



Meeting needs, making changes, improving outcomes

How Are Our Families?

By
Dr Tara Murphy (Childhood Development Initiative)
Dr Suzanne Guerin (University College Dublin)
2012





FOREWORD

In 2003, when a group of concerned parents, residents and service providers came together to consider the needs of children and families in Tallaght West, we were determined that our efforts would lead to an increased understanding of the community, improved connections across services, and ultimately better outcomes. Central to this approach was being evidence-led, making informed decisions, and balancing the strategic efforts with a commitment to local delivery with tangible benefits for children.

A central element of this process was the needs assessment conducted in 2004, *"How Are Our Kids?"* which centrally informed the development and focus of CDI's strategic plan. Eight years later, CDI has developed five programme manuals, commissioned eight independent evaluations and established strong governance structures with effective links between organisations and community residents. During this period we have learnt a great deal about how to deliver quality services, promote reflective practice and enhance access to supports. As final evaluation reports and findings begin to emerge CDI will increasingly focus on translating and disseminating these lessons, alongside strategies to sustain the delivery of those programmes which have been demonstrated as being effective. The desire to remain evidence-based and maintain a deep understanding of the community led us to revisit the information from *"How Are Our Kids?"* and consider additional information from both parents and young people. The resulting findings and insights are considered in this report, offering a comprehensive answer to the question *"How Are Our Families?"*

These developments have taken place in the context of unique and dramatic shifts in the economy. When CDI was first established as a company in 2007, the country was still in the throes of the Celtic Tiger. The construction industry was booming, immigration rates were high and there was a general belief that this lifestyle would always sustain. Of course, this was not the case and Tallaght West similar to many other communities experiencing disadvantage, has experienced a deep impact resulting from the financial downturn. As this timely report shows families are managing significant worries about money including high levels of reliance on social welfare and local authority housing and concern about making basic utility payments. However, the report also indicates very positive relationships between children and parents, high levels of support and connectedness within the community and a sense of belonging and ownership in Tallaght West.

The range of organisations and services being accessed by families is indicative of both the complexity of need and the levels of motivation amongst families to get involved and seek support. *"How Are Our Families?"* offers a snapshot of family life in Tallaght West; it will be of use to those interested in understanding the community better and wishing to ensure the adoption of an evidenced-based approach to the planning of children's services. It also serves as a reminder of the resilience of the people in Tallaght West, their capacity to 'put the best foot forward' and focus on the positives and the enduring commitment of parents to love, care for and nurture their children.

We hope this report supports all of us in doing just that.

Dr. Noelle Spring
Chair
CDI Board of Management



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several individuals and organisations made this study possible and the research team would like to thank the following (in no particular order):

- Members of the Community Survey Advisory Committee who gave their time to carefully advise and consider the survey in its entirety in conjunction with members of the CDI team:
 - ❖ Frances Chance;
 - ❖ Colette McLoughlin;
 - ❖ Maria O'Donoghue;
 - ❖ Pauline O'Hanlon.

- Participating schools and youth organisations:
 - ❖ Citywise (John Keogh and Paul Waverly);
 - ❖ Killinarden Community College (Ita Garvey);
 - ❖ Jobstown Community College (Mona Moran);
 - ❖ St. Aidan's Community College (Sr. Ann);
 - ❖ St. Mark's Community College (Eithne Kennedy); and
 - ❖ Youth Horizons (Sr. Mairead).

- Our Community Fieldworkers who demonstrated a strong sense of commitment to the task. To us, they are the 'Erin Brockovich's' of Tallaght West!
 - ❖ Mareta Albogachiev,
 - ❖ Valerie Behan,
 - ❖ Aishling Bolarinwa,
 - ❖ Susan Brennan,
 - ❖ Sinead Casper,
 - ❖ Mary Doyle,
 - ❖ Geraldine Ennis,
 - ❖ Martina Genockey,
 - ❖ Leslie Fagan,
 - ❖ Christine Mc Donnell,
 - ❖ Val O'Reilly, and
 - ❖ Sarah O'Shea.

- Those individuals who worked tirelessly on data input including Fiona Horahan, Jennifer Rogers, and Sarah O'Shea.

- Dr Deborah Ghate (formerly Centre for Effective Services) who co-developed and implemented the original needs analysis survey in the United Kingdom and from whom we were fortunate to receive guidance.

- Willie Sheils from South Dublin County Council who supported the study and Sean Kennedy from Leisureplex who gave us his best deal for vouchers!

- Last but certainly not least, to all the young people and families who participated in this study. Your honesty was oftentimes incredible and we hope we have done you some justice by capturing a meaningful picture of family life in Tallaght West.



