'Life affords no greater responsibility, no greater privilege, than the raising of the next generation'
C. Everett Koop

The babies of the new millennium

first results from the Child of the New Century study
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Thank you for taking part in the Child of the New Century study.

We have put together this magazine which outlines key findings based on the information that you gave us in the first survey, when your babies were nine to ten months old.

This magazine focuses on five areas:

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Child of the New Century is a large-scale survey of the babies of the new millennium and the families who are bringing them up. The first sweep of research took place in 2001 and 2002 and we gathered information about 18,819 babies in 18,553 families.

The size and design of the study means that we can:

• Compare babies and their families across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
• Look at babies and families of different ethnic identities
• Examine family structures and their impact on the well-being of children
• Investigate children’s development in the first year of their life
• See how people adapt to parenthood

By following these babies through their childhoods and into adult life, we can track changes over time and understand what it is like to bring up children in the 21st century.

The information you give us allows us to build a valuable picture of how children develop from a very young age and through their primary school years. In later years we will also be able to see how these children grow into adulthood, and start forming their own families.

This information can help inform decision makers in health services and education, as well as other government departments, independent scientists and the general public, and can lead to improvements in the care we give children in the UK.

Children are an investment in the future and they are of critical importance to the future economic and social well-being of our nation.
Family background

Giving birth at the beginning of the 21st century is very different to giving birth 50 years ago. Many changes have taken place since the Second World War including the timing of childbearing, the number of births, the partnership status of parents, the state of the health services, the possibilities of birth control, new obstetric practices, the availability of pain control, hospital versus home births, antenatal classes, and so on.

The kind of family that a baby is born into will affect his or her starting point in life. In particular, parents and their relationships, siblings and wider kin will have an impact on the baby’s life.

Birth rates in the UK have dropped over the years and our population is getting older. Fertility rates have fallen from 2.95 children per woman in 1964 to 1.63 in 2001.

Single child families are becoming more common.

Roughly 20% of women now remain childless.

Large families are more common in Pakistani and Bangladeshi families, in Northern Ireland, and in areas where there are high levels of poverty.

In 1971 only 8% of families with children were lone parent families. By the end of the 20th century the number of single parents had increased to 20%.

Most of the babies in Child of the New Century had married parents. A further 24% were born to parents who were not married but were living together. About 15% of babies were born to parents who were not living together when their baby was born.

Younger mothers were less likely to be married - 92% of teenage mums weren’t married when they had their babies while over 70% of mums who were older than 30 were married when their babies were born.

Around 50% of teenage mothers and about a third of mothers aged between 20 and 24 were not living with the baby’s father. These figures were very different for older mothers - less than 10% of mothers over the age of 30 were not living with the baby’s father.

Asian mothers were more likely to be married when their child was born than black or white mothers.

Almost 50% of black Caribbean and 40% of black African babies were not living with their natural fathers.

Older mums

The average age of first-time mums has increased over time. More than a third of the first-time mums in this study were over the age of thirty, compared to only 8% of first-time mums back in 1946.

Teenage mums

Teenage motherhood has declined in recent years but the UK still has the highest rates in Western Europe. Almost 5% of mothers in this study were under 20 years old.

Absent fathers

About 14% of the babies in Child of the New Century were not living with their father when they were between 9 and 10 months old. Of these non-resident fathers, 49% saw their children at least once a week, 15% saw their children at least once a month, and 36% had no contact at all with their children.

Around 75% of non-resident dads were on friendly terms with the baby’s mum. However, only 33% of lone mothers said that they received maintenance payments from non-resident fathers. Working mothers and those with qualifications were more likely to receive maintenance from the baby’s father.

Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers were more likely to have babies at a younger age than white mothers - the average age for Pakistani mothers was 26 and the average for Bangladeshi mothers was 25.
Healthy, happy parents?

How healthy are the parents of the new millennium?

About 15% of parents told us that their health was ‘fair’ or ‘poor’. Ethnic minority mothers were less likely to say they had good health than white mothers.

About 21% of mums and nearly 16% of fathers reported a long-term health problem, such as asthma, back-pain or depression.

Black fathers were 2.5 times more likely to have a long-term illness than white fathers. Indian fathers were twice as likely to suffer long-term illnesses than white fathers.

13% of mothers could be classified as depressed.

How happy are the parents?

Most parents felt good about themselves and in control of their lives but fathers reported higher levels of self esteem than mothers.

Most parents were happy in their relationship with their partners but fathers tended to wish for more warmth and affection whilst mothers were more likely to say they felt lonely.

Most of the couples that we spoke to felt they had become closer to each other following the birth of their baby but in 2% of cases both partners felt it had actually caused them to become less close. In 12% of couples, one of them felt that their relationship had in fact worsened.

Mothers were slightly more satisfied with their lives than fathers. Self-employed parents tended to be most satisfied with their lives and were the least depressed. Those who had never been in a paid job had the lowest scores for life control, satisfaction and depression.

