



13<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Research  
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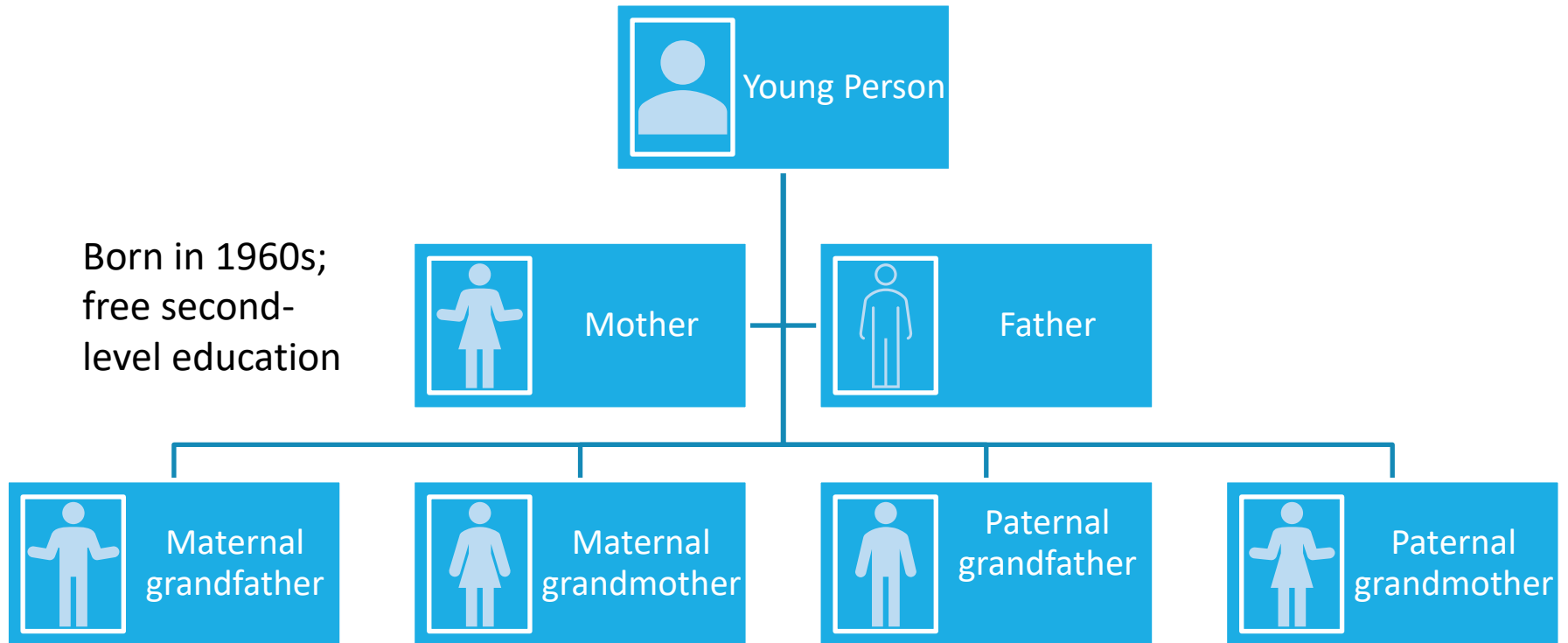
# Educational inequality: does it span three generations?

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# Introduction

- Large body of research on the effects of parental education on educational outcomes among children and young people
- Growing attention to the issue of intergenerational inequality, looking at the relationship between grandparental resources and child educational outcomes
- GUI Cohort '98 at 17 years collected information from parents on the educational level of their parents and their family circumstances when growing up
- Ireland is an interesting case-study because of very marked educational expansion across the generations in this study

# Three generations



Born in 1960s;  
free second-  
level education

Born in 1930s

# International research on intergenerational inequality

- Systematic review indicated that over half of studies indicate a direct relationship between grandparents' socio-economic circumstances and children's educational outcomes (Anderson et al., 2018)
- 21-country study indicated a direct effect of grandparental education, even controlling for parental education (Shepphard and Monden, 2018)
- Pattern evident despite wider social change (e.g. post-Soviet transition) (Saar and Helemaë, 2021)
- FI effect is only evident where parents have lower resources – compensatory effect (Lehti et al., 2019)
- SE effect of grandfathers on children's grades is stronger than that of grandmothers (Modin et al, 2013)

