

Family cohesion

Introduction

Family is an important social institution, critical to the health and wellbeing of individuals, especially children, who depend on their family for most of their needs for physical and emotional development (Ministry of Social Development 2004).

The health or wellbeing of families is a complex concept to measure, especially in a survey where only one family member is interviewed. The New Zealand Health Survey used an internationally validated question from the Child Health Questionnaire Parent Form (CHQ-PF28) as a proxy for family wellbeing, which captured one parent's opinion of how well their family members interact. This is often called 'family cohesion', and is both a critical element in the daily functioning of a family and an important asset for families to have in order to 'rebound' from stresses and in times of crisis (Kalil 2003). Family cohesion is not the sole determinant of family wellbeing, but simply one dimension of many that has an impact on the way a family functions (Olson 1993).

What were the survey questions?

In the 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey the primary caregiver of each child participant aged from birth to 14 years was asked to rate their family's ability to get along with one another. A definition of family as the immediate family members that live in the same household was given to all participants.

While the definition of family in the question does not match the description many New Zealanders have of their family – which may include supporting friends and wider family members who do not live in the household – this definition allowed for consistency across family types and cultures within New Zealand.

Analyses presented here have not been adjusted for the number of people in the family, household overcrowding, or other socio-demographic variables about the family which may impact on cohesion. As with other analyses in this report, these are simply the first descriptive findings by age and ethnic group of the child, and neighbourhood deprivation of the household. It is expected that further research will be undertaken on these data to explore associations with other variables of interest.

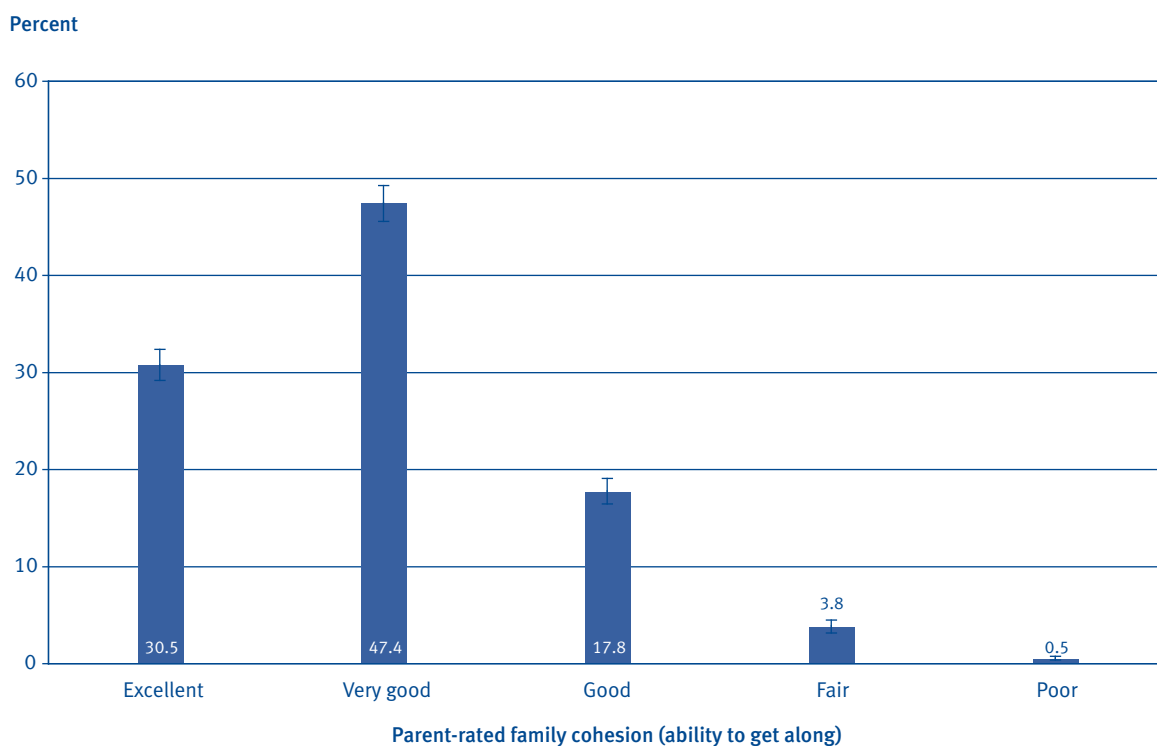
There were no differences in family cohesion by gender of the child, so the analyses in this section combine data for boys and girls.

