

Book experiences and socio-emotional development during early childhood

Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland study

Gabriela Portillo and Dr. Suzanne Egan

Department of Psychology — Mary Immaculate College, Limerick



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Book experiences during early childhood

- Solid evidence of the **benefits of early experiences with books** (Hoyne & Egan, 2019)
- Positive effects appear as early as **8 months of age** (Dickinson *et al.*, 2012) and have long-term effects continuing through childhood (Kalb & van Ours, 2014)
- Benefits for different developmental areas, but mixed information about the effects on **socio-emotional development**

Books and socio-emotional development

- Several authors point out the importance of the **home literacy environment** (Baker, 2013; Wirth *et al.*, 2020) and notice that literacy activities have more positive effects than other activities, such as playtime (Brazzelli *et al.*, 2021; Drummond *et al.*, 2014)
- Book-based interventions have yielded positive results in fostering **socio-emotional development** in young children (Batini *et al.*, 2021)
- However, O'Farrelly *et al.* (2018) suggest these benefits are related to socio-emotional **competence** but may be insufficient to counterbalance externalising, internalising, and dysregulation **problems**

Home Literacy Environment (HLE)

“Activities undertaken by family members at home that relate to literacy learning as well as the literacy resources in the home and parental attitudes toward literacy” (Puglisi *et al.*, 2017, p. 498).

Indicators: reading frequency, library visits, number of children’s books available at home, child’s interest in reading, parental literacy teaching and parental reading habits (Hood *et al.*, 2008; Taylor, 2011).

Current study

How is the HLE configured for families living in Ireland?

Does it influence the socio-emotional development of preschool children?

1. A rich HLE will be associated with lower scores on children's socio-emotional difficulties.
2. The HLE variables will predict children's socio-emotional difficulties, even after controlling for the effect of other related variables.

Methodology

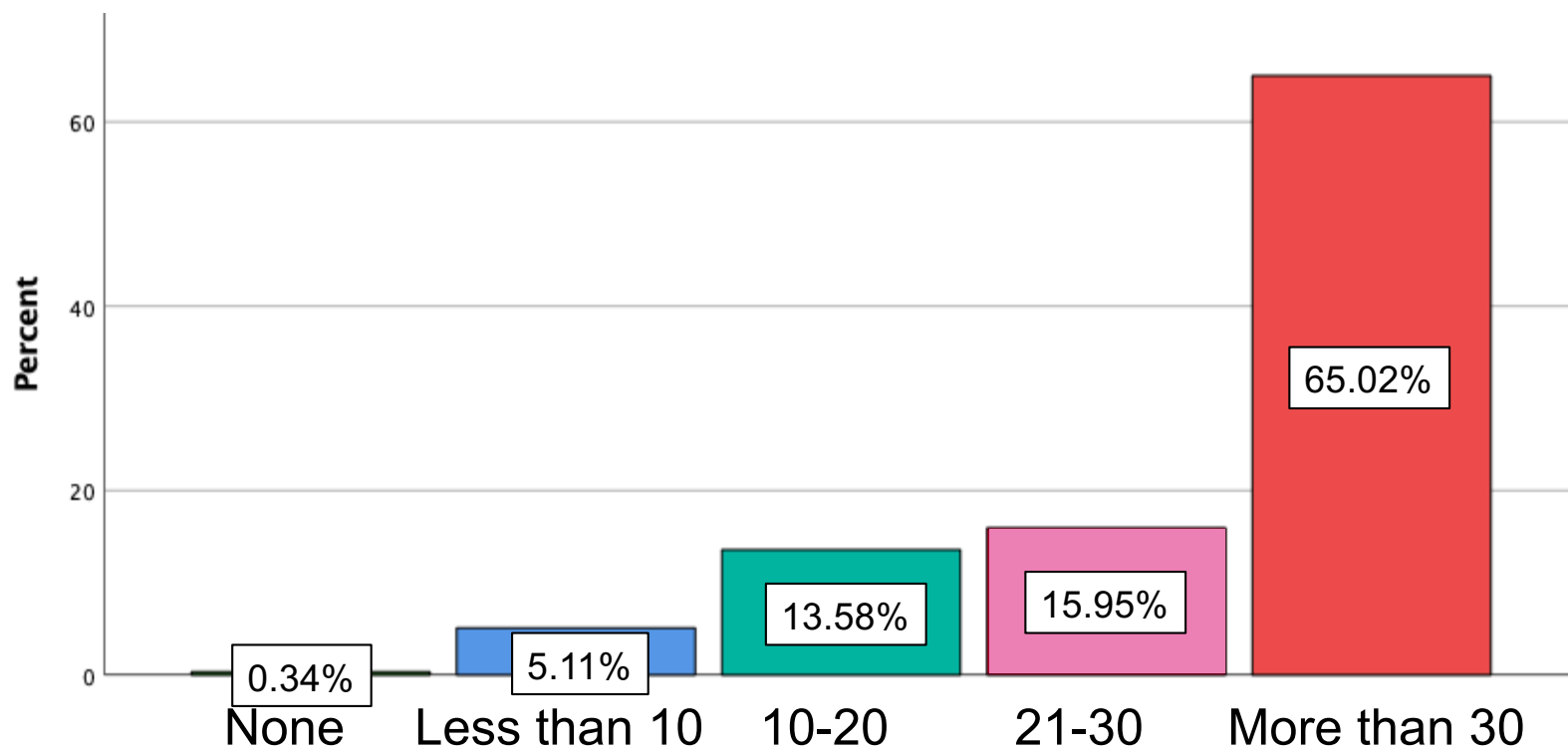
- Quantitative analysis of GUI data
 - Wave 3 of **Cohort '08** = 5 years old
 - N = 9001 families
 - 98% of PCG were female, and the average age was 31 years (*SD* = 6.31)
 - Analysed using ANOVA and linear regression in SPSS

