



Growing Up in New Zealand

Now We Are Twelve

Life in early adolescence

Now We Are 12 – Extended Factsheet: Families and Whānau

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Background

This Families and Whānau Factsheet presents a snapshot of the parents, families, whānau, and household composition of young people in Aotearoa, New Zealand, at 12 years of age. Supportive and caring family and whānau, including parents or primary caregivers, other family members, and other non-familial adults, are instrumental in supporting the health, wellbeing and development of young people.

While household structure describes the number of people living in a household and the relationships between them, families can span multiple households. Non-nuclear family forms and diverse household structures are becoming more ubiquitous, particularly as rates of divorce and parental separation increase (Kukutai *et al.*, 2020). Living in intergenerational households or with extended family has long been a cultural norm for Māori and Pacific families (Kukutai *et al.*, 2020). However, household structure is not necessarily determined by preference, with many families shaping their household structure to optimise material resources (Harvey, Dunifon, & Pilkauskas, 2021).

Previous research has explored associations between different family forms and health outcomes for children and young people. For example, young people living in single-parent families tend to experience worse outcomes economically, cognitively, and emotionally compared to those living in two-parent households, although these disparities can often be explained by differences in material deprivation (Lopoo & DeLeire, 2014; Carr & Springer, 2010; Burt, 2002). Living with extended family or with non-kin can have many benefits for children, including shared caregiving and increased cognitive stimulation (Kim, Spangler & Gutter, 2016; Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2007). These living arrangements may also alleviate material deprivation for families, as the costs of housing are shared (Harvey, Dunifon, & Pilkauskas, 2021).

Co-parenting and living in multiple households are also becoming increasingly common experiences for young people, particularly as rates of parental divorce increase and joint custody arrangements become more common. Research on co-parenting has grown in recent years and supports a view that co-parenting is also a central component of family life that can influence parental and child outcomes (Feinberg, 2003).

Family and Whānau measures at 12-years

At the 12-year data collection wave, *Growing Up in New Zealand* measured four key constructs related to young people's families and whānau. The cohort families were asked about: who lives in their household; whether the young person lived in two or more households; about the relationship status of the parent/s; and if there are any co-parents the young person might have. With this data, the

complexities of young people's living arrangements and family structures can be explored, providing the potential to link this information to our longitudinal data sets, as well as to other measures of a young person's health and wellbeing. Table 1 presents a complete description of the questions asked at the 12Y DCW relating to families and whānau.

Who are young people living with in the household at 12 years of age?

A Household Grid (HHG) was given to the young person's mother or primary caregiver, and either asked about or asked to confirm the following: the age/s and gender/s of the child/ren of the mother receiving the call; the age and relationships of all other members of the household to the cohort child (categorised into 20 and under, and over 20); the number of couples in the home; the number of bedrooms in the home; and the number of other rooms used for sleeping in the home. Together, this information was collated to create several derived variables as measures of household composition, such as whether the young person was living in an intergenerational family or living with non-kin. Table 2 presents a description of the derived variables created to describe specific aspects of household composition.

How many young people are living in two or more households?

Secondly, we asked the young person's mother or primary caregiver to confirm their relationship to the cohort child/ren, and state how much of the time their child/ren currently live/s in the house (all of the time; almost all the time or almost every day; approximately half of every week; around one or two days every week; only on weekends; approximately half of every fortnight; one to a few days a fortnight; one to a few days a month; one to a few days each 2-3 months; only on school holidays; occasionally every year; or less than once a year or not at all). If the young person lives any amount of time with someone else, we asked who they live with *mainly*.

Parental relationships

Thirdly, we asked mothers or primary caregivers if they considered that they were currently in a romantic or intimate relationship, and if so, both mothers and their partners were asked about the nature of this relationship (dating and not co-habiting; dating and co-habiting (de facto, living together); married; or in a civil union). [Relationship status was asked of the mother only, as it was assumed that if the mother provided details for her current (intimate/romantic) partner to complete the 'Partner' questionnaire, then this partner was theoretically in a relationship with the mother.].

Co-parental relationships

Fourthly, for the first time across data collection waves, we asked if there were any co-parents (other than the mother's partner) involved in young people's lives, and if so, we asked what this relationship looks like. Four questions were asked of the young person's mother or primary caregiver.



The first two items were developed in-house, to commence with positively worded items, and to compliment the subsequent questions that together tap into the ways in which separated families manage parenting. The third and fourth items measured the degree of conflict and argumentativeness experienced in co-parenting, taken from a modified conflict subscale of the Quality of Co-parental Interaction Scale (Ahrns, 1981).