Cohesion of families with children

Most parents of children aged from birth to 14 years reported that their family got along very well (Figure 4.20). Four out of five parents (77.9%, 76.4–79.3) rated their family’s ability to get along with one another as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’. A further 17.8% (16.5–19.1) rated their family’s ability to get along as ‘good’.

One in twenty-three parents (4.3%, 3.6–5.0) rated their family’s ability to get along as ‘fair’ or ‘poor’, which equates to 37,100 children living in families with low levels of cohesion.

Figure 4.20: Parent rating of family’s ability to get along (unadjusted prevalence)



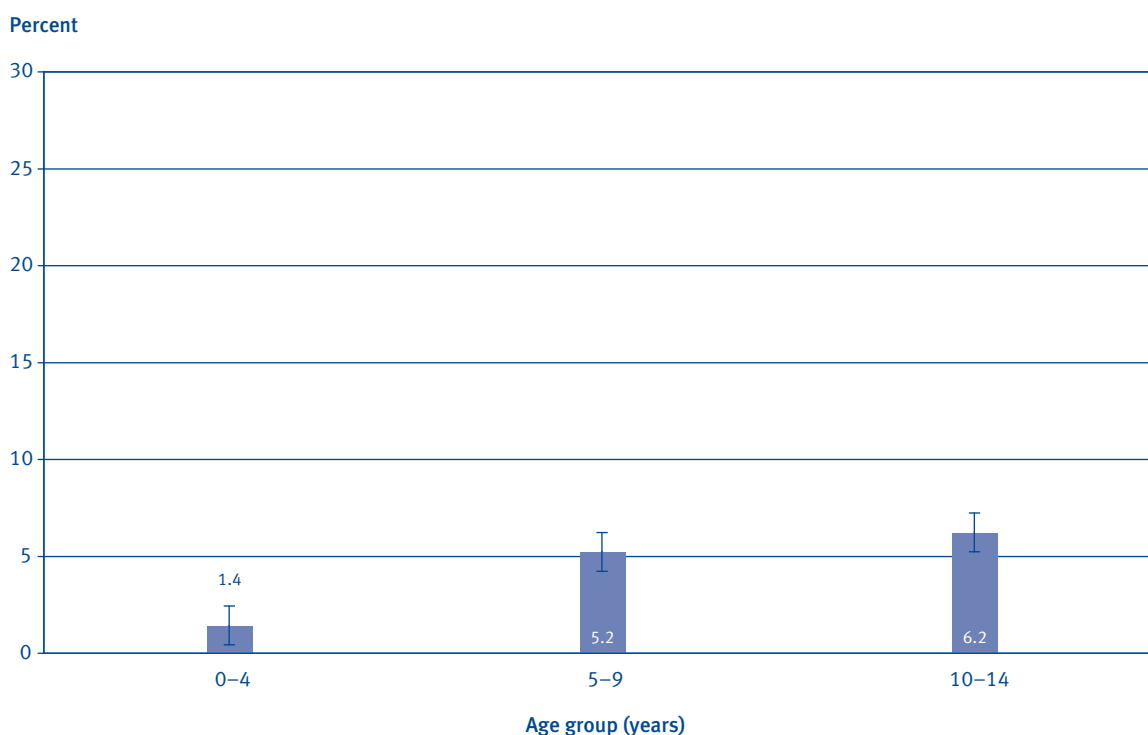
Source: 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey

The rest of this section focuses on children living in families with ‘fair’ or ‘poor’ parent-rated family cohesion.

Cohesion of families with children, by age of child

Parents of children aged from birth to 4 years were significantly less likely than parents of children aged from 5–14 years to rate their family’s ability to get along as fair or poor (p-value < 0.05). One in 16 parents of 10–14 year olds reported low family cohesion (Figure 4.21).

