WELL-BEING AND THE FAMILY SYSTEM

A Structural Equation Model of Individual, Relational and Contextual Influences

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KEY CONCEPTS TO BE CONSIDERED

The central question guiding our research is:

What influences the well-being of children and their families?

Drawing on Ryff and Keyes (1995), we define well-being as a multi-dimensional construct situated between the individual and the social whole, comprising:

- ❑ Emotional well-being (absence of depression, internalising behaviours)
- ❑ Subjective well-being (e.g. life satisfaction)
- ❑ Relational well-being (including family and intimate relationships)
- ❑ Positive self-concept (self-esteem, self-efficacy)
- ❑ Positive work and/or study role
- ❑ Absence of symptoms or externalising behaviours

OUR APPROACH

- We situate the well-being of children within the context of the **“family system”.**
- We develop an integrated **theoretical model** of well-being and the family system, based on previous research.
- We seek robust **latent multi-item measures** of key concepts in this model.

- We distinguish between
  - the **measurement model** (items and scales used to measure key concepts),
  - the **structural model** (relationships between the key concepts), and
  - the **risk and protective factors** that constitute the context of child development.

- We use **Structural Equation Modelling** techniques to estimate parameters in our model – these models are well-adapted to studying the family system.

THE DATASET

Our analysis is based on the GUI 9 year-old cohort data, which has a number of **strengths**…

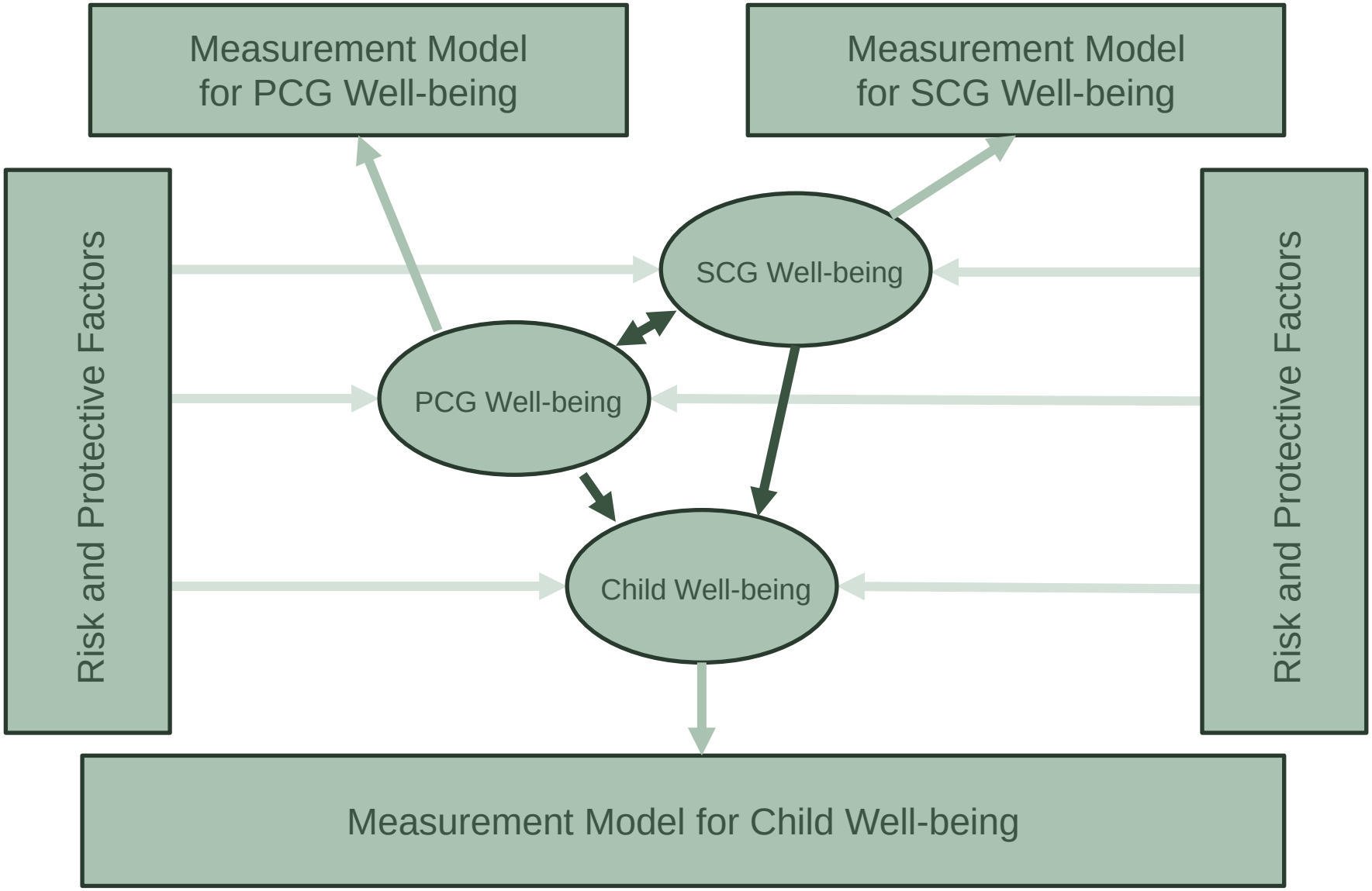
- Large sample, panel design, multiple measures, independent assessments, clustered sampling design, “ecological” approach

