Parenting with a disability in Ireland

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Fás Aníos in Éirinn
Growing Up in Ireland

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Motivation

- Existing research on parenting and disability focuses on **parents of children with a disability**
- Parenting with a disability not mentioned in Ireland's **National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030**
    - Maternity care for disabled people mentioned in Strategy for Women and Girls
- ***Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services*** (2025) lists parents with a disability as an area of policy importance

- We are interested in how people with a disability navigate parenthood, and what factors impact their outcomes

Background

- **Social Model of Disability** (Oliver, 1990)
  - Disability emerges through the interaction of external societal factors with a person's illness or condition
  - Disability is defined in GUI using this paradigm → a long-lasting condition/illness that **hampers** day to day life
- **Ecological Systems Theory** (Bronfenbrenner, 1972; Pederson and Revenson, 2005)
  - Individual development stems from interconnected environmental systems
  - Link between family illness and family outcomes is mediated by **individual, family**, and **external** factors



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Background

(Mainly qualitative) research from both parent and child perspectives suggest an association between parental disability and adverse outcomes for parent and child, but generally **mediated by external factors**

- Cultural norms: parents = care-giving vs disabled persons = care-receiving (McConnell & Hahn, 2020; Olsen & Clark, 2003)
- Inaccessible environments (Dunne and Ryan, 2025; Hu et al., 2025) e.g. health, labour market, schools/childcare, housing
- Family & friends support/lack of support (Hu et al., 2025)
- Risk of poverty and material deprivation (Roantree et al., 2026; Slevin et al., 2025)

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Data & Methodology

Data

- Growing Up in Ireland Cohort ‘08 (9 mths → 13 yrs)

