



**Growing Up
in Ireland**
National Longitudinal
Study of Children

**Family settings and
children's outcomes:
Differential adjustment across families
of nine-year-olds in Ireland**

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www.growingup.ie





Introduction

- Main focus is association between family structure and child social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD)
- Important as continuum between SEBD in childhood and social integration in adult life (Rutter, Kim-Cohen & Maughan, 2006)



Introduction

- Major changes in the family structure in Ireland over recent years
 - Divorce only possible since 1997, first marriage breakdown rate is 13% (Iona Institute, 2007, from Census 2006)
 - 33.7% of births to unmarried parents in 2010 (CSO, 2011, based on Census, 2006) [many will be to cohabiting parents]
 - Approximately one-quarter of children live in a household headed by a lone-parent, while 69% live with two married parents, and 6% with cohabiting parents (based on Census, 2006)
 - The proportion of children in re-constituted families (step /remarried families) remains unknown
- Family is the child's primary context for socialisation (Parke & Buriel, 1998) - implications of family structure for SEBD and general well-being have been a central topic of research for several decades
- On average children in lone parent and step families show higher levels of SEBD (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Simons et al., 1996)



Possible Mechanisms

- Many of the differences in outcomes are accounted for by factors associated with family structure (e.g. Income, family processes) rather than family structure per se
 - Lone parents often face limited economic resources and higher rates of poverty than any other type of family
 - Once income is controlled for, the association between negative outcomes and living in a lone-parent home is often substantially reduced (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2002)
 - Limited relational/financial resources and lack of support can impact upon parental psychological wellbeing (e.g. Depression) and on quality of relationships/parenting abilities (Amato, 1993; 2004)
 - depression → family processes



Possible Mechanisms

- Stepparent families have more economic and social resources – BUT children still tend to have more negative outcomes when compared with children in intact families
 - transition into new family situation may be problematic for children
 - family friction, adjustment to new roles → impact on parenting and parent-child relationships → impact on outcomes
- Some of these issues may also apply to previously married lone parent families, where children experience relationship disruption/conflict and departure of one parent from home (Hetherington, 1999; Deater-Deckard & Dunn, 1999)
- Role of the non-resident parent will have an impact (Dunn et al., 2004)



The Current Study

- Data from Growing Up in Ireland – The National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland is the first study of its kind ever to be carried out in Ireland and its principal objective is to describe the lives of Irish children, to establish what is typical and normal as well as what is atypical and problematic
- 9-year data used here - 8568 households

