



Growing Up in New Zealand

Now We Are Twelve

Life in early adolescence

Now We Are 12 – Extended Factsheet: Stepping into Adolescence: Emerging Autonomy and Independence

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Background

By 12 years of age, young people are gaining greater autonomy, which includes increasing independence from parents and whānau and developing their own sense of identity, agency and decision making. This autonomy is multidimensional – it can be seen in the ways young people behave and move about, how they express emotion (e.g., affectivity), and how they think (e.g., cognitive development) (Sessa & Steinberg, 1991).

Young people's autonomy has been associated with several measures of wellbeing, including increased health-related quality of life (Eriksson, Boman, & Svedberg, 2022). Perceived autonomy in adolescence has also been found to be negatively associated with depression (Eagleton et al., 2016) and positively related to wellbeing (Avedissian & Alayan, 2021). However, because autonomy can be defined in different ways (e.g. as emotional independence or as volition), its effect on health and wellbeing depends on its definition (Van Petegem, 2013). Moreover, experiences of autonomy often vary depending on a young person's ethnicity and cultural background (Phinney, 2005), parenting styles (Allen & McElhaney, 2012), and neighbourhood factors such as perceived safety and community amenities (Cops, 2013).

Autonomy measures at 12-years

At the 12-year-old data collection wave, *Growing Up in New Zealand* measured three key constructs that relate to young people's autonomy.

Parental supervision and monitoring

First, we captured **parental supervision and monitoring** of their children from both the parents' (Mother and Partner if there was one) and the young person's perspective. Parental supervision generally decreases as a young person gets older. On the one hand, supervision that is too restrictive is thought to hinder children's development of their own independence. On the other, inadequate parental supervision is associated with greater likelihood of early substance use (Claes et al., 2006), greater likelihood of antisocial friendships (Knoester et al., 2006), and prevalence of conduct disorder (Murray & Farrington, 2010).

Independence in the neighbourhood

Second, we measured **independent mobility**, defined as the ability to play and travel around their neighbourhood without parental supervision (Badland et al., 2016; Bhosale et al., 2017). Greater independent mobility in young people is associated with increased physical activity and less sedentary behaviour (Marzi & Reimers, 2018; Stone et al., 2014), and greater psychological wellbeing (Leung & Loo, 2017) and sense of community (Prezza & Pacilli, 2007). Previous research has found that the

degree of young people’s independent license is likely affected by the physical environment, measures of neighbourhood deprivation, perceptions of the neighbourhood environment, and other sociodemographic factors (Marzi & Reimers, 2018), measures that have also been collected at *GUINZ*. At the 12-year data collection wave, we asked young people about visiting three types of neighbourhood places without an adult, including how safe they felt when visiting a particular area.

Financial independence

Third, we asked young people questions about their money: whether they had their own money, ways they were able to receive that money (e.g., for doing chores, special occasions, as a paid job), and how they spend or save their money. While it would seem that children and young people having their own money – with agency over how to spend it – could help with learning how to manage money and gain financial independence, there is little research exploring this in adolescence. Furthermore, higher socio-economic families are more likely to have the means to give their children consistent pocket money, potentially creating early inequities in financial independence and money decision-making skills. However, some researchers have found that early stages of money ownership may increase childhood access to unhealthy food and other unhealthy commodities, such as tobacco (Glover *et al.*, 2006). In addition to asking what the child had spent their money on, we also asked parents or caregivers whether they knew what their child had spent their money on (item 4 from the Parental knowledge subscale).

Table 1 presents a description of measures and questions asked at the 12-year data collection wave relating to autonomy.

Table 1. Measures of autonomy at the 12-year data collection wave

Constructs	Tools	Who was asked	Description of items
Parental supervision and monitoring	Parental knowledge (8-item subscale from the Parental Monitoring Scale + 2 items developed in-house)	Mother, Partner	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you know what {NAME} does during their free time? 2. Do you know which friends {NAME} spends their free time with? 3. Do you know what type of homework {NAME} has? 4. Do you know what {NAME} spends their money on? 5. Do you know when {NAME} has an assignment due at school? 6. Do you know how {NAME} is doing in different subjects at school? 7. Do you know where {NAME} goes when they are out with friends at night? 8. Do you know where {NAME} goes and what they do after school? 9. Do you know what {NAME} eats in their free time? 10. Do you know what {NAME} does or watches on screen devices or on the internet?

	<p>Young person's disclosure of activities (2 items from the disclosure subscale of the Parental Monitoring Scale and 1 item developed in-house)</p>	<p>Mother, Partner</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the last month, have you ever had no idea of where {NAME} was at night? (Only when they were in your care). 2. Does {NAME} keep a lot of secrets from you about what they do during their free time?
		<p>Child</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the last month, have your parents or caregivers ever had no idea of where you were at night? 2. In the last month, have you ever skipped school without your parents or caregivers knowing? 3. Do you keep a lot of secrets from your parents or caregivers about what you do during your free time?
<p>Independence in the neighbourhood</p>	<p>Independent license to walk alone in the neighbourhood (developed in-house)</p>	<p>Child</p>	<p>We asked whether the child had visited three types of neighbourhood places without an adult. These places include: local food shops, outdoor play areas, and indoor community places. We asked the following questions separately for each of these three types of places:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How often do you usually visit this place without an adult? 2. How safe do you feel at this place? 3. What is the main reason you don't visit this place without an adult? <p>We also asked whether the child was allowed to do things without an adult. These questions include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cross main roads 2. Travel to or from school 3. Go to neighbourhood places other than school 4. Travel on local buses other than school buses 5. Cycle on main roads 6. Go out after dark
<p>Financial independence</p>	<p>Money and savings (4 items developed in-house)</p>	<p>Child</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you have any money of your own? 2. Do you sometimes get money for... (Good behaviour; finishing your homework; doing well at school; pocket money/allowance; special occasions e.g. birthdays, Christmas, New Year; doing a paid job; selling your things; doing chores/housework; other)? 3. About how much money do you get every week? 4. What do you do with your money? (Save it; buy food/drinks for myself; buy food/groceries for my family or whānau; buy food/groceries for my friends; buy gifts for my family or friends; use it to pay for my phone or internet; buy cards/games/toys; buy clothes/shoes; go out, go to the movies; give it to charity; I can't use or access my money yet)