Twins and triplets

In Child of the New Century there were 246 sets of twins and 10 sets of triplets. Older mothers, who were more likely to have fertility treatment, had a greater chance of having multiple births. Half of the mothers of triplets and over a quarter of mothers of twins said that they had used some form of help in getting pregnant.

Black African mothers were most likely to have twins or triplets.

The growth in the number of caesarian sections has been a hot topic in recent times. 22% of Child of the New Century babies were delivered by caesarian, double the number of babies born in 1970.

For 86% of the births in this survey, the baby’s father was present. For 16% of mothers, their own mother or their mother-in-law was with them when their baby was born. Only 4% of the mothers interviewed went through childbirth with only the health professionals present.

Parents who were better off were much less likely to smoke than poorer parents.

42% of babies in the Child of the New Century study were first children. Around half of the mums said that they didn’t want to have any more children, 35% said they did and 15% weren’t sure about it.

Pregnancy

More than half of mothers said their pregnancy was planned but this varied across the ages. Only 16% of women under the age of 20 and 39% of those aged between 20 and 24 said that their pregnancy was planned. For older women over the age of 30, the rate of planned pregnancies rose to 75% of the group.

Despite the fact that some pregnancies were unplanned, a high proportion (69% of mothers with first births and 61% of mothers who already had children) said that they were happy to be pregnant. However, mums under the age of 20 were more likely to be unhappy about it.

6% of mums older than 35 had undergone fertility treatment.

The number of home births has declined over the years. In 1946 nearly half of all babies were born at home, in 1958 the figure was just over a third, and in 1970 the figure was 12%. In the new millennium, giving birth at home is even less common - home births accounted for only 2% of all births. Mothers in better paid jobs were more likely to have a home birth.

Mums are also recovering from childbirth quicker these days, most mothers in this study stayed at hospital for a maximum of 2 days compared to an average stay of 13 days back in 1946.
Parents’ educations and working lives

Recent government policies to encourage greater flexibility in the working arrangements of parents and efforts to increase the availability of childcare have brought some benefits to parents. However, there is still scope for improvement in areas such as the ‘long hours’ culture. Although paid maternity leave at the time of the survey was 18 weeks and unpaid leave was 29 weeks after the birth of a child, many mothers were going back to work before the end of their leave entitlement.

Despite the fact that the number of working single mothers has increased in recent years, single mothers are highly likely to be unemployed when they have young babies.

In the past, poorly educated mothers tended to go back to work earlier than well-educated mothers. In the new millennium, however, this has reversed - more highly qualified mothers are now most likely to return to work early.

First-time mums
- 59% were in paid work when their child was 9-10 months old.
- 26% had worked when pregnant but were not working when we interviewed them.
- 15% had no job during pregnancy and still didn’t when we did the survey.

Education

Fathers of Child of the New Century babies were better educated than mothers - 38% of dads had a university degree compared to 33% of mums. Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents were the least likely to have any UK qualifications, while Indian and black African parents were the most likely to be highly qualified.

Only 25% of white or mixed ethnic identity mothers in employment were working full-time when their baby was 9-10 months old, compared to 50% of black mothers.

Dads

Pakistani, Bangladeshi and black African dads were the least likely to be employed.

Older dads were more likely to be working than younger dads.

Fathers were more likely to be in managerial and professional jobs than mothers.

Flexible working hours were available to 42% of mothers and 35% of fathers. On an occasional basis, 21% of mothers and 29% of fathers were able to work from home. Access to part-time work was generally high for mothers, however, fathers were more likely to take part-time work in well paid jobs.

Only 2% of mums worked over 48 hours each week compared to 39% of fathers.

Over half of Child of the New Century mothers had taken maternity leave from work. About 50% had received some maternity pay. Roughly half of all mothers were in paid work 2 or 3 months before their baby’s first birthday.

Older mums were more likely to be employed than those who were younger. If the mums were under the age of 18 when they had their first baby, they were six times more likely to be receiving state benefits than mums who had been older than 30 when they had their first baby.
Parenting

Over 95% of parents in the Child of the New Century study agreed that talking to their baby, cuddling it and providing stimulation were very important.

However, less than 50% of teenage parents rated stimulation as important, compared to 73% of mothers over the age of 40. Better educated parents and those in better jobs were likely to place greater importance on stimulation for their baby’s development.

In all age groups, mothers believed more in cuddling than fathers did.

36% of dads and 32% of mums thought that their babies should be picked up whenever they cried.

Over 90% of all parents in the survey believed that regular sleeping and eating patterns were important.

Almost all the mothers (97%) who we interviewed admitted that they felt sad when they were parted from their baby. Over 80% said they did not mind having to give things up for their child.

Over 90% of all parents spoke to admitted that they occasionally got annoyed with their baby, and almost half of them said that they were occasionally impatient with their child.

Frequently being annoyed or impatient was very rare although it was more common in mothers who were depressed.

Fathers

Statutory entitlement to paid paternity leave was not introduced until 2003, which was too late for the fathers in the Child of the New Century study.

Of employed dads, 78% had taken some leave when their baby was born. Of those fathers, 46% took paternity leave.

