



University of  
**Strathclyde**  
Education

# The Poverty attainment gap: Insights for the early years context

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SUII Seminar- Conversations about Language and Literacy

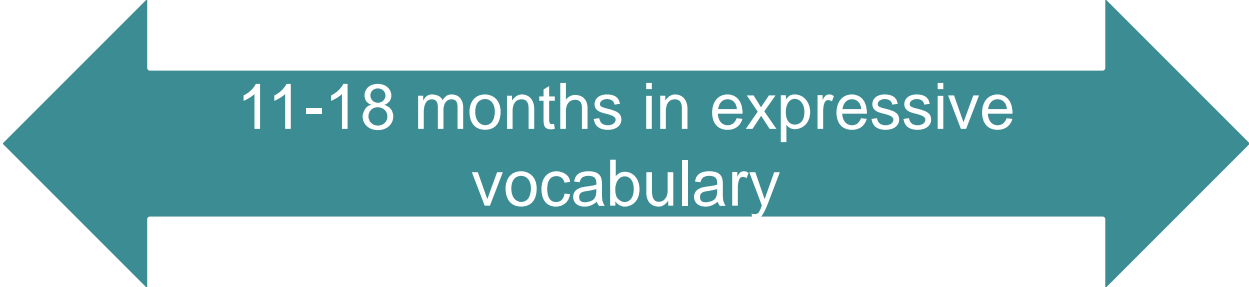
# Patterns of Early Attainment Gap

Several longitudinal studies suggests gap starts before formal schooling

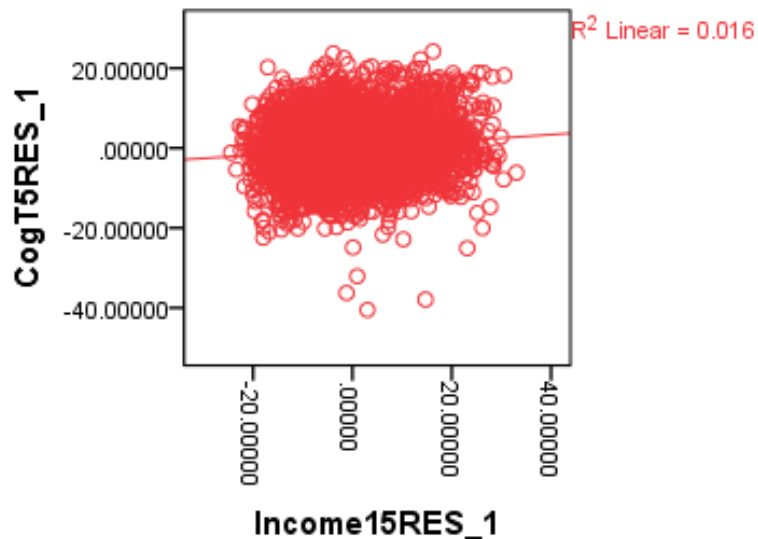
Gap between children from richest and poorest background at age 5