## Previous research (2)

- Potential mechanisms:
  - Transfer of financial resources
  - Grandparent-child contact; cultural resources
- Methodological challenges in accurately measuring grandparental influences (Mare, 2014; Breen, 2018)
- NL no direct effect on grandchild's educational level taking account of parents' education and occupational status; does not vary by degree of contact (Bol and Kalmijn, 2016)
- US similarly no direct effect once parents' characteristics are taken into account (Fiel, 2019)

# Research questions

1. Is there a relationship between the educational attainment of grandparents and educational outcomes for young people?
2. To what extent is any such relationship mediated by parental educational attainment?

# Methodology and variables

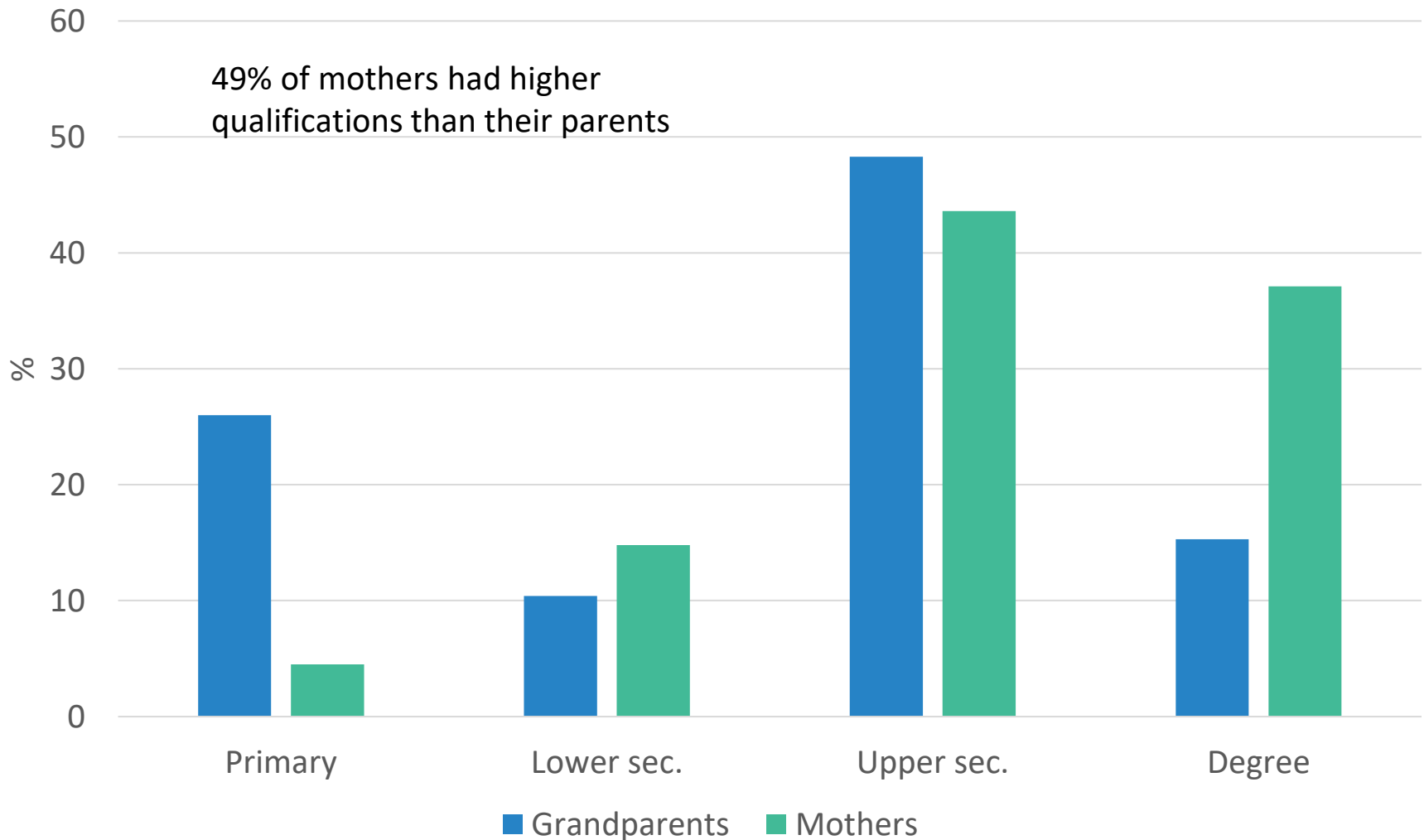
- Outcome variables:
  - Whether the 17-year-old intends to go on to higher education after leaving school
  - Junior Certificate exam performance: transformed into a grade point average based on subject levels and grades; ranges from 0 to 10
- Explanatory variables:
  - Grandparents:
    - Educational level (highest of two grandparents for maternal and paternal separately)
    - Lone-parent family; no. of children
    - Financial strain (very great or great difficulty making ends meet)
  - Parents: educational level
  - Control for young person's gender