OVERVIEW

The purpose of this study was to update our understanding and information on families in the community of Tallaght West and particularly the risk and protective factors associated with children's wellbeing. The research focused on extensive child and family demographic information and well-being indicators in order to provide a holistic picture of children's, young people's, and family's lives.

Study Method

"How Are Our Families?" is a follow-up study to *"How Are Our Kids?"* (2004). The current study used the same methodology as *"How Are Our Kids?"* (HAOK), with an additional youth survey to indicate any changes in child and family well-being over the six years. While not returning to the specific participants from HAOKs, this follow-up study sources participants in the same community. *"How Are Our Families?"* has been divided into two surveys: 1) Household Survey and 2) Youth Survey.

For the household survey community field workers were trained to collect information using a structured survey. The field workers systematically called to houses in the community to invite residents to take part. Survey questions were taken from a range of existing questionnaires examining education and employment, financial issues, health and well-being, child behaviour, sense of community and safety. The survey took up to one hour to complete and in the majority of cases, responses were recorded by the field worker. The youth survey was completed in school and youth settings, again with the support of trained fieldworkers. The youth survey drew on questions from previous studies such as KIDSCREEN¹ and the Irish Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey (HBSC)².

Study Participants

Overall, 141 families with 313 children participated in *"How Are Our Families?"*, as well as 208 young people aged 12-17 years attending local secondary schools and youth organisations.

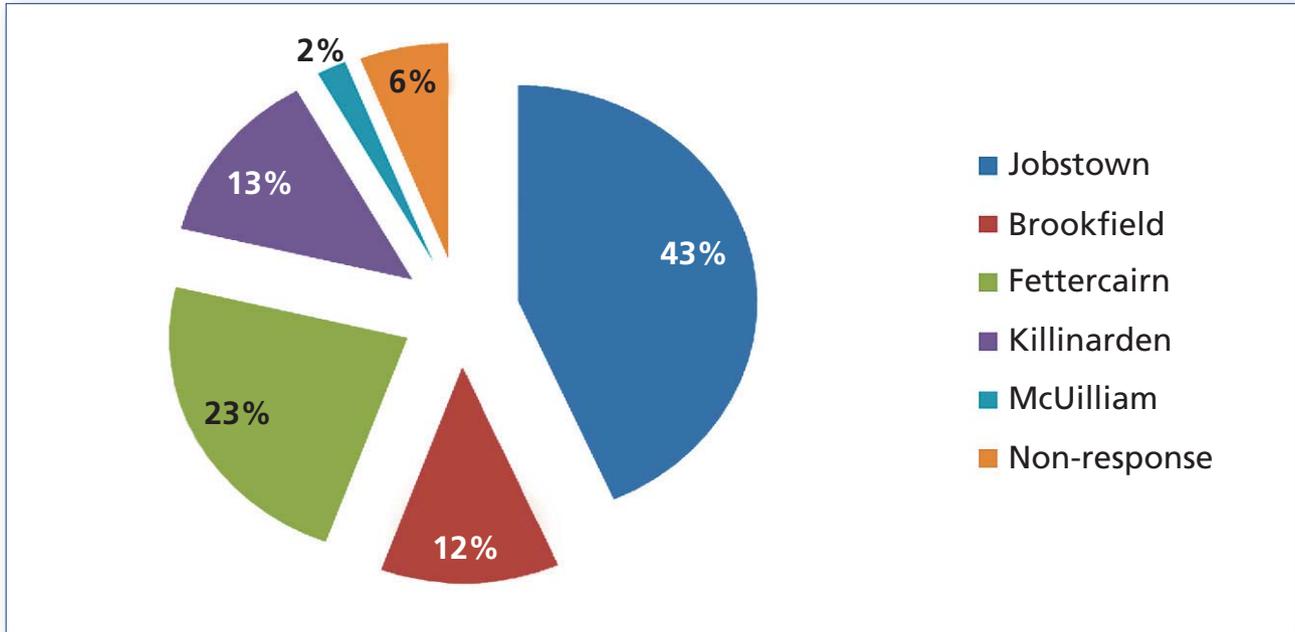
Residents completing the household survey were between 19 and 73 years old, with an average age of 33 years. The majority of the young people who participated in the study were aged 12-13 years (65%, n=135) with the average age being 13 years (SD = 1.3). In over half of the cases (57%, n=80) the family was headed by a couple, while just over 40% (n=57) were single parents. In addition families reported having between 1 and 6 children, with an average of 2 children per household.

Participants for the household survey were sampled from across five estates in Tallaght West with the largest group living in Jobstown, followed by Brookfield, Fettercairn, Killinarden and McUilliam (See Figure 1). The majority of young people who participated in this study lived and attended school in Jobstown followed by Killinarden and Brookfield. Two thirds of residents (67%, n=95) were currently renting their property from the Local Authority compared to 65% in HAOK, with 17% (n=24) owning or buying their home and the remaining renting or sharing privately (16%, n=22).

