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# Children's Well-Being in Vulnerable Families

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# Introduction

*‘The true measure of a nation’s standing is how well it attends to its children: their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued and included in the families and societies into which they are born.’*

UNICEF Report Card 7( 2007)

This important report placed the issue of child well-being firmly on the political agenda of most developed countries. The fact that the UK and the US were ranked lower than many poorer countries raised important questions about what factors do influence children’s well-being.

[Ireland ranked in the middle third. State of the Nation Reports have been produced in Ireland for some time (Brooks, Hanafin and Langford, 2010).]



# Family Stress, Child Vulnerability

- the ‘Integrated Children’s System’ (2000) and the ‘Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families’ (2001) facilitate professionals in assessing child need and matching services
- “...what will happen to the child’s health and development ***without services***”
- A tiered set of possible interventions
- No nationally agreed framework in Ireland yet or legislative basis but priority of DCYA

# Framework for the Assessment of Children

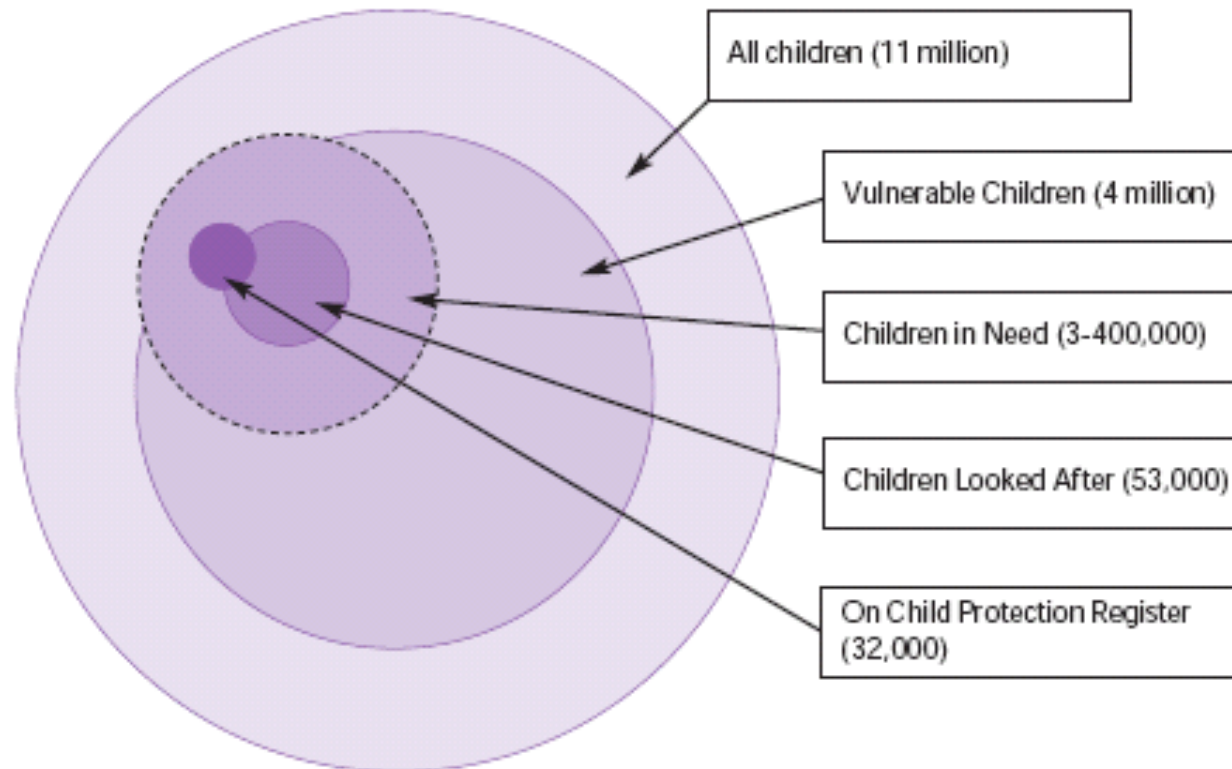


Figure 1 Representation of Extent of Children in Need in England at any one time



# Defining Vulnerability

- Around a 17% of children live in poor households in Ireland
- Vulnerability is about more than money and resources
- Families experience stress for a multitude of reasons: physical and mental health, family traumas, addiction or problematic relationships
- Family stress often defined in terms of relationships, maternal coping and child behavioural problems
- Important to consider not only how families function but how it impacts upon the well-being of children



# Children's Views of their Well-Being

- Objective indicators of child well-being have historically been used (deprivation, health etc)
- BUT, we also need to consult children directly as to how they feel about their lives i.e. subjective well-being (Ben-Arieh, 2010; McAuley, Morgan and Rose, 2010)
- In this paper we look at the functioning of the families and how this relates to the children's views of themselves and their sense of happiness



# The GUI Study-Sample Design

- 8,568 nine-year old children participating in the Growing Up in Ireland Project.
- Selected through the school system using a Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) sampling method with schools serving as the primary sampling units (PSU's).
- 910 schools from the national total of 3,200 primary schools were selected for inclusion.
- 82% response rate at the school level and 57% at the household level (i.e. eligible child selected within the school)
- The data was weighted to be nationally representative.



# Parenting Stress and Family Vulnerability- Latent Class Components

- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) – Total Score
- Pianta Scale of Parent-Child Relationship Quality – Conflict Subscale (12 Items)
- Social Isolation Scale (3 Items)
- Parental Self-Efficacy (1 Item)
- Economic Strain (1 Item)
- Maternal Depression (CES-D) (8 Items)





# Children's Self-Concept and Sense of Happiness

- Piers Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale
- 60 Item, child self-report questionnaire
- Attitudes and beliefs that the child holds about themselves
- 6 sub-scales and a summary, total scale
- Total scale and happiness subscale used here
- "I am a happy person"; "I like being the way I am"



# Latent Class Analysis

- Probability obtaining response pattern  $\mathbf{y}$  is weighted average  $C$  class specific probabilities