Figure 4.21: Parent-rated family’s ability to get along as fair or poor, by age of child (unadjusted)



Source: 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey

Cohesion of families with children, by ethnic group of child

The ethnic group analyses in this section do not represent the family unit, that is, these analyses do not describe, for example, ‘Pacific families’. There is currently no standard method for analysing the ethnicity of families in New Zealand (Callister et al. 2007b).

Table 4.7 presents an indication of the proportion and number of children in New Zealand’s main ethnic population groups who live in families with low cohesion (as reported by a parent).

Table 4.7: Children living in families where parent rated family’s ability to get along as fair or poor, by ethnic group of the child (unadjusted)

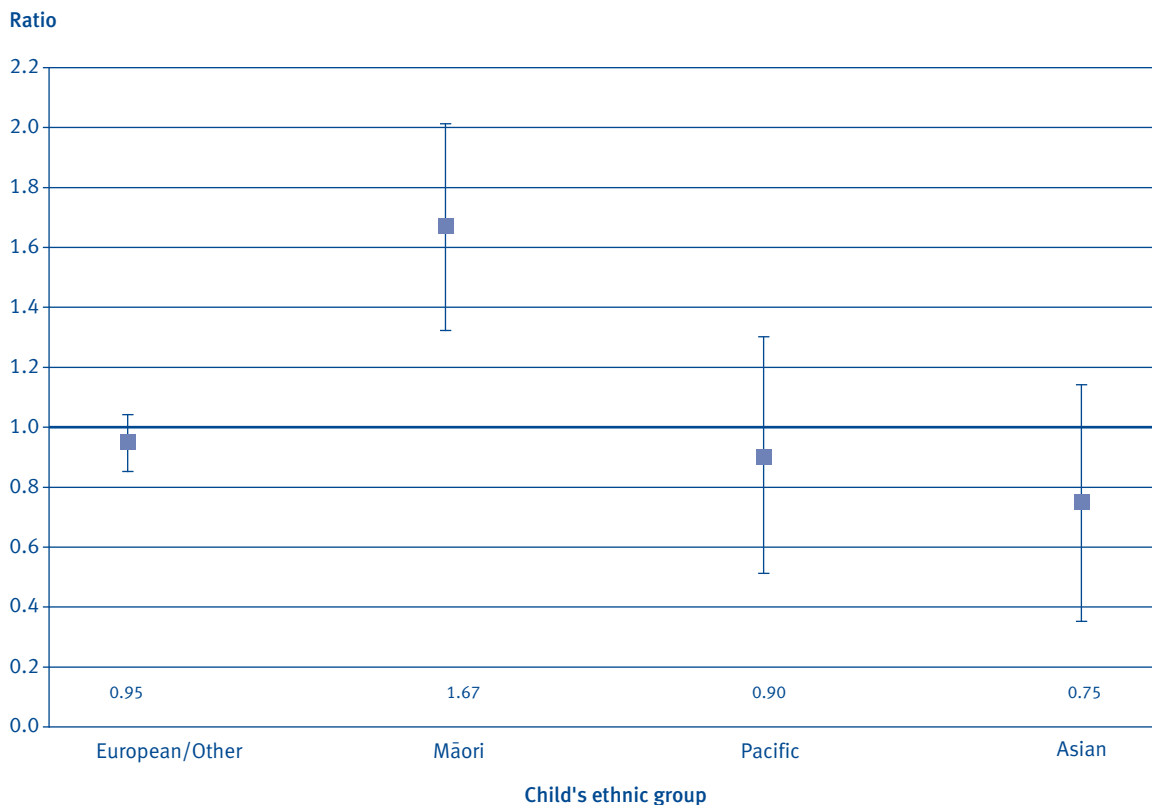
Ethnic group	Prevalence (95% CI)	Number of children
European/ Other	4.1 (3.3 - 5.0)	26700
Māori	7.1 (5.7 - 8.6)	13900
Pacific	3.8 (2.0 - 5.5)	3800
Asian	3.2 (1.7 - 5.6)	2500

Source: 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey

Note: Total response ethnic group has been used. Ethnic groups cannot be compared using the crude rates presented in this table.