¹ KIDSCREEN (Kidscreen Group Europe, 2006) is a 52-item instrument designed to assess the subjective health and wellbeing of children and young people (health-related quality of life, HRQOL).

² The Irish Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Survey (HBSC, Ireland) is a study that assesses the health and well-being of young people from their perspective.

Figure 1 **Geographical participation across five estates in Tallaght West**



KEY FINDINGS: HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

1	FAMILY ISSUES
2	EMPLOYMENT
3	EDUCATION
4	LIVING CIRCUMSTANCES
5	FINANCIAL ISSUES
6	SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND SAFETY
7	PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH
8	SERVICE UTILISATION



1. FAMILY ISSUES

- In over half of the cases (57%, n=80) the family was headed by a couple, while just over 40% (n=57) were single parents;
- 21% of respondents reported experiencing difficulties with former partners while 16% reported having regular fights with their partner;
- 16% of respondents stated that they felt unsafe in their home with 8% reporting that their child felt unsafe in the home;
- 11% of respondents stated that they had a problem with alcohol or drugs;
- The top three most frequently reported events by respondents were experiencing difficulties with their children, the death of a close friend or relative, and difficulties with close relationships/ friends.

Parenting

- Overall 45% (n=63) reported that they wanted their child to go to college or to have a good education, 8% (n=12) wanted their child to get a good job and 16% (n=23) reported they wanted their child to be happy [Non-response 14%];
- 81% (n=114) reported that they believe their child has a happy future ahead of them (all or most of the time);
- 50% (n=71) of parents who answered the question about their child's strengths referred to child's personality characteristics (e.g. child is happy, clever, determined);
- In terms of good things that happened to the family recently, 27% (n=39) who responded reported a family holiday or family activity;
- Nearly two thirds of respondents (63%, n=89) stated that they could talk to someone when upset. Of these, 41% (n= 59) indicated that they had turned/could turn to their family/spouse or partner while one third (33%, n= 47) had/could access this support from their friends.

RESPONSES TO "CHILD STRENGTHS AND PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES"

"Very happy baby [who] gives me lots of joy".

"She used to be shy but now she has come out of herself and is good".

RESPONSES TO "WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT THE CHILD?"

"His little personality. [I] could not imagine life without him".

"She makes me happy being herself".

"Watching her achieve".

"I get the feeling that I'm a child again when I play with him, we have fun together".



RESPONSES TO "BEING A PARENT/CARER"

"It's harder than I thought it would ever be but I still love it".

"Very hard when you're a lone parent".

"Sometimes very lonely, feels that she has failed. [Respondent has] suffered with bad postnatal depression".

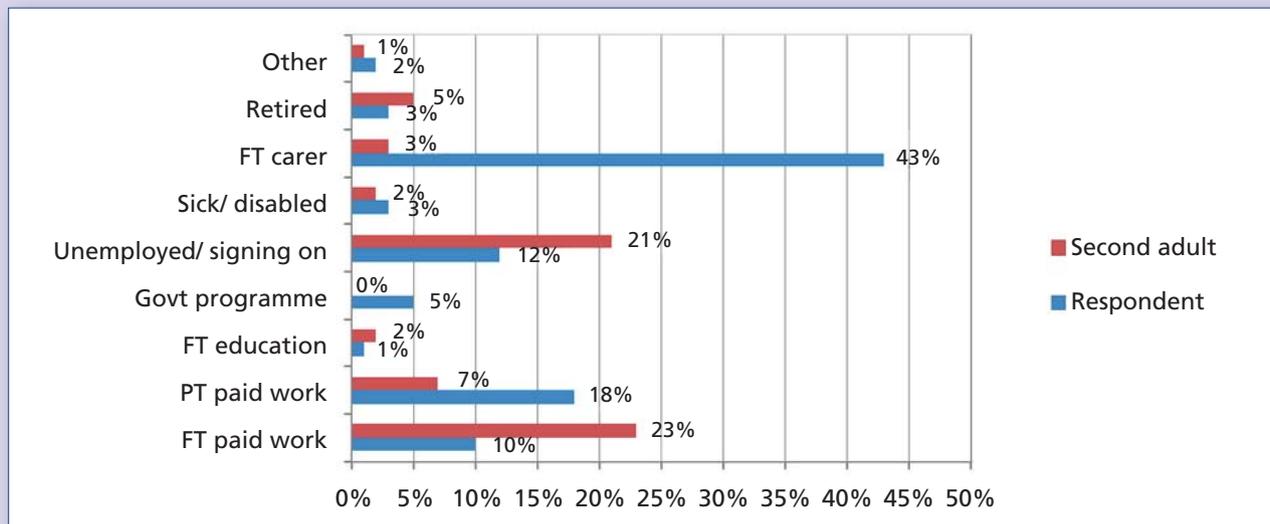
"I am glad that I live with my Ma. She helps me a lot".



