**



# Life satisfaction

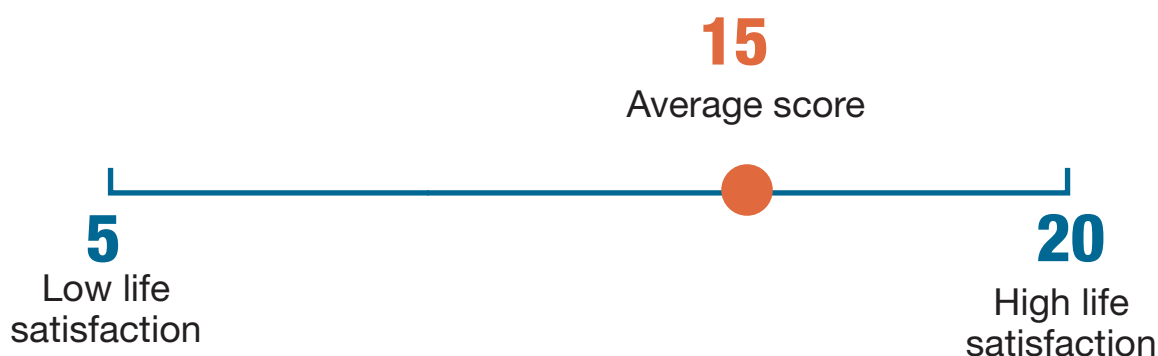
Life satisfaction was measured using selected items from the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1991). Children were asked the following four questions:

- Do you wish your life was different?
- Do you feel that your life is just right?
- Do you feel you have what you want in life?
- Do you feel you have a good life?

Each question had four possible responses: never, sometimes, often or always. Responses to each of these questions were added together to represent their overall life satisfaction. The scale has a minimum score of 5 and a maximum of 20 with a higher number indicating higher life satisfaction. Differences in levels of life satisfaction were explored in relation to a range of children's characteristics and experiences including: gender, BMI and perceptions of body weight, enjoyment of school, peer relationships and experience of bullying, and parent-child relationship.

On average, children scored 15 on the scale, indicating a generally high level of life satisfaction. There was no statistically significant difference in the average score for boys and girls.

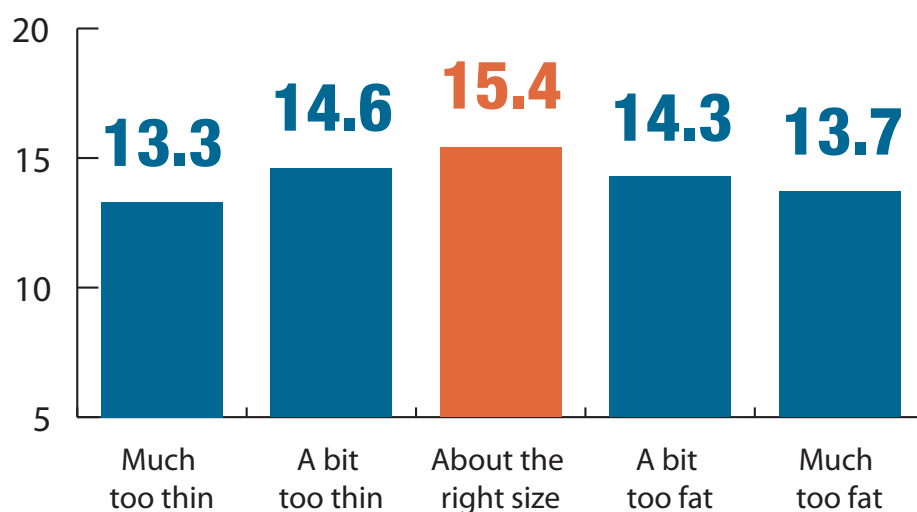
## On average, children scored 15 on the life satisfaction scale



Life satisfaction did not differ notably according to BMI classification - children who were of healthy weight had a relatively similar life satisfaction score as those who were overweight and obese. However, levels of life satisfaction did vary according to the child's perception of their own weight. Children who considered themselves to be the right size reported higher life satisfaction than other children. Those who described themselves as about the right size had an average score of 15.4 compared with a score of 13.7 amongst children who believed they were much too fat.



## Children who considered themselves of about the right size reported higher life satisfaction than other children



Levels of life satisfaction were also related to children's enjoyment of school, with children who always looked forward to going to school reporting higher life satisfaction than those who never looked forward to school (15.9 compared with 13.6). In addition, life satisfaction was lower than average amongst children with lower educational aspirations. Those who wanted to leave education when they turned 16 scored 14.0 on average, compared with 15.1 for children who wanted to stay on when they turned 16 and 15.0 for all children.

