



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Social Justice Outcomes Framework: Family Stability Indicator

Update

March 2016

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Headline Figures

This publication is an update of the Family Stability indicator published in March 2015. The indicator is part of the Social Justice Outcome Framework¹.

Figures are based on data from Understanding Society (USoc). The headline figures are:

- In 2013-14, the percentage of children living with both birth parents was 71 per cent. This is a small increase from 2012-13, but the change is not statistically significant.
- The proportion of children in low-income households living with both birth parents has risen from 44% to 48%. However, this finding should be treated with caution as a comparison of the Family Stability indicator results with other data sources reveals a significant difference in the estimated proportion of children in low-income households living with both birth parents. For more detail, please see the annex.
- In 2013-14 the percentage of children living with both parents where parents report happiness in their relationship is 76 per cent. This is unchanged from the percentage reporting happiness in 2011-12.

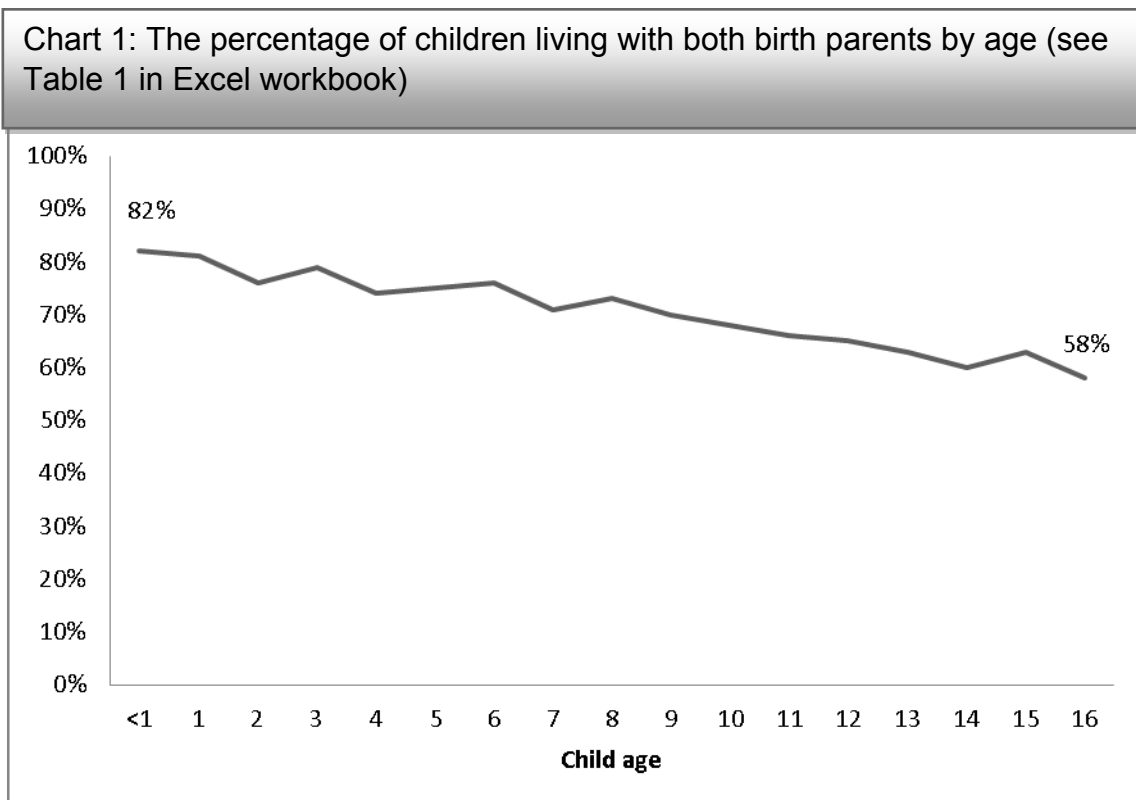
¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-justice-outcomes-framework>

Results

Children living with both birth parents

71% of children aged 0-16 were living with both birth parents in 2013-14. This is slightly higher than 2012-13, but the change is not statistically significant.

The proportion of children living with both birth parents was 82% for children aged less than 1; for those aged 5 it was 75% and for children aged 15 was 63%.



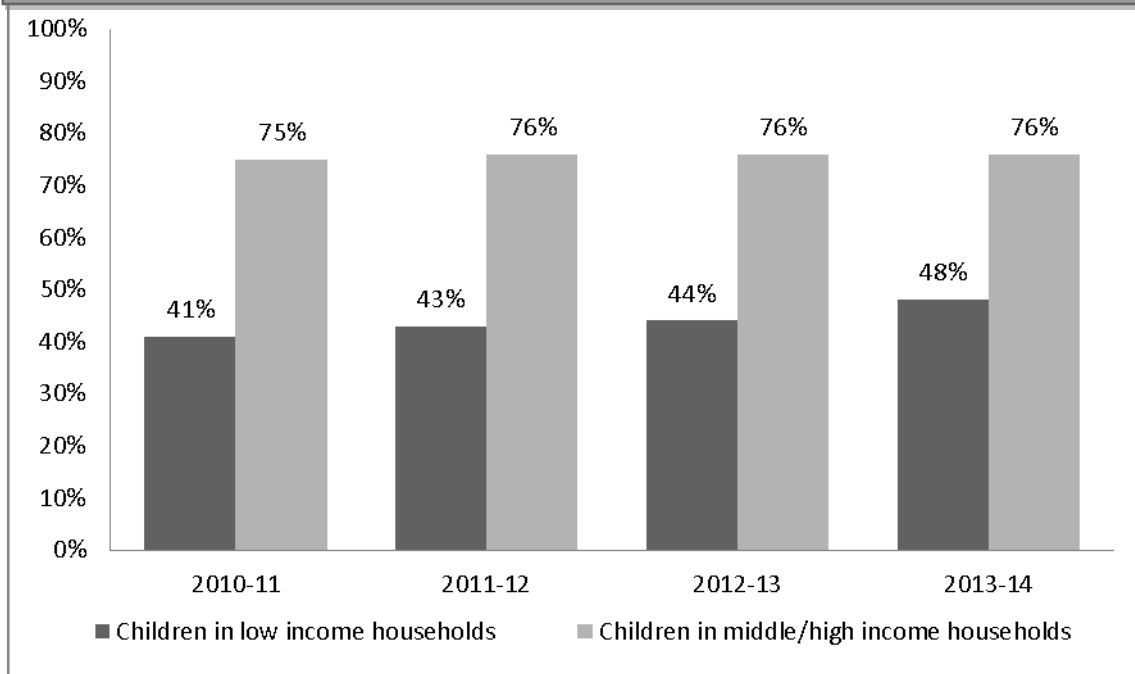
Source: Understanding Society, 2013-14

Children in low-income households not living with both birth parents

The second measure within the Family Stability indicator is the percentage of children in low-income households not living with both parents compared to the equivalent percentage for children in middle to high-income households.

The latest data shows that the proportion of children living with both birth parents was higher for those in middle to high-income households than those in low-income households: 76% of children in middle to high-income households were living with both birth parents, compared to 48% of those in low-income households. The proportion of children in low-income households that were living with both birth parents has increased from 44% in 2012-13, but the increase is not significant.

Chart 2: The percentage of children in low-income households living with both birth parents compared to the percentage of children in middle to high-income households (see Table 2 in Excel workbook)



Source: Understanding Society, 2010-14

However, these results should be treated with caution. To assess the robustness of the Family Stability indicator, the findings have been reproduced using other data sources, where possible. While the slight upward trend in the percentage of children in low-income households living with both parents also appears in the Family Resources Survey, the two surveys show significant differences in the overall proportion of low-income children living with both birth parents. For more information, see the Annex.

Parental happiness in relationship

Evidence also shows that the quality of the relationship between parents is of fundamental importance to family stability and children's longer-term outcomes. Frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflict is detrimental to child outcomes. The third component of the Family Stability Indicator is therefore focussed around relationship quality and provides an estimate of the proportion of parents who report happiness in their relationship.

The proportion of children living with both birth parents where their parents report happiness in their relationship is 76%. This is unchanged since 2011-12.

Table 3: The percentage of children living with both birth parents where the parents report happiness or unhappiness in their relationship

	Happy parental relationship	Unhappy parental relationship	Unweighted base
2011-12	76%	24%	9603
2013-14	76%	24%	7495

Source: Understanding Society, 2011-12, 2013-14

Methodology

The analysis uses data taken from the latest release of Understanding Society (USoc) which was released in November 2015; USoc is a longitudinal household survey covering the UK.

Results for 2013-14 are based on Wave 5 of USoc. Results from 2012-13, 2011-12 and 2010-11 are based on Wave 4, Wave 3 and Wave 2 respectively. The fieldwork for each wave is carried out over a two year period, so the latest results (Wave 5) are based on fieldwork conducted between the start of 2013 and the end of 2014.

Since the first ad hoc publication in April 2013 and the updates of the Family Stability indicator in March 2014 and March 2015, there have been revisions to the early waves of USoc data. Therefore, figures for the earlier waves of data (2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13) have been recalculated.

For details on the latest revisions that have been made to the USoc data, please see: http://doc.ukdataservice.ac.uk/doc/6676/mrdoc/pdf/6676_wave1_to_4_revisions_2015.pdf

General details on USoc can be found at the following link: <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/>

The tables from which the charts and statistics in this publication are derived are available in the Excel workbook available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/social-justice-outcomes-framework-family-stability-indicator>

The results are derived as follows:

Table 1: Percentage of children living with both birth parents, by age of child

1. Shows the percentage of children at each age between 0 and 16 that live with both of their birth parents and the percentage that do not live with both birth parents.

2. Children have been identified as living with both birth parents where an adult within the household has reported the child's natural mother and father as being resident.
3. Children not living with both birth parents include those born into or living with a step-parent, in lone parent families, adoptive families, foster families or those who are in the care of relatives.

Table 2: The percentage of children in low-income households living with both birth parents compared to the percentage of children in middle to high-income households, by child age group

1. Children are categorised into low and middle to high-income groups to show, by age group, the proportion in each that live with both of their birth parents and the proportion that do not. Results are compared between 2013-14, 2012-13, 2011-12 and 2010-11.
2. Children in low-income households are defined as the bottom 20% of children ranked by household income, and children in the middle to high-income group are the 80% of children living in households with an income above this. This is based on gross household income, before housing costs. Income has been adjusted using the OECD equivalisation scale, to take account of the number of people in the household.
3. This type of analysis only shows association and is unable to show if there is a causal relationship between children living with both birth parents and income.

Table 3: The percentage of children living with both birth parents where the parents report happiness or unhappiness in their relationship

1. The measure of parental relationship happiness is reported by USoc on a biennial cycle and is not available for 2012-13. Results are compared between 2013-14 and 2011-12.
2. Results presented are based on parents' self-reported level of happiness. Parents are asked to report the degree of happiness, all things considered, with their relationship. A relationship is classified as unhappy based on it being reported as 'extremely unhappy', 'fairly unhappy' or 'a little unhappy'.
3. Where each parent within a couple responded but gave different answers, we use the answer of the least happy parent. Where only one parent within the couple responded, the happiness of the relationship has been classified according to that reply. This has the potential to introduce some degree of bias where relationships classified as happy would have been classified differently if the non-responding partner was unhappy. An analysis of cases where both partners answered suggests that in 78 per cent of cases in 2011-12 and 79 per cent of cases in 2013-14, they would have been classified in the same way irrespective of which partner's response we relied upon. Our overall judgment is that the potential bias introduced by our choice of treatment of such cases is likely to be small.
4. In *Social Justice: transforming lives – one year on* it was estimated that of children living with both birth parents between 11-28 per cent reported an unhappy relationship, and 72-89 per cent of parents reported a happy

relationship. This was reported as a range to account for uncertainty caused by a high proportion of missing data for this question in USoc wave 1, 2009-10. The same question in 2011-12 was subject to lower missing response, following a change in survey methodology, and can therefore be benchmarked as a point estimate for comparative purposes in future. Due to the change in survey methodology, results for 2011-12 and 2013-14 are not comparable to those for 2009-10.

Notes applying to all tables

1. All figures are based on survey data and are therefore subject to a degree of uncertainty. Small differences should be treated with caution as these will be affected by sampling error, variability in non-response and could be revised by future adjustments to underpinning data.
2. Understanding Society is a longitudinal survey meaning the same respondents are interviewed in each wave. A proportion will drop out each year. Weighting for Understanding Society should minimise the impact, but nevertheless differences between annual figures reported in the tables may be affected by unequal attrition between survey waves of children living, or not, with both birth parents.
3. Results have been weighted using cross-sectional person weights².

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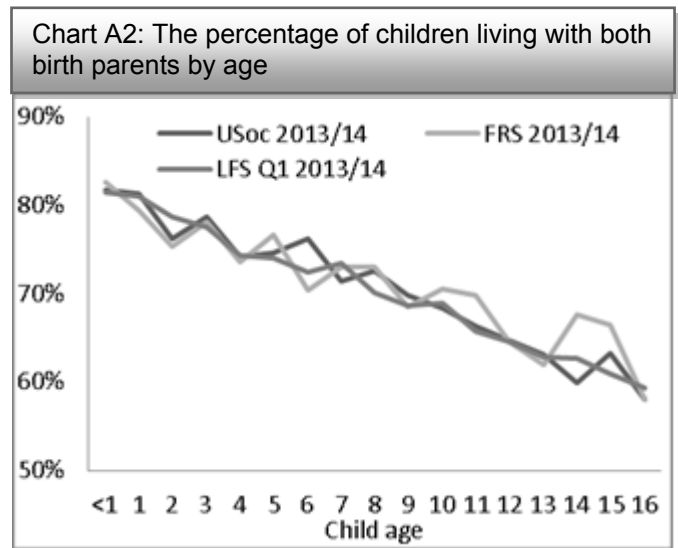
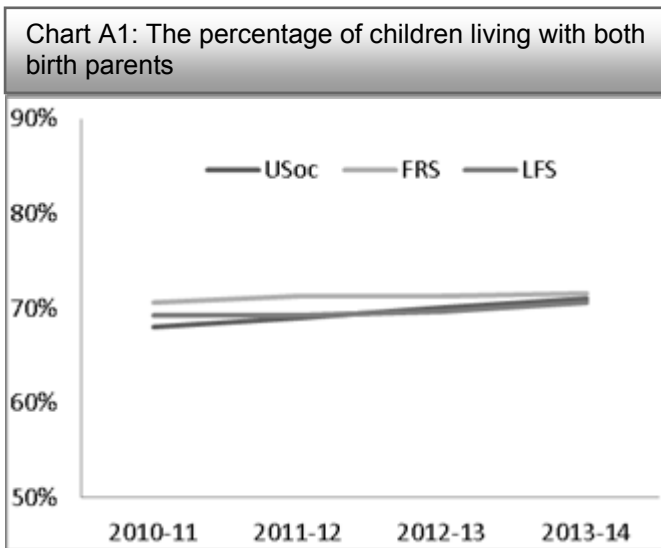
² Analysis has been weighted using b_psnenub_xw, c_psnenub_wx, d_psnenub_xw, e_psnenub_xw for Waves 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. For more information on USoc weighting design, see description of weights in the [Understanding Society User Guide](#).

Annex – comparisons with other data sources

The Family stability indicator is based on data taken from Understanding Society (USoc). USoc is used because it contains a wide range of information about families, including household income and parental relationship satisfaction.

In order to assess the robustness of the results of the latest Family Stability indicator, we have compared the results from Tables 1 and 2 (in Excel workbook) with other sources.

Charts A1 and A2 provide comparisons of the percentage of children living with both birth parents using USoc with the equivalent results from the Labour Force Survey (LFS)³ and the Family Resources Survey (FRS)⁴. The results show that the estimated percentage of children living with both birth parents is fairly consistent between USoc, the LFS and the FRS, although the percentage living with both birth parents is slightly higher for the FRS than the other two data sources and the trend is flatter in the FRS and LFS than in USoc.