…but also some **weaknesses**:

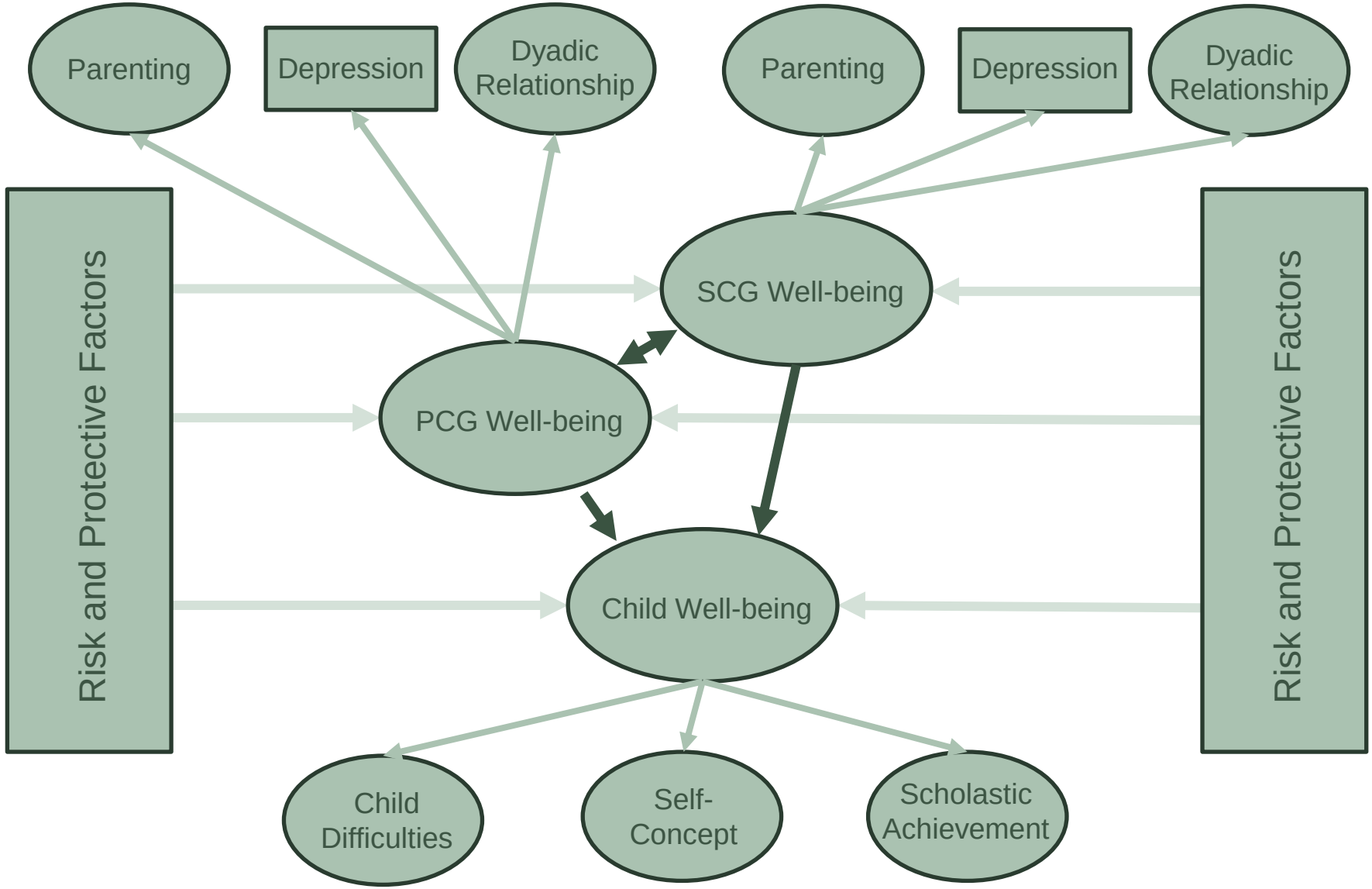
- It does not provide detailed information on relationships (reciprocity, support, intimacy, conflict) within the neighbourhood, family or friendship group.
- It lacks a range of important measures, such as conflict between intimate partners, subjective well-being, physical symptoms, positive/negative affect, adult self-concept.

