

Poverty and Parenting in the UK



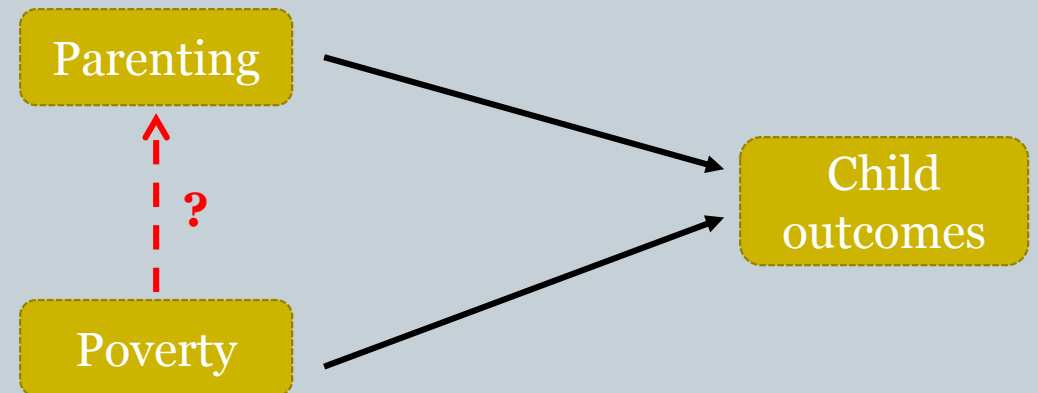
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Background and Motivation

- By the time children start school there is already an achievement gap between richer and poorer students
- One explanation for this is differences in parenting
- This has been the main policy focus in the UK – parenting rather than poverty (e.g. Field report, 2010)
- But the two are very much connected
 - US causal evidence (Cooper & Stewart, 2013)
 - UK evidence parenting explains 50% of the relationship (Kiernan & Huerta, 2008; Mensah & Kiernan, 2011)



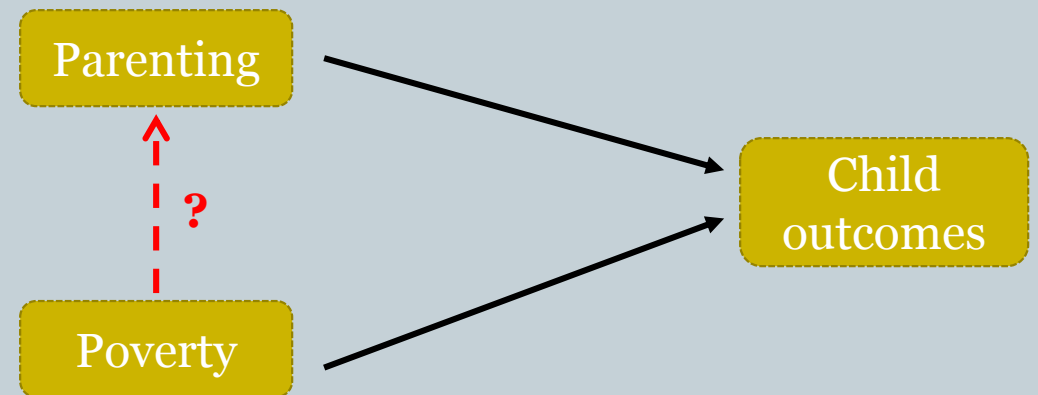
Background and Motivation

- Research questions:

1. What is the relationship between economic hardship* and parenting in the UK?
2. What mechanisms explain this relationship?

- UK context:

- Increased focus on parenting policy
- Cuts to benefits
- Redefining child poverty
- Increase in child poverty



Data



- Using the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)
- Oversampled areas with high poverty
- Cross-sectional analysis : wave 3 when child aged around 5 years
- Mothers only
- Taking into account: mothers' education, work status, age, ethnicity, number of siblings, one/two parents
- N= 14,376

Measuring parenting



Conceptual framework

1. Meeting physical needs

- E.g. Nutrition, physical activities

2. Parent-child relationship

- How close feel to child

3. Discipline and control

- Authoritative discipline
- Harsh or permissive discipline
- Routine

4. Cognitive stimulation

- Trips out
- Hours of TV & computer
- Play activities
- Involvement in education

Rich dataset: use 38 measures of parenting.