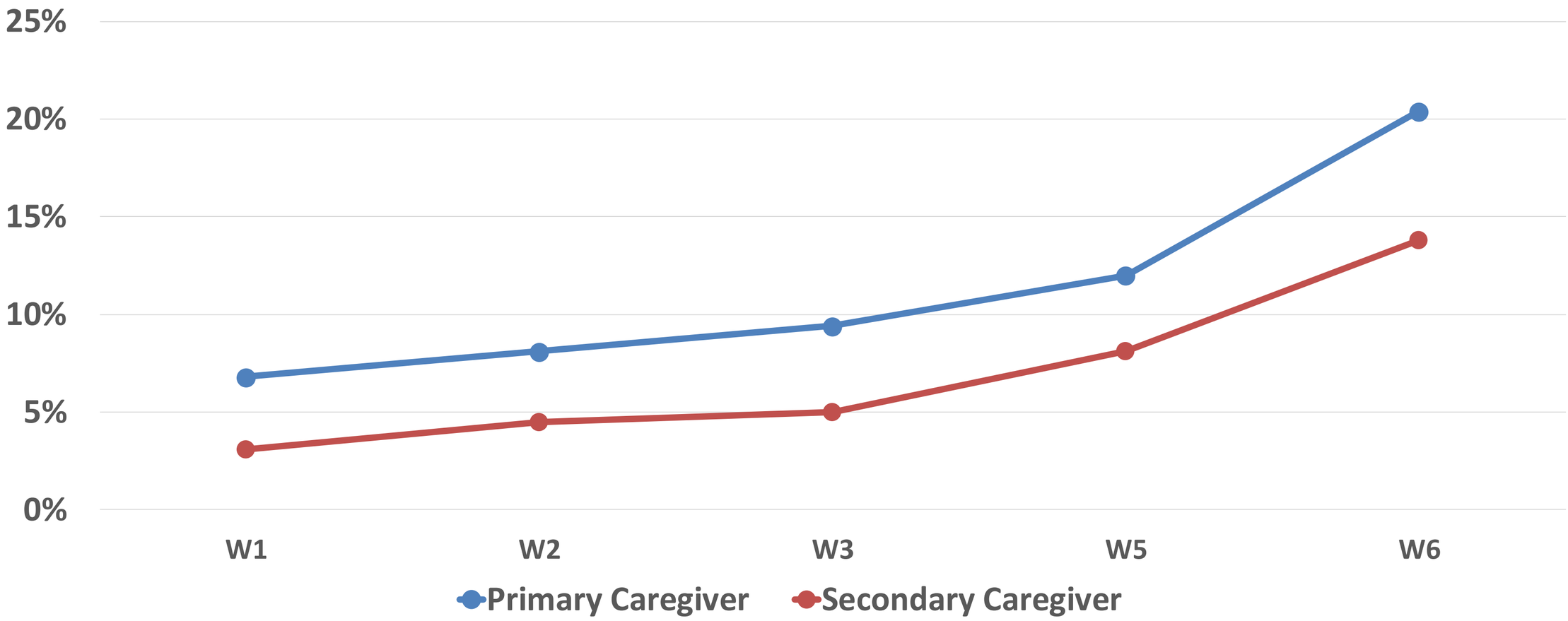
Variables

- **Disability**: Number of waves PCG hampered between wave 1 and wave 5*
- **Mediators**
  - ***Housing tenure***: Owns Home, Renting, Local Authority/Voluntary Body, Parents
  - ***Friends & Family support:*** Has no/not enough support from family/friends (binary)
  - ***Ability to make ends meet****:* Ends meet is at least somewhat difficult (binary)
- **Controls:** Employment status, number of children in hh, child gender, child disability

We do run models for wave 6, but disability changed definition in this wave

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Proportion of Primary and Secondary Caregivers with a Disability