# Methodology (2)

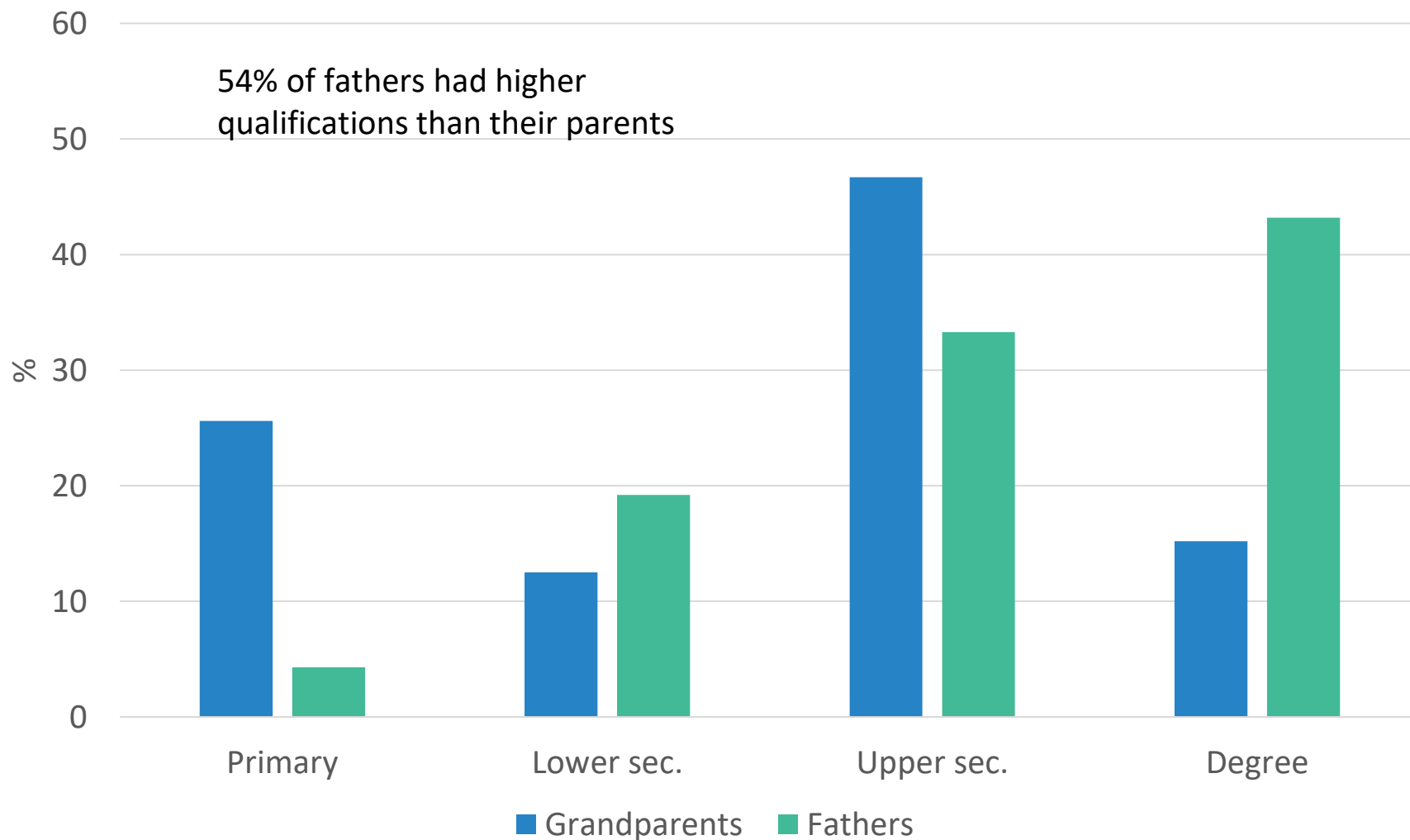
- Approach to modelling:
  - Focus on simple models initially
  - Look at maternal grandparents for the whole sample
  - Look at maternal and paternal grandparents for two-parent families where fathers completed the SCG questionnaire