Therefore, not all of the concepts of well-being believed to be of importance can be implemented within the current analysis.

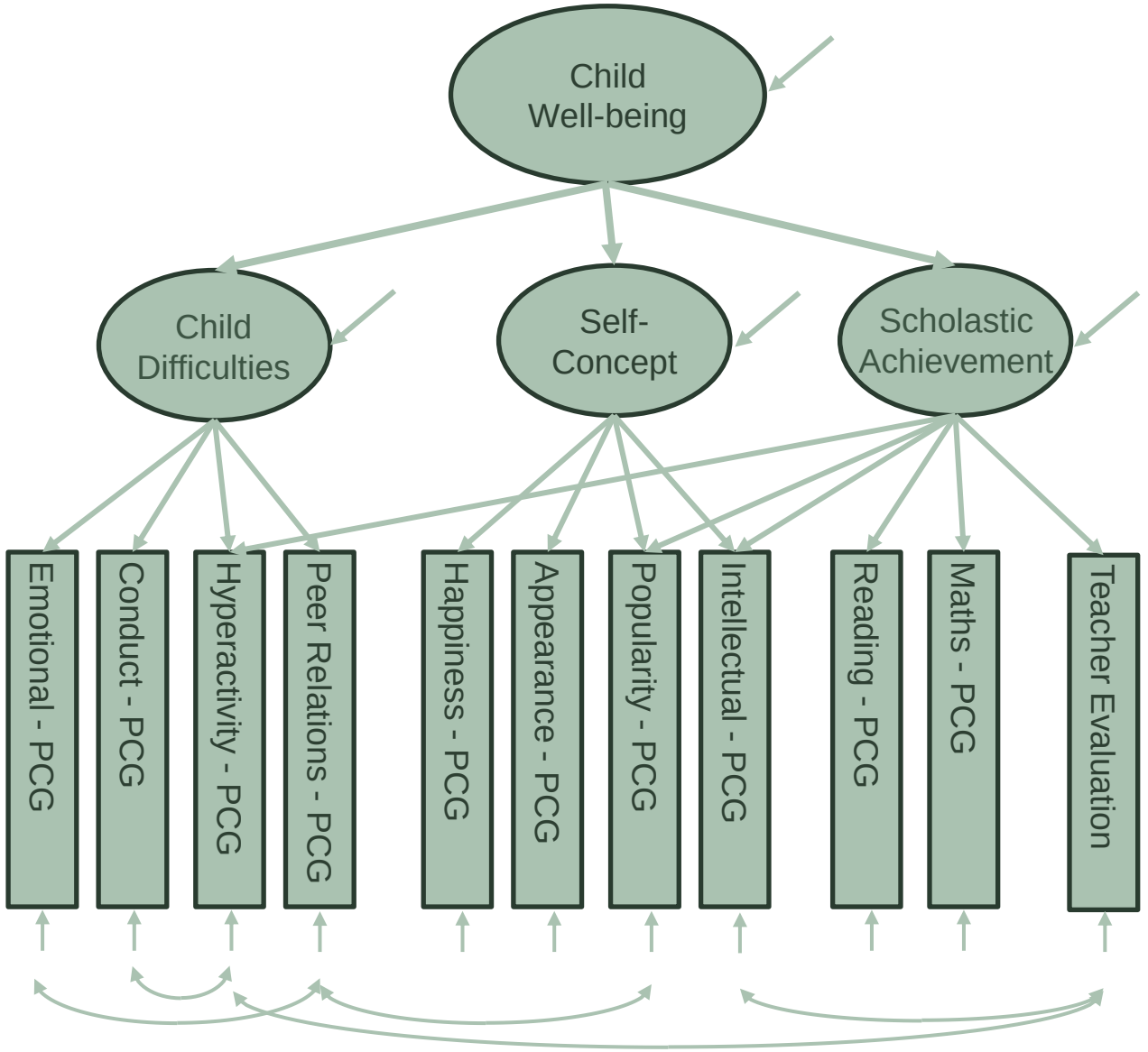
AN ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF CHILD WELL-BEING