2. EMPLOYMENT

The most frequent response for the participant was fulltime carer (43%, n=61), followed by more than a quarter reporting that they were in full or part time work. Among the second family member the most frequent responses were fulltime paid employment (23%) or unemployment/signing on (21%).

Figure 2 Employment Status of Respondent and Second Adult in Household



3. EDUCATION

- Overall, 12% of the index³ children (n=17) were not yet of school going age, 12% (n=15) were in preschool/nursery etc, nearly 60% of children attended primary school (59%, n=83), 10% were in secondary school (n=14) and one child was in a special school;
- In terms of school absenteeism, almost one third reported being absent for 5-20 days. The most common reason being illness (55%, n=78), with fewer participants reporting the reason as appointments (16%, n=22), holidays (11%, n=15), truancy (3%, n=5) or temporary exclusion (1%, n=2);
- Just over half (52%, n=72) of children were involved in after-school activities [Non-response <1%], the most frequently reported categories being music, dance and drama (30%, n=42) and sports (26%, n=37).
- 62% of participants (n=87) believed their child was achieving their potential at nursery/school [Non-response = 21%].
- 45% of parents reported that they wanted their child to go to college or have a good education.

³ Where there was more than one child in the house aged less than 18 years, respondents were asked to randomly select one child (referred to as the 'index' child in this report).

4. LIVING CIRCUMSTANCES

- Two thirds of respondents (67%, n=95) were currently renting the property from the Local Authority compared to 65% in HAOK, with 17% (n=24) owning or buying their home and the remaining renting or sharing privately (16%, n=22);
- Overall 80% (n=113) reported they had lived in the same home for two years or more [Non-response <1%], with 93% (n=131) reporting that they have lived in the same neighbourhood for a similar length of time;
- 81% (n=116) were generally positive about their home.



RESPONSES TO WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT YOUR HOME?

"The fact that it's mine".

"Feels very safe and comfortable [at] home".

"My mother and father live beside me".

"The people that live around make it special".

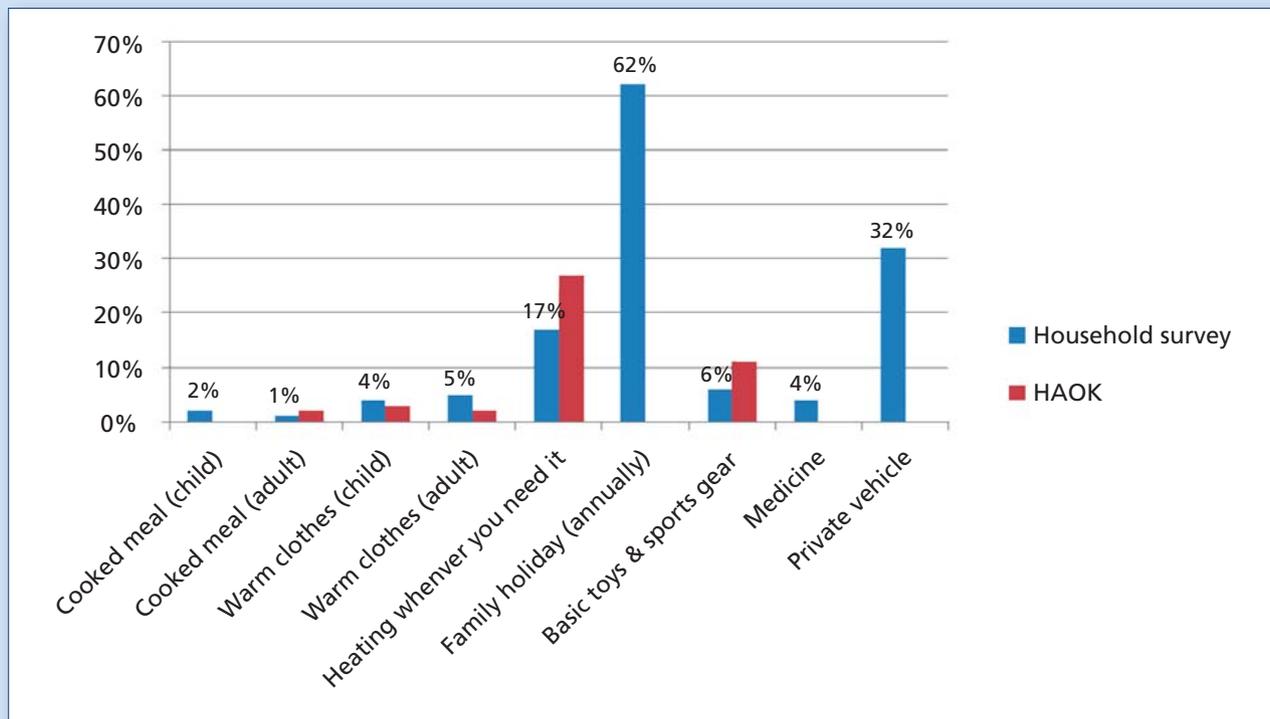
"My garden. The view of the mountains".