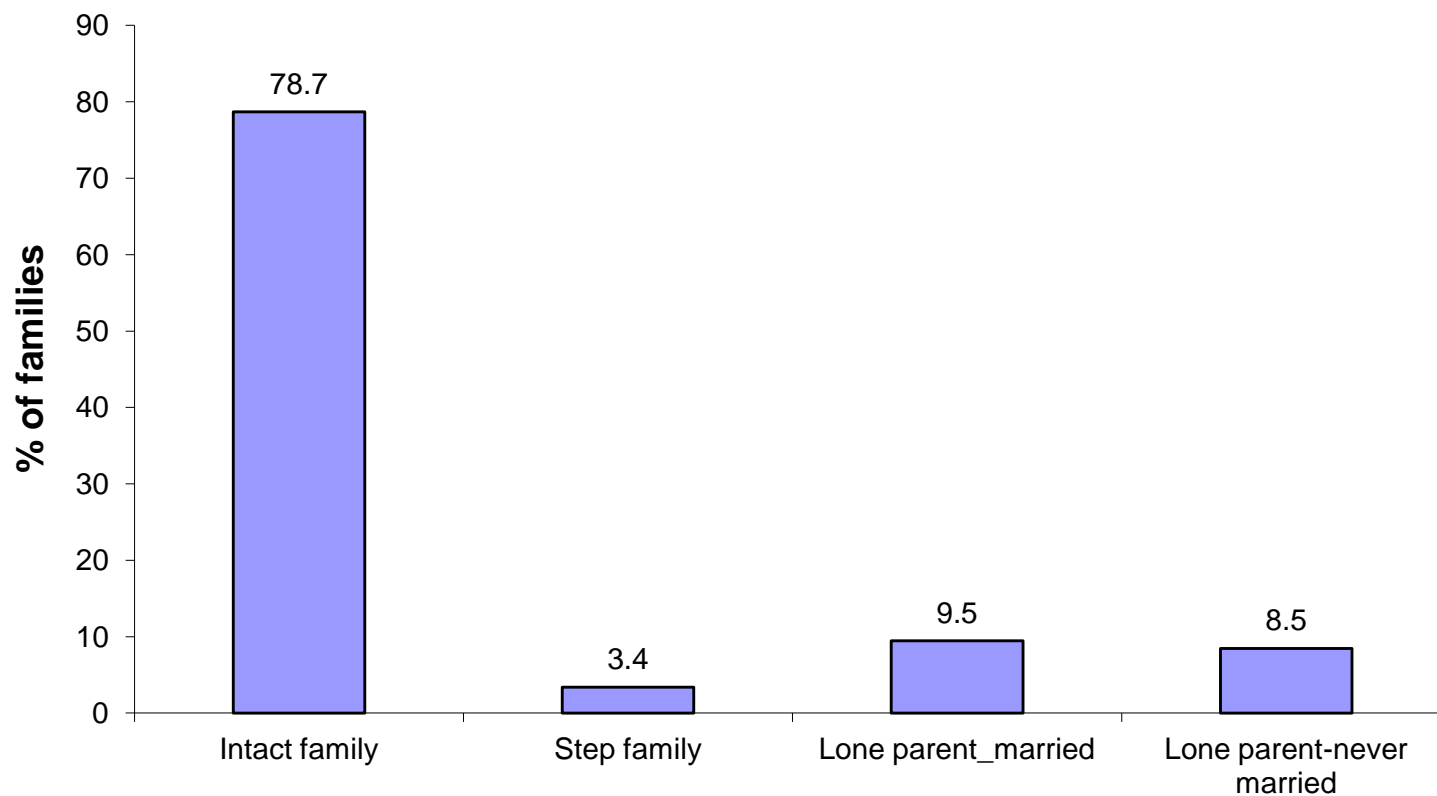


Aim of the Paper

- Association between different types of family and emotional and behavioural outcomes for 9-year-old children. Two models (using logistic regression):
- Model 1: All family types – Two parent families and lone parent families
- Model 2: Two parent families – intact and reconstituted



Family Structure in GUI – at 9-Years



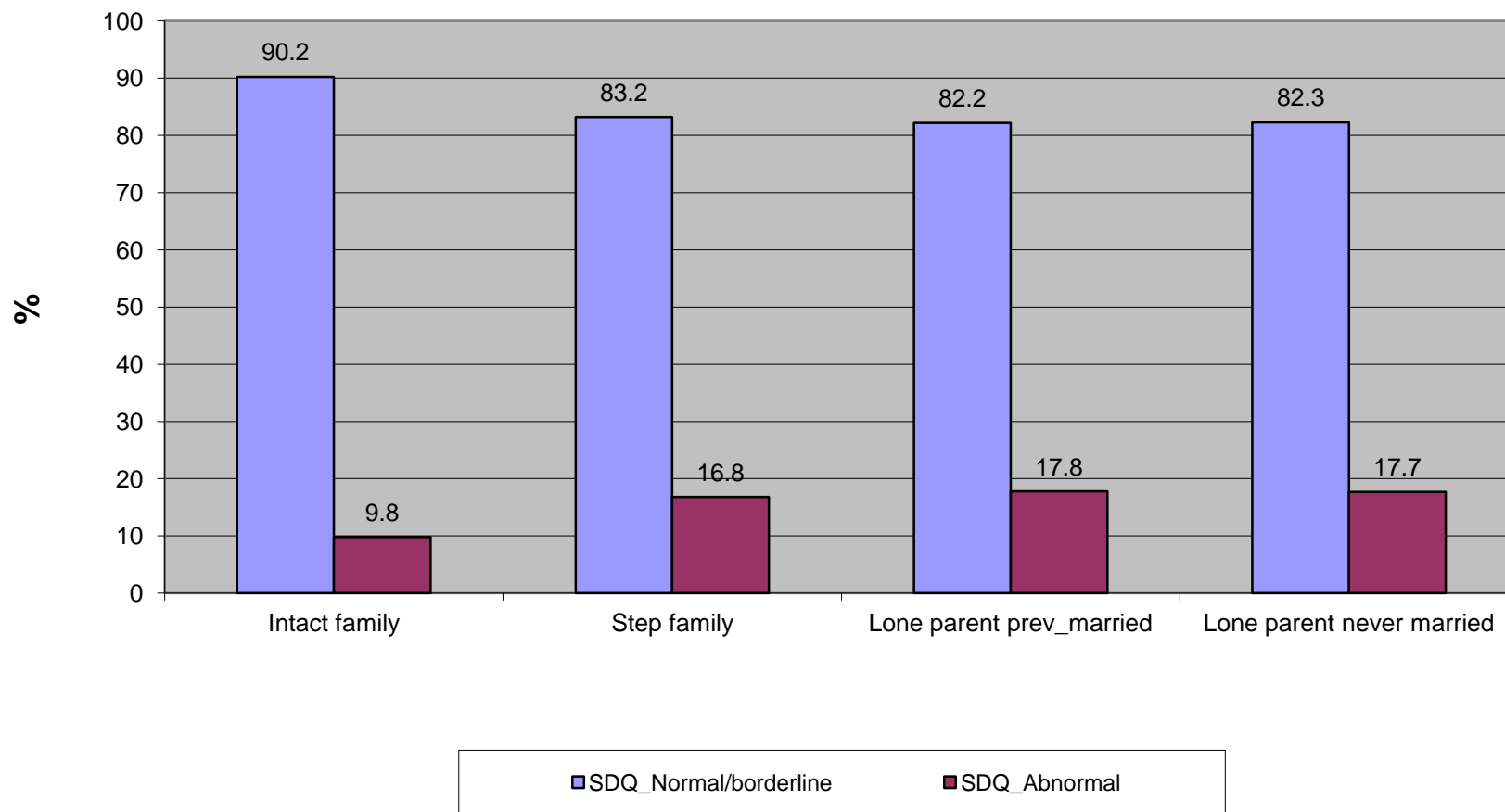


Child Outcome Measure

- **Emotional and behavioural problems - Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) – parent report**
 - Five subscales - emotional symptoms, conduct, hyperactivity, peer problems and prosocial behaviour
 - Total difficulties - scores run from 0-40
 - As per author's recommendation - about 10% will fall into the 'abnormal'/problematic range – current models use this cut-off – 1013 children