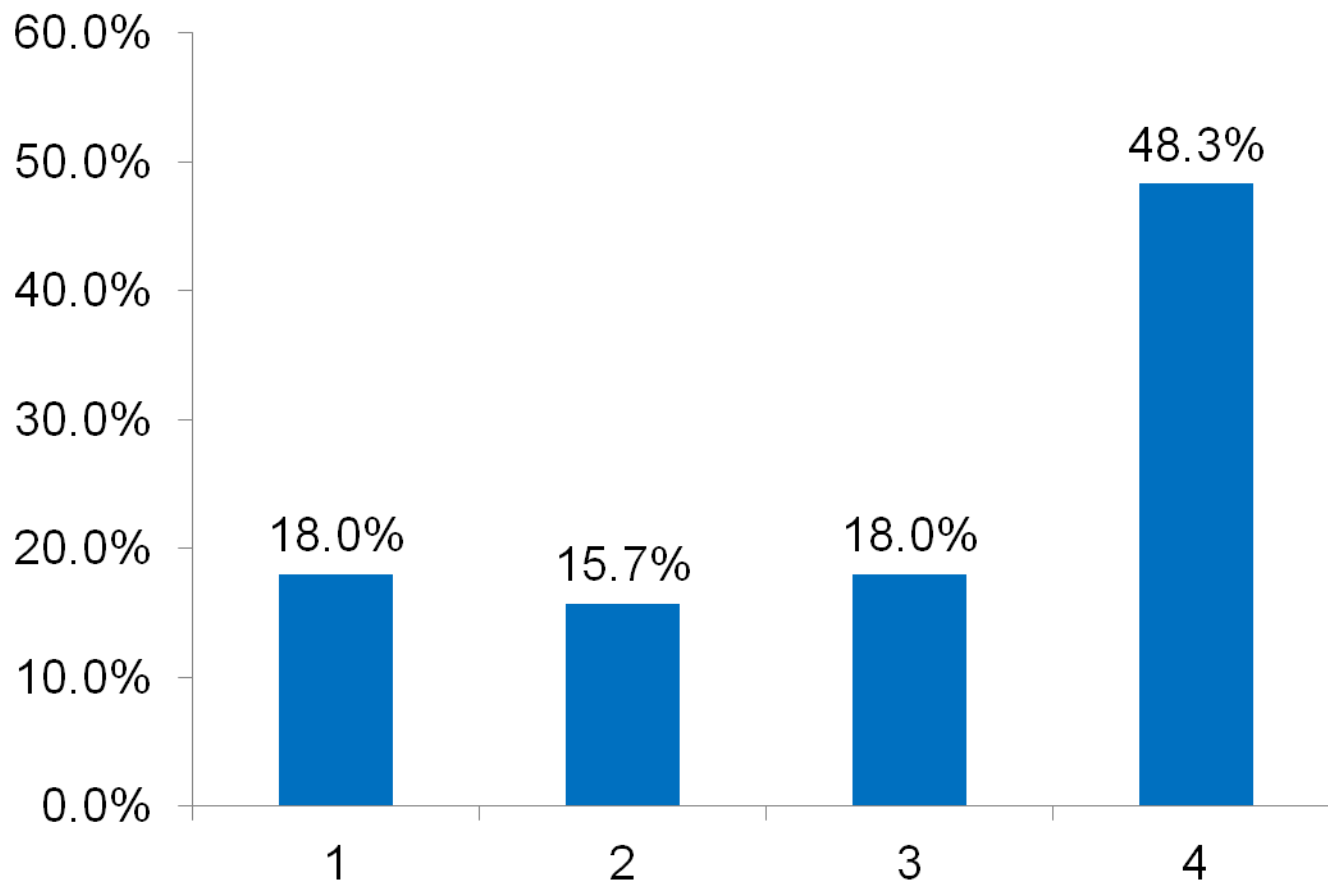
$$P(\mathbf{Y} = \mathbf{y}) = \sum_{x=1}^C P(X = x)P(\mathbf{Y} = \mathbf{y}|X = x)$$

- Solution produces 'local independence'

$$P(\mathbf{Y} = \mathbf{y}|X = x) = \prod_{\ell=1}^L P(Y_{\ell} = y_{\ell}|X = x)$$