Adjusted for the age of the child, parents of Māori children were 60 percent more likely to have rated their family’s ability to get along as fair or poor (Figure 4.22). There were no other differences by ethnic group of the child.

Figure 4.22: Parent-rated family’s ability to get along as fair or poor, by ethnic group of the child (age standardised)



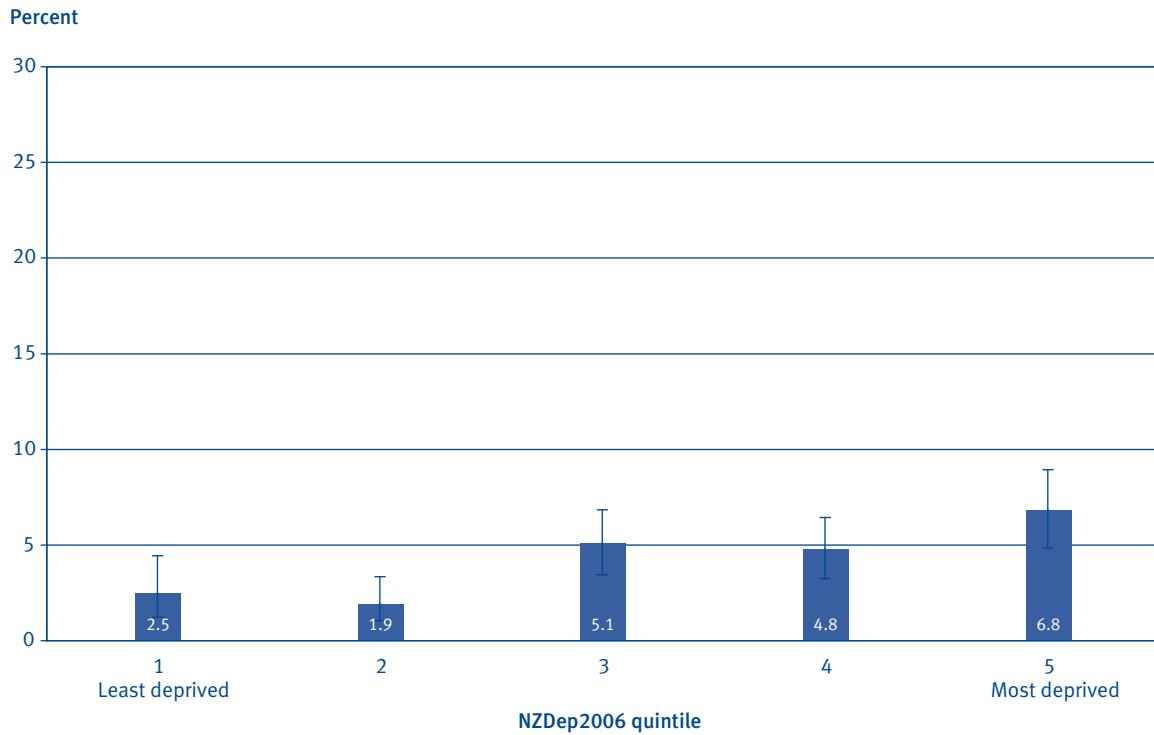
Source: 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey

Notes: Reference group (bold line, rate ratio=1.0) is the total child population aged 0-14 years. Total response ethnic groups have been used. Ethnic groups cannot be compared with each other; compare only to the reference group. Age-standardised to WHO world population.

Cohesion of families with children, by neighbourhood deprivation

A small number of families in all NZDep2006 quintiles reported low family cohesion; however, families in the most deprived areas (quintile 5) were more than twice as likely as families living in the least deprived areas (quintile 1) to report that their ability to get along was only 'fair' or 'poor' (Figure 4.23).

Figure 4.23: Parent-rated family's ability to get along as fair or poor, by NZDep2006 quintile (age standardised prevalence by age of child)



Source: 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey