

Parents' break up affects children's development

The impact of separation on mother is vital, claims study

STEPHEN NAYSMITH

ONE in 10 Scottish children sees their parents split up by the time they are five, according to a new study.

They are affected not just by the separation itself, but by its impact on their mother, according to researchers, who discovered that a split increased the likelihood of mothers being on a low income and suffering from mental health problems.

Financial deprivation also has an impact on child health, with the effect apparent even in the early years.

The findings come from the

Growing Up in Scotland study (GUS), which was launched in 2005 to chart the experiences of 14,000 children and their families.

Angela Constance, Minister for Children and Young People, said that the need for early years' support was now "non-negotiable".

She added: "This research will play a crucial role in informing what we need to do to improve the life chances for all of Scotland's children."

"Our priority is to create a fairer start for all, to provide the most important people in a child's journey, their parents

and carers, with the right support. But we also have to make sure that support is being accessed and used to its fullest.

"This research will be used to identify areas we need to improve and what can be strengthened to get help to those who need it the most."

Carried out by the Scottish Centre for Social Research, based in Edinburgh, the study aims to shine a spotlight on the realities faced by children growing up in Scotland today, and the impact of background and family attitudes towards parenting, childcare, healthcare, children's services and education.

Researchers said yesterday the report showed GUS was already providing useful information about how early experiences can impact on later life.

It showed parents appear most



ANGELA CONSTANCE: Priority is to create a fairer start for all.

likely to separate in the first two years after a child is born, and points out that separation can leave the mother poorer, or suffering from poor mental health, both of which can have a negative impact on child development.

Earlier findings showed that children from well-educated

families had cognitive advantages from the age of three and these are still present by the age of five. Other factors such as a "rich" home learning environment also tended to put children at an advantage before they started school.

Families facing economic or social hardship were likely to have children in poorer health and with a more unhealthy lifestyle. However, the researchers found that good parenting was a key factor in improving child health and argue that parenting support could go some way in reducing health inequalities.

However, mothers living in disadvantaged areas were less likely to take advantage of services aimed at supporting parents with young children.

Michael Matheson, Minister for Public Health, said: "No-one

should be condemned to a life of ill health because of where they live or the family's background. Poor health is not inevitable and we should not accept it.

"Intervening at the earliest opportunity to improve children's wellbeing is absolutely crucial to improving Scotland's health in the long term."

"Expanding the Family Nurse Partnership programme to more sites across Scotland will support first-time teenage mothers from early pregnancy until their child reaches two, to improve pregnancy outcomes and child health and development."

The study is tracking 5000 babies born in 2004 and 2005, and 3000 toddlers born in 2002 and 2003. A new cohort of 6000 babies born since March last year is being enrolled in the study.

Fire crew honoured for saving pitchfork man's life

MARTIN WILLIAMS

FIREFIGHTERS saved the life of a man who was attacked with a garden pitch fork by performing a surgical procedure in a hospital operating theatre.

The crew was asked by surgeons to remove bits of the garden implement from the victim's neck at Glasgow's Western Infirmary using their specialist cutting gear, believing it was the only way the victim would survive.

Details of the remarkable rescue came as those involved, Watch Commander Brian Wardle and firefighters Fabrice Duboi, Gordon Maxwell, Craig McDougall, Andrew McGregor and John Parker, who are all based at Clydebank in West Dunbartonshire, were presented awards for their bravery at Strathclyde Fire and Rescue headquarters in Hamilton.

A fire spokesman said: "It is a very, very unusual one. There were officers there with 30 years' experience involved and they had never known anything like this ever happen before."

The crew found the man unconscious and with the pitch fork embedded in the his face and neck after being subjected to a "very violent attack" in July last year.

They helped to quickly cut away parts of the fork at the scene because the victim, who has not been identified, had severe breathing difficulties.

The patient was then rushed to hospital with parts of the fork still lodged in his face and head.

After advising the surgeon on the heavy duty

Highland Fling as X Factor comes to Glasgow

THE X Factor judges got into the Celtic spirit as they took their search for a new star to Scotland.

New judges Gary Barlow, Kelly Rowland and Tulisa Contostavlos joined Louis Walsh to be greeted by a Scots piper and three Highland dancers at Glasgow's SECC.

Former Destiny's Child singer Rowland looked intrigued by the three Highland dancers who performed a Highland Fling as she