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Outcomes

- Results presented here are on **primary caregiver**
- **Outcome 1**: Parental Stress Score
  - 6 questions asked in **every wave**
  - E.g. The major source of stress in my life is my child, having a child leaves little time and flexibility in my life

- **Outcome 2:** Pianta Parent-Child **Conflict** scale
  - 8 item conflict subscale
  - E.g. My child and I always seem to be struggling with each other, dealing with my child drains my energy

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Modelling Outcomes: Primary Caregiver Disability

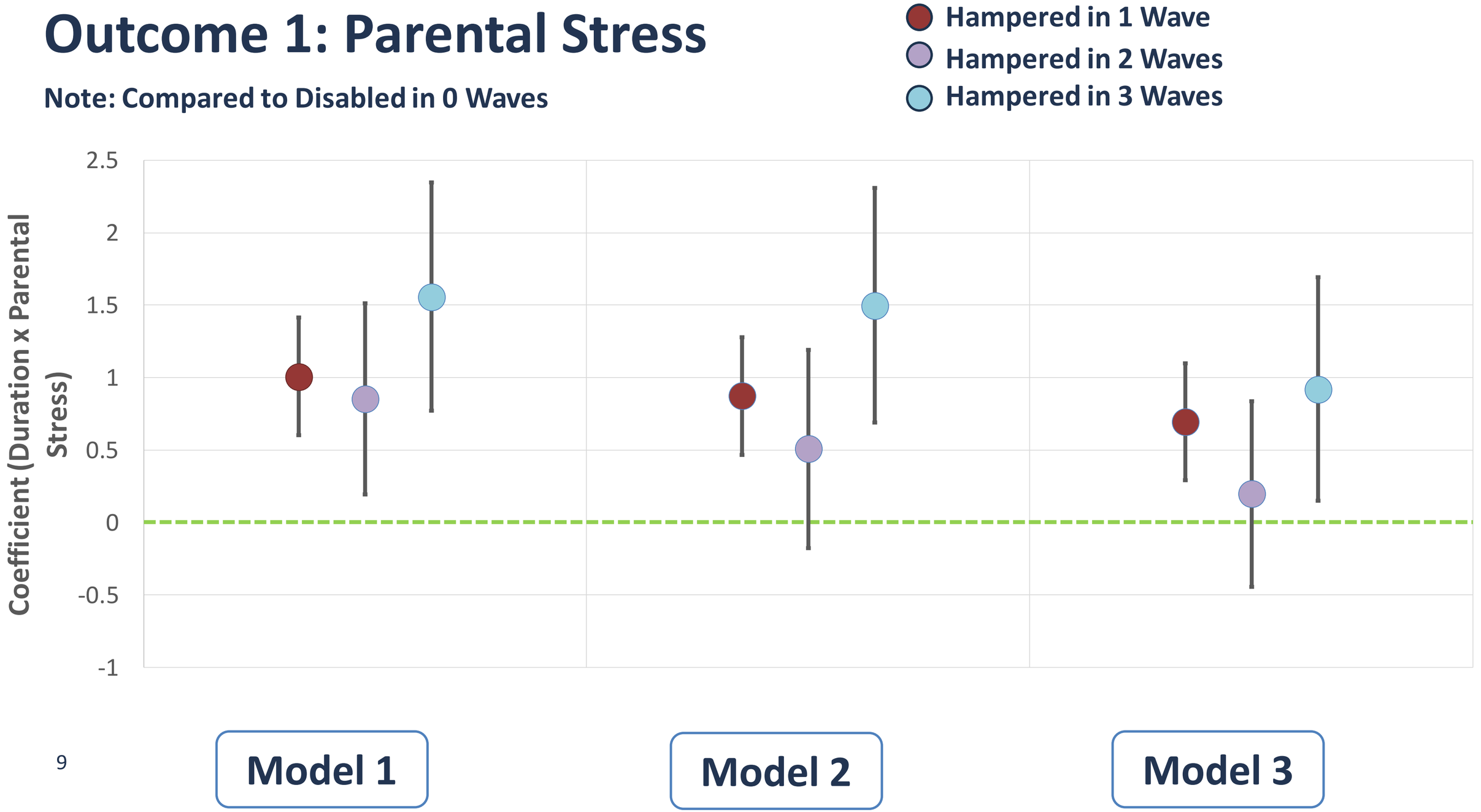
- **Model 1**: Duration of Disability x Outcome