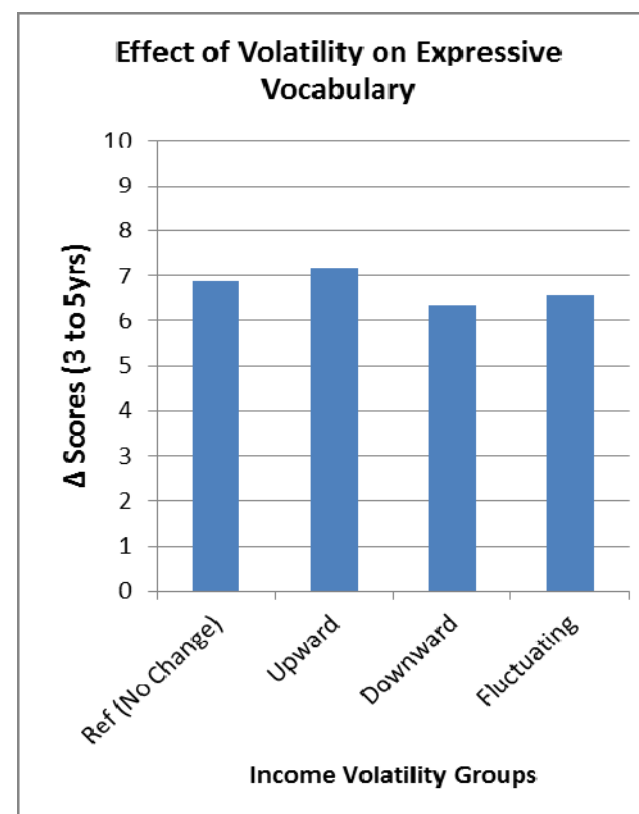
6-13 months in problem solving



11-18 months in expressive vocabulary



Cases weighted by De Birth cohort Sw5 weight - longitudinal



- ❖ **Average income predicted change in domain specific and composite cognitive ability**

- ❖ **Upward volatility (gaining) marginally predicted increases in expressive vocabulary ability**

## Affects other developmental outcomes

Higher prevalence of

- Emotional and behavioural difficulties
- Additional support needs/SEN
- Stress & depression
- Somatic complaints
- Pervasive negative thinking

These problems **can reinforce** or **are reinforced** by poor cognitive outcomes (e.g. Sosu & Schmidt, 2017, *Frontiers in Psych*)