5. FINANCIAL ISSUES

- The most frequently reported item/commodity that participants reported not being able to afford was a family holiday (62%) followed by a private vehicle (32%);
- Participants were asked if they were seriously behind in terms of paying the following bills:
 - ❖ TV licence (31%);
 - ❖ Other loans (19%);
 - ❖ Electricity (18%) compared to 15% in HAOK;
 - ❖ Rent (17%) compared to 26% in HAOK;
 - ❖ Gas (11%) compared to 3% in HAOK;
 - ❖ Road tax (11%);
 - ❖ Goods on hire purchase (9%);
 - ❖ Phone (8%) compared to 16% in HAOK.
- 46% of respondents indicated that they were 'getting by' financially. However, 33% reported have financial worries 'almost all of the time' within the previous 6 months of the current study.

Figure 3 Unable to afford within the past 6 months





6. SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND SAFETY

- Two-thirds of respondents (67%, n=95) reported that they felt a sense of community with other people in their area [Non-response 10%];
- Interestingly 93% (n=131) reported that they knew at least one/two of their neighbours personally – that is, knowing their names and stopping to talk to them at least every once in a while;
- Nearly 90% (88%, n=124) reported that their child/children feel a sense of community with other children in the area;
- Three quarters of the sample (76%, n=107) reported that they would allow their child to play outside [Not applicable/Non-response 11%] and a similar number (77%, n=108) reported that their child/children did in fact play outside [Non-response 11%].
- There was a high reporting of crime (87%, n=123), anti-social behaviour (79%, n=111) and environmental issues (77%, n=109) in the area. However, the extent to which the problems impact on respondents' own households was less;
- 83% (n=119) were generally positive about living in Tallaght West.

RESPONSES TO SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND SAFETY

"Most of my neighbours are very friendly".

"[I have] lived in Tallaght for over 30 years".

"Get neighbourhood (family) days going to bring people closer. Paying mortgage for 30 years may as well get to know each other".

"Teenagers passing round the area causing trouble"

"I love living here. I know everyone around and most of my good friend lives here".

7. PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Overall, 75% of participants in this study believed that their own health in the last 12 months was 'fairly good' or 'very good' (n = 105), 13% (n=18) of respondents described their health as neither good nor poor and 6% (n=9) described their health as very poor [Unclear/Non-response = 6%];
- 13% (n=18) of respondents reported that someone in the house was in receipt of disability benefit [Non-response = 6%];
- In the present study 76% (n=107) reported that someone in their house has a medical card;
- 43% (n=60) indicated that state benefits are the household's only source of income [Non-response 33%];
- 27% of participants self-reported difficulties with anxiety or depression (n = 38, Non-response 6%), while 16% (n = 22, Non-response 47%) reported anxiety and depression in their partners;
- Overall 35% (n=49) of parents reported that their child had difficulties with emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get on with other people to some extent.



8. SERVICE UTILISATION

In terms of accessing formal support, we have grouped these into four categories, medical support, educational support, other supports and financial supports. As you can see from the charts below the most frequently reported services accessed by respondents in this study were the GP/doctor (81%, n=112), school staff (34%, n=47), and the St. Vincent de Paul (33%, n=46), Credit Union (29% n=41) and Public health Nurse (26% n = 26). Previous research by Nolan (2008) found a positive relationship between the frequency of visits to the GP among adults and eligibility for the medical card.