Table 1. Measures of family and whānau at the 12-year data collection wave

Constructs	Tools	Who was asked	Description of items
Household composition	Household Grid	Mother or Primary Caregiver	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can I please confirm the age and gender of {NAME/NAMES}? 2. Apart from {NAME/NAMES} how many other children and young adults aged 20 and under live with you? 3. Now we will confirm some details about them (including age, whether immediate family, extended family or non-kin, and relationship to the young person). 4. How many other adults aged 21 and over, including you, are living in your house? 5. Now, we will confirm some details about them, starting with you first (including age, whether immediate family, extended family or non-kin, and relationship to the young person). 6. How many couples live in your house? 7. How many bedrooms are there in your house? 8. Which of the following rooms or areas (other than bedrooms) are regularly used for sleeping in your house?
Multi-family households	Relationship to cohort child/ren and living arrangement (in-house questions)	Mother or Primary Caregiver, Partner	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (<i>Mother or primary caregiver asked</i>) Please confirm that your relationship to {NAME} is: Biological mother; Birth mother (not biological); Adoptive mother; Foster mother; Stepmother; Grandmother; Aunt; Biological father; Foster father; Stepfather; Grandfather; Another relationship. (PQ103) 2. (<i>Partner asked</i>) Please confirm that your relationship to {NAME} is: Biological father; Adoptive/whangai parent; Foster parent; Stepparent; Mother's partner (not biological parent); Grandparent; Uncle/aunt; Another relationship. (PQ7_y12Cp) 3. How much of the time does {NAME} live in your house? (Do not include temporary arrangements, such as sleepovers or nights with grandparents). (HC19) 4. If {NAME} lives any amount of time with someone else, who else does {NAME} live with mainly? (Biological mother; Birth mother (not biological); Adoptive mother; Foster mother; Stepmother; Grandmother; Aunt; Biological father; Foster father; Stepfather; Grandfather; Another relationship). (HC10)
Parental relationships	Parental relationship (in-house questions)	Mother or Primary Caregiver, Partner	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (<i>Mother or primary caregiver only</i>) Do you have a current (intimate/romantic) partner? (PQ5) 2. What best describes the nature of your relationship with your current partner? (REL2 - Mother) (REL22 - Partner)
Co-parental relationships	Co-parenting (items 1-2 in-house, items 3-4 from the Quality of Co-parental Interaction Scale (Ahrons, 1981).	Mother or Primary Caregiver	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you consider that there is someone else who shares the parenting of your child (a co-parent)? 2. Who is mostly involved in making decisions about parenting your {CHILD/CHILDREN}? (e.g. what they eat, what they are allowed to do after school, time they can go to bed etc.) 3. How often do you disagree with the other parent about basic parenting issues? 4. How often is there anger or hostility between you and the other parent?

Table 2. Derived variables that measure household composition at 12 years

Derived variables	Response options	Details of this variable
Single parent family	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sole parent 2. Two or more parents 3. Other 	A parent included: Mother, Father, Mother’s partner (Female), Mother’s partner (Male), Step father, Step mother.
Living with extended family	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 0. Not living with extended family 1. Living with extended family 	Extended family household members included: Aunt, Brother-in-law, Cousin (Female), Cousin (Male), Grandfather, Grandmother, Great aunt, Great grandfather, Great grandmother, Great uncle, Nephew, Niece, Sister-in-law, Uncle, Sister’s partner, Brother’s partner.
Living with non-kin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 0. Not living with non-kin 1. Living with non-kin 	Non-kin household members included: Boarder (Female), Boarder (Male), Flatmate (Female), Flatmate (Male), Friend (Female), Friend (Male), Homestay (Female), Homestay (Male), Caregiver (Female), Caregiver (Male), Other (Male), Other (Female).
Living in intergenerational household	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 0. Not intergenerational household 1. Intergenerational household 	Intergenerational household members included: Grandfather, Grandmother, Great aunt, Great uncle, Great grandfather, Great grandmother.
Household structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sole parent 2. Two or more parents 3. Parent(s) living with extended family 4. Parent(s) living with non-kin 	Four response categories, combining the Single parent family, Living with extended family and Living with non-kin derived variables.
Household or ‘Bubble’ size	Numeric	This is a measure of the number of people, including the cohort young person (or persons if twins or triplets), that reside in the household.