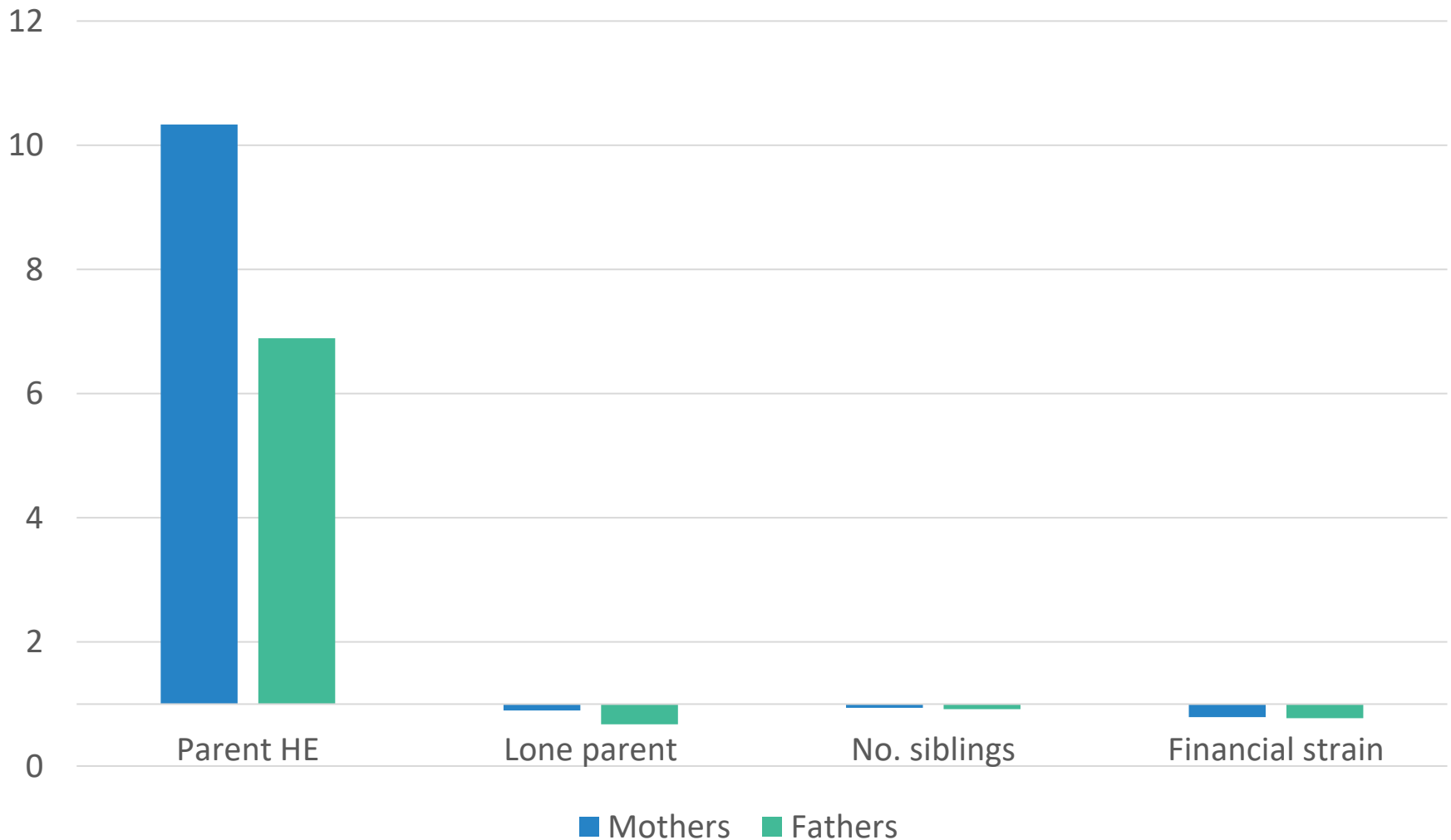
# Maternal grandparents and mothers



