

Economic Recession, Family Stress and the Adjustment of 3-year-olds

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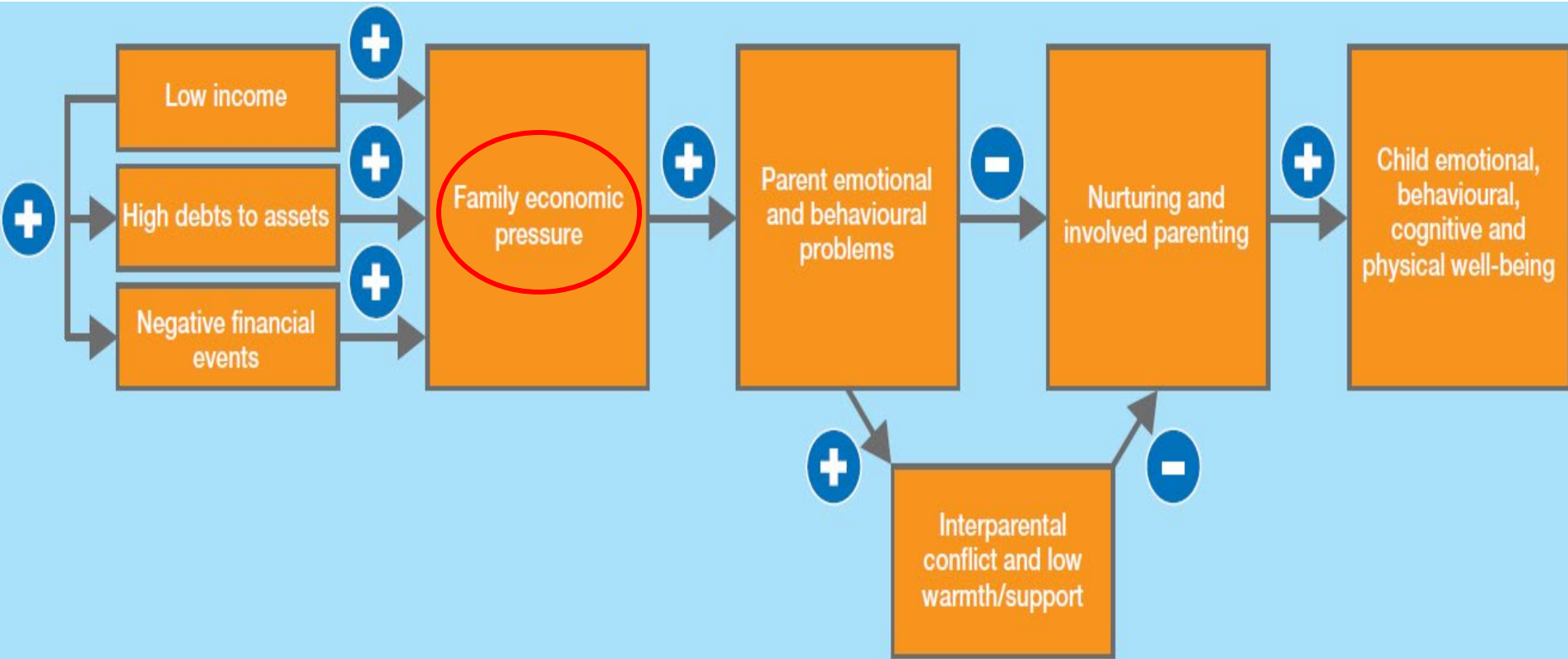
An Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children and Youth Affairs



Economic Recession

- Long history of research on the effects of socio-economic disadvantage on children's development
- Limited research on direct effects of recession on children's outcomes at a population level
 - Instability and change in economic state of families are likely to contribute to family instability and chaos
 - Investments in children may occur more intermittently: reducing consumption and investments in children's education and other activities are common responses to economic shocks
 - Reductions in fiscal resources available to governments may affect service delivery across a range of areas pertinent to the lives of children
- Timing of data collection coincided with onset of the 'Great Recession' in Ireland (2008)

Family Stress Model



Economic Strain – gives psychological meaning to the stressful experience of economic hardship



'08 (Infant) Cohort of Growing up in Ireland

Infant Cohort

Random sample drawn from Child Benefit Register
Population 73,362

9 months

- 11,134
- Interviewed between September 2008 and April 2009
- 69% positive response rate of valid contacts made

3 years

- 9,793
- Interviewed between December 2010 and June 2011
- 87.96% retention rate