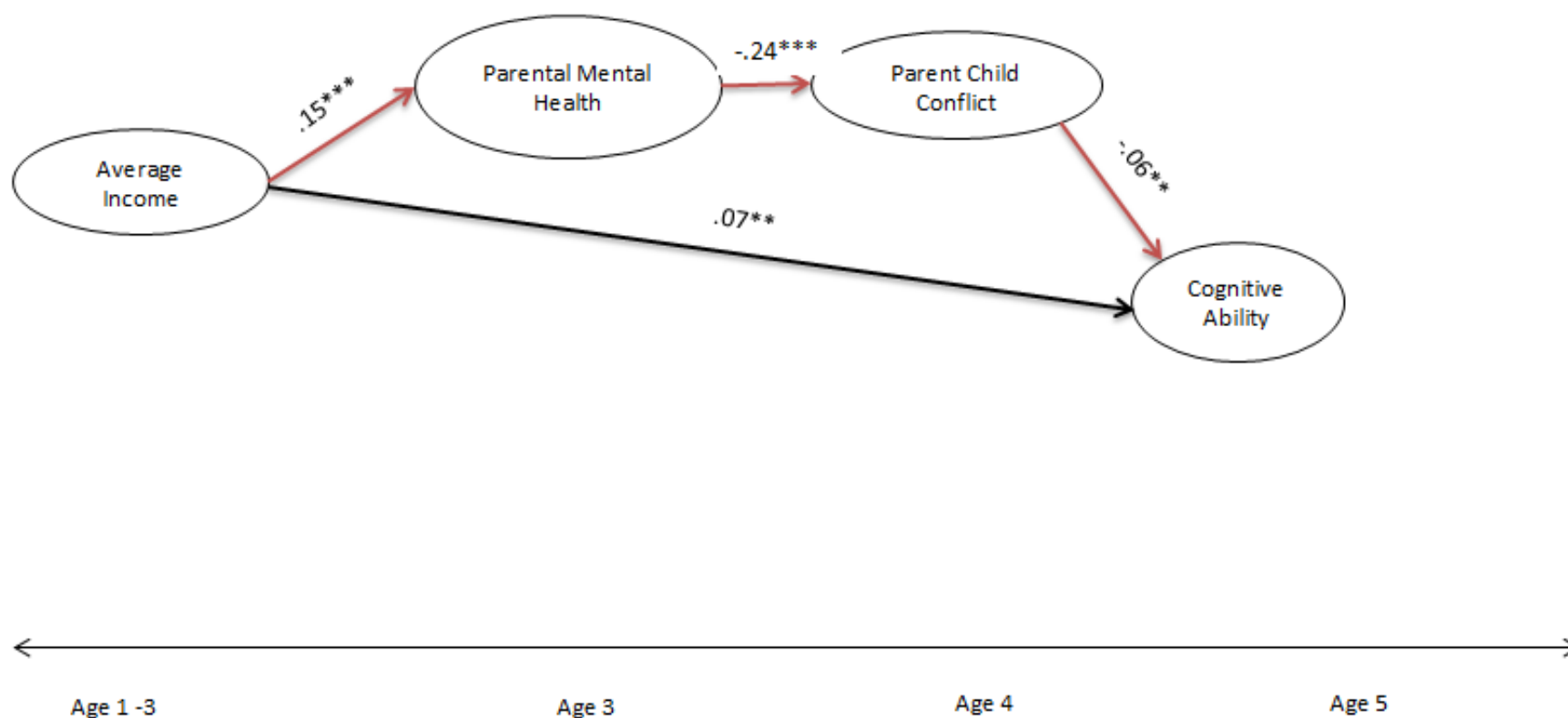


# Why/how does poverty influences outcomes?

Individual and structural mechanisms

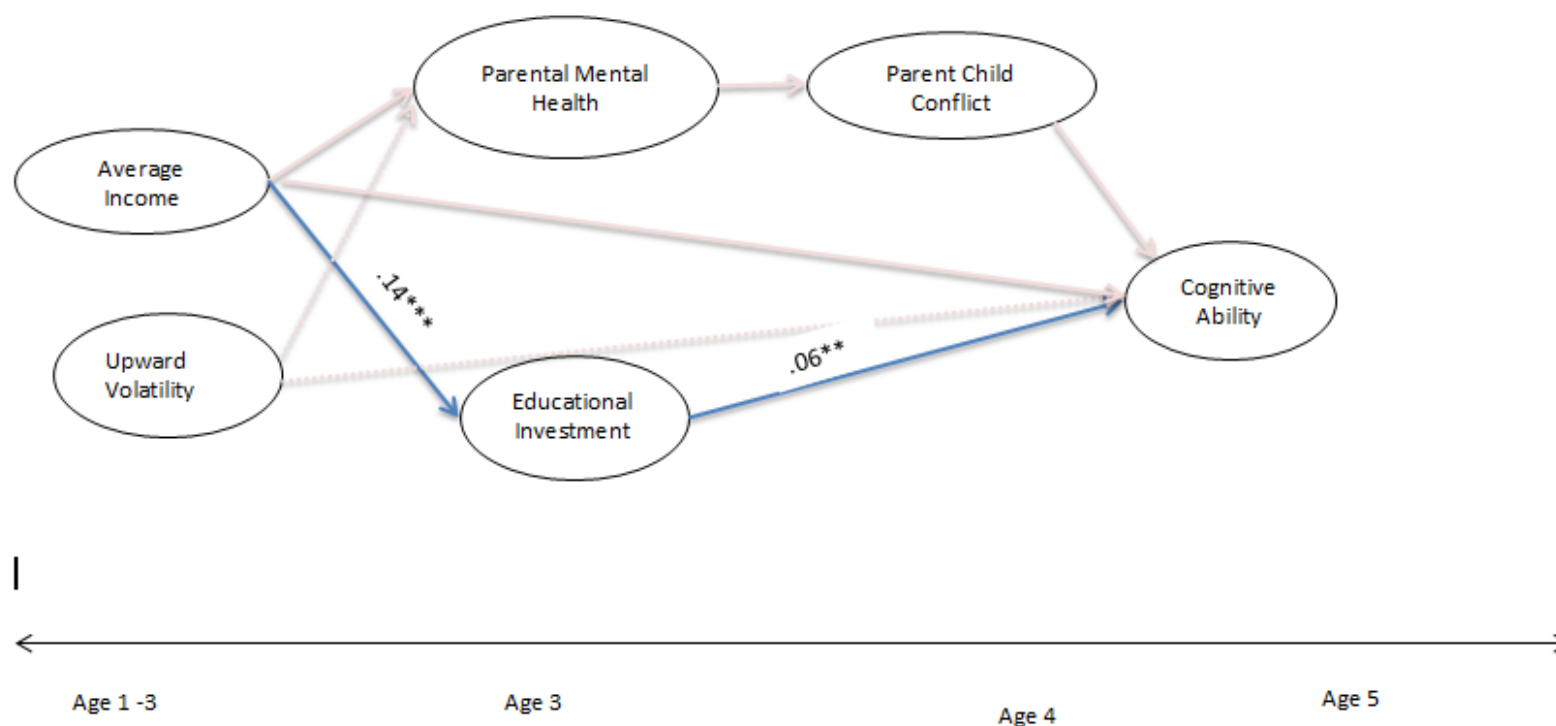


# Family Stress Mechanisms - Average Income

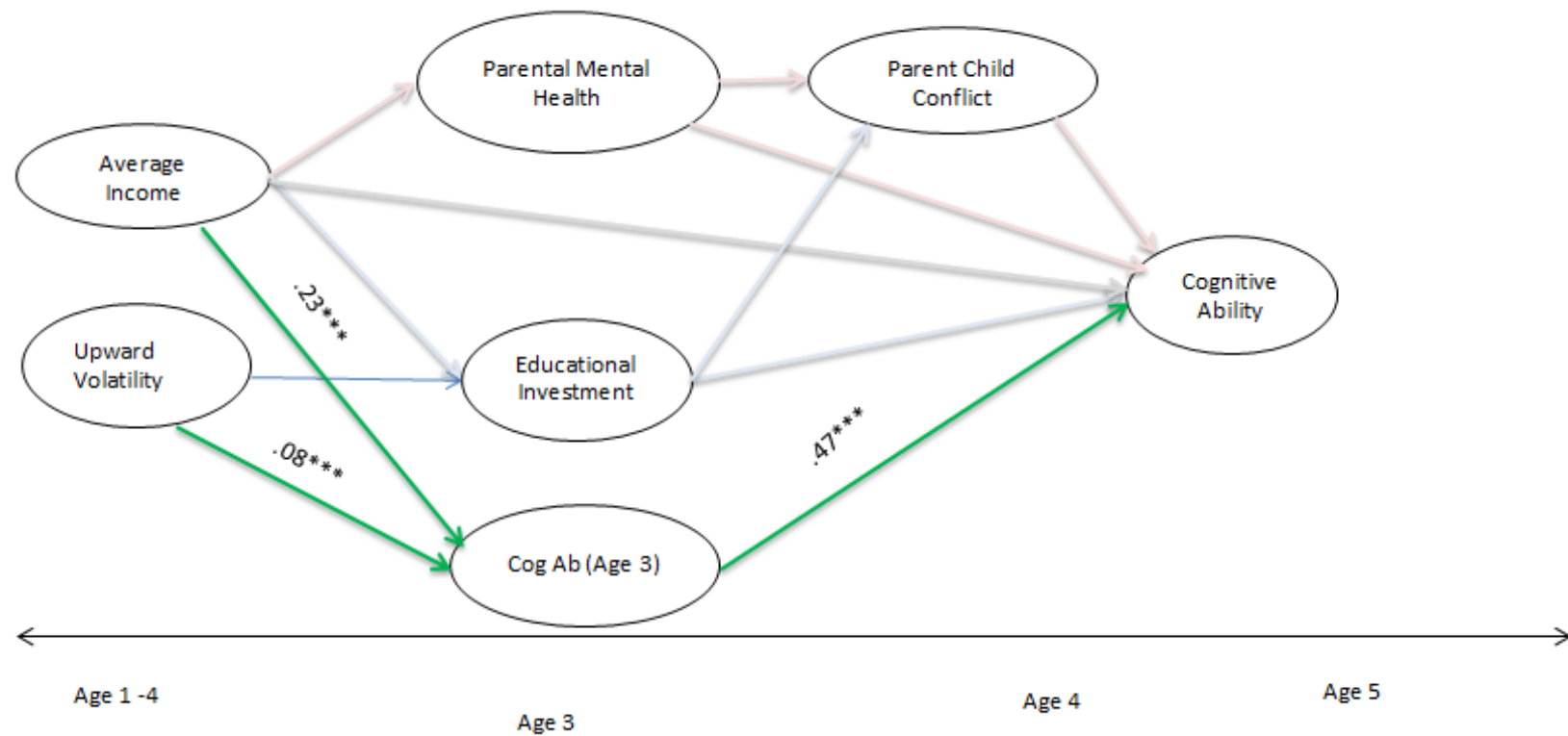




# Investment Mechanisms- Average Income



# Pathway via age 3 cognitive ability





# CHILD Stress:

(Blaire et al, 2011, child dev)