Medical Support

GP Doctor	Public Health Nurse	Other Healthcare Professional	Other Social Services Professionals	Psychiatrist
81%	26%	21%	9%	7%

Educational Support

Teacher/School Principal	After-schools clubs	Home School Liaison Officer	Education Welfare Officer	Educational Psychologist	Playgroup, parent and toddler group	Specific parenting/parent support group	Youth Service
34%	16%	7%	2%	4%	6%	5%	4%

Other Supports

St. Vincent de Paul	Local Authority	Gardaí	Free Legal Aid/Solicitor	Citizens Advice Bureau	Social Worker	Support group for victims of domestic violence
33%	17%	13%	10%	6%	3%	2%

Financial Supports

Credit Union	MABS
29%	7%

KEY FINDINGS: YOUTH SURVEY

1	PARENT RELATIONS AND HOME LIFE
2	HEALTH
3	SELF-PERCEPTION AND AUTONOMY
4	SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES
5	PERSONAL SAFETY, SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND BULLYING
6	FINANCIAL RESOURCES

1. PARENT RELATIONS AND HOME LIFE

- Nearly 40% (n=80) of children and young people in this study reported living with one to three people in their home while half (n=103) indicated living with four to six people;
- Over half of the participants (56%, n=116) reported living in a household that was headed by a couple, whereas 37% (n=77) were living in a lone parent household. These findings are in line with those previously reported in HAOK (2004) and the CSO (2006)⁴;
- In general, participants in this study reported having a more positive relationship with their parents (or primary caregivers) compared to participants in KIDSCREEN.



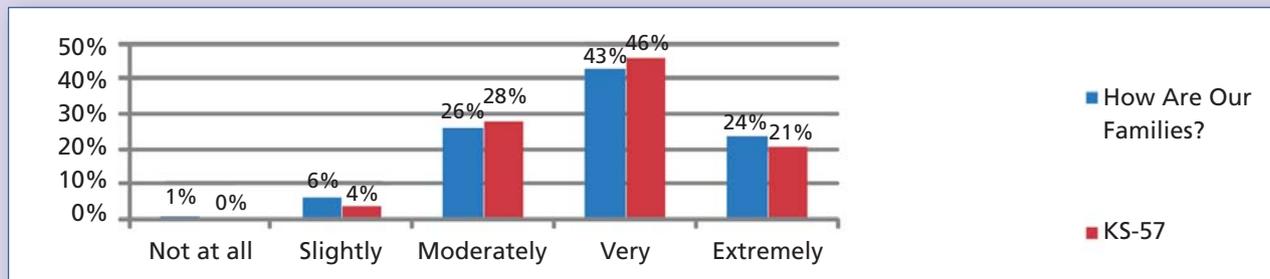
⁴ At the time of collection, data from Census 2011 was not available.



2. HEALTH

- 67% (n=139) of participants in this study believed that their health was 'very good' or 'excellent' which is similar to that reported in KIDSCREEN (67%) and only slightly higher to that reported in the HBSC survey (64%);

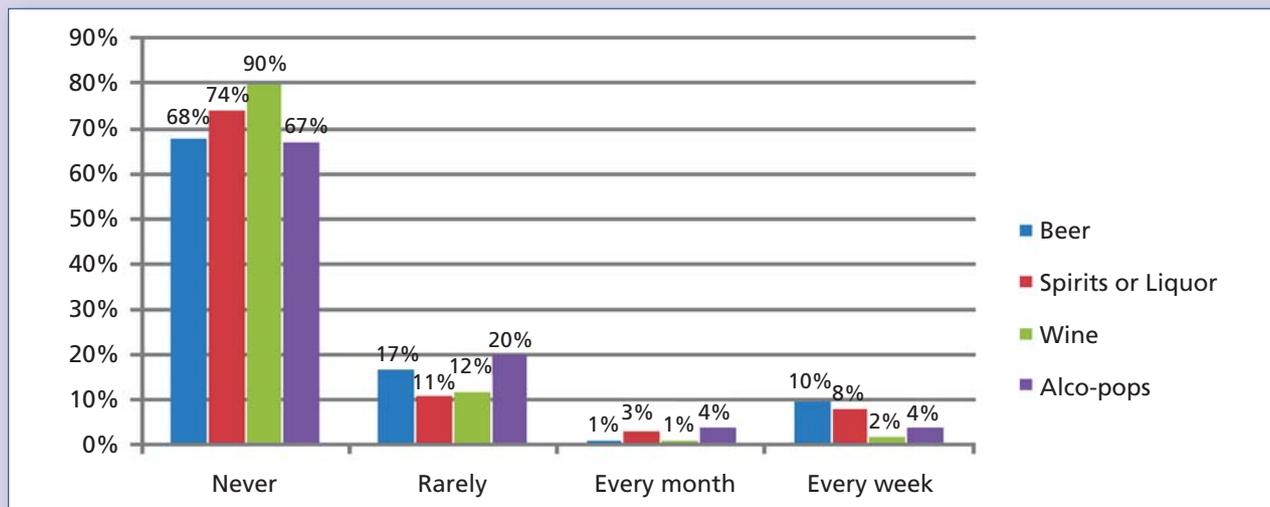
Figure 4 General Health



1.1: Health behaviour

- 30% (n=62) of participants reported having ever smoked which is lower than that found in the HBSC⁵ survey (36%);
- Nearly one third (n=57) stated having ever been drunk which is lower than that reported in the HBSC survey (36%).