N.B. All self-reported

1. Are poor parents *poor* parents?

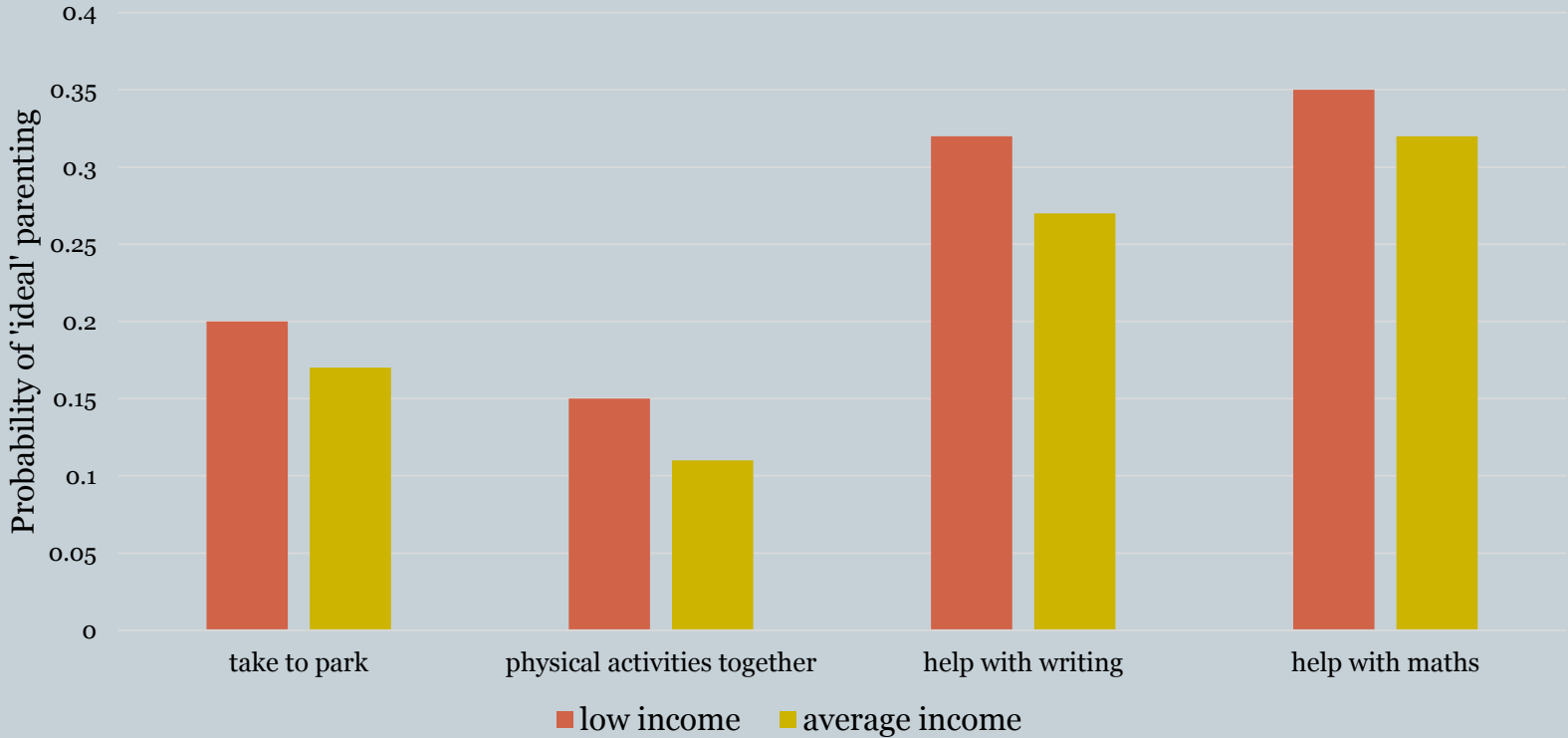


- **Looking across the full income distribution (rather than binary poverty measure)**
- **Specifically comparing mothers in the lowest income group and mothers with median incomes**