Variables

Outcome variable (Socio-emotional development)	Predictor variables (HLE indicators)
<p>Total difficulties subscale from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997) — Parent-reported version</p> <p>(emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems)</p>	Number of children's books at home
	Read to child
	Listen to child read
	Visits to the library

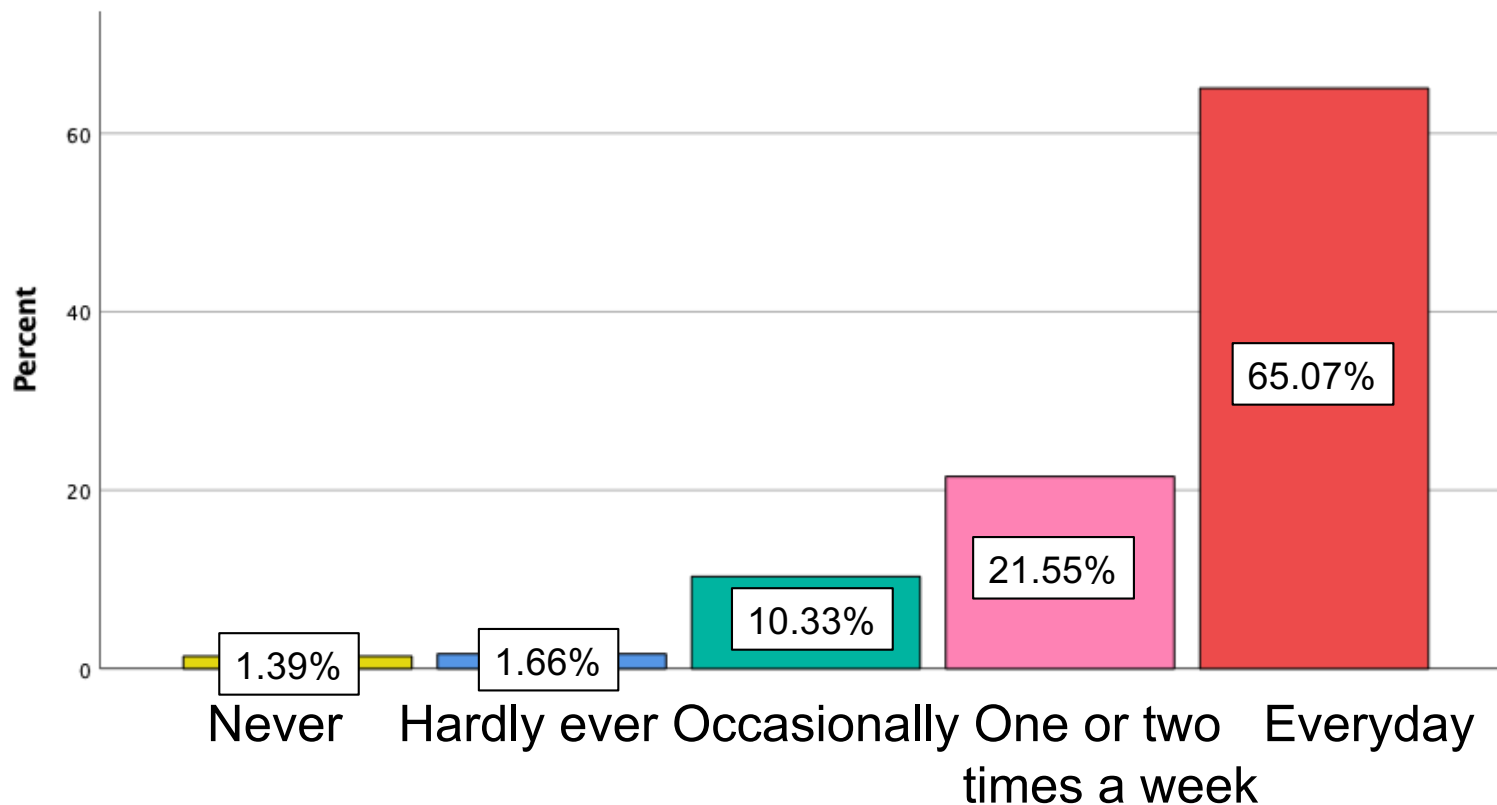
Results — Descriptive analysis

Number of children's books at home



Results — Descriptive analysis

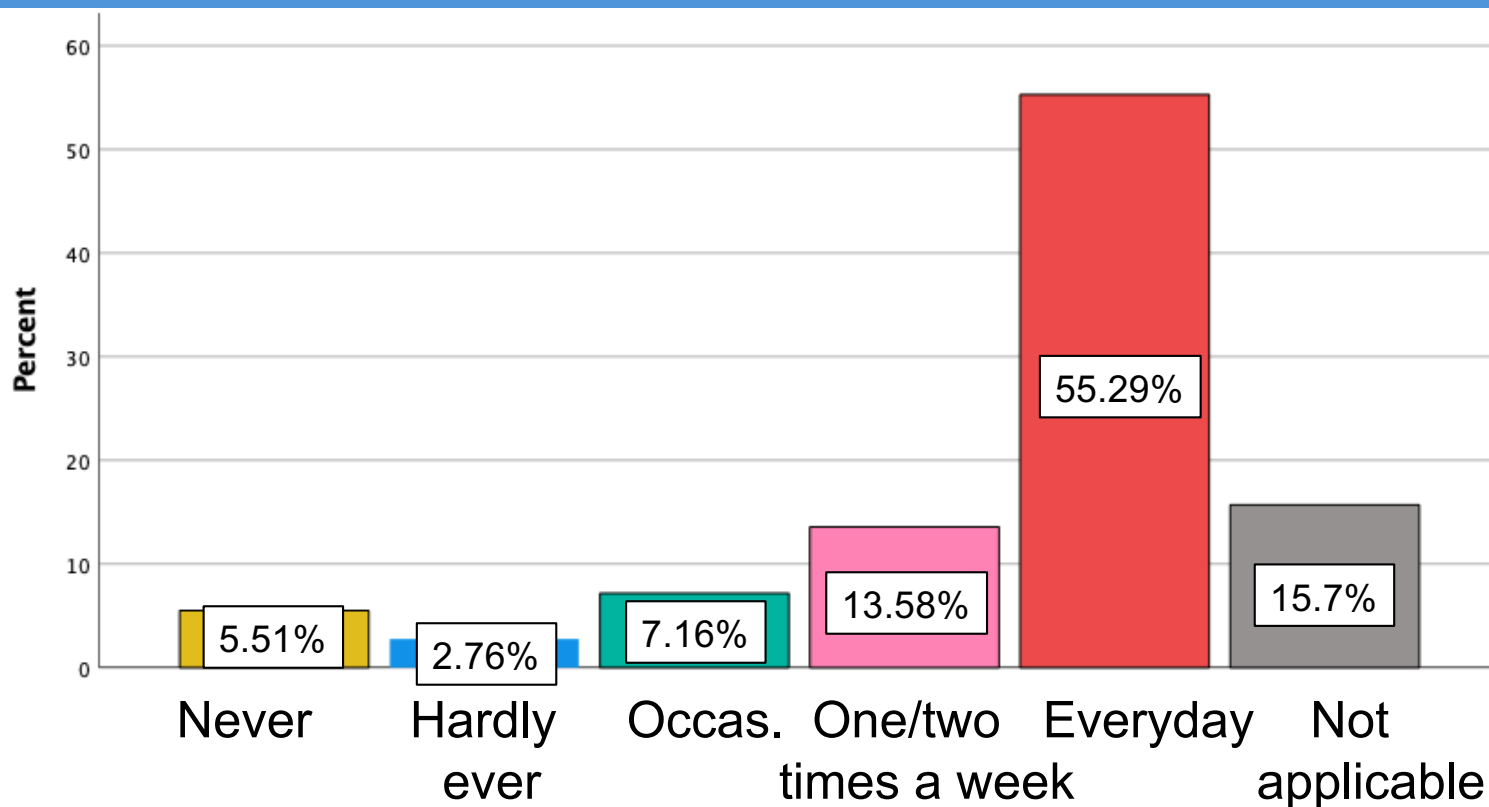
Read to child*



*Significant association between PCG and SCG ($p < .001$; Cramer's $V = .174$)