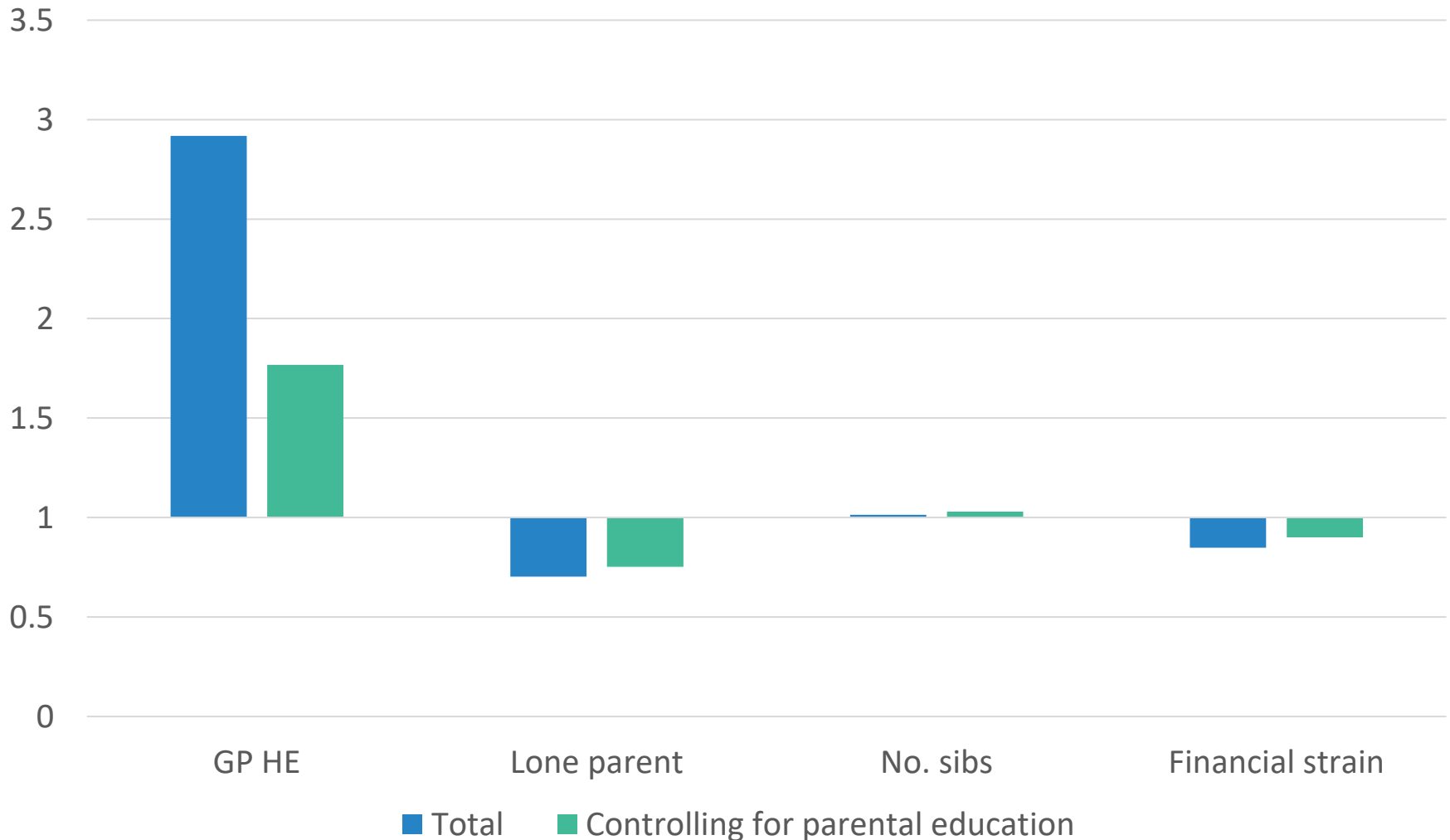
# Paternal grandparents and fathers