Family Type by SDQ Categorisation





Other Measures

- *Equivalised income* makes meaningful comparisons between households on their income, household size and structure possible. In this analysis equivalised income quintiles are used
- *Household Social Class* was derived from occupation. We used the following categories in the current analyses: Professional managers; Non manual/skilled manual; Semi-skilled/unskilled manual; Validly no social class
- *Maternal / Paternal education* – primary education or no education; secondary education; degree or postgraduate degree
- *Depression* was measured using the 8 item version of the CES-D (Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale)
- *Marital Relationship* was assessed using the seven-item version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976)

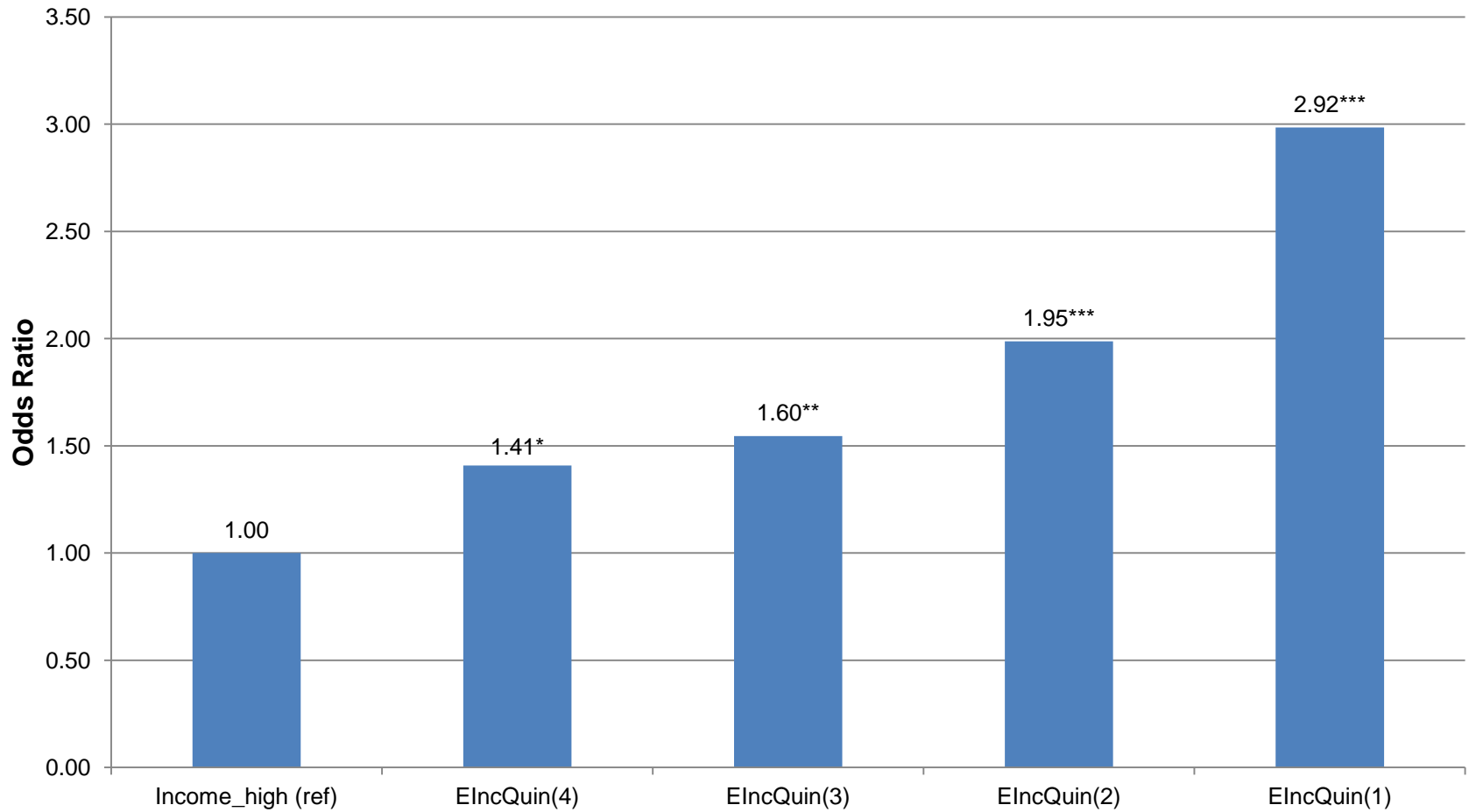


Other Measures

- *Parent-child relationship* - Using the conflict/ closeness subscales from the Pianta child-parent relationship scale (Pianta, 1992), a conflict/ closeness score of more than one standard deviation from the mean was coded as being high
- *Parenting style* – child report based on an adapted form of the Parenting Style Inventory II (Darling & Toyokawa, 1997), producing summary classifications of authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful

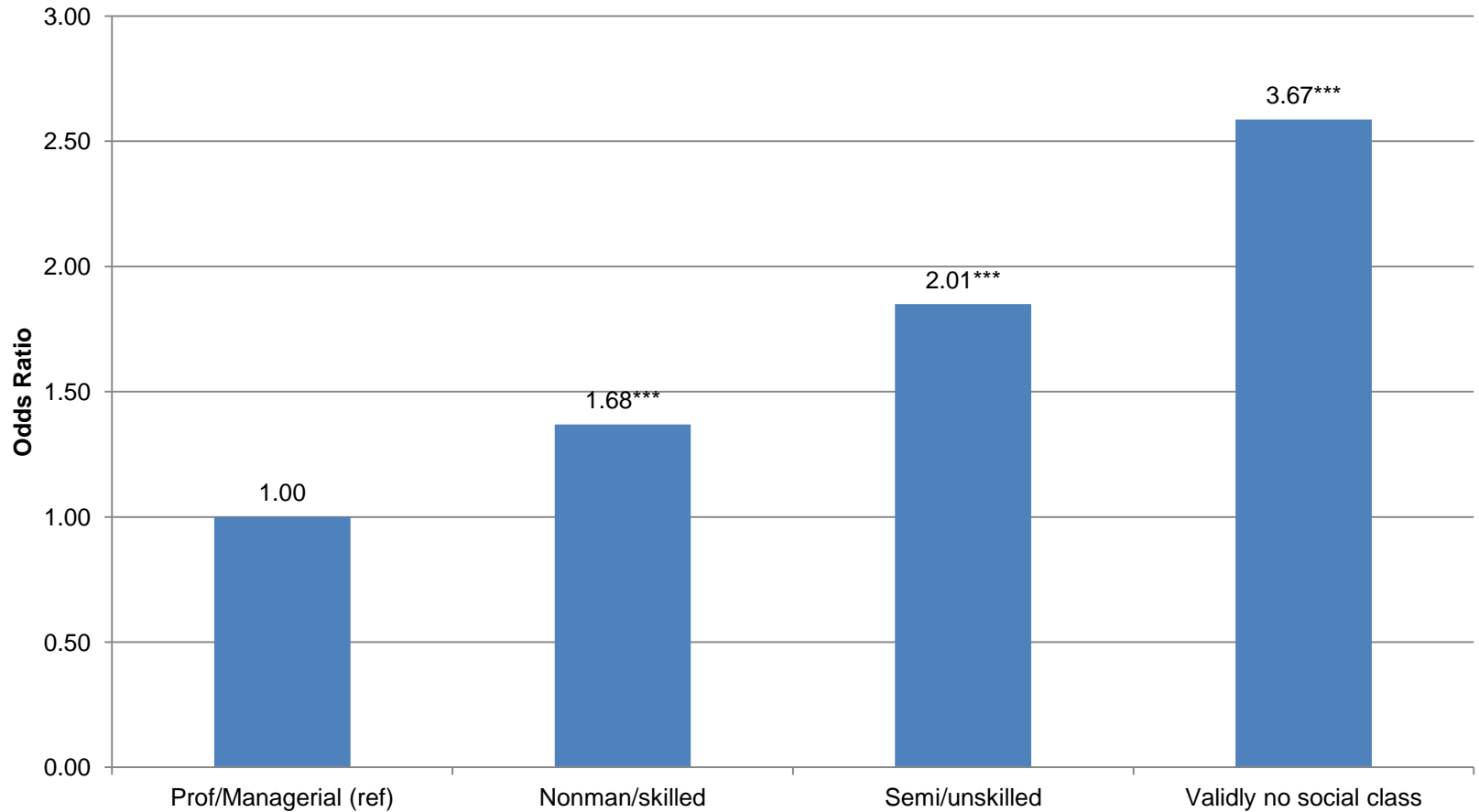


Income



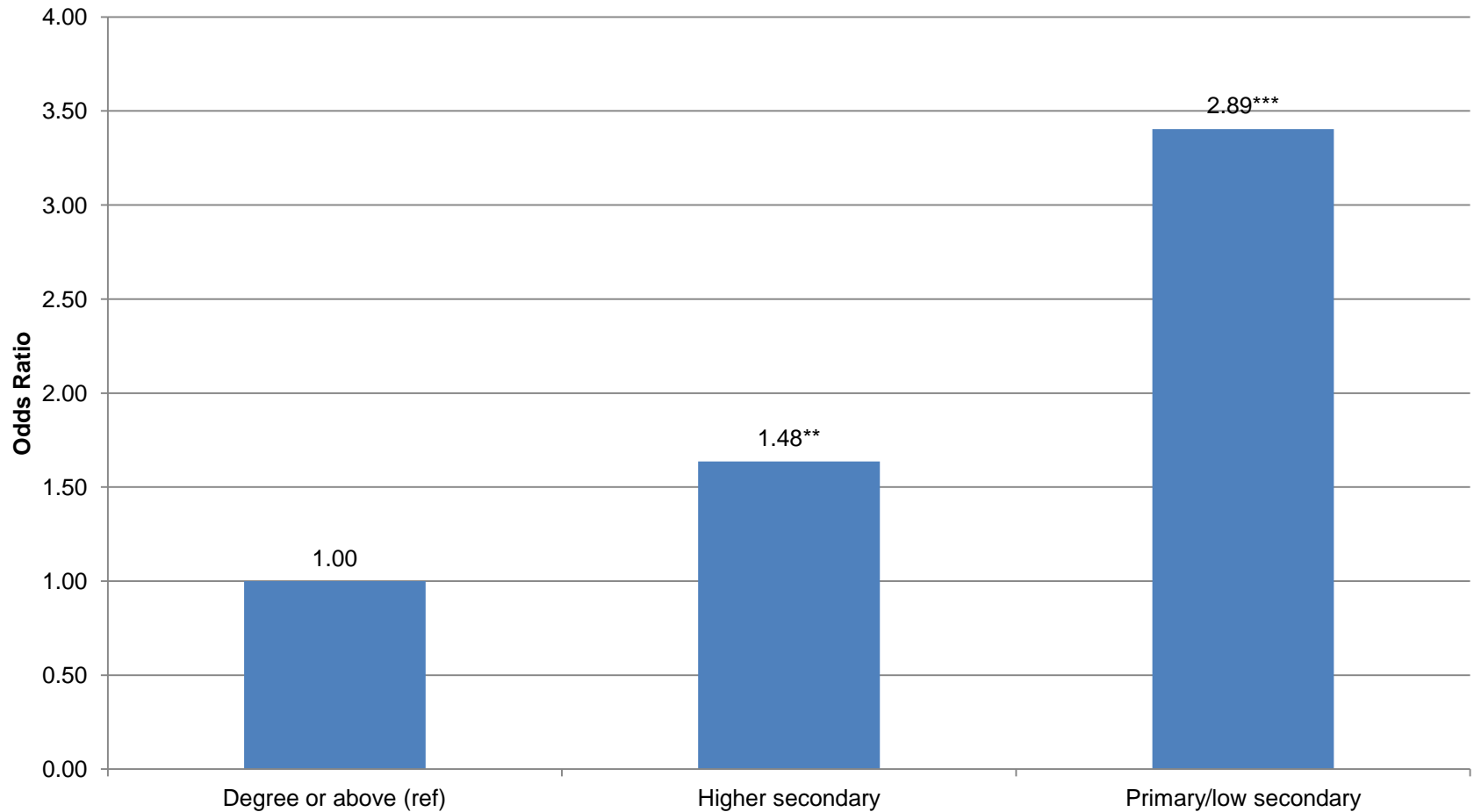


Social Class



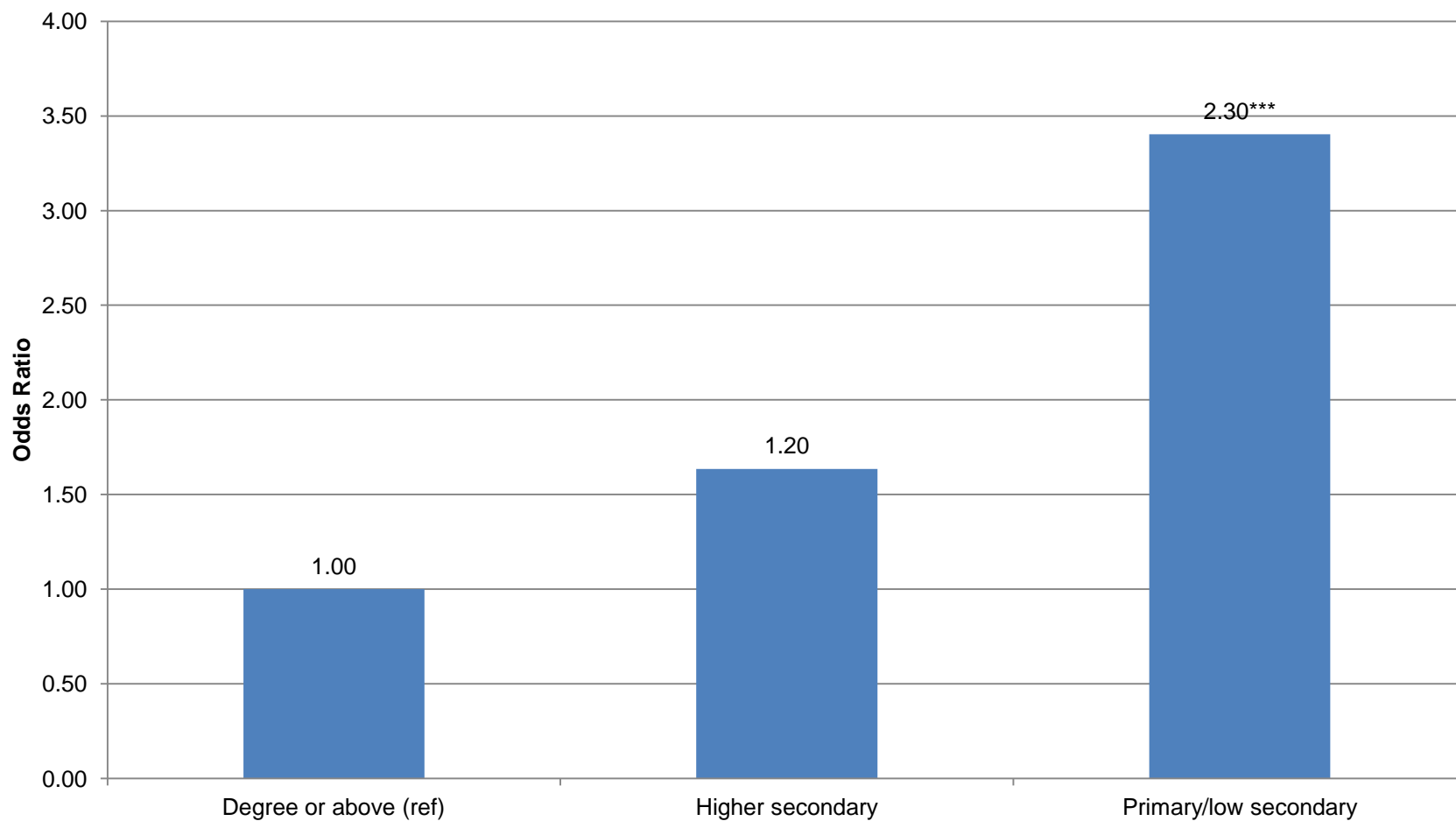