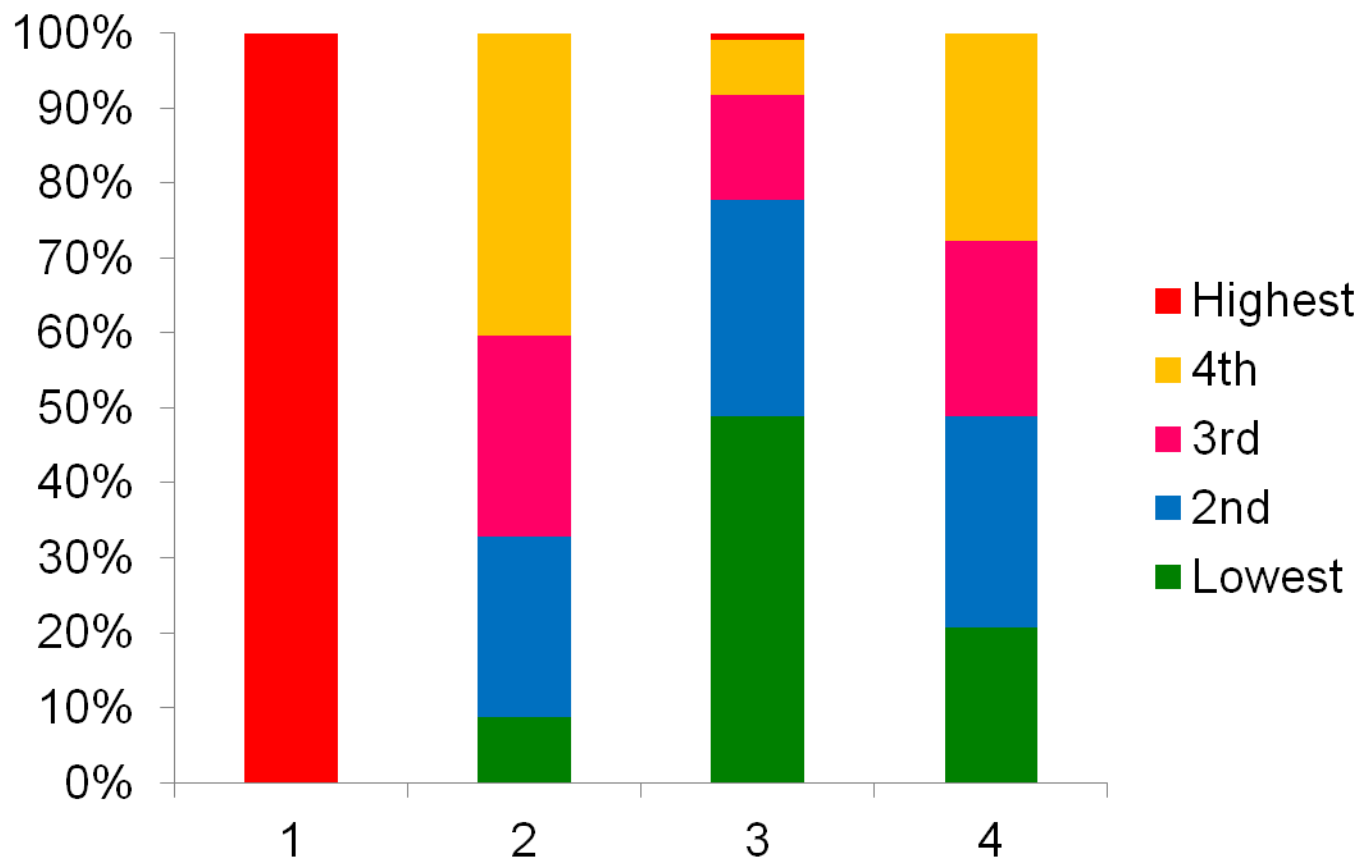


# Distribution Latent Classes



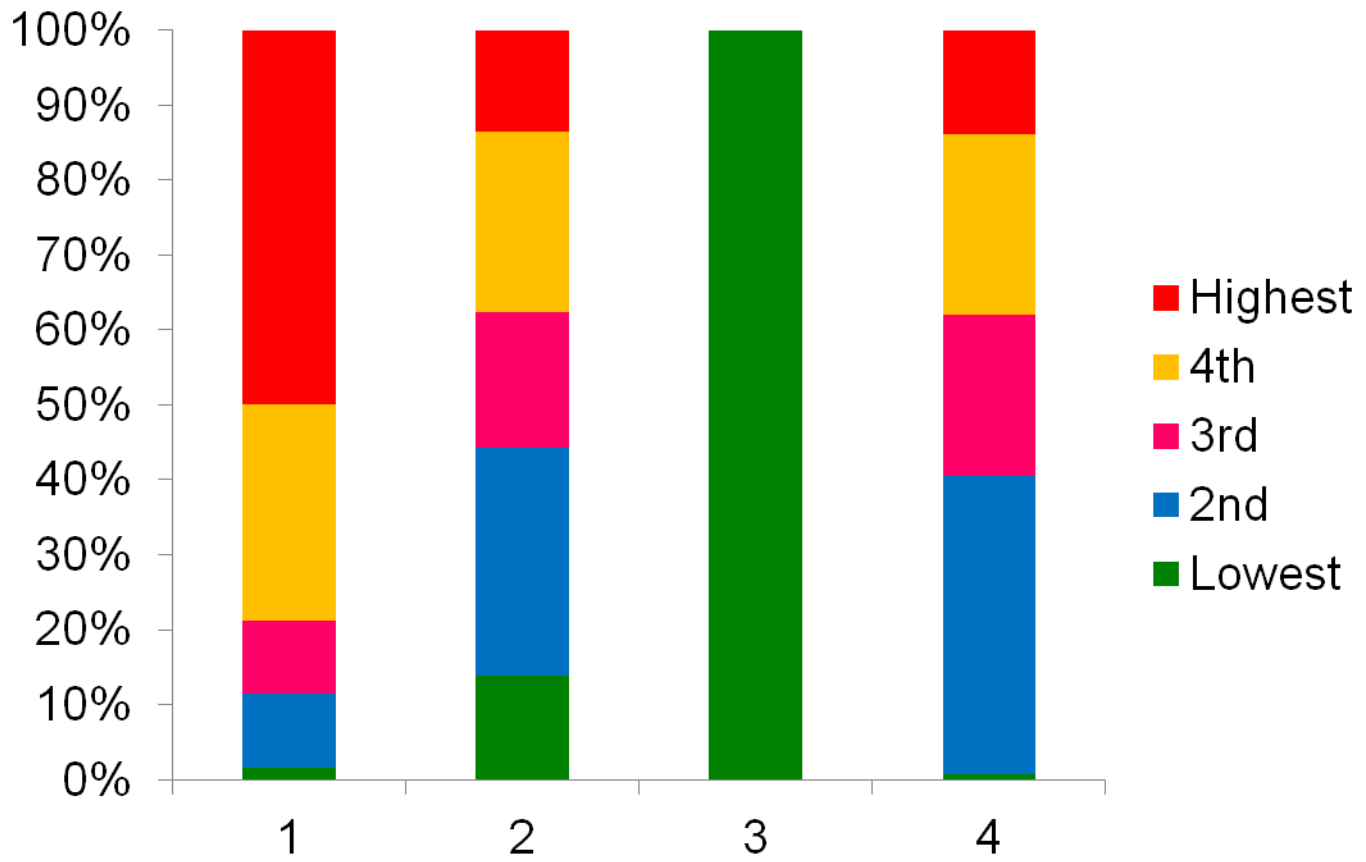


# Parent-Child Conflict



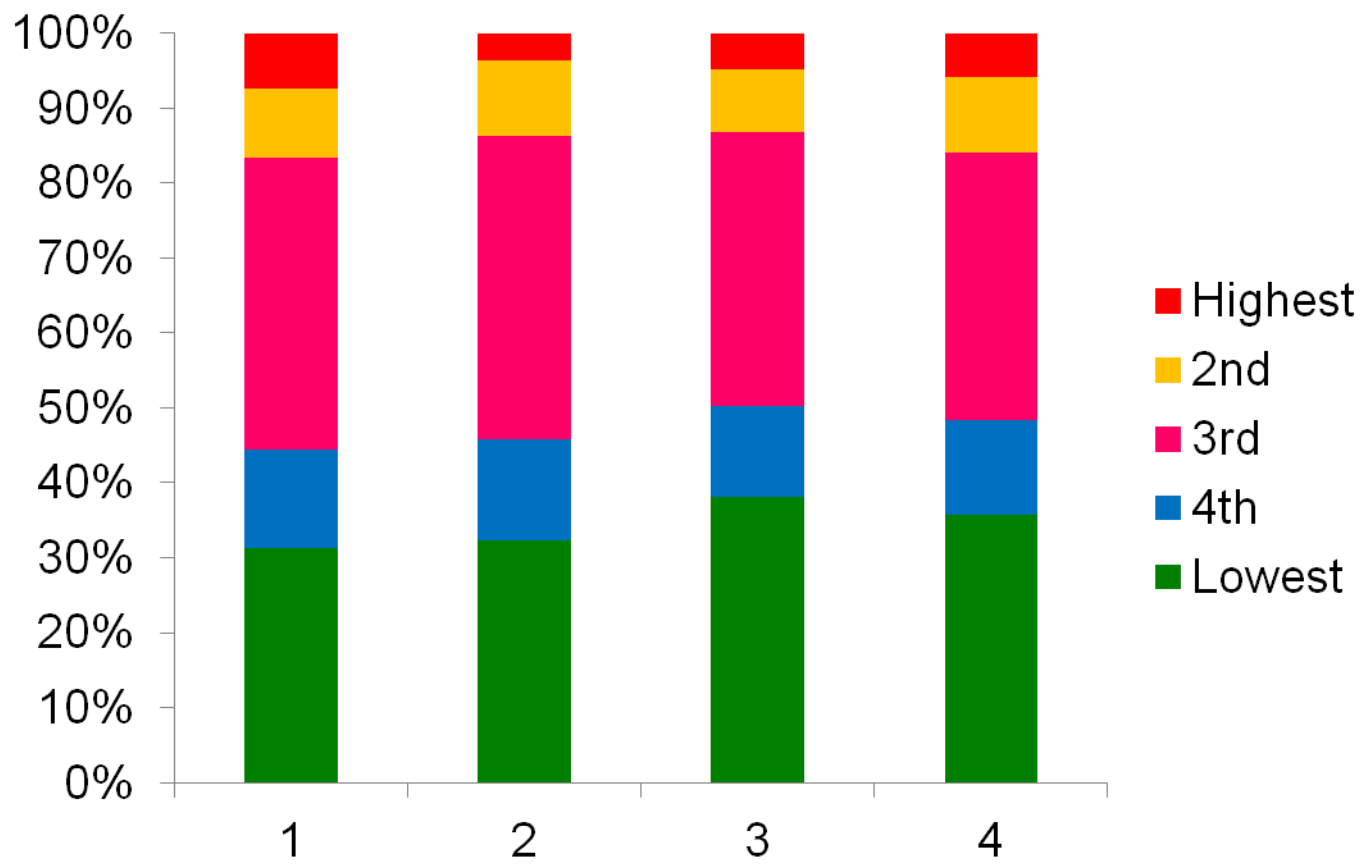


# Child Difficulties (SDQ)



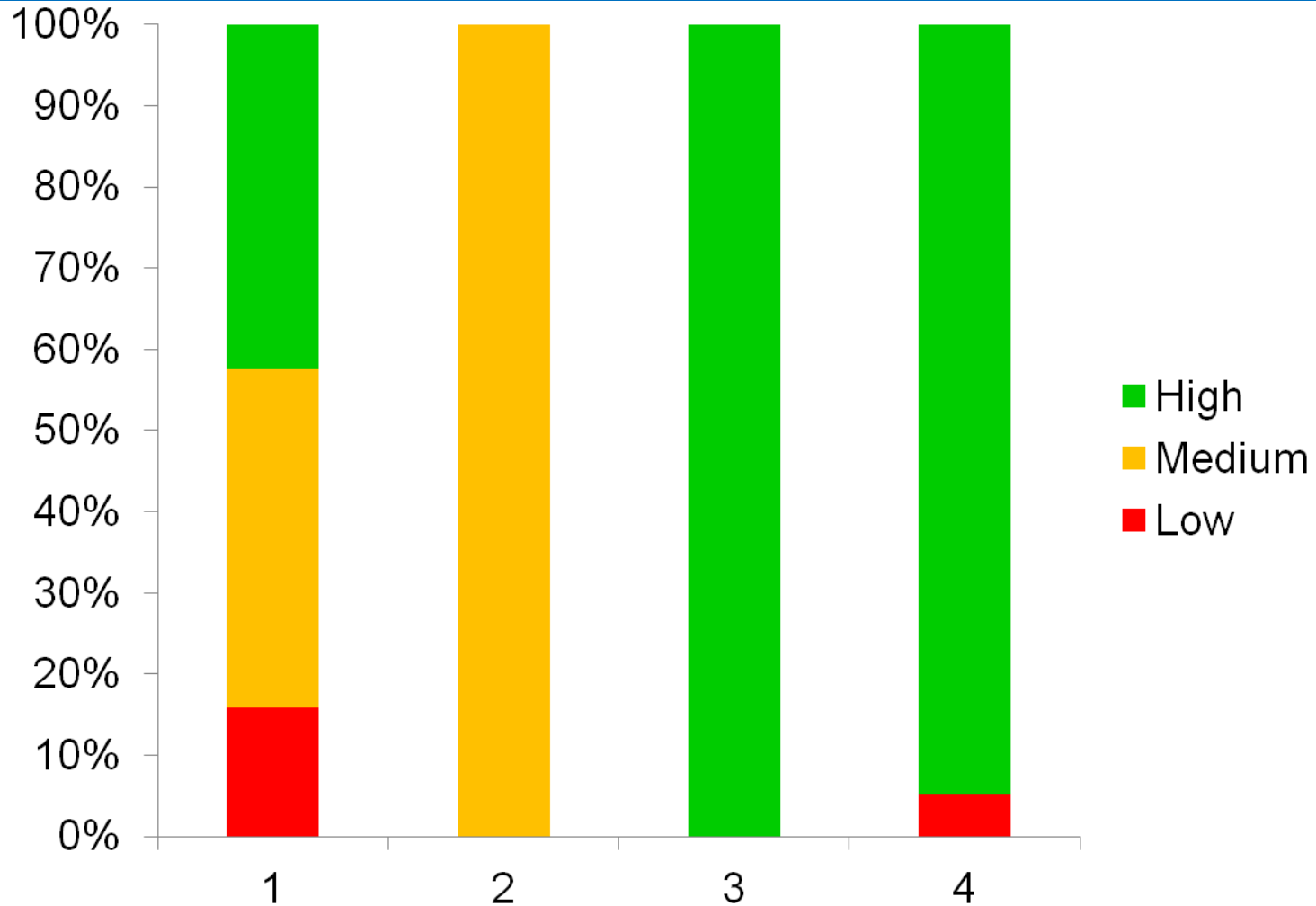


# Family Social Isolation

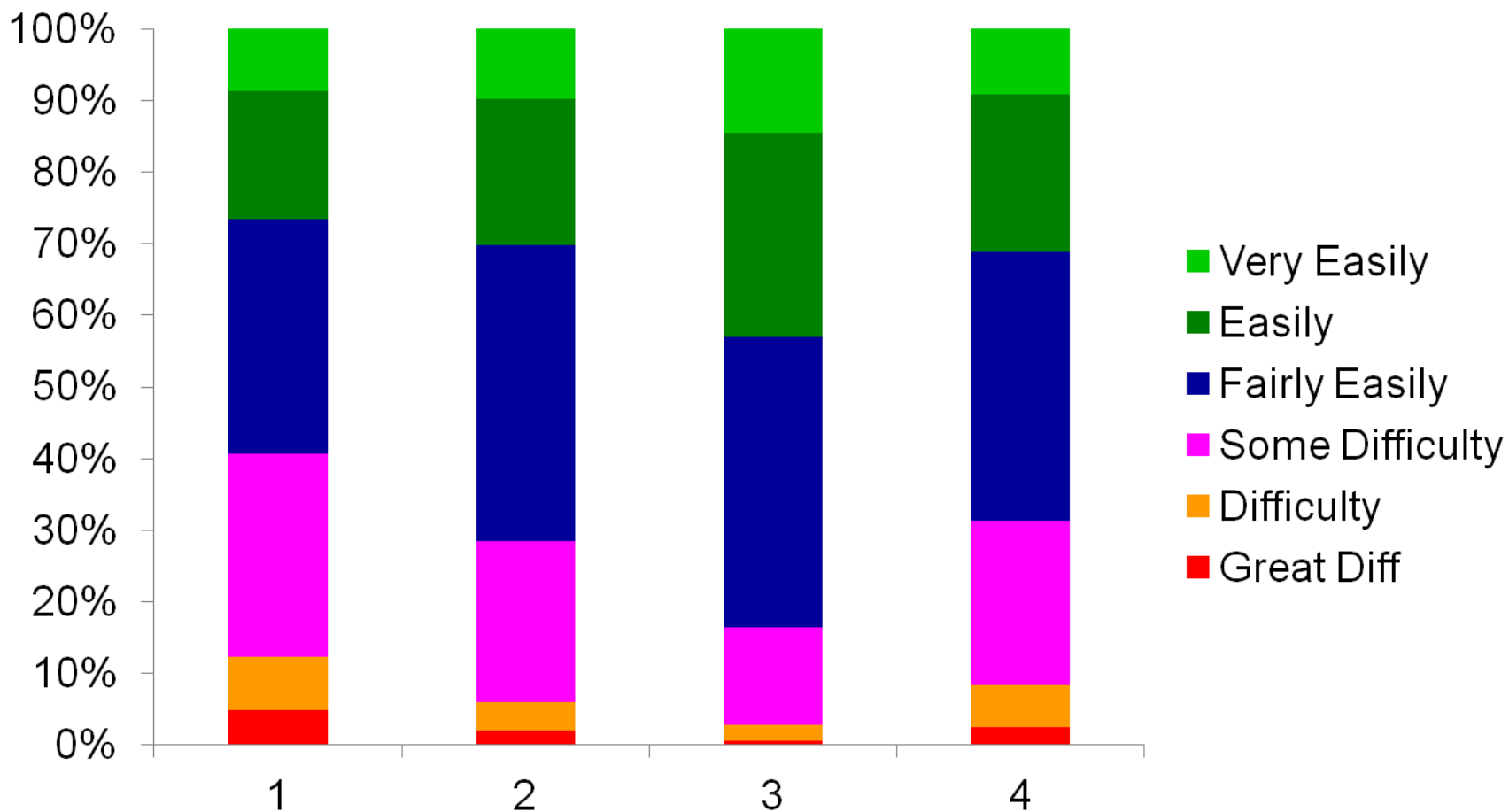




# Parental Self-Efficacy



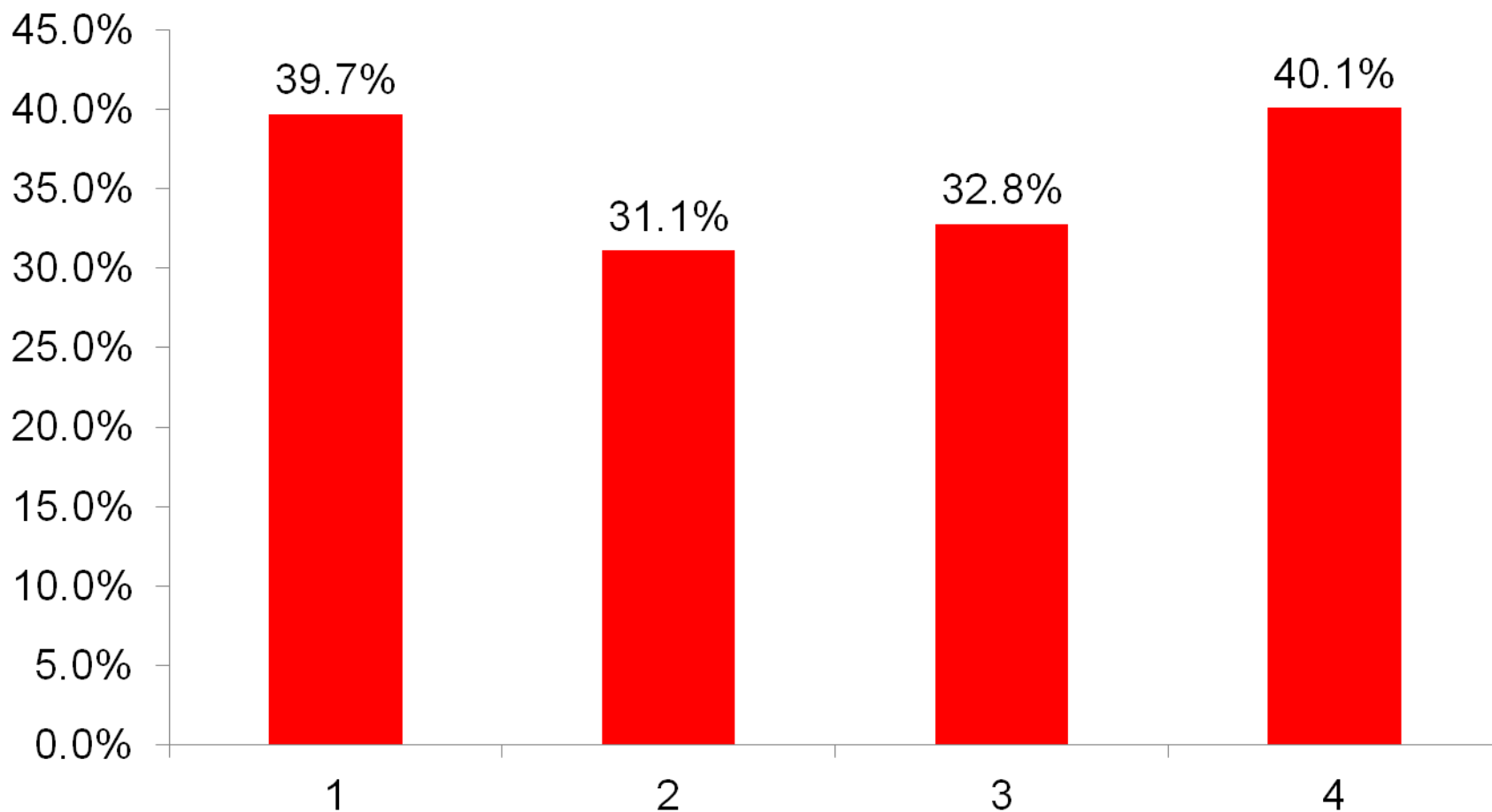