Results — Descriptive analysis

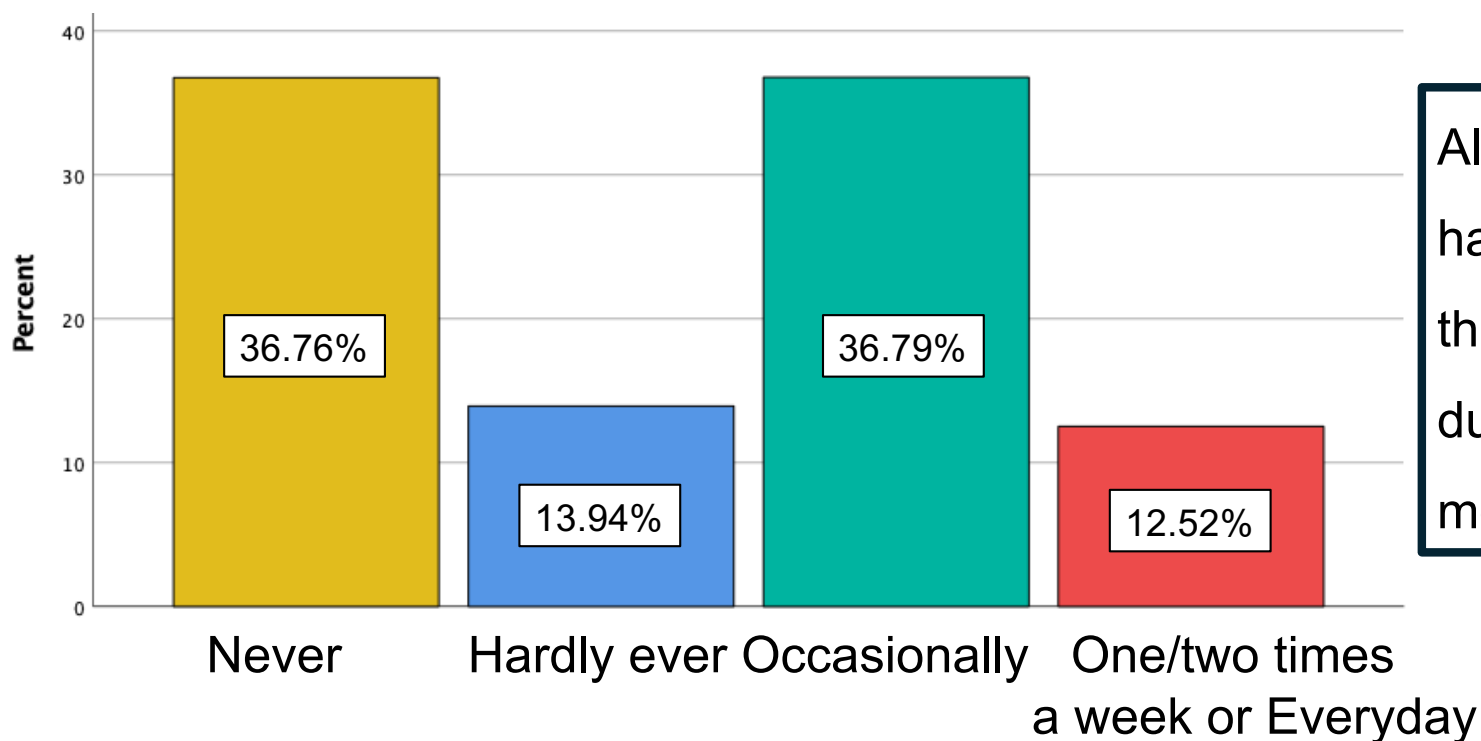
Listen to child*



*Significant association between PCG and SCG ($p < .001$; Cramer's $V = .392$)