Maternal education



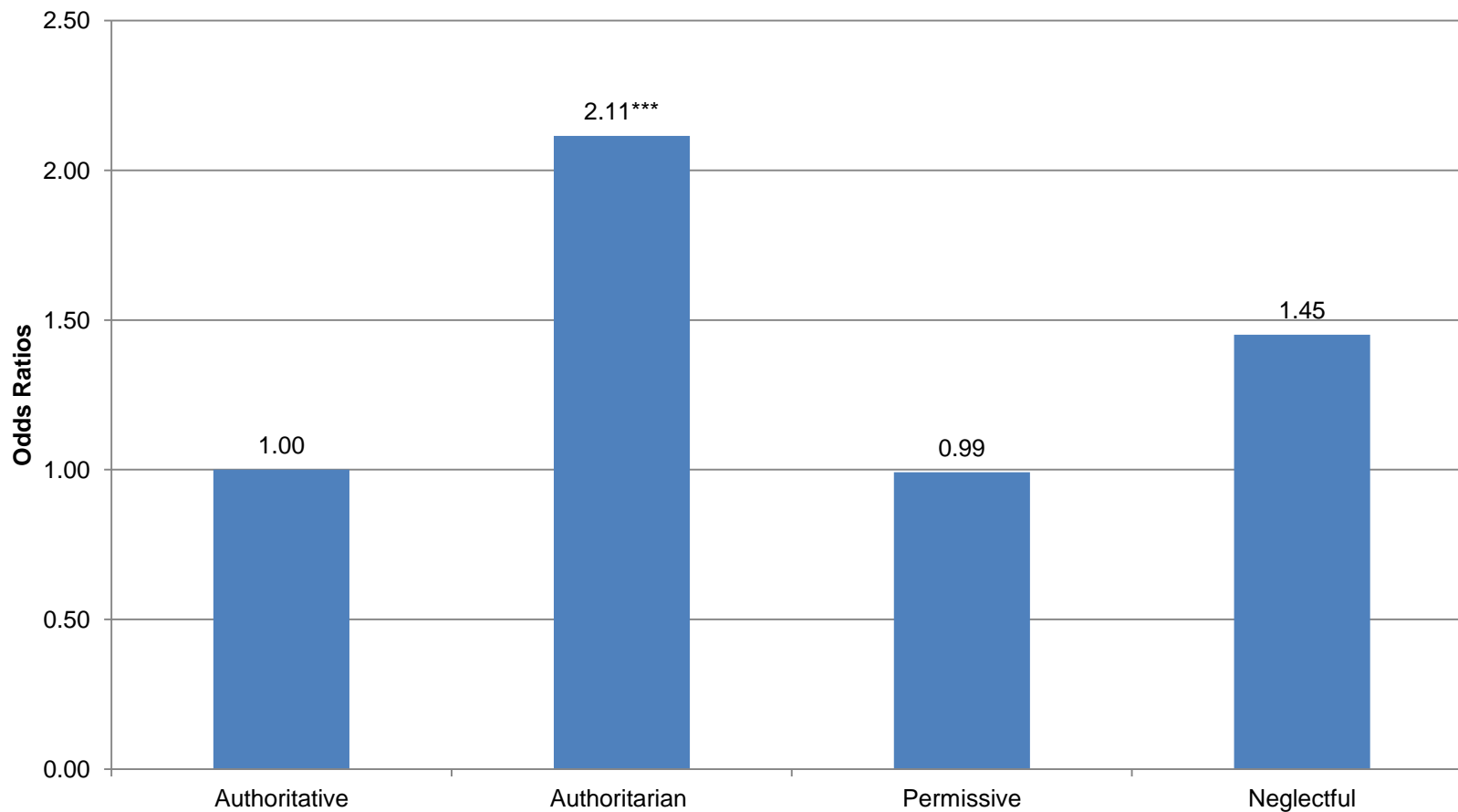


Paternal education





Parenting style





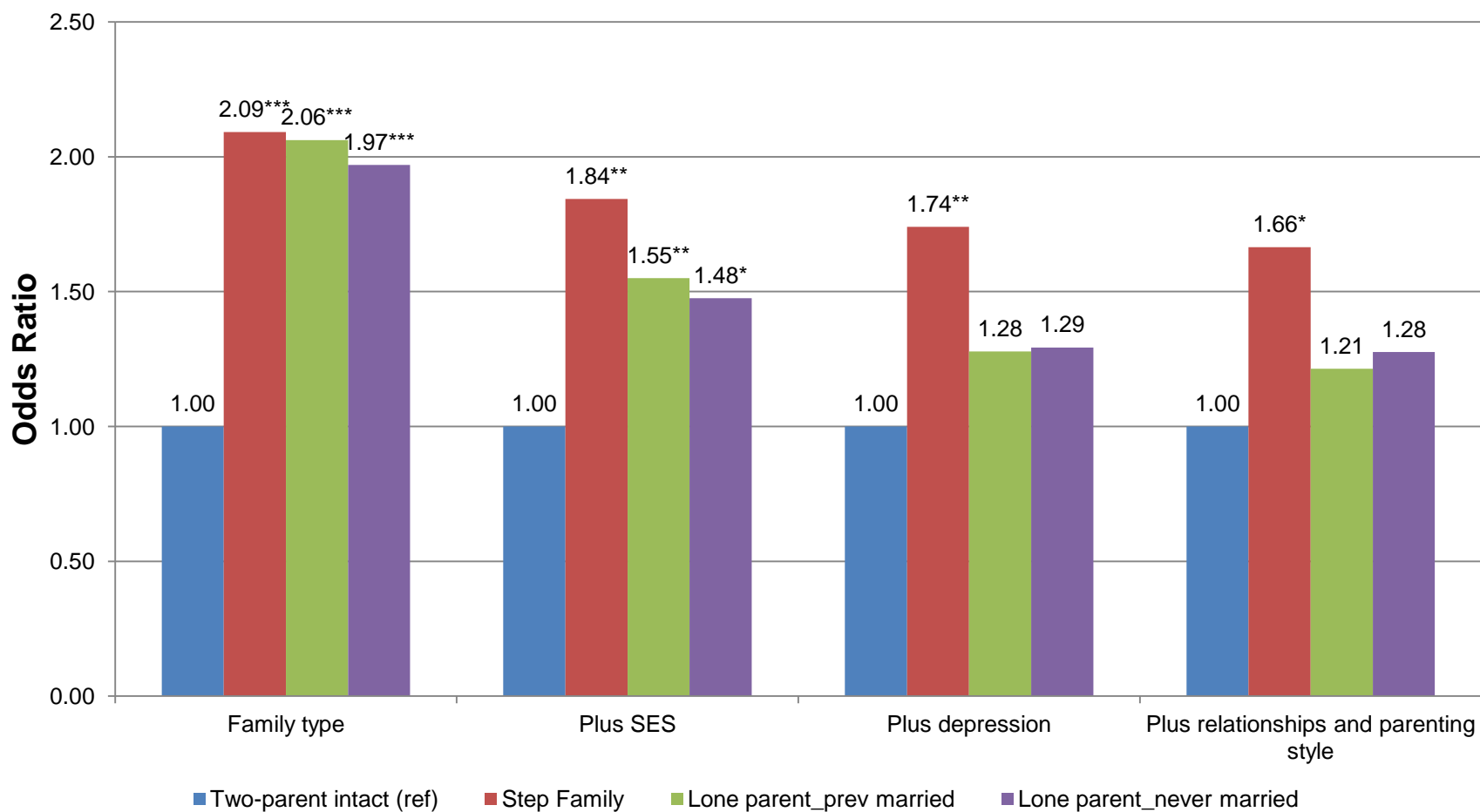
Analytical strategy

Base Model: family structure (+ gender of child)

- Add household income
- Add household social class
- Add education of mother (and partner in 2-parent hholds)
- Add Maternal depression
- Final Model: Add additional family context variables (parental relationship; parent-child relationship; parenting style)