The families and whānau of young people at 12 years of age

Here we provide some examples of key statistics from the 12-year data collection wave, to offer a preliminary glimpse of young people’s families and whānau at age 12.

Household composition

- 17 percent of young people are living in single parent households.
- 12 percent of young people are living with extended family.
- 9 percent of young people are living in intergenerational households.
- The average bubble size (including cohort child/children) is 4.7 people per household, with a range of between 2 and 14 people.

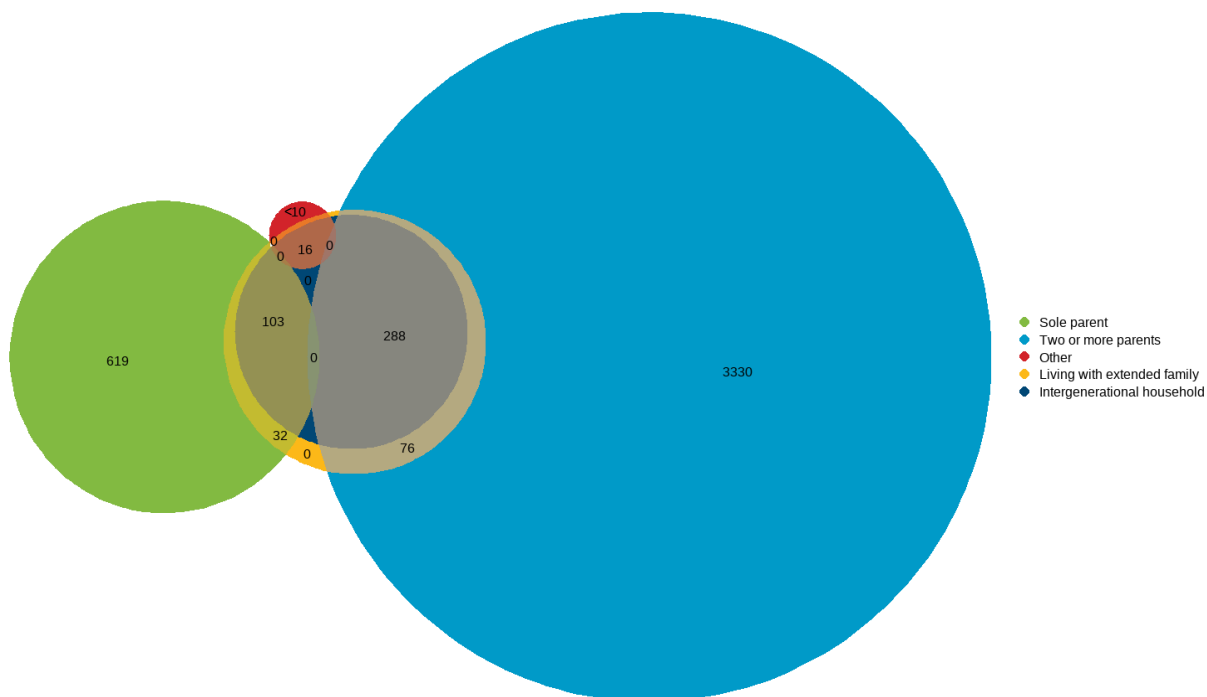


Figure 1. Venn diagram showing the overlap of different family configurations

Multi-family households

- For those who answered the question ($n=4251$), 11 percent of child/ren were reported to live at least some of the time in another household.
- For those who live at least some of the time in another household (in addition to their mother or primary caregiver’s homes), 78% of young people live with their biological fathers, and 9% live with their biological mothers (Figure 2).