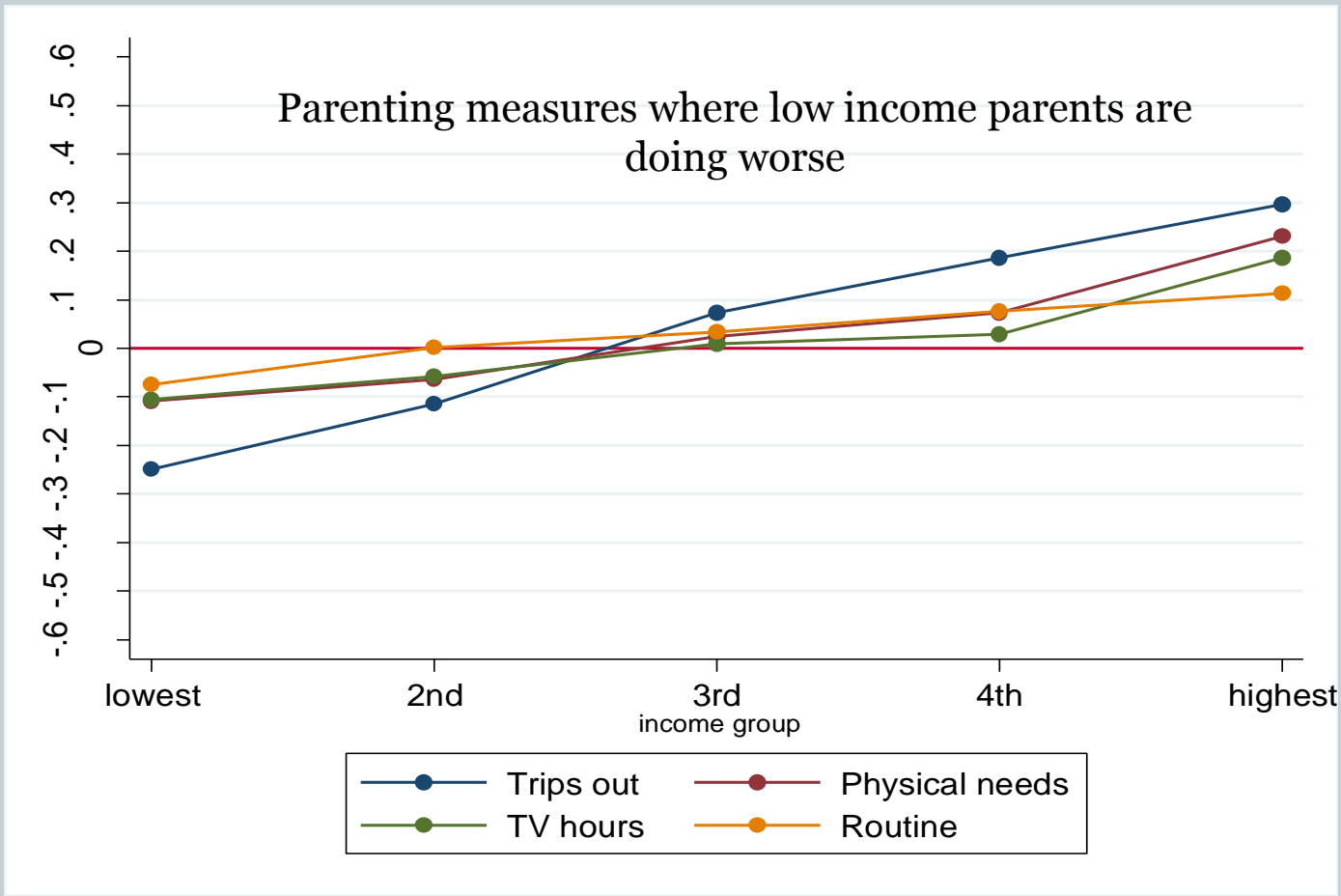
Findings – Are poor parents *poor* parents?



Parenting measures where low income parents do better



Findings – Are poor parents *poor* parents?