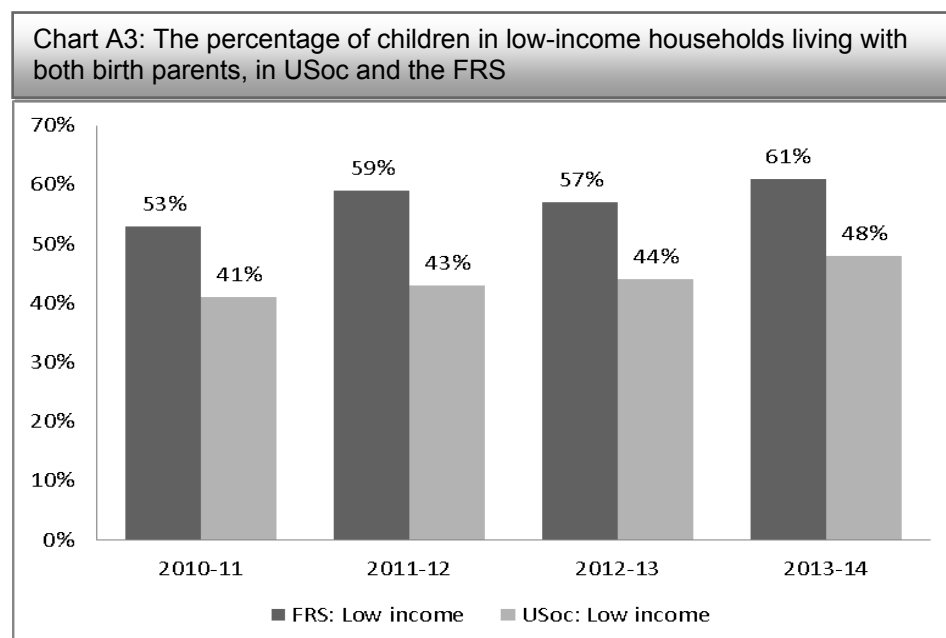
When the results are broken down by household income, there are significant differences between the results found in USoc and the FRS⁵. As Chart A3 shows, both surveys seem to suggest a slight upward trend in the percentage of children in

³ The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a survey of the employment circumstances of the UK population. It is the largest household survey in the UK and provides the official measures of employment and unemployment.

⁴ The Family Resources Survey is a continuous household survey which collects information on the income and circumstances of a representative sample of private households in the United Kingdom.

⁵ It is not possible to produce a breakdown by income using the LFS as the survey does not contain full information on household income. Therefore only USoc and the FRS are compared here.

low-income households living with both birth parents, but there is a large disparity in the proportions reported in USoc and the FRS. Given this difference, we advise that the Family Stability indicator results for children in low-income households based on USoc data should be treated with caution.



Notes for Charts A1 to A3:

1. Definition of living with both birth parents:
 - a. In USoc, children are identified as living with both birth parents where an adult within the household has reported the child's natural mother and father as being resident. Children not living with both birth parents include those born into or living with a step-parent, in lone parent families, adoptive families, foster families or those who are in the care of relatives.
 - b. In the LFS analysis, children are counted as living with both birth parents if the household relationship grid identifies them as the 'natural child' of more than one member of the household.
 - c. For the analysis based on the FRS, a child is classified as living with both birth parents if they are described as the son or daughter of more than one member of the household. The survey identifies step and foster parent-child relationships separately. However, it is not possible to distinguish between biological and adopted parents.
2. There are differences in the time period for each survey: USoc results are based on one wave of the survey (collected over two years); FRS results are based on the dataset for that financial year; and LFS results are based on the dataset for the first quarter of the financial year.
3. In Chart A3, children in low-income households are defined as the bottom 20% of children ranked by household income, and children in the middle to high-income group are the 80% of children living in households with an income above this. This is based on gross household income, before housing costs. Income has been adjusted using the OECD equivalisation scale, to take account of the number of people in the household.