Figure 5 Type and frequency of alcohol consumed by participants



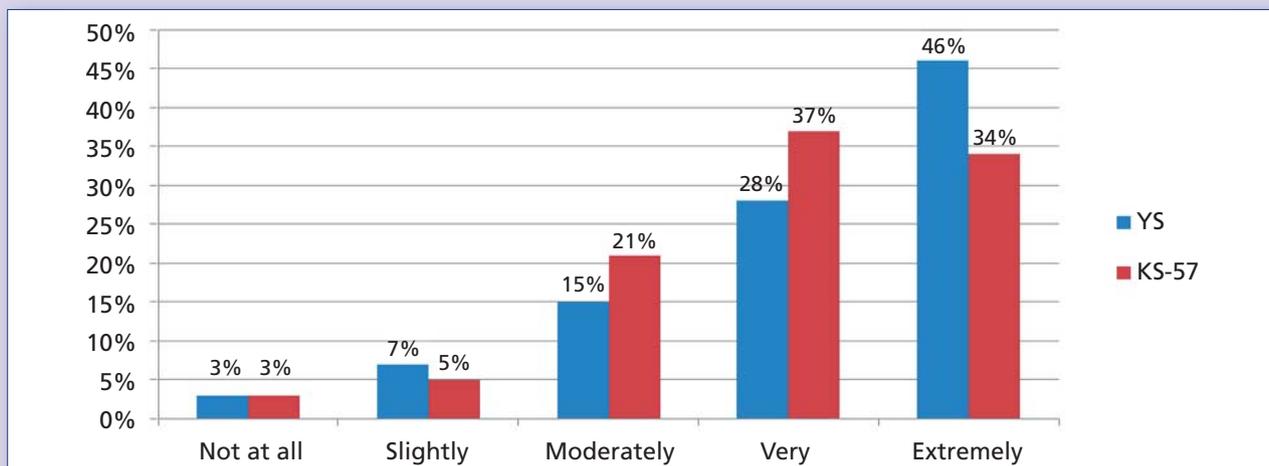
⁵ Older participants (i.e. aged 15 years and over) completed this section in the HBSC. Therefore, comparisons drawn between "How Are Our Families?" and HBSC must be interpreted with this in mind.

2. HEALTH CONTD...

1.2: Psycho-emotional health and wellbeing

- In general, participants in this study were more satisfied with life compared to their peers nationally (e.g. has your life been enjoyable? Have you felt cheerful? Have you had fun?);
- However, participants also reported experiencing more negative moods and feelings compared to those in KIDSCREEN (e.g. have you felt that you do everything badly? Have you felt sad? Have you felt fed up?).

Figure 6 Satisfaction with life



A greater proportion of participants (76%, n=159) reported having a 'very' or 'extremely' enjoyable life compared to 72% in KIDSCREEN. Of the 207 valid responses to the question 'Have you felt pleased you are alive?', a welcome 83% (n=174) of participants felt 'very' or 'extremely' pleased to be alive which is line with their peers nationally (83%).

2.3: Social Support and Peers

- The majority of children and young people in this study reported having a wide circle of close male and female friends, with participants reporting that they have on average 12 (SD=31) close male friends and 13 (SD=27.9) close female friends;
- The majority of respondents reported having very positive relationships with their friends;
- 86% (n=179) stated that they and their friends 'very often' or 'always' helped each other compared to 67% in KIDSCREEN.

RESPONSES TO "ENJOYS MOST ABOUT LIVING IN TALLAGHT WEST"

"That the friends you make care about you".

"My mates, me fella, my football. I absolutely love it so much".

"It's safe and it's a nice place to live in".

"My school is near to me".

"I enjoy the school I go to".





3. SELF-PERCEPTION AND AUTONOMY

- An exploration of self-perceptions revealed that 75% (n=156) of young people in this study felt very often or always happy with the way they are which is higher than that reported by their peers nationally (60%);
- Over 80% (n=171) reported very often or always being happy with the clothes they have compared to nearly 70% nationally, while 28% of participants are very often or always worried about the way they looked which is in line with national findings;
- 25% (n=53) of participants reported that they would very often or always like to change something about their body which is lower than reported for their peers nationally (35%).