Transitions to autonomy at 12 years of age in the *GUINZ* cohort

Here we provide some examples of key statistics from the 12 year data collection wave, to offer a preliminary glimpse of how young people are experiencing transitions to autonomy at age 12.

Parental supervision and monitoring:

- 9% of young people kept their night-time whereabouts a secret from their parents/caregivers in the past month.
- 3% of mothers and 2% of partners reported they didn't know their child's night-time whereabouts in the past month.

Independence in the neighbourhood:

- 92% of young people had visited places in their neighbourhood without an adult.
- 84% of young people had crossed main roads without an adult.
- 77% of young people had travelled to or from school without an adult.
- 36% of young people had travelled on local buses (other than school buses) without an adult.
- 13% of young people had gone out after dark without an adult.

Financial independence:

- 90% of young people had their own money.
- 43% of young people sometimes got their money as pocket money or allowance.
- 27% of young people sometimes got their money for doing a paid job.
- 94% of mothers and 88% of partners (often the young person's father) said they often or always knew what their child spent their money on.

Figure 1 shows the responses of young people who had their own money to the question "What do you do with your money?" Almost 4 out of 5 (78%) young people said they saved some of it, over one-third (36%) said they bought food and/or drinks for themselves, and around one-quarter said they bought games or toys (27%) and clothes/shoes (25%). Six percent said that they weren't allowed to use or access their own money.

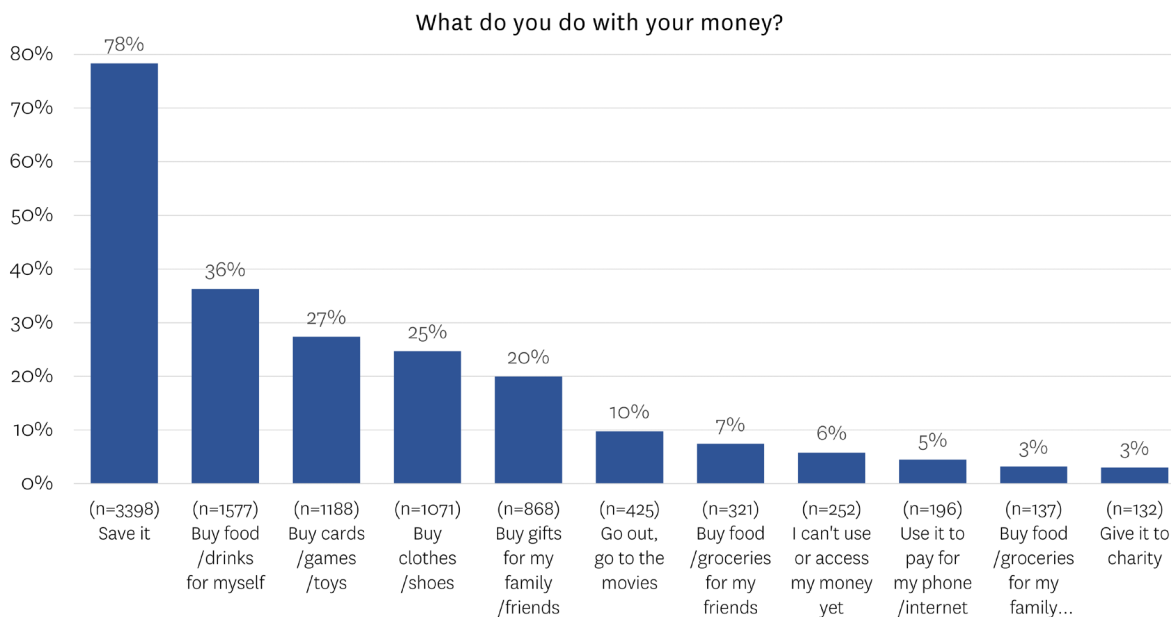


Figure 1. How young people reported spending their money at 12 years ($n = 4,340$)

Research ideas: Autonomy and independent licence

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

- How do parents and young people match or differ on their reports of parents' knowledge of young people's whereabouts at night?
- Are different levels of pocket money, and whether young people receive pocket money consistently, associated with how young people spend or save their money?
- Are perceptions of safety by young people, and young people's perceptions of whether adults think different community places, such as parks and community centres, are safe for them to be, associated with young people visiting community places on their own?

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

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.

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 autonomy 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 2). Researchers are also encouraged to consult our Data Factsheet Series 2023.

Table 2. Young people and family wellbeing measures potentially associated with levels of autonomy (non-exhaustive)

Domain	Constructs related to young people’s transitions to autonomy
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
Health and wellbeing	Physical activity, self-rated health
Psychological and cognitive development	Depression and anxiety symptoms, stress
Societal context	Material wellbeing/deprivation, neighbourhood deprivation/area-level

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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