Of the fathers that lived with their child, 53% fed their baby every day, 57% changed their baby’s nappy at least once a day (but only 10% of Pakistani fathers) and 60% cared for their baby on their own at least a few times each week.

Unsurprisingly, the longer hours the father worked, the lower their involvement in the day-to-day care of their baby.

In Child of New Century families where the dad was the only earner, 78% of mothers were responsible for looking after their baby.

In families where both parents were working, 35% of mums in full-time work were also responsible for childcare. Of part-time working mums, 63% said that they were mainly responsible for childcare.

Other forms of childcare and support providers

The most common form of childcare for employed mothers were grandparents (45%), followed by partners (31%). Grandparents helped with the babies in a third of all the families whilst a small number of mums were able to take their child to work or work from home. Of employed mothers, 46% paid for childcare for their baby. Childminders were used by 14% of the families we spoke to.

Over 86% of mothers interviewed admitted that their parents would help them if they had financial problems raising their baby. Of all the mothers, nearly three quarters told us that their parents bought gifts and extras for the baby and a quarter said that their family had bought the essentials. 18% had been lent money by their family.

However, about 22% of mums with parents still alive had received no help at all from them.
The millennium baby

Of all the births in the Child of the New Century study, 8% were early (between 28 and 36 weeks). The average weight of all babies was 3.38kg (7lb 7oz). This is heavier than babies born in 1970 but lighter than babies born in 1946 and 1958. If the mother was white, babies were likely to be heavier. Lighter babies tended to be born to younger and older mothers, smokers, lone parents and Bangladeshi and Pakistani mothers. First-born babies were more likely to be lighter than later brothers or sisters.

Single mums were more likely to have a baby who weighed under 2.5kg than other mums. Around 7% of the babies in this study had a low birth weight, which is linked to a range of long-term health difficulties.

Immunisations

Over recent years, there has been a sharp decrease in the number of babies who are being immunised against diseases. This has been a matter of concern to policy makers. More than 1% of babies had no immunisations by the age of 9 months. 4% had some, but not all, of the immunisations recommended for their age.

Immunising a baby against disease was less common in England (especially in London) and Wales than in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Single mothers, teenagers, those with large families, those who smoked whilst pregnant and mothers living in disadvantaged areas were more likely to have babies that were not immunised.

Older mothers and well educated mothers were also less likely to have their baby immunised.

Most of the mothers we spoke to said that their baby had had at least one injury. Head injuries were most common, 58% of reported injuries.

Illness and injury

78% of mothers told us that their baby had had at least one health problem in the first 9 months. Boys were more likely than girls to have had a health problem. Boys were also more likely to have been admitted to hospital at least once.

The most common problems were:

- Chest infections - 29%
- Skin problems - 20%
- Ear infections - 10%
- Persistent or severe diarrhoea - 9%
- Persistent or severe vomiting - 9%
- Sight or eye problems - 9%
- Wheezing or asthma - 6%

8% of the mothers we spoke to said that their baby had had at least one injury. Head injuries were most common, 58% of reported injuries.

Breastfeeding is known to be good for a baby’s health but in Britain the number of mothers who breastfeed their children is one of the lowest in Europe. Recently, the government has tried to encourage more women to breastfeed, including the 3-year Infant Feeding Initiative, which was launched in 1999.

In the Child of the New Century study, we found that more mums were breastfeeding than in 1958 and 1970. In this study, 70% of mothers breastfed their baby immediately after it was born. 48% of mothers continued for one month, 33% for four months and 22% for six months.

Breastfeeding was most common in London and south east England and least common in Northern Ireland and north east England.

Mums who were the least likely to breastfeed were younger, single, those without any qualifications and British and Irish white mums.

Development

We tested aspects of early child development in our study and found that mothers who are depressed are more likely to have children who show delays in this area.

Communicative gestures

Fewer than 1% of babies were delayed on any of the communications gestures such as pointing.

Babies from ethnic minority families seemed to have the most advanced communication skills.

Older mothers and contact with grandparents reduced the risk of delayed gestures.

Most of the mothers we spoke to who had not had their baby immunised said it was because of their beliefs about immunisation.

Moving around

7% of babies showed delayed development in moving around such as crawling.

Black, Indian and mixed ethnicity children were less at risk of delayed development in this area than white, Bangladeshi or Pakistani children.

Better educated mothers tended to have babies with better movement skills.

Picking things up

Around 5% of babies showed delays in actions such as picking up small objects. Low birth weight and premature babies were the least likely to be able to pick things up by 9 months old.
Find out more by visiting...

www.childnc.net

the website for Child of the New Century parents

If you need to contact us at any point, you can do so in the following ways:

Send us an email: childnc@ioe.ac.uk

Call our freephone number: 0800 092 1250

Write to us:  Child of the New Century
Centre for Longitudinal Studies
Institute of Education
FREEPOST LON20095
London WC1H 0BR

If you change your address, please let us know so we can contact you in the future to highlight important stages in our surveys.