## Children who looked forward to school reported a higher than average life satisfaction whilst those who wanted to leave school at age 16 reported a lower than average life satisfaction



**14.0**

average for children who wanted to leave school at 16



**15.0**

average

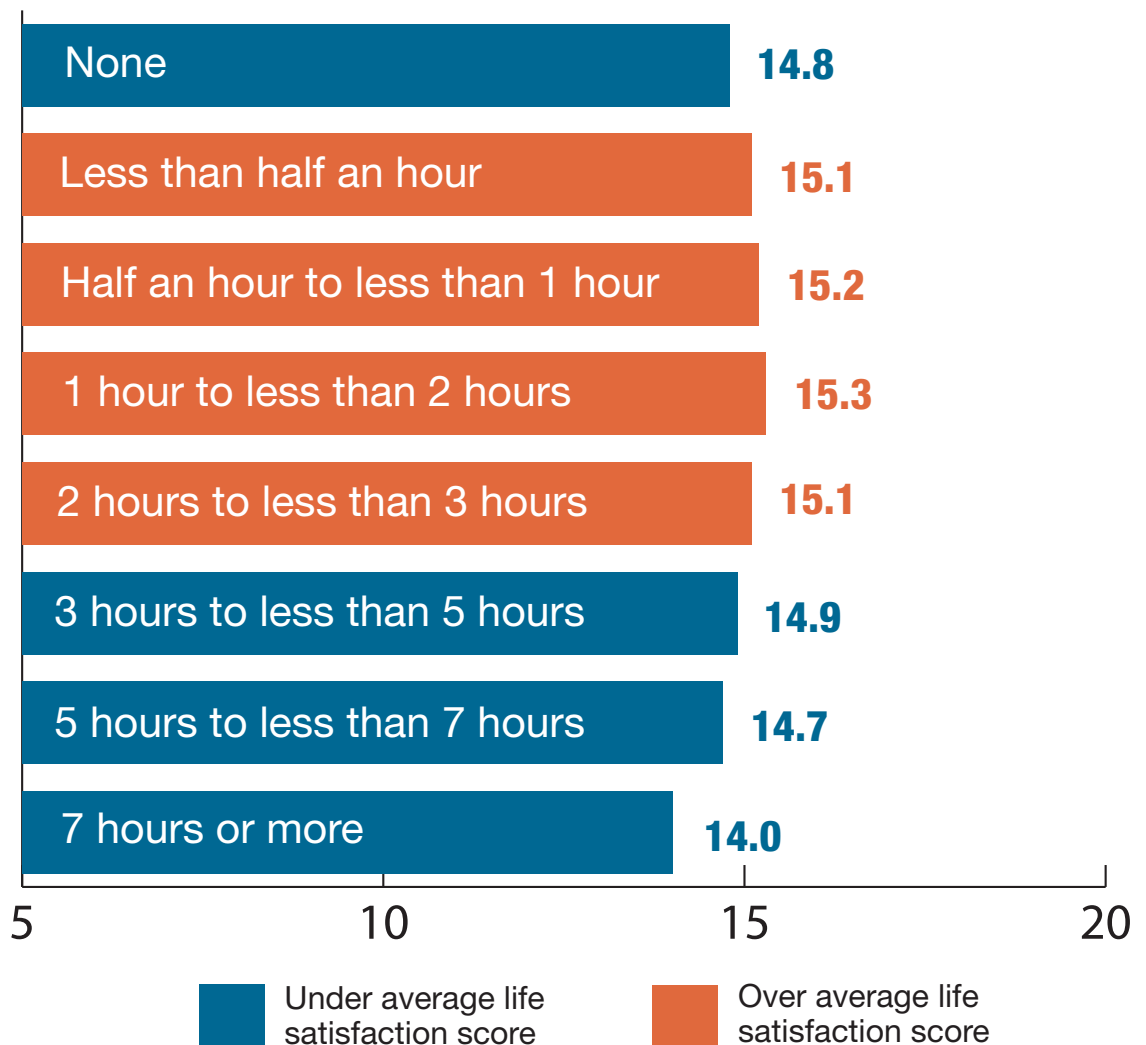


**15.9**

average for children who looked forward to going to school

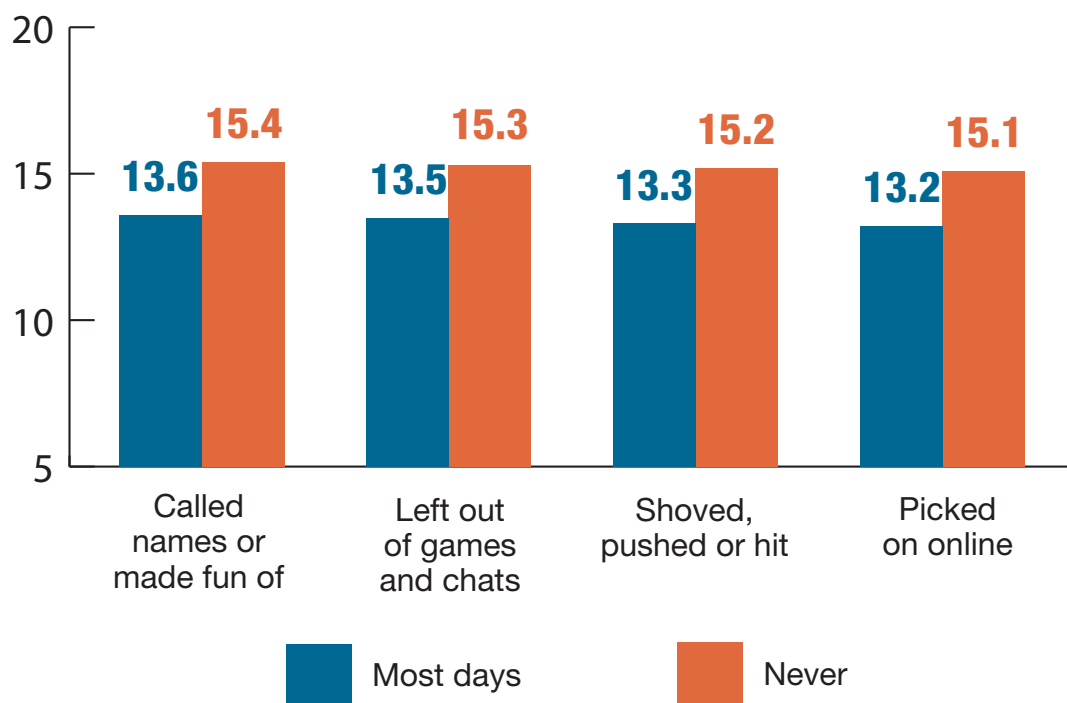
Children who spent less time on social media or messaging tended to have higher life satisfaction than either those who spent a lot of time or those who spent no time on social media. Those who spent between 30 minutes and 1 hour or 1 to 2 hours on social media or messaging people on an average school day reported the highest life satisfaction scores (averages of 15.2 and 15.3 respectively). In contrast, children who spent 7 or more hours daily reported the lowest average score (14.0) and those who spent no time at all on social media on an average school day had lower than average life satisfaction (14.8).

**Children who spent a limited amount of time on social media on an average school day had higher average life satisfaction than those who spent no time or excessive periods of time on social media**



Having positive or negative peer relationships was associated with children’s life satisfaction. Children who reported regular experience of any form of bullying tended to have lower life satisfaction than those who did not experience any bullying. For example, children who had been picked on most days had a lower mean life satisfaction (13.6) compared with children who never experienced it (15.4).

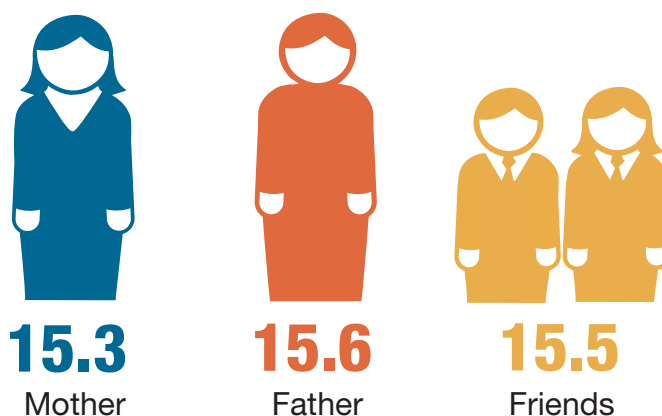
## Children who experienced the following behaviours most days tended to have lower life satisfaction than those who never experienced that behaviour



Being able to easily make new friends at secondary school was also associated with higher life satisfaction. Children who said making new friends was very easy had an average score of 15.4 compared with a score of 13.6 amongst children who found making new friends very hard. Similarly, children who felt that they could always count on their friends to help them when they had a problem reported higher life satisfaction than those who felt that they could never do so (15.5 compared with 13.6).