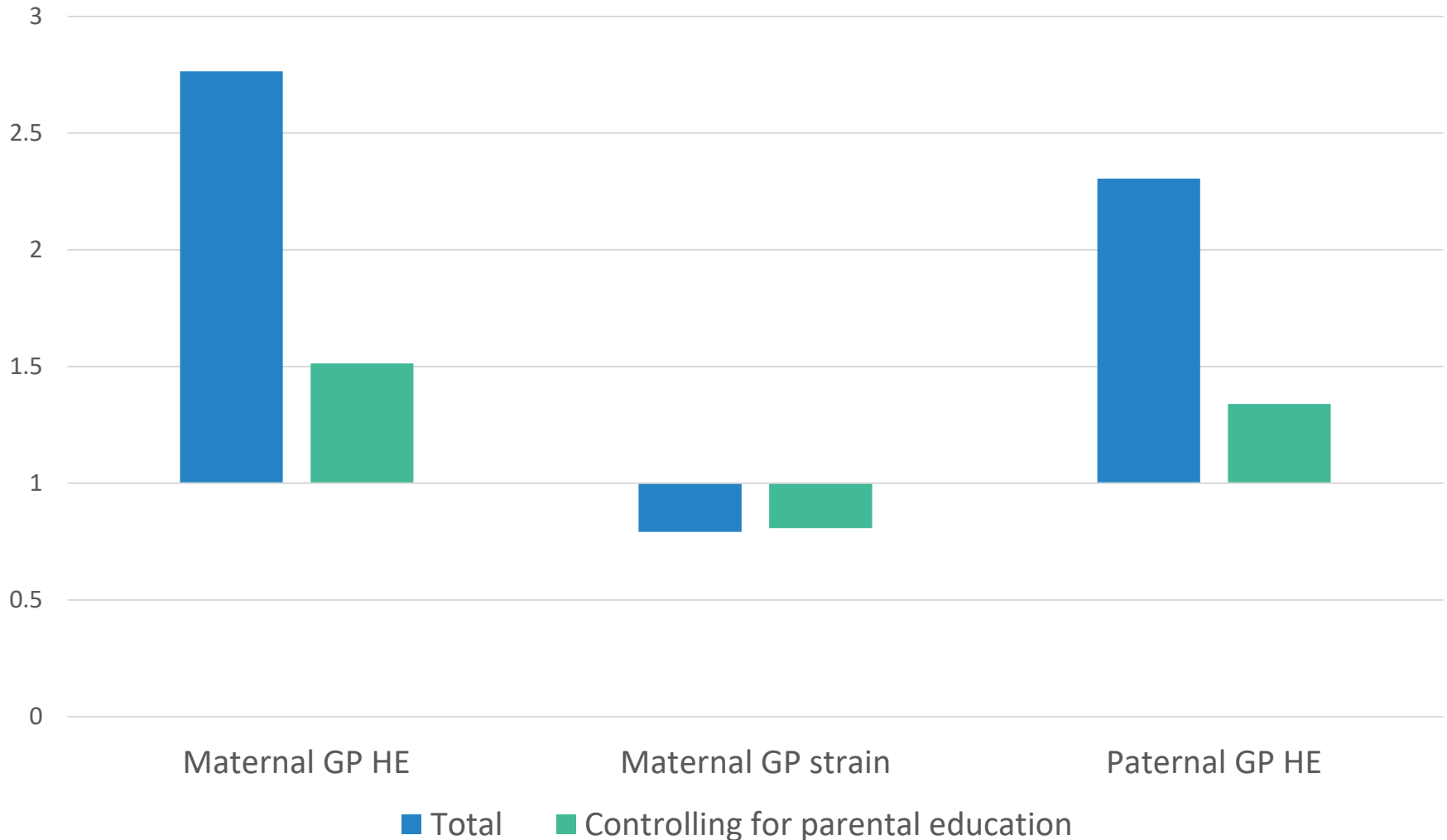
# Effects on parents reaching higher education (odds ratios)