Model 1 – Effect of family structure on child SEBD



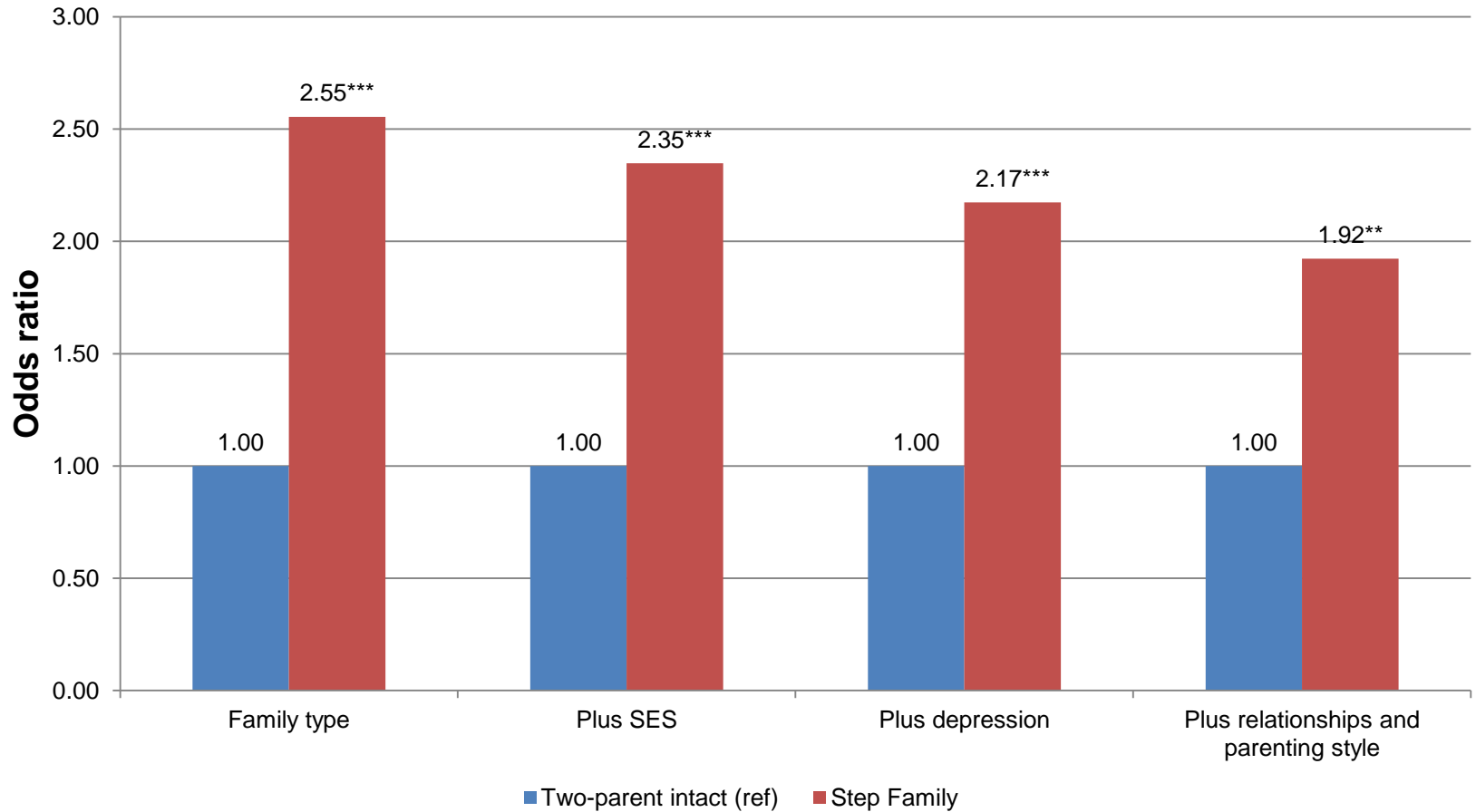


Model 1 – Summary of Findings

- **In the final model only children in reconstituted families had a significantly higher risk of an abnormal SDQ score relative to intact families**
- **Elsewhere in the final model, the following variables were associated with elevated risk of an abnormal SDQ score**
 - Boys relative to girls
 - The 2 lowest income quintiles (relative to the highest)
 - Low/sec maternal education (relative to degree level)
 - Non-manual social class (relative to professional/managerial)
 - Maternal depression
 - Authoritarian parenting style (mother)
 - High conflict between child and mother



Model 2 – Effect of family structure on child SEBD (two parent families only)





Model 2 – Summary of Findings

- **Children in reconstituted families retained a significantly higher risk of an abnormal SDQ score relative to intact families even after the inclusion of a wide range of family and parent variables**
- **Elsewhere in the final model, the following variables were associated with increased risk of an abnormal SDQ score**
 - Boys relative to girls
 - The lowest 2 income quintiles (relative to the highest)
 - Maternal (both) and paternal education (lowest)
 - Maternal depression
 - Authoritarian parenting style (mother)
 - High conflict between child and mother
 - High conflict between child and father



Conclusions and limitations

- Social, emotional and behavioural problems are only some of the possible outcomes in any interaction between individual characteristics and the environment in which they develop
- Findings arising from model 1 highlight parental psychological characteristics and family processes as key mechanisms underpinning risk of SEBD of children in lone-parent families
 - once these variables were accounted for, no difference in risk for SEBD in lone-parent versus two-parent (intact) families
- But risk of SEBD remained elevated for children in reconstituted families, after taking account of income and family processes
- **Why is this?**
 - **Findings suggest different mechanisms may be operating in reconstituted families**



Conclusions and limitations

- Findings highlight the need for longitudinal work in this area
 - only current family structure is explored and no account is taken of **how many transitions children** have experienced or **how long they have been living within their current situation**
 - adjusting to parents' divorce – 2-3 years at best (Hetherington, 1999) [but much diversity in how children adjust]
 - adjusting to living in a step-family may take much longer, due to the cumulative disadvantage associated with possibly greater number of transitions (Dush, 2009; Raley & Wildsmith, 2004)
 - Role of non-resident parent remains relatively unexplored
 - Genetic factors may explain a sizeable proportion of individual differences in emotional and behaviour difficulties



Future directions

- Use of longitudinal data to explore reciprocity – for example the reciprocal nature of the relationship between SEB outcomes and parent-child relationship
- More sophisticated modelling to try and untangle some of the processes – and explore interactions
- Look at children experiencing co-occurring emotional and behavioural difficulties



Policy implications

- Family is clearly an important focus for prevention and treatment of emotional and behavioural problems among children
- Interventions that target parenting have had the most consistent success in addressing these issues - studies suggest that parents of children with co-occurring emotional and behavioural disorders are very responsive to family focused interventions (Beauchaine, Webster-Stratton, & Reid, 2005)
- Policies that increase access to support for parents to strengthen relationships, either with their partners or with their children, and to cope with their own psychological difficulties are likely to be beneficial for children's well-being
- Children in step-families are often required to adjust to multiple transitions and these families may benefit from specifically targeted support to help them manage those transitions



THANK YOU