Results — Descriptive analysis

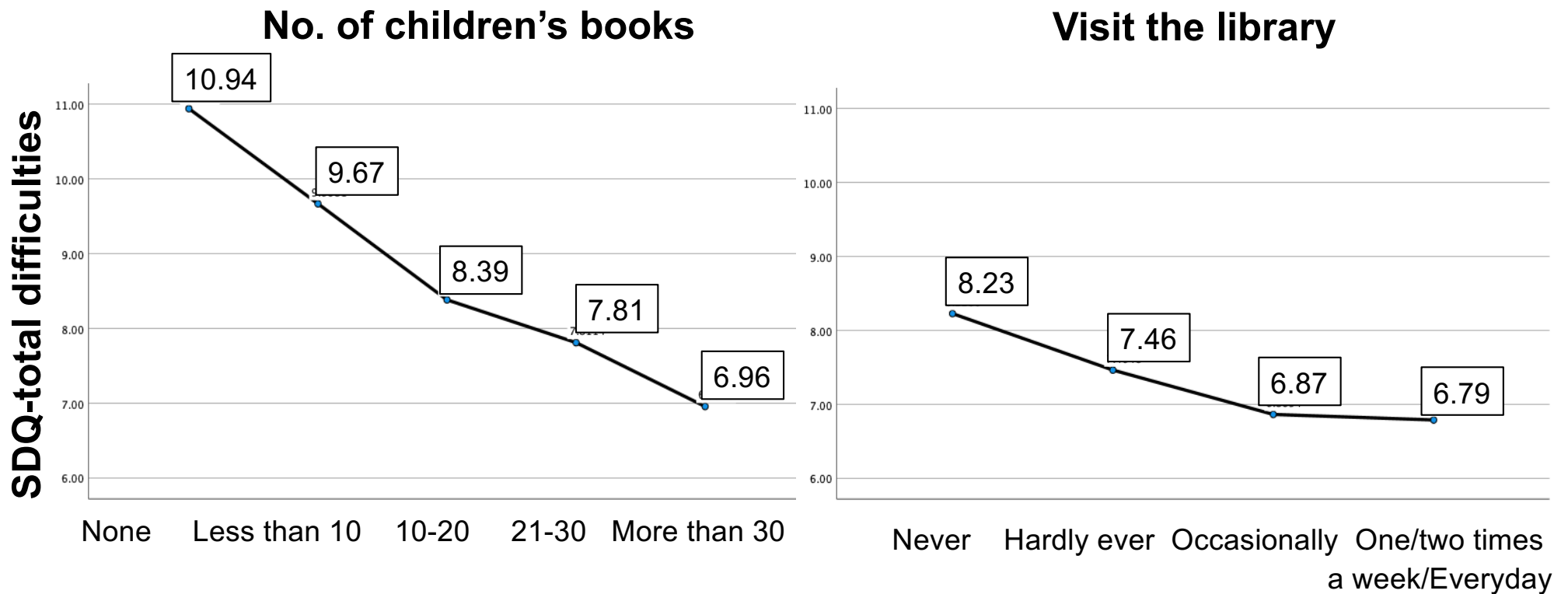
Visit the library*



Almost 60% had not visited the library during the last month