3.2: Autonomy

- Overall, children and young people in this study reported having a greater sense of independence compared to their peers in KIDSCREEN;
- 64% (n=133) of participants in this study reported that they have 'very often' or 'always' had enough time for themselves compared to 54% in the KIDSCREEN survey;
- 71% (n=148) stated that they are 'often' or 'always' able to do the things that they want to do in their free time while only half indicated the same in KIDSCREEN;
- In response to the question 'have you had enough opportunity to be outside', 81% (n=171) of participants indicated that they 'very often' or 'always' had an opportunity to be outside which is greater than that report in KIDSCREEN (64%);
- Nearly 80% (n=164) of the participants in the youth survey reported that they have 'very often' or 'always' had enough time to meet friends compared to 57% in KIDSCREEN;
- 78% (n=159) of participants reported that they 'very often' or 'always' had been able to decide what they did in their free time compared to 62% of participants in KIDSCREEN.



4. SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

- The majority of participants reported walking to school (83%, n=173) while 28% (n=58) reported being taken to school by car;
- Children and young people in this study felt happier and more satisfied in their school or youth organisation compared to their peers nationally;
- 35% (n=74) of participants 'often' or 'always' attended an after-schools club compared to 13% in HAOK;
- While one in three (n=62) reported 'often' or 'always' going swimming, more than 59% (n= 122) stated that they 'never' or 'seldom' visited the library (or conversely, approximately 20% (n=42) indicated that they 'very often' or 'always' attend a library outside of school hours).
- Just over one in three participants (32%, n=67) stated that they 'very often' or 'always' were a member of a music, drama or dance group which is higher than that found in HAOK (11%).



5. PERSONAL SAFETY, SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND BULLYING

- Half of the participants (50%, n=104) in this study indicated having acquired an injury that required medical attention once or more within the previous 12 months which is greater than the 43% reported for participants aged 10-17 years in the HBSC survey [non-response=2%];
- Over one third (34%, n=72) have been bullied at least once or more which is higher than that found in the HBSC survey (24%) and slightly lower than that reported by caregivers in HAOK (39%);
- Nearly half (49%, n=101) participants stated that crime was an issue in their neighbourhood whilst 10% (n=21) reported that they were affected by it;
- In terms of the incidence of anti-social behaviour, half (n=102) of the participants in this study indicated that this was a problem in their neighbourhood with 13% (n=26) indicating that they were directly affected by it;
- Nearly half (49%, n=100) reported there being environmental issues (e.g. presence of graffiti, rubbish or traffic pollution) in their neighbourhood whilst 14% (n= 28) stated that it directly affected them;
- This suggests that parents and/or schools may be mediating the effects of negative experiences of crime, anti-social behaviour and environmental problems.

6. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- A greater proportion (71%, n=148) of participants in this study reported 'very often' or 'always' having enough money to do the same things as their friends compared to KIDSCREEN (69%);
- The most frequently reported items owned by participants in this study include TVs (89%, n=186), DVD players (86%, n=179), mobile phones (89%, n=186), laptops (78%, n=162) and bicycles (68%, n=141).

CONCLUSION

"How Are Our Families?" provides a detailed report on the lives of a group of families living in Tallaght West in 2010. Overall, findings from this study suggest that families are coping well in relation to health, parenting, and general wellbeing. For example, there is a positive sense of community and family support appears to be forthcoming for the majority of respondents. There is also less school absenteeism and bullying for children and young people as reported by respondents. Also, nearly half of respondents in the household survey and just under half in the youth survey reported participation in out-of-school activities. However, the findings also highlight the struggles that some families have particularly in relation to paying bills including gas and electricity. This is also reflected in the types of formal services accessed by respondents.

The findings of *"How Are Our Families?"* will be of interest to those living and working in Tallaght West and can provide the basis for understanding and indeed meeting the needs of these families in a more comprehensive way. Different stakeholders will take varying lessons from this report, but decisions taken in response to this information will be evidence-based. It would be difficult to identify a set of recommendations that come from this report, and instead we have attempted to highlight key findings, which may have meaning to stakeholders.

Nevertheless, we would argue that central to the learning from this report is the clear theme that while many families in Tallaght West, and perhaps other similar communities face many challenges on a day to day basis, and indeed a significant minority experience multiple and major challenges, there is strong evidence of resilience and coping within the community. Members of the community report positive experiences, a sense of community, and developed social networks. They also provide examples of coping with challenges, drawing on and providing supports both through friends and family and engaging with formal services.

Perhaps the main conclusion is that supporting the development and wellbeing of children and families in Tallaght West relies on understanding the challenges the community faces, recognising the resources that are clearly evident within the community and identifying the gaps between these as areas for future development.



CONTACT US:

The Childhood Development Initiative
St. Mark's Youth & Family Centre
Cookstown Lane
Fettercairn
Tallaght
Dublin 24

Tel: 01-494 0030

Fax: 01-462 7329

Email: info@twcdi.ie

www.twcdi.ie

Registered Charity No. CHY17557



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of
Children and Youth Affairs



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