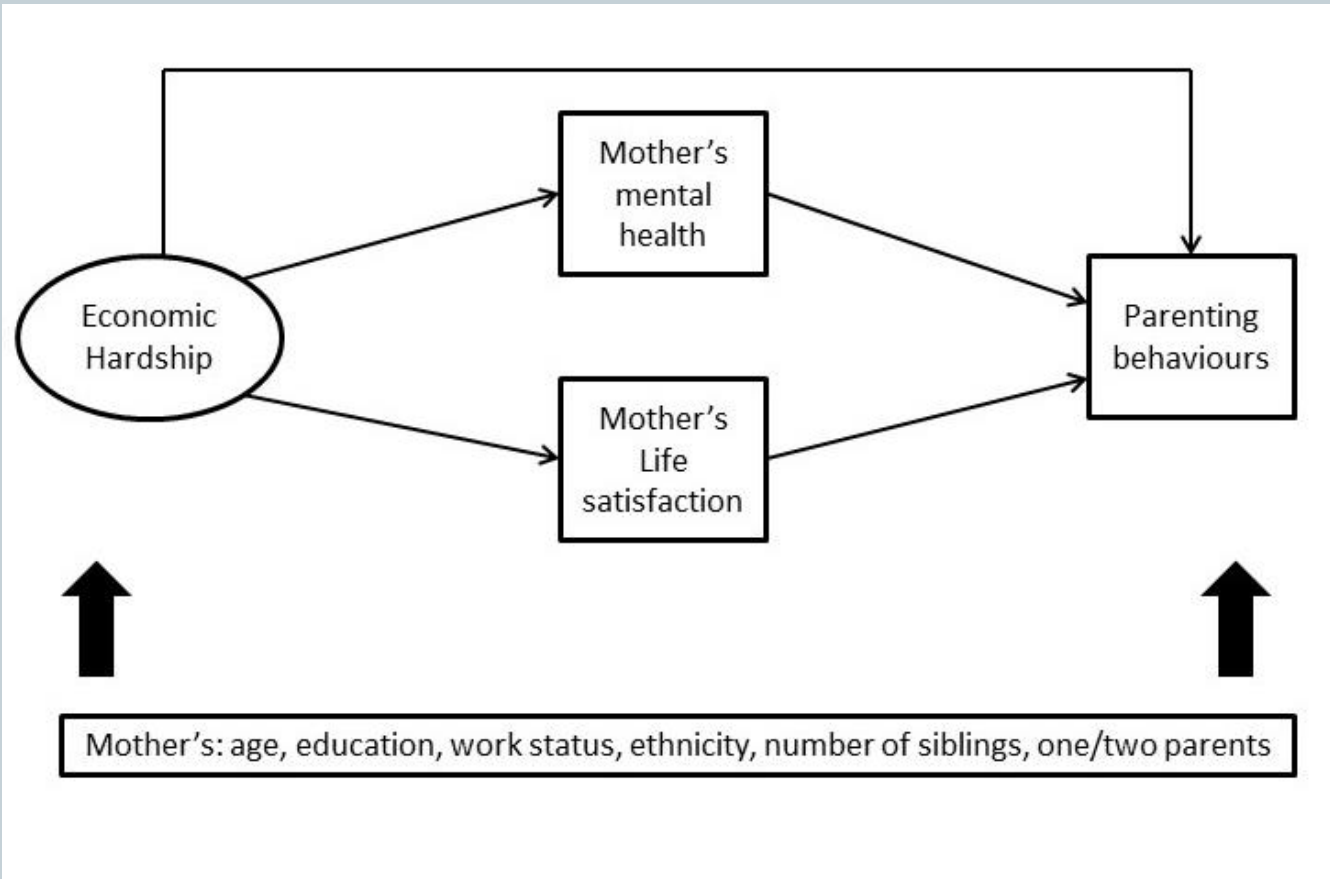


2. What mechanisms explain this relationship?



- **US evidence for the Family Stress Model (Conger et al, 2000)**
- **Is this model relevant for the UK?**
- **Do the pathways differ in relation to different parenting behaviours?**