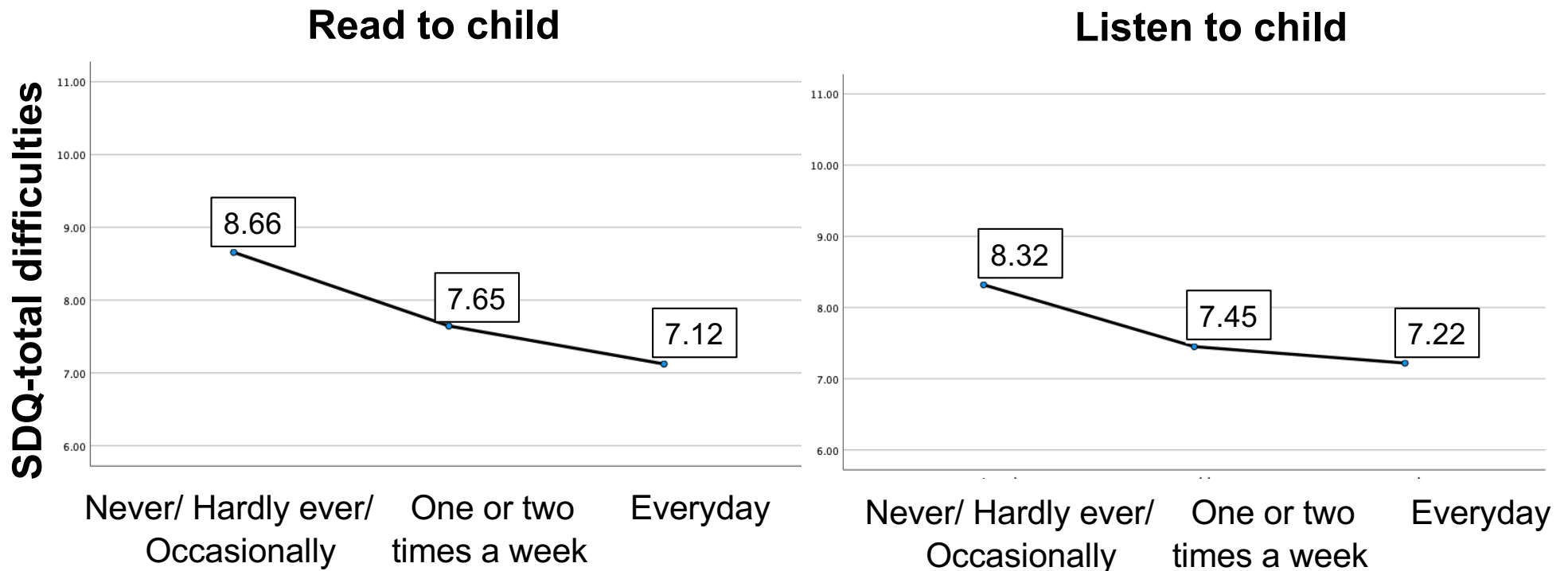
*Significant association between PCG and SCG ($p < .001$; Cramer's $V = .25$)