# Economic Strain





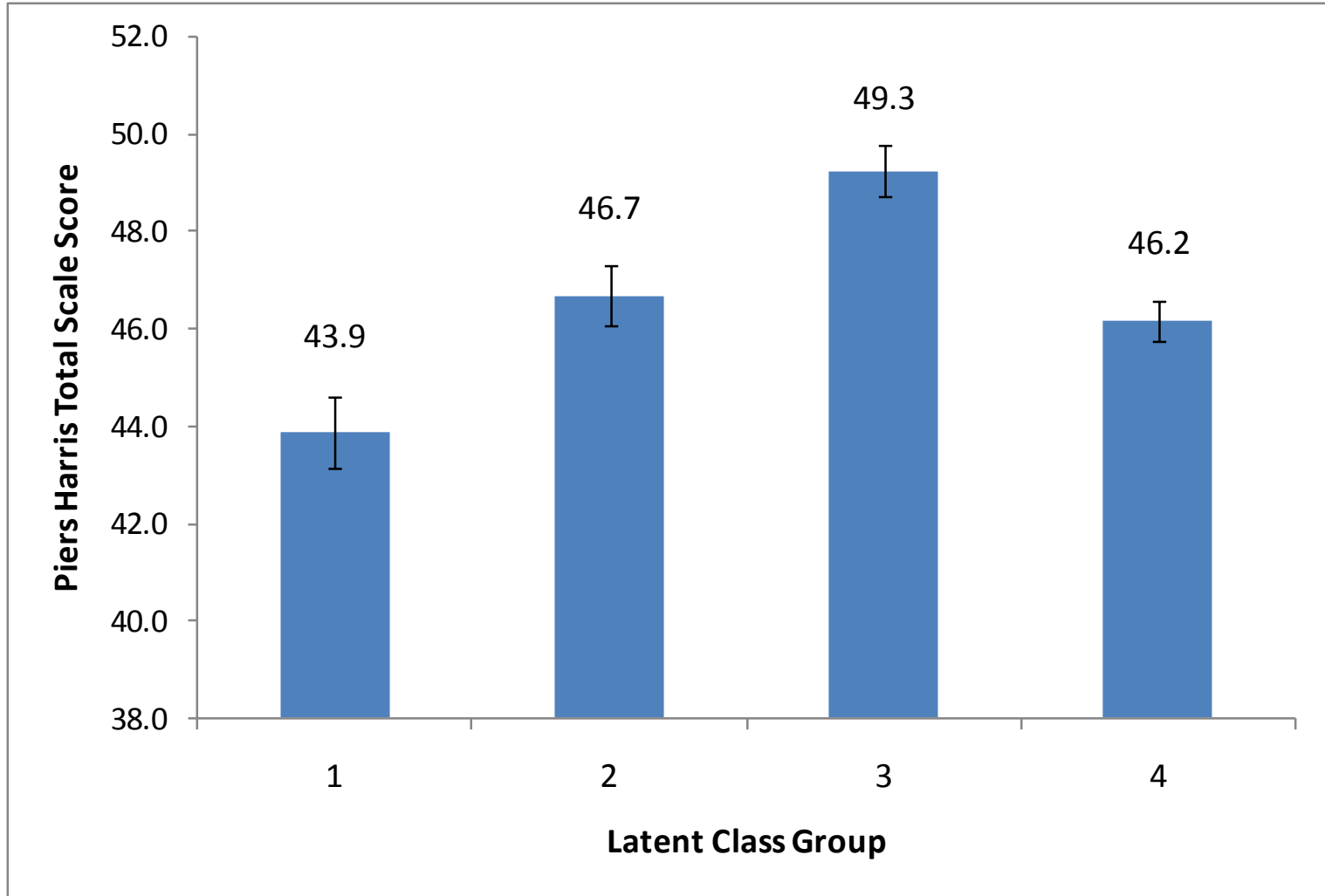


# Maternal Depression



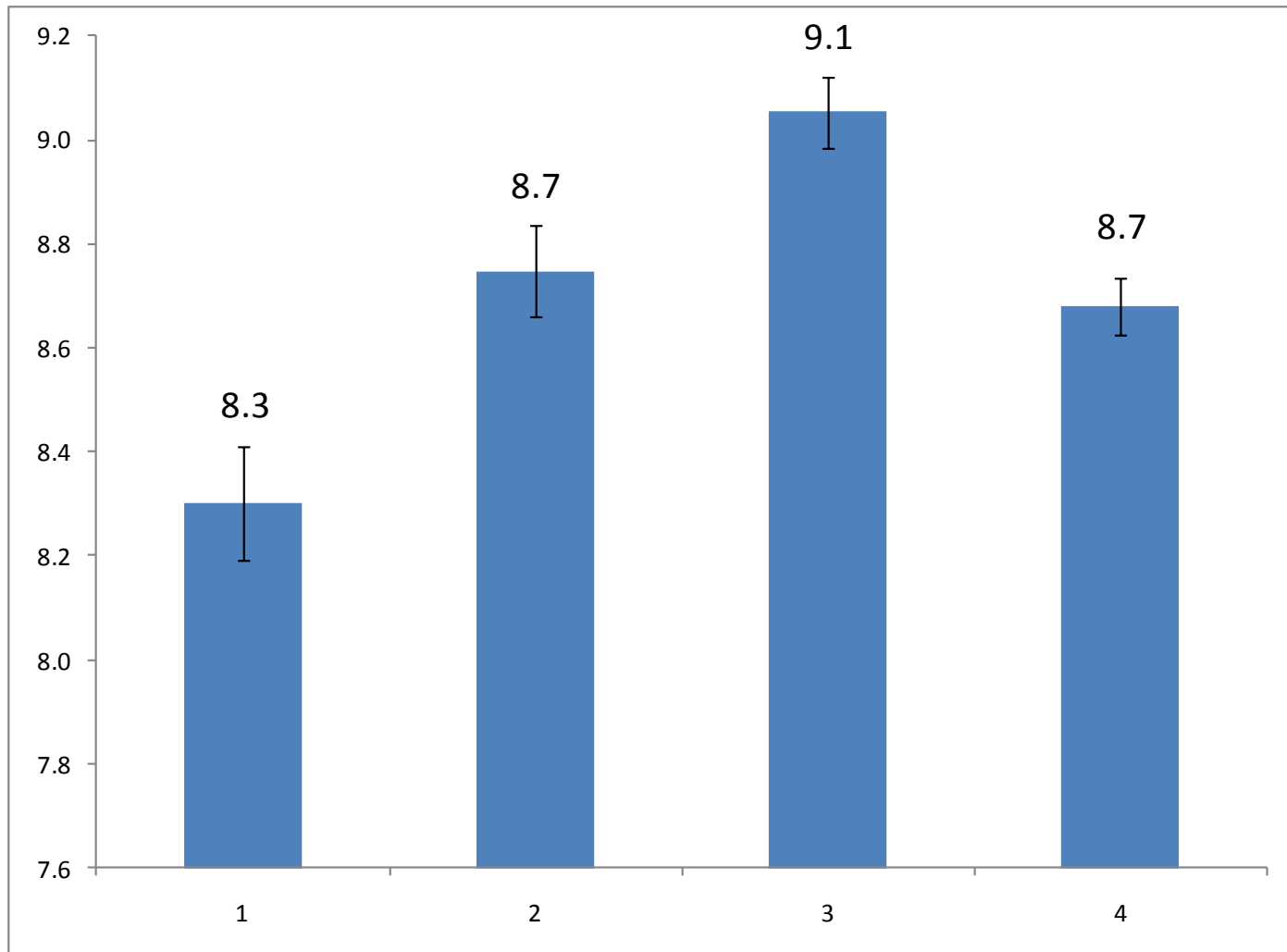


# Mean Piers Harris Total Score by Latent Class Group



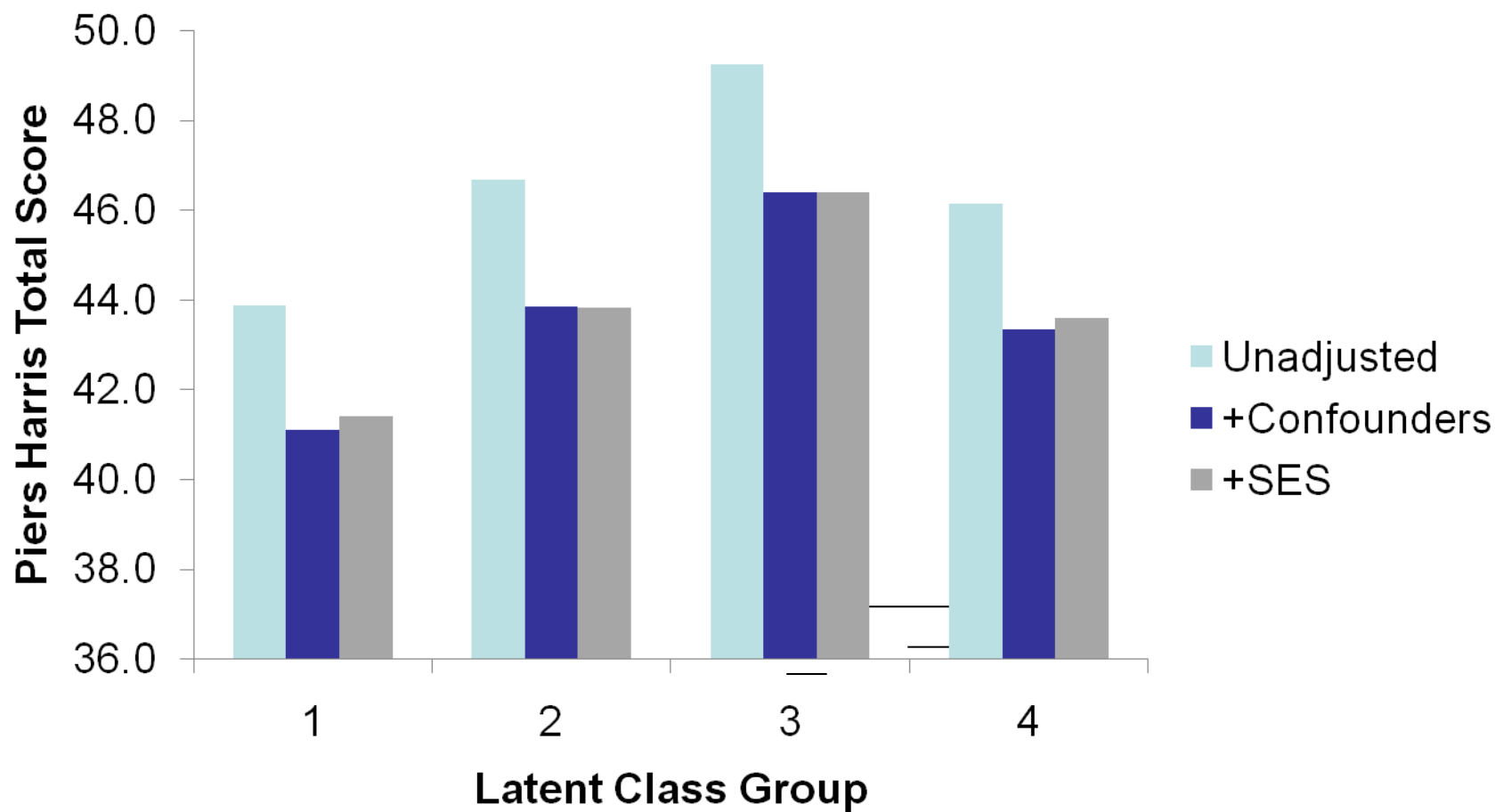


# Mean Piers Harris Happiness Score by Latent Class Group



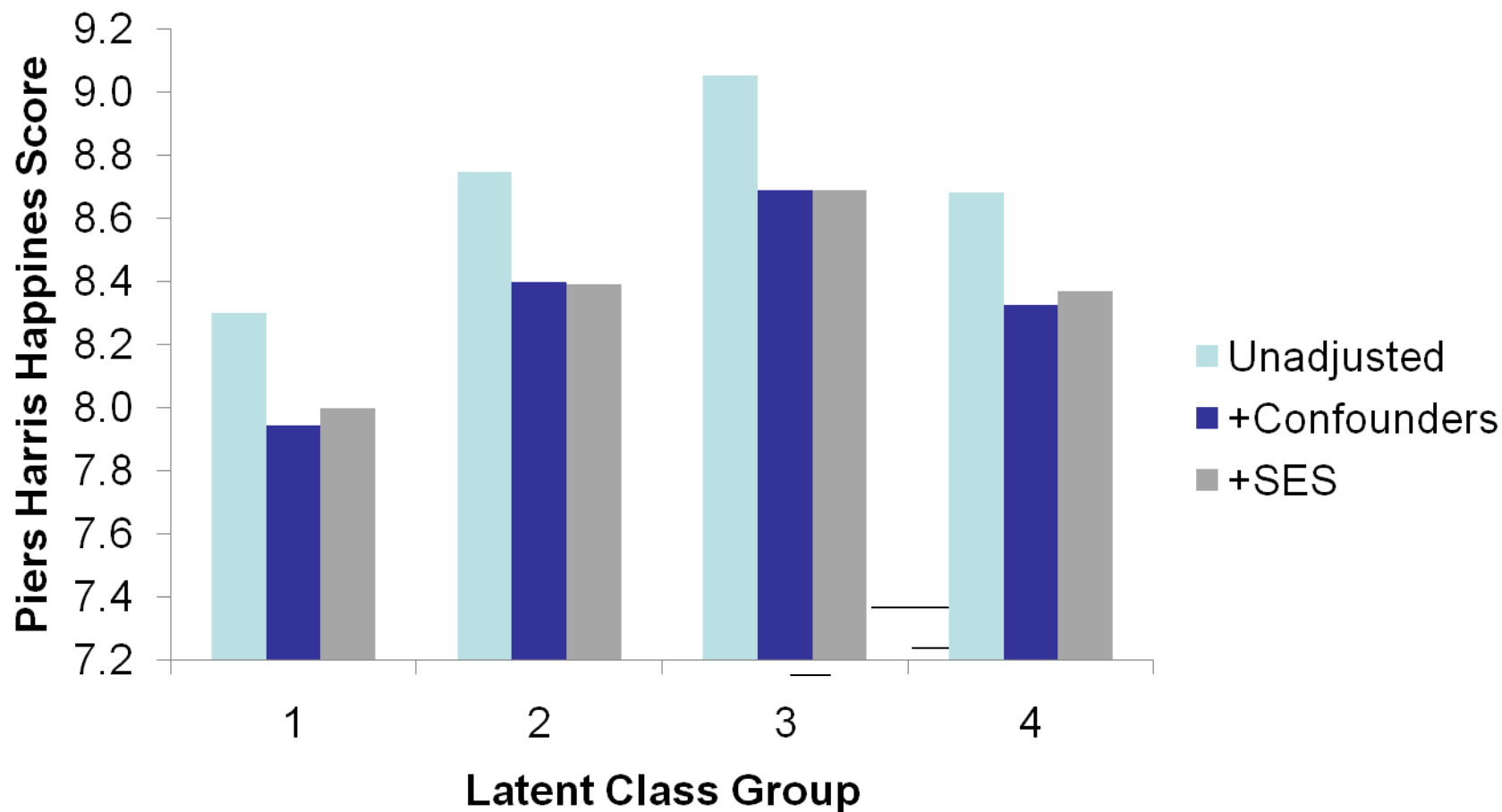


# OLS Models Piers Harris Total Score





# OLS Models Piers Harris Happiness Score





# Summary of Findings

- LCA identifies 18% families faring worst on five of the six domains
- This vulnerable group were socio-economically disadvantaged but not the most disadvantaged of the groups in terms of income, maternal education and social class position
- But, they did have a higher proportion of single parents and the highest levels of lifestyle deprivation



# Summary of Findings

- ‘Vulnerable’ children score significantly lower on Piers Harris ‘happiness’ and total scores
- This raises questions about what precisely was it about these families and their lifestyles which made the difference to their children’s sense of self and happiness.
- Our next exploration of the qualitative data may hopefully throw further light on these questions
- UNICEF qualitative study (2011) shows child well-being centred on time in a happy family whose interactions are consistent and secure; having good friends; and having plenty of things to do, especially outdoors.



# References

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- Brooks, A., Hanafin, S. and Langford, S. (2010) 'National Reporting on Child Well-Being-The State of the Nation's Children'. *In* C. McAuley and W. Rose (2010) *Child Well-Being: Understanding Children's Lives*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
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- UNICEF (2007) *Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-Being in Rich Countries*. Innocenti Report Card 7. Florence: Innocenti Research Centre.
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