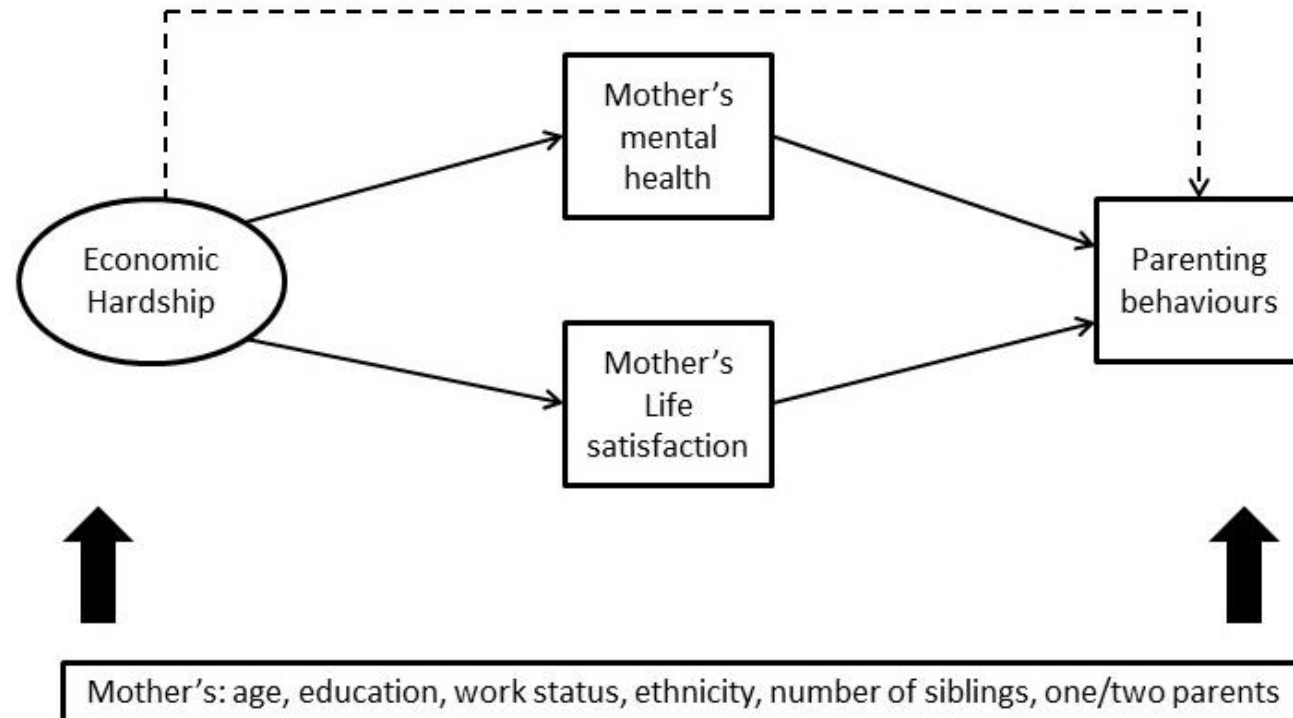
Findings – What mechanisms explain this relationship?



Partially mediated:

- Meeting the child's physical needs (21%)
- Routine meal and bedtimes (34%)
- Educational activities (37%)

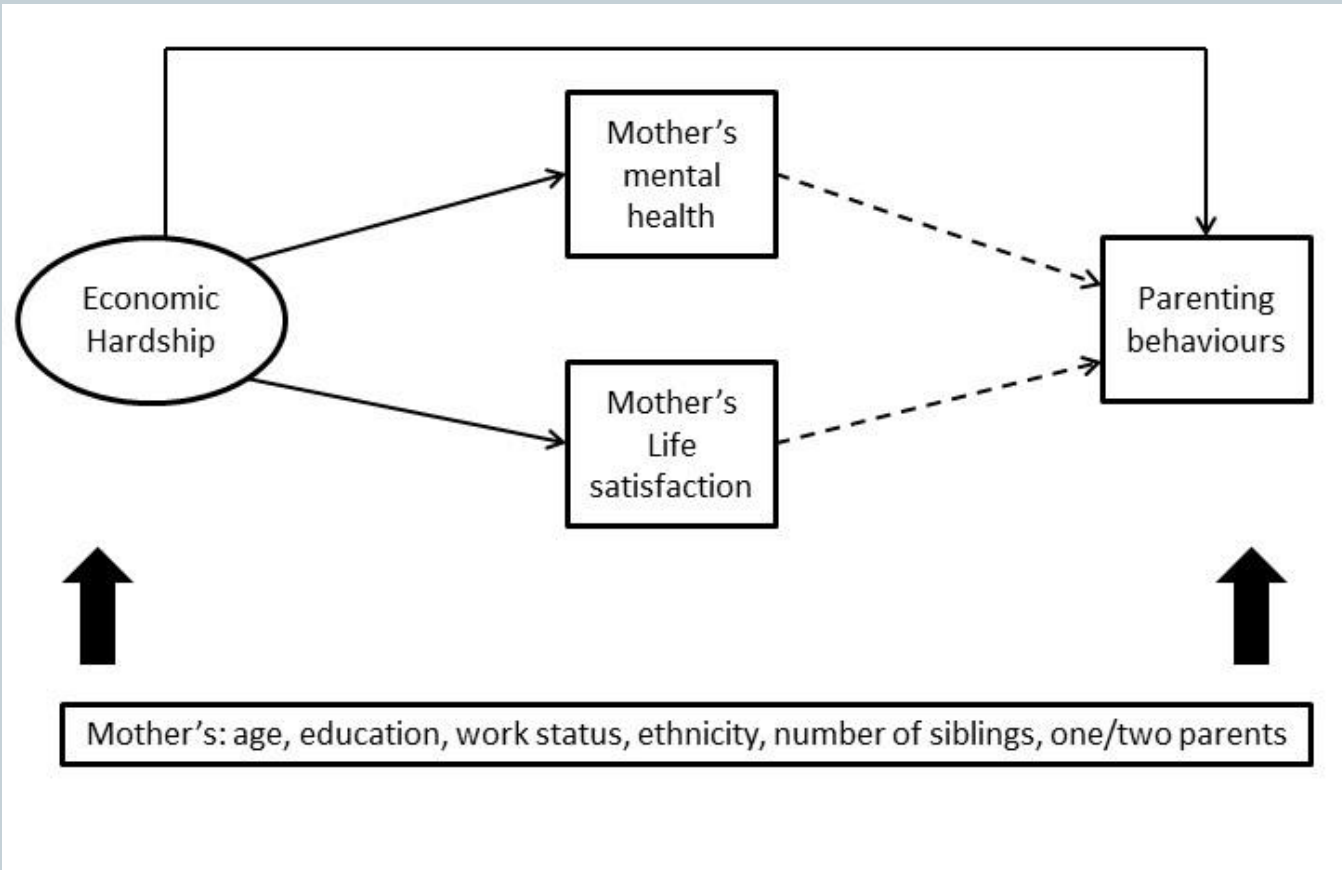
Findings – What mechanisms explain this relationship?