Results — Group comparison



Differences were significant ($p < .05$) except between occasional and weekly visits to the library ($p = .970$)

Results — Group comparison



Differences were significant ($p < .05$) across all subgroups except for weekly and daily listening ($p = .299$)

Results — Regression analysis

The HLE variables significantly **predicted** SDQ-total difficulties scores

$$F(4, 7574)=78.37, p<.001$$

$$R^2 = 4.0\%$$

Number of books in the home $\beta = -.12$

Visits to library frequency $\beta = -.09$

Reading by PCG frequency $\beta = -.05$

Listened by PCG frequency $\beta = -.06$

Variables

Outcome variable (Socio-emotional development)	Predictor variables (HLE indicators)	Control variables
Total difficulties subscale from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997) — Parent-reported	Number of children's books at home	Attachment to PCG (closeness)
	Read to child	PCG's educational level
	Listen to child read	
	Visits to the library	Household income

Results — Regression analysis

The HLE variables significantly predicted SDQ-total difficulties scores even after controlling for attachment, mother's educational level and household income

$F(7, 7214)=169.12, p<.001$

$R^2 = 14.1\%$

Attachment $R^2 = 9.6\%$

Ed. level $R^2 = 2.5\%$

HLE $R^2 = 1.5\%$

Income $R^2 = 0.6\%$

Number of books in the home $\beta = -.07$

Visits to library frequency $\beta = -.07$

Reading by PCG frequency $\beta = -.02$

Listened by PCG frequency $\beta = -.04$

Summary

- About two-thirds of preschool children are **read daily** and have **+30** children's books at home. Half are listened to while reading by their caregivers **every day**
- Over **50%** of families **never or hardly ever** visit the library
- Richer HLEs (i.e., higher frequency of reading, listening and library visits and more books at home) were associated with **fewer socio-emotional difficulties**
- The HLE **predicted** socio-emotional difficulties even after controlling for the effects of attachment, mother's educational level and household income

Considerations

- Lack of some **HLE indicators** (e.g., attitudes towards reading or book's content) and no control for individual differences
- Focus on socio-emotional **difficulties** over competencies (O'Farrelly *et al.*, 2017)
- Is the HLE effective, or does the effect result from the time spent with caregivers? (Murray & Egan, 2014)

Discussion

- Nurturing the HLE contributes to **cycles of mutual influence** within the context
 - Transactional models of development (Sameroff & Fiese, 2000)
 - “Snowball” and “upward spiral” effects expand and intensify the benefits of books to other development areas (Mol & Bus, 2011)
 - Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979): family and community engagement → **beyond the home environment**

Conclusions

- Book and literacy activities may be an effective means to **foster socio-emotional development** in preschool children
 - Cost- and time-effective (Batini *et al.*, 2021)
 - More malleable than other variables (e.g., family income and parents' educational level) → **library and gifting schemes**

Thank you

gabrielam.p.menendez@mic.ul.ie

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