Positive parent-child relationships were also associated with higher life satisfaction. Children who were always able to count on their resident mother to help them with a problem reported a higher life satisfaction score than those who were never able to (15.3 compared with 13.4). Similarly, children who could always count on their resident father for assistance with a problem also reported a higher mean than those who never could (15.6 compared with 13.0).

**Children who could always count on their resident mother, resident father and friends reported higher life satisfaction scores**



# Concluding remarks

This report marks the end of the ninth sweep of data collection with Birth Cohort 1 in the Growing Up in Scotland study. This was the first data collected since the cohort members moved to secondary school and embarked on their journey into adolescence. The tenth sweep of fieldwork, where the cohort children are aged 14, commenced in January 2019 and interviewing will continue until summer 2020. The enduring support from and enthusiasm of the cohort members and their families is allowing the continued expansion of an already rich and diverse unique source of information on the characteristics, circumstances and experiences of children and their parents in Scotland.

Although this report contains only preliminary analysis from one sweep of the study, it is evident that several important themes and issues are already emerging as children enter an important phase in their lives. Many of these will warrant more detailed examination incorporating the considerable data collected on their earlier childhood experiences. Others will form baseline measures which will be tracked through future sweeps of the study.

A key part of the design and philosophy behind GUS is that the study would be the centrepiece of a wider programme of research and provide a rich resource for other researchers. A considerable body of work already exists and more will follow as these new data are disseminated to the study's broad interest group encompassing central and local government policy personnel, voluntary and public sector practitioners and academic and research communities.

To find out more about GUS, access existing research reports and articles and sign up to receive study updates, visit the study website:

[www.growingupinscotland.org.uk](http://www.growingupinscotland.org.uk)



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