Fully mediated:

- Closeness to the child
- Authoritative discipline
- Harsh/permissive discipline
- Play activities

Findings – What mechanisms explain this relationship?



No mediation:

- Trips outside of the home
- Hours of TV and computer games

Summary of findings



- Not straightforwardly the case that poor parents are *poor* parents – some parenting behaviours where low income mothers doing *better*
- Where there are negative differences many of these differences are not specific to low income parents but part of a broader income-parenting gradient
- The negative relationship between hardship and mother's mental health explains this relationship for most parenting behaviours

Implications for policy



- No magic bullet in parenting classes
- Importance of economic context in which parenting takes place – protecting family incomes (but also improving housing, local areas, tackling problem debt)
- Significant role of mother's mental health – another important area for policy intervention, though again influenced by economic context

Thank you for listening



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Motivation



- Explaining the gap between richer/poorer children
- Policy focus on *parenting* rather than poverty e.g. Field Report (2010)
- Poor parents blamed and structural constraints ignored (Gillies, 2007)
- But Dermott (2012): ‘a false dichotomy’
- Current context:
 - Cuts to tax credits & benefits which will affect families with children most (IFS, 2015)
 - Increase in child poverty: +200,000 by 2016 (Resolution Foundation, 2015)
 - Redefining poverty – focus on employment/education

Contributions



1. Include measures of parenting across multiple domains
2. Not just focusing on binary poverty - examines differences in parenting across the income distribution
3. Multiple measures of economic hardship
4. Test whether the Family Stress Model mechanisms are relevant to the UK

Findings 2 – debt, deprivation and feeling poor



Hardship measure:	OECD equivalised income quintile						Sample size
	lowest	2nd	3rd	4th	highest	Total	
Debt	47.7	30.1	12.8	5.7	3.8	100	14287
Material deprivation	51.9	27.1	13.3	6.1	1.6	100	14303
Subjective hardship	45.5	24.9	16.9	9.6	3.1	100	14304
Crowded housing	43.9	31.4	14.1	6.9	3.6	100	14308
Damp housing	40.0	27.0	15.7	9.1	8.3	100	14305
Poor/unsafe area	43.9	30.9	13.1	7.8	4.4	100	14292
Negative area observation	47.7	27.7	14.5	6.7	3.3	100	11362
Worst decile Index of Multiple Deprivation	51.7	29.5	11.1	5.0	2.7	100	8970