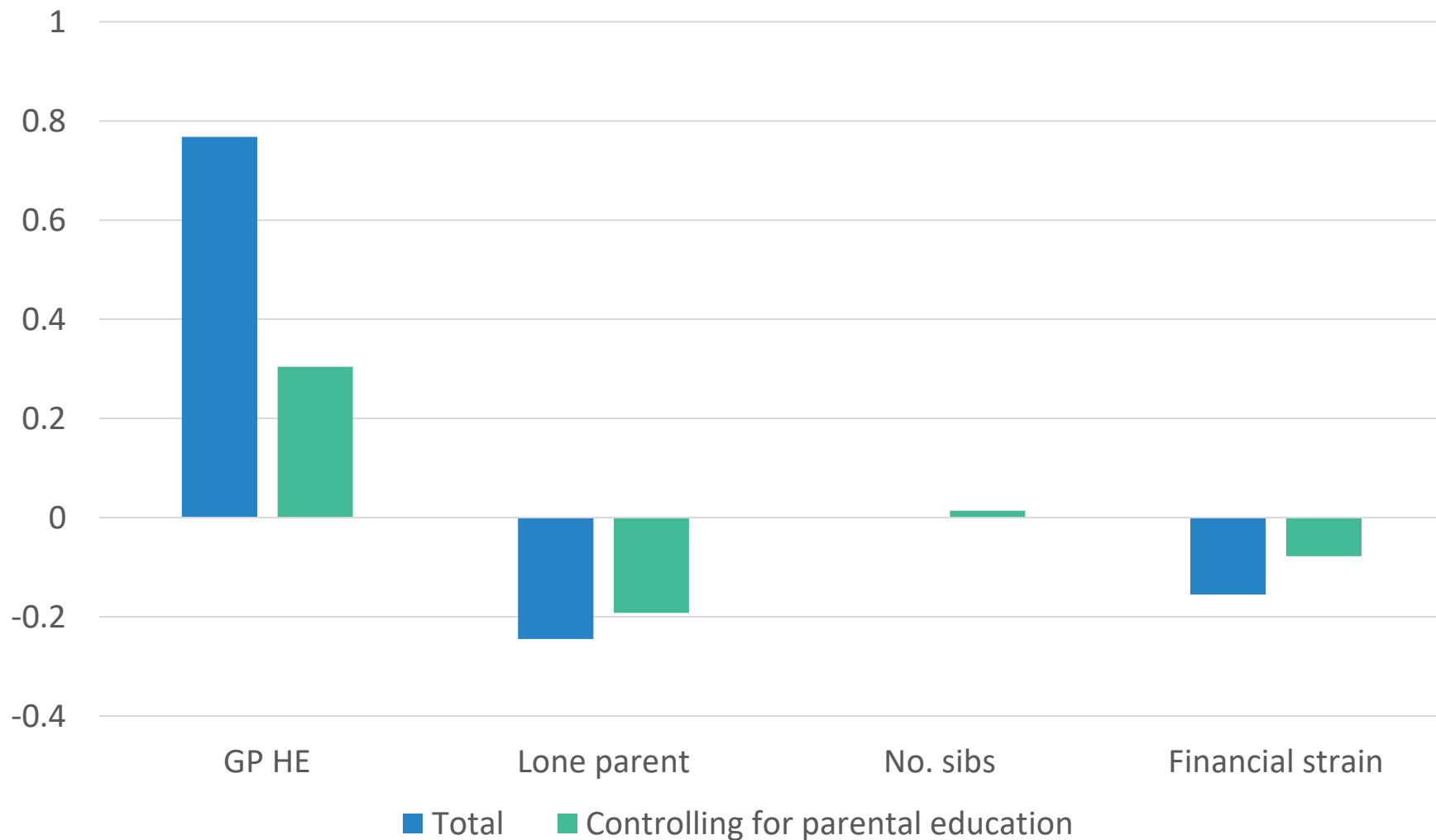
# Effects of maternal grandparents on young person's HE intentions (odds ratios)



