

Now we are four: Describing the preschool years ^[1]

Growing up in New Zealand: A longitudinal study of New Zealand children and their families

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AVAILABILITY

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Overview

Now we are Four gives us a comprehensive look at how kiwi kids from the Growing Up in New Zealand study are faring.

In particular, we can see how the situation of mothers changes when children pass from infancy to early childhood. The biggest shift for most children is that they now attend early childhood education, and most are reported to be generally happy and healthy and spending time getting to know their peers. This means that we also see greater employment of mothers, leading to improved economic circumstances for these households.

Nearly half of this generation of mothers live in private rental accommodation and experience multiple changes of address. The effect of this on access to services needs further exploration. Pacific households appear to bear the most significant effects of overcrowding, as seen in the reporting by Pacific mothers that half of their four-year-olds sleep in a room with adults. We also see:

- Families moving homes frequently, with half of the children experiencing one or more residential moves since the age of two. One question this raises relates to what impact this has on continuous health care and early childhood education services, and ensuring places are available in local schools?
- The increasing number of children living with a single parent as the cohort gets older. This has implications for agencies developing services and systems to support sole parents and their children.
- A greater proportion of Māori children living in singleparent households compared to other ethnic groups. Previous research by Superu identified that these families tend to face greater financial stress which impacts their ability to function well. There is a clear need to address this.
- By the age of four, 97 percent of children spend time away from their parent, such as in early childhood education or organised home-based care. This has implications for managing the demand and supply of preschool education.

There is still a lot to learn about this group of children as they grow up. To ensure we as a country learn as much as possible, Superu has made funding worth over \$1 million available in 2017 to fund policy-relevant research using the Growing Up in New Zealand data. We look forward to sharing what's been learned and the implications with you in 2018 and beyond. What we're discovering from these children is a gift for the whole country so future generations grow up happier and healthier.

The options children have are influenced by the aspirations of our society, by those who care for them and by the aspirations of children themselves. The knowledge we gain from Growing Up in New Zealand provides a window on all of us as to how we understand and play our part in this.

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