5 years

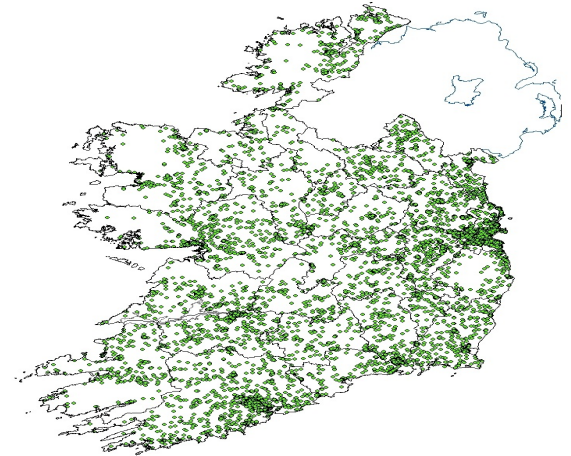
- 9,001
- Interviewed between December 2012 and June 2013
- 91.91% retention rate (from Wave 2; 80.84% from Wave 1)

7 years

- Inter-wave contact, postal questionnaire only
- Completed between October 2015 and February 2016

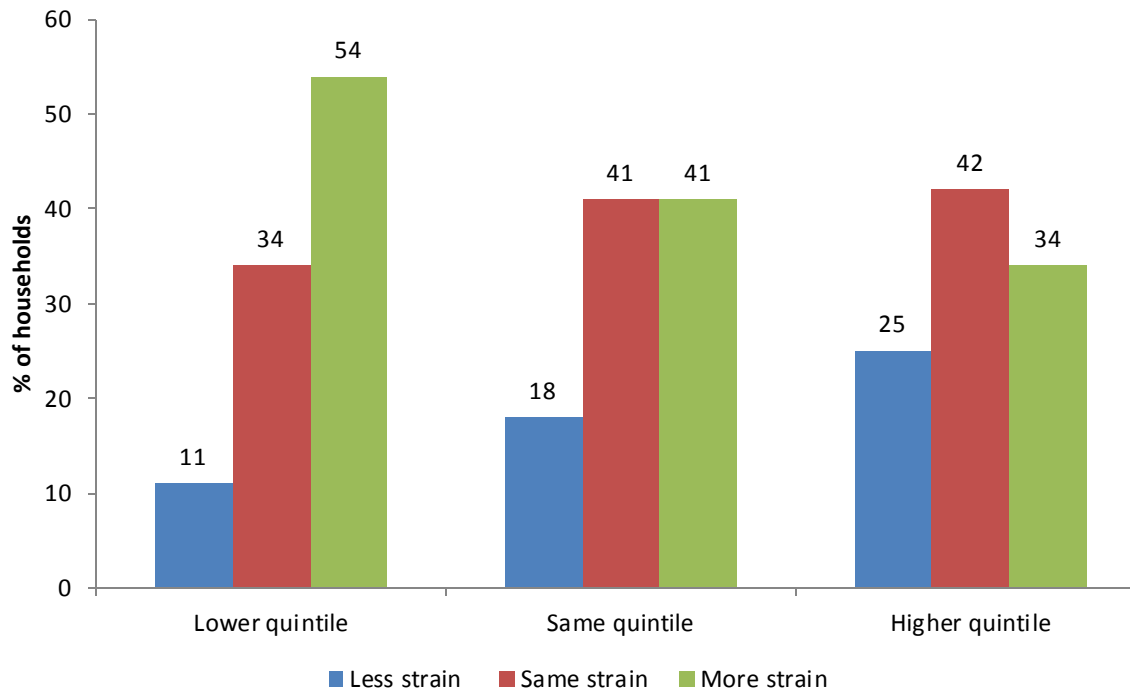
9 years

- Full home and school-based assessment
- Completed between March 2018 and August 2018



Economic Strain

- Economic Strain – gives psychological meaning to the stressful experience of economic hardship
- “Difficulty making ends meet” – 61% of families; 14% in arrears on utility bills, 9% in arrears on rent/mortgage
- Change in income is important for experiences of economic strain.... but is not the only factor