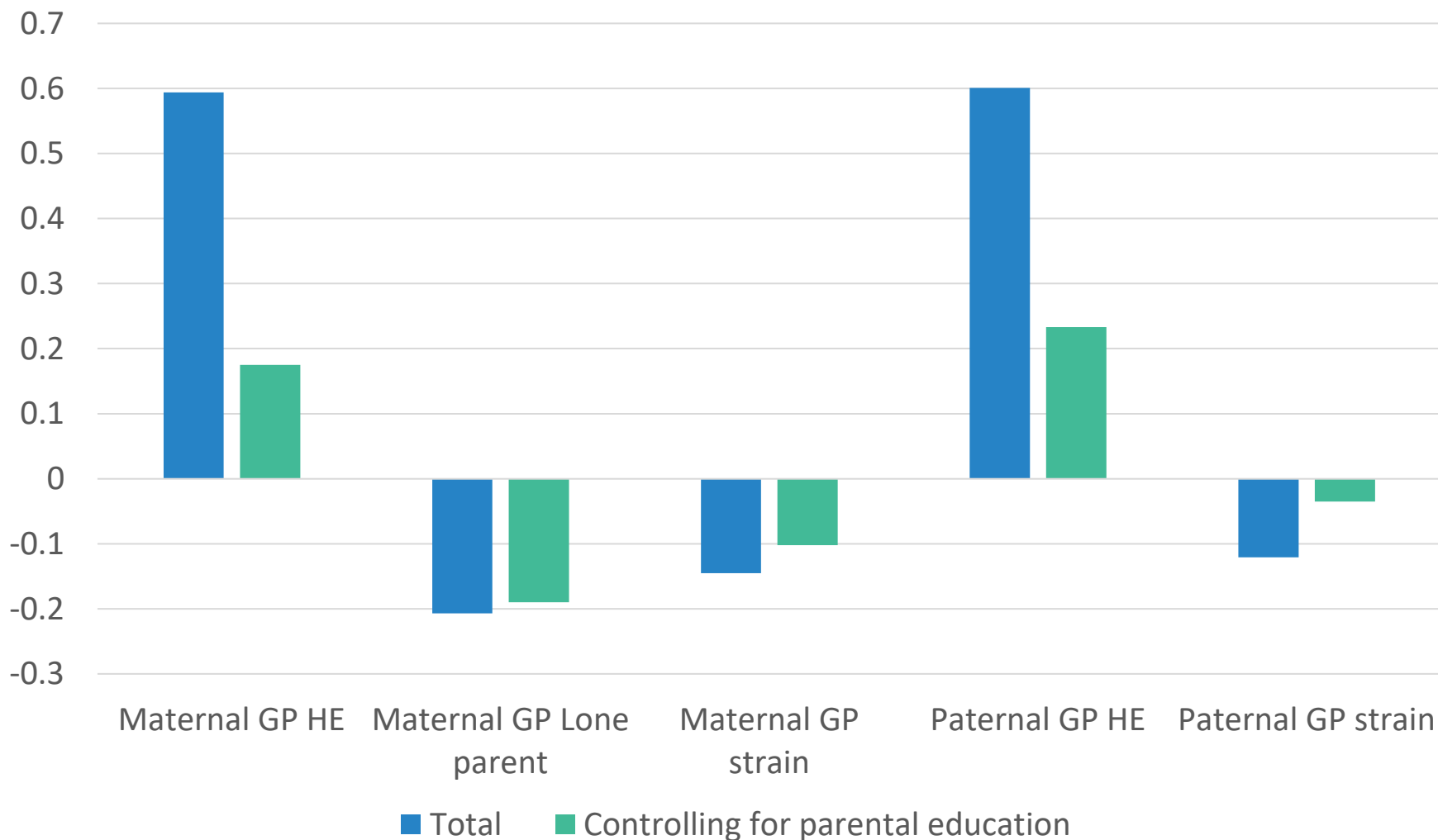
# Effects of maternal and paternal grandparents on young person's HE intentions (odds ratios)



# Effects of maternal grandparents on JC performance



# Effects of maternal and paternal grandparents on JC performance



# Conclusions

- Very marked intergenerational educational mobility between grandparental and parental generations
- Strong relationship between grandparents' education and financial circumstances and parents' education
- Young people are more likely to achieve higher Junior Certificate grades and intend to go on to higher education if their grandparents had higher levels of education and lower levels of financial strain
- Much of this effect is mediated by parental education but some direct effects are evident



# Conclusions (2)

- Preliminary analysis
- Next steps
  - Formal testing of mother's v. father's background (educational and social homogeneity)
  - Conduct decomposition analyses to quantify the direct and indirect effects of grandparents' education on young person's outcomes
  - Look at whether these patterns are sensitive to the inclusion of parental social class and income
  - Examine whether the effects on the young person's educational outcomes are stronger if they have had more contact with their grandparents