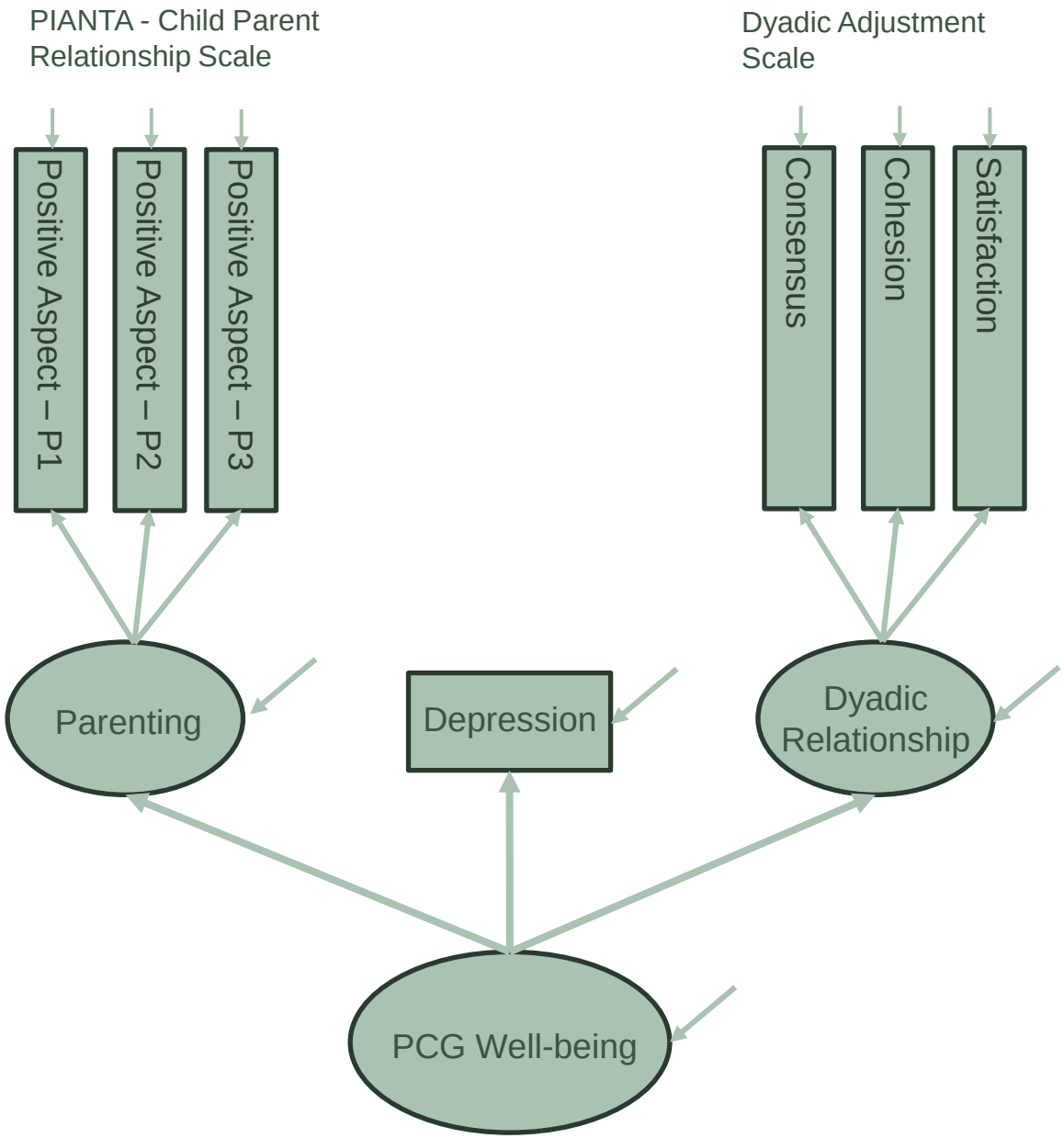
BROAD OUTLINE OF A SECOND ORDER LATENT VARIABLE MODEL



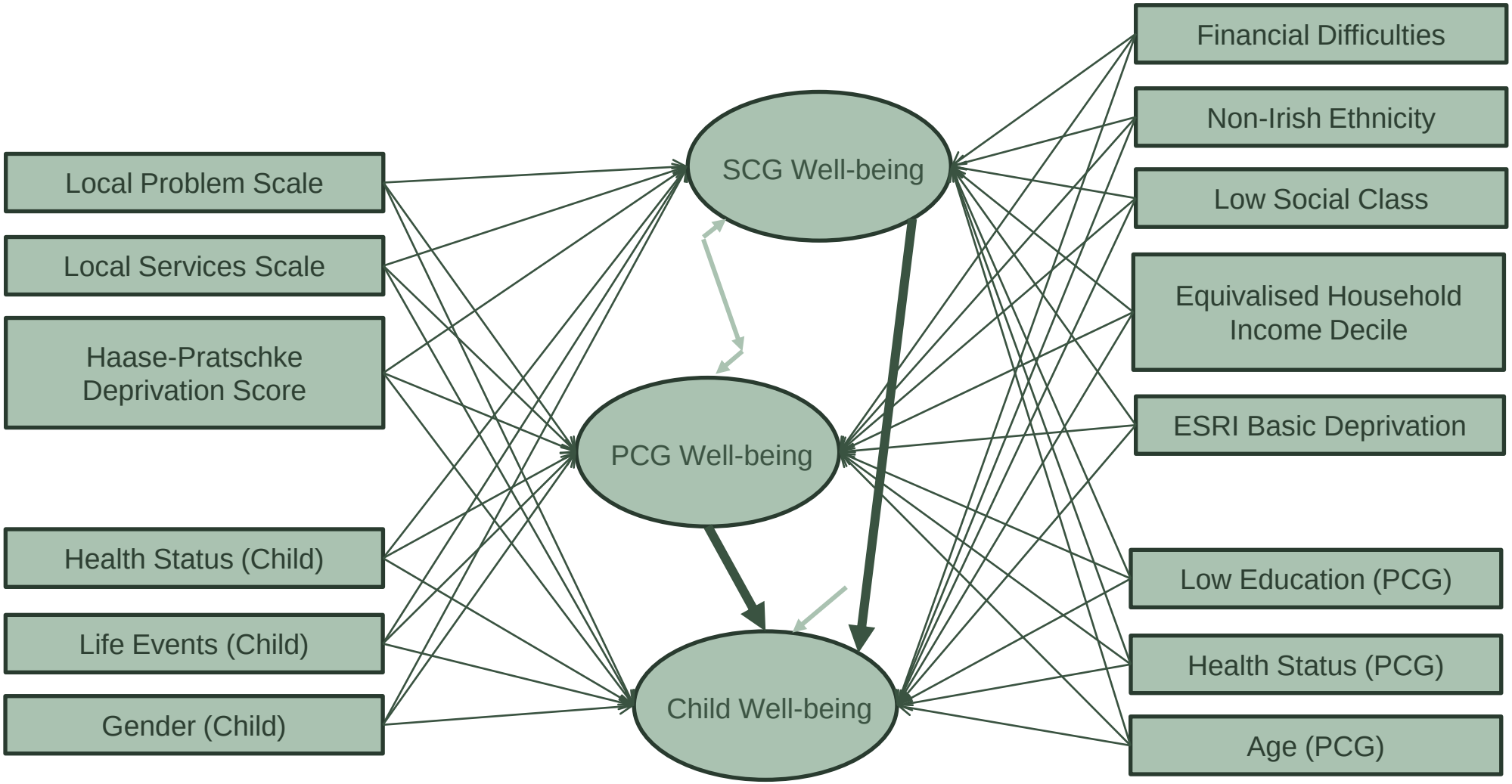
MEASURING CHILD WELL-BEING



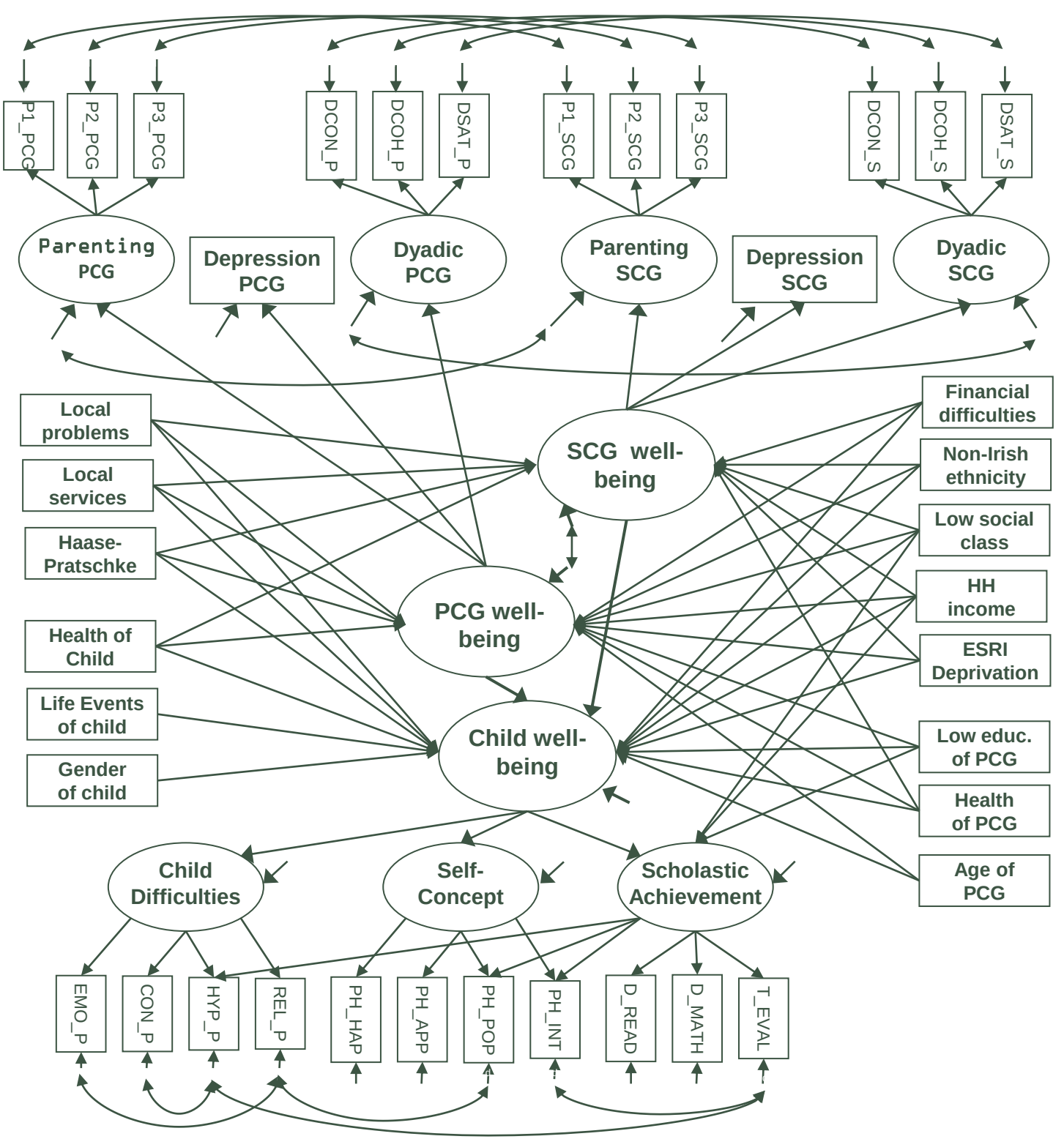
MEASURING PARENTAL WELL-BEING



RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS



A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL OF CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING



Note 1:
covariances between disturbance terms for Child Well-being and Parenting (PCG and SCG) not included in figure.

Note 2:
all covariances between independent variables omitted from figure

INFLUENCE OF RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS ON FAMILY WELL-BEING