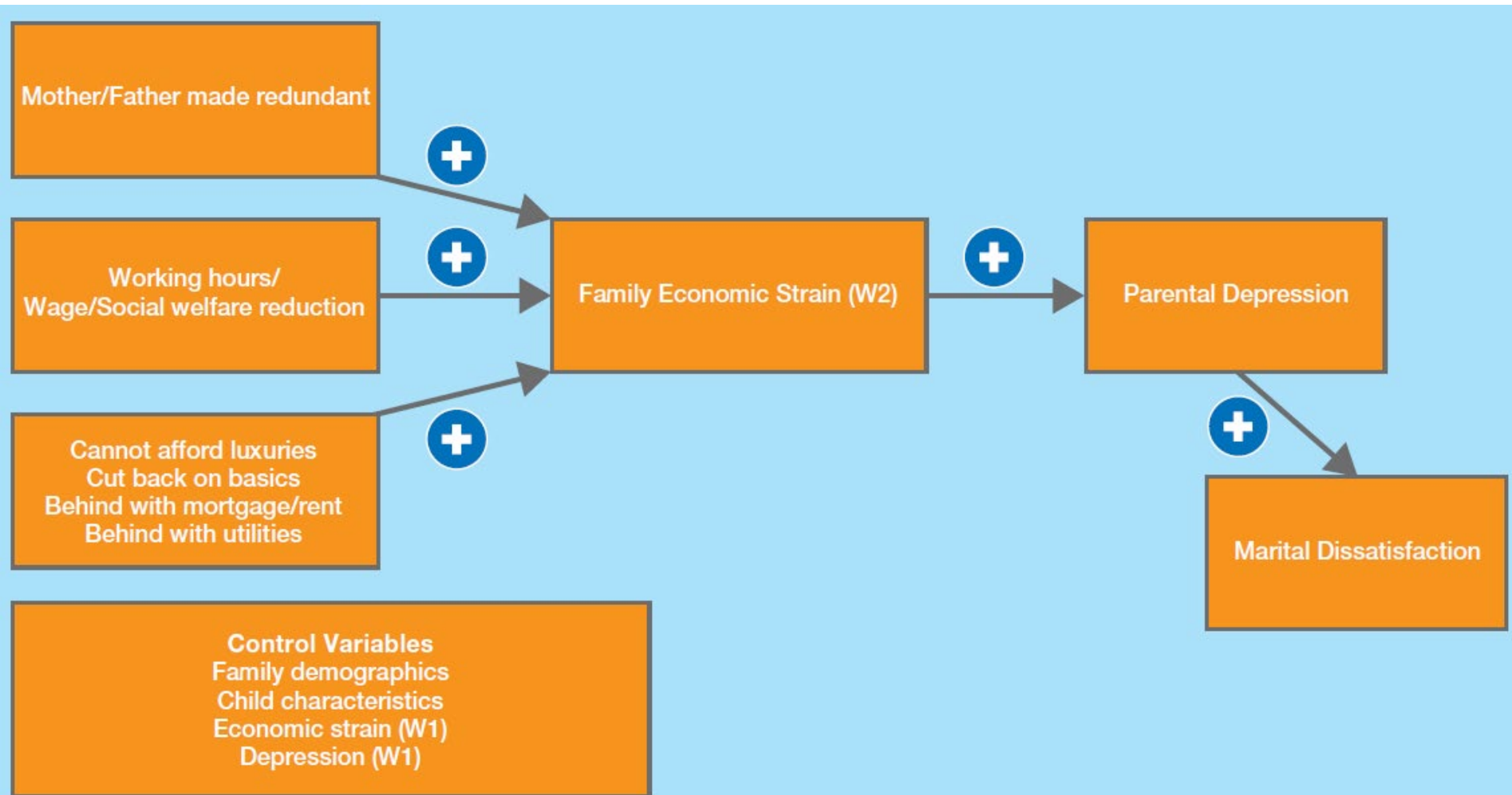


Economic Strain

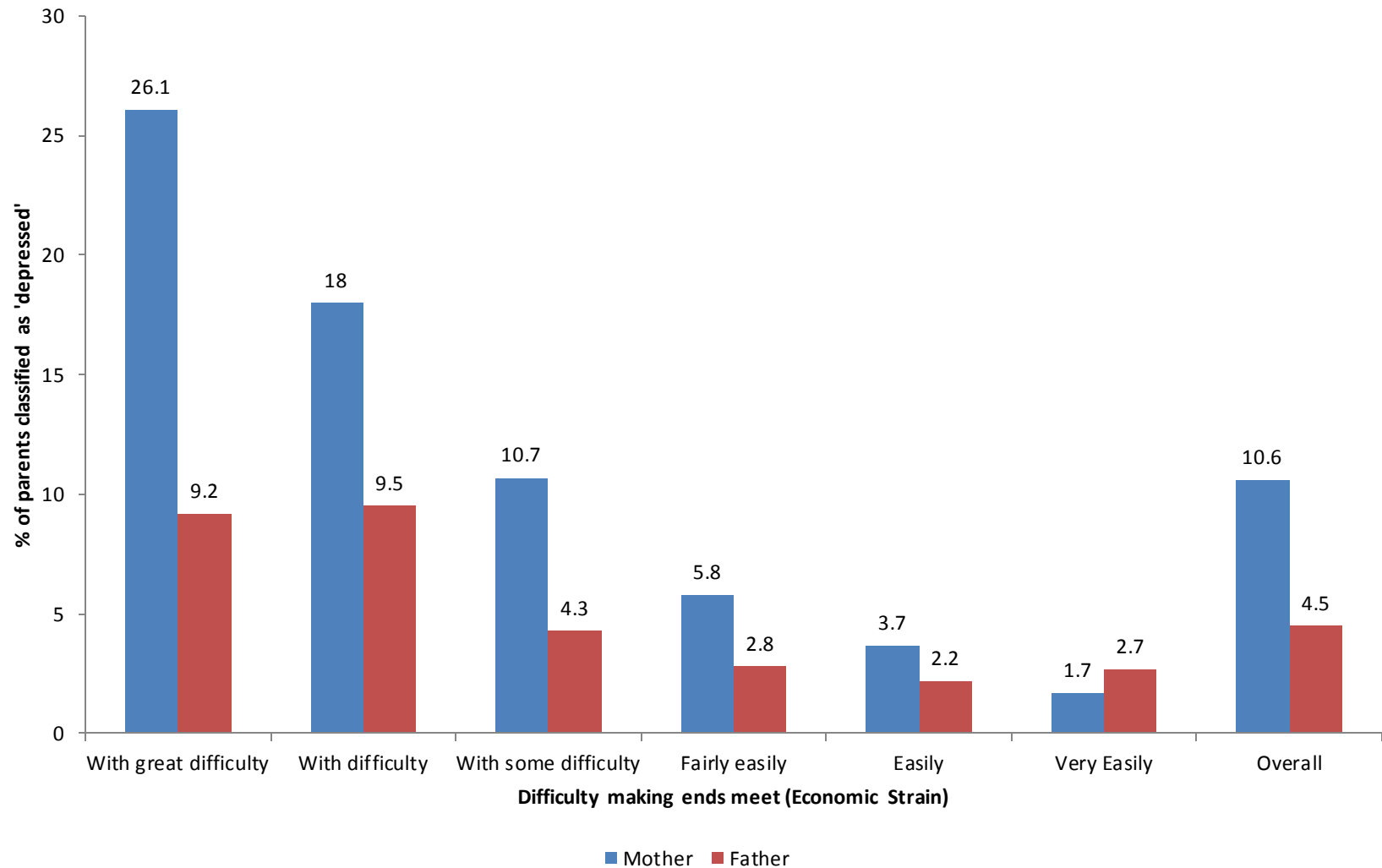
- Wage reduction per se not associated with economic strain
- Strongest predictors were
 - Cutting back on basics
 - Cutting back on luxuries
 - Arrears on rent/mortgage
 - Arrears on utility bills

 - Redundancy of either parent
 - Being in a single parent household
 - Lower level of maternal education
 - Working hours reduced
 - Social welfare reduced

Effects of Economic Strain



Effects of Economic Strain on Depressive Symptoms





Effects of Economic Strain on Depressive Symptoms

Strong effects of economic strain on mothers' depressive symptoms

Having to cut back on basic necessities, and being in arrears were also directly associated with depressive symptoms for mothers

For fathers:

- In arrears on utility bills
- Redundancy (of mother or father) associated with higher depressive symptoms
- Having social welfare reduced
- Not being able to afford luxuries



Effects of Economic Strain on Marital Satisfaction

Mothers' economic strain and depressive symptoms were the strongest predictors of marital dissatisfaction.

Older mothers had lower marital satisfaction, but satisfaction was higher when a new child had been born between waves of the study.

For fathers, the only economic variable associated with marital satisfaction was having working hours reduced: this was associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction

Fathers' depressive symptoms were also associated with marital satisfaction.

Older fathers had lower marital satisfaction and fathers with more children, and where a new child had been born between waves had higher marital satisfaction



Spill-over effects into parenting?

Comparing depressed/non-depressed mothers and fathers - small differences in warmth, bigger differences in hostility

Similar patterns in terms of those with 'distressed' relationships

Does this matter for children's outcomes?



Children's Adjustment Difficulties

Externalising

...and Internalising

Mother hostility

Father hostility

Mother depression

Recent migrant

Higher levels of mat education

Mother warmth

Mother age

Father warmth

Mother marital satisfaction

Father depression

Father marital satisfaction

Child gender

Positive associations



Negative associations



Non-significant associations

Mother hostility

Mother depression

Recent migrant

Higher levels of mat education

New child born btw waves

Mother warmth

Mother age

Mother marital satisfaction

Father warmth

Father hostility

Father depression

Father marital satisfaction

Child gender



What can we conclude?

Strain is highest when families are in arrears and have to cut back on basic necessities

Important associations with psychological distress... and marital dissatisfaction

Questions remain about the stability of these difficulties over time - will they leave lasting effects over time? Or will economic recovery be associated with a dissipation of these difficulties?

Parental mental well-being plays a key role in bridging the link between distal macro-level economic circumstances and children's relationships and outcomes

Spill-over effects point to the importance of supporting parents who are experiencing psychological distress