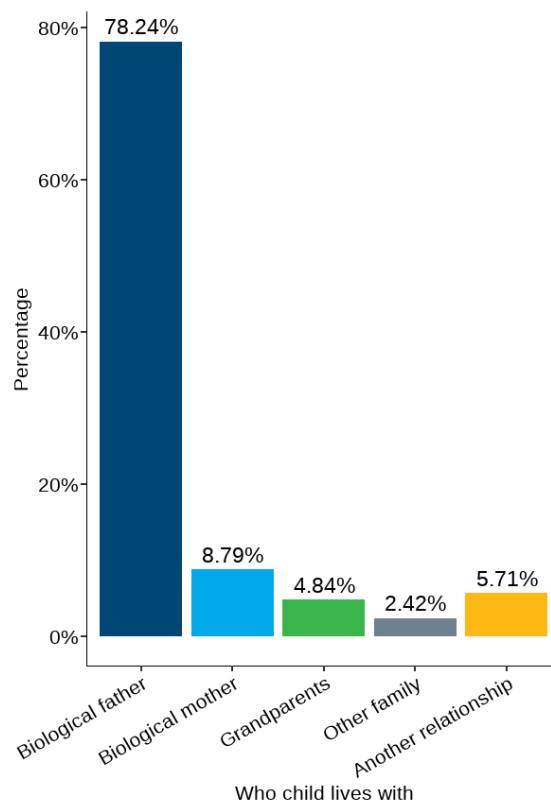


Figure 2. Who young people also reside with in addition to their mother or primary caregiver's home

Parental relationships

- 85 percent of mothers (or primary caregivers) said they have a current partner and 13% said they do not have a current partner.
- Of mothers who have a current partner, 80% said they are married, 15% are co-habiting (de facto, living together), 4% are dating but not co-habiting/not living together, and 0.4% are in a civil union.

Co-parental relationships

- 68 percent of mothers (or primary caregivers) said there is a co-parent in their child/ren's life, and of these, 90% were reported as being the child/ren's biological father, and 2% were reported as the child/ren's grandmother.
- 53 percent of mothers say that both parents equally make decisions about parenting their child/children, and 35% say it is mainly themselves.

Research ideas: Families and Whānau

Below are some examples¹ of questions researchers could explore using the data collected at the 12-year data collection wave.

- Who are the young people living with extended family in their household, and how does this compare with current national statistics? What are the associated benefits or protective factors of living with extended family, for young people at 12 years of age?
- Does household composition data collected at 12 years fit with the longitudinal trends in the GUiNZ cohort in general, for example with increasing numbers of single parent families, and decreasing numbers of those living with extended family? (See [NWA8 report](#)).
- What are the co-parenting experiences of parents of young people at 12 years of age?
- How does residential mobility intersect with diverse family structures and experiences?
- How might the complexities of household structure be associated with young people's experiences of caring for others in the home?

An intersectional lens is important for understanding these trends. There is significant opportunity for the GUiNZ dataset to be used to investigate research questions that explore the dynamics of families and whānau within and between ethnic groups, those that explore intersections with other demographic factors such as socioeconomic position, and questions that are driven by the communities represented.

In addition to these questions, researchers can explore whether any of these constructs are associated with a wide range of child and family or whānau health and wellbeing outcomes that are available in the Growing Up in New Zealand data sets (Table 3). Researchers are also encouraged to consult our Data Factsheet Series 2023.

¹ These research questions are suggestions only and have not been fully explored to determine policy or research relevance, feasibility, and utility. Researchers are encouraged to develop their own data access applications with reference to our data dictionaries and data user guides available on the GUiNZ website.

Table 3. Young people and family wellbeing measures potentially associated with measures of family and whānau (non-exhaustive)

Domain	Constructs related to young people’s family and whānau
Culture and identity	Culture, attitudes
Education	School outcomes (delinquency, bullying)
Family and whānau	Family cohesion, parent-child relationships, peer relationships, special adult relationships, parental warmth and involvement, parental experiences, caring for others
Health and wellbeing	Physical activity, self-rated health

How to access *Growing Up in New Zealand* data

***Growing Up in New Zealand* can provide evidence through:**

- Fast track requests: cross-tabulations to answer a specific policy-relevant query;
- Policy briefs: up to four-page policy briefs on specific topics;
- Bespoke, comprehensive reports for government agencies;
- Collaborative projects between government agencies and *Growing Up in New Zealand* researchers.

Datasets are available from antenatal to the 12-year data collection wave. Additionally, we have data available from smaller data collection waves at 6 weeks, 16 months, 23 months, 31 months, 45 months, 72 months, and a specific COVID-19 survey at 10 years.

More information on the data access application process to conduct your own analyses can be found here: growingup.co.nz/data-access-application

Further resources

A range of existing resources based on our research findings can be found on our website, including:

- **Policy briefs:** smaller publications on a specific topic of interest to policymakers and government. growingup.co.nz/growing-policy-briefs
- **Reports:** comprehensive reports based on data collected at key milestones. growingup.co.nz/growing-reports
- **Published articles:** *Growing Up in New Zealand* researchers use the study data to investigate a wide range of topics around child and youth development. growingup.co.nz/published-articles

For more information, please email researchgrowingup@auckland.ac.nz or visit our website at www.growingup.co.nz

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