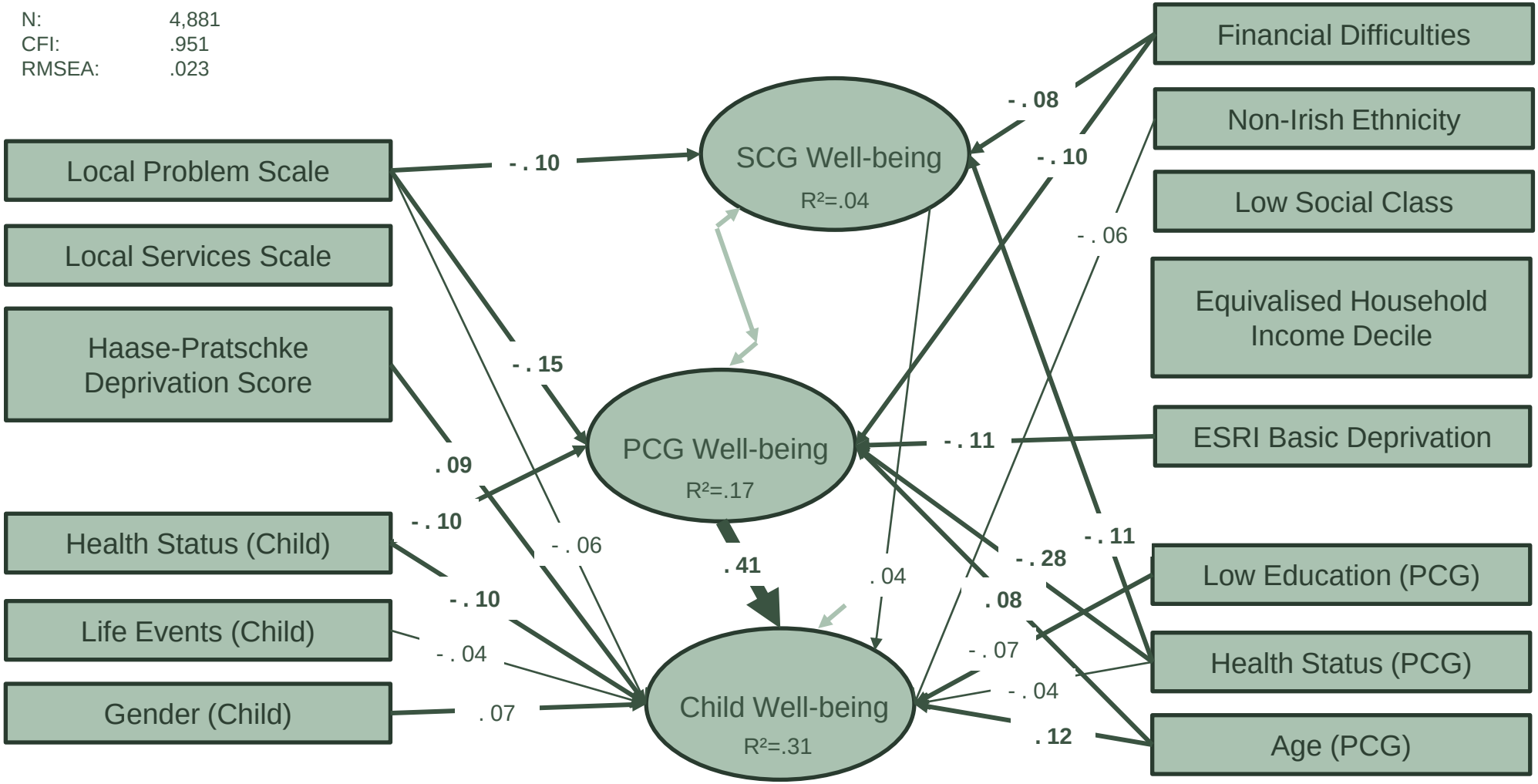
Standardised coefficients

Explanatory variable	Child well-being	Primary Caregiver well-being	Secondary Caregiver well-being
Neighbourhood variables			
Local problems	*** -0.06**	*** -0.15**	*** -0.10**
Local services	0.01	0.02	-0.01
Haase-Pratschke Deprivation Score	*** 0.09**	-0.04	-0.00
Child variables			
Health of Child	*** -0.10**	*** -0.10**	-0.02
Life Events of Child	*** -0.04**		
Gender of Child male	*** 0.07**		
Family variables			
Financial Difficulties	-0.03	*** -0.10**	*** -0.08**
Non-Irish Ethnicity	*** -0.06**	0.01	0.01
Low Social Class	-0.03	-0.01	0.04
Equivalised Household Income Decile	0.01	0.00	0.01
ESRI Basic Deprivation Scale	-0.04	*** -0.11**	-.01
Primary caregiver variables			
Low Education PCG	*** -0.07**	-0.02	
Health of PCG	*** -0.04**	*** -0.28**	*** -0.11**
Age of PCG	*** 0.12**	*** 0.08**	
Latent constructs			
SCG Well-being	0.04		
PCG Well-being	*** 0.41**		
R^2	0.31	0.17	0.04

SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCES ON WELL-BEING

Goodness of Fit:

N:	4,881
CFI:	.951
RMSEA:	.023



All effects significant at p < .05

KEY FINDINGS

1. The analysis confirms the importance of the mother's well-being as a mediating factor on the child. A one unit improvement in the mother's well-being is associated with a 0.4 unit direct improvement in child well-being.

2. In stark contrast, the direct effect of the father's well-being on the child (.04) is almost negligible once we control for other factors.

3. A striking result is the strongly mediated effect of many contextual influences, in harmony with the ecological model of child well-being.

4. With the exception of the mother's health and the Haase-Pratschke Deprivation Index, which have a significant direct effect on child well-being, all other socio-economic factors, including financial variables and local area problems, have a distal effect on child well-being that is mediated by the mother's well-being.

DISCUSSION

1. The conceptualisation of well-being as a higher-order latent concept reveals itself to be a powerful and well-supported hypothesis.
2. The assumption that the well-being of children cannot be understood without simultaneously analysing the well-being of their parents is reinforced.
3. All of the key influences identified in this analysis are in line with our previous research on child and family well-being using independent data – including the finding that a unit change in maternal well-being is associated with almost half a unit change in child well-being.
4. Parents act as a buffer between economic risk factors and child well-being.
5. Socio-economic risks do influence parental well-being, and thus have a mediated effect on children.
6. The model presented here reflects the situation of two-parent families only. As we elected to study the dyadic relationships between caregivers and between caregivers and children, single parents were excluded. The next step would therefore be to focus on the primary caregiver and child, thus including single parent families.

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