- **Model 2**: Added Controls
  - PCG employment
  - Child gender
  - Child disability (w2, w3, w5)
  - Partner in hh
  - Other children in hh

- **Model 3**: Added Mediators
  - Difficulty making ends meet
  - Housing tenure
  - Support network

Outcome 1: Parental Stress

Note: Compared to Disabled in 0 Waves



Model 2: Controls	Model 3: Controls + Mediators
Child Disability (N Waves) +++ (ref: child not disabled)	Child Disability (N Waves) +++
Employed Part Time - (ref: employed full time)	Employed Part Time -
Not Employed - - (ref: employed full time)	Not Employed --
	Receive no/not enough support +++
	Ends Meet at least somewhat difficult +++
	Social Housing (LA) - (ref. Owns Home)
	Renting + (ref. Owns Home)

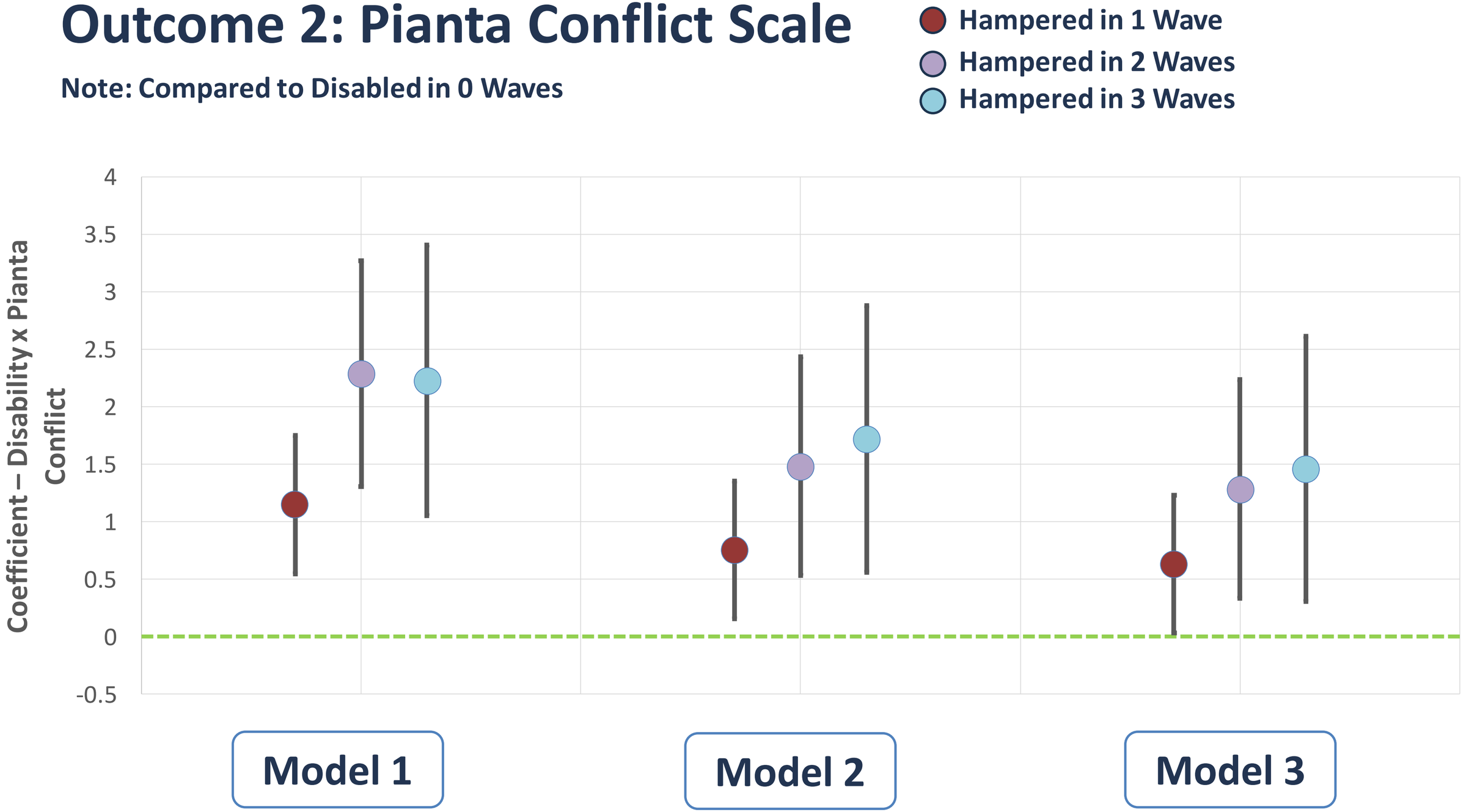
Outcome 1: Parental Stress

Financial Strain is most significant mediator (explains more of the variance in stress outcomes between groups

Child Disability significant in both models

Outcome 2: Pianta Conflict Scale

Note: Compared to Disabled in 0 Waves



Model 2: Controls	Model 3: Controls + Mediators
Child Disability +++ (ref. Child not disabled)	Child Disability +++
Not Employed - (ref. Employed full time)	Receive no/not enough support +++
	Ends Meet at least somewhat difficult +
	Social Housing ++ (ref. Owns home)
	Private Renting ++ (ref. Owns home)

Outcome 2: Parent-Child Conflict

Family/Friends Support is most significant mediator (explains more of the variance in conflict outcomes between groups

Child Disability significant in both models

(Preliminary) Conclusions

- Controlling for financial difficulty, social support and housing partly account for higher parenting stress and parent-child conflict for PCGs with a disability
  - **Stress**
    - Stress declines/becomes non-significant when mediators are added
    - Strongest mediator is **difficulty making ends meet**
  - **Conflict**
    - Relationship between disability and parent-child conflict reduces for both models
    - Strongest mediator is **network**

- Many children are living in households with a disabled parent → importance of providing targeted supports for those who need it
  - Improving financial supports and access to employment
  - Social supports (formal & informal)
  - Ensuring that parenting supports and disability supports are connected
  - Child disability is a strong predictor of increased parental stress and parent-child conflict, and correlates with parental disability → whole of family approach

Limitations & Next Steps

Limitations

- Current model looks at static outcomes at wave 5
- The duration of disability measure doesn't specify whether the disability occurred closer to or further from the outcome

Next Steps/Current Work

1. Models for Secondary Caregivers using same specification
2. Models for Child Outcomes (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, Peers-Harris Self-Esteem Scale)
3. Investigating the change over time through fixed effects modelling
    - Allows us to examine the impact of disability on stress in the next wave

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Thank you

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