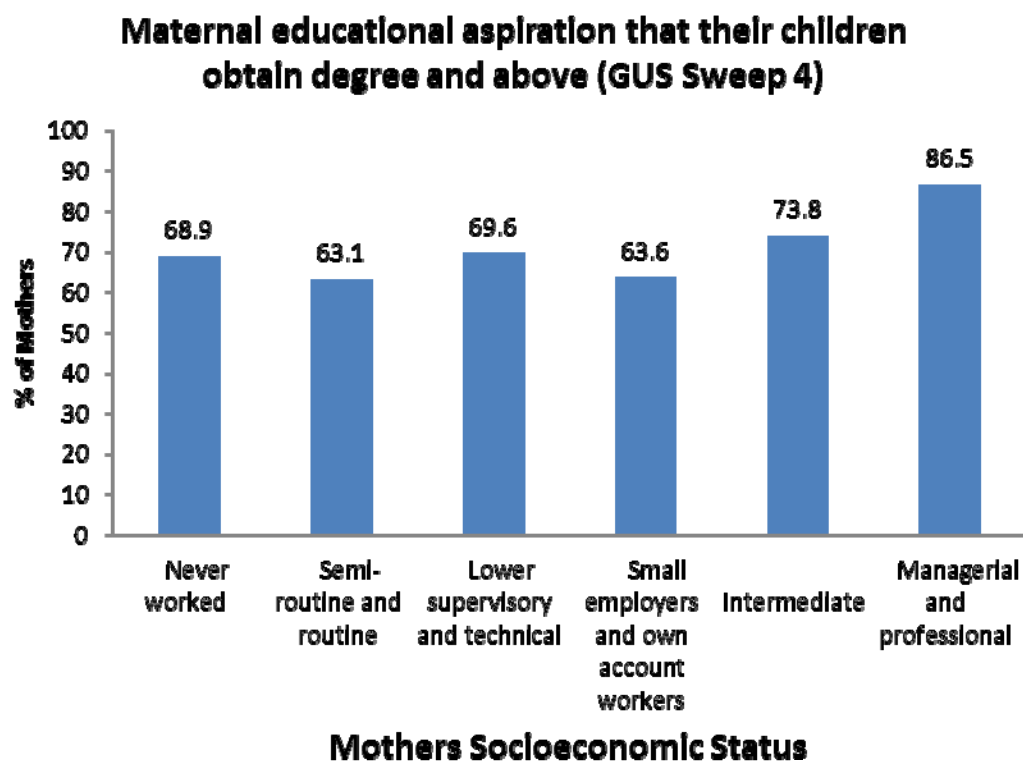
- ❑ Chn in poverty - Higher stress hormones
- ❑ Stress hormones associated with executive function/prefrontal cortex/hippocampus
- ❑ Associated with information processing and decisions about how to cope with new situations

## Is this fatalistic? – not necessarily

- ❑ Not all children in poverty perform poorly
  - We need to know more about protective factors
  
- ❑ Concept of ‘plasticity’ suggests that enriched experiences can reverse even severe negative effects (*Sonuga-Barke et al, The Lancet, 2017*)
  
- ❑ EPPE study suggests buffering effect of quality early years education (*Sammons et al., 2007*)



...parents are optimistic



*(Sosu, 2014, International Journal of Educational Research)*

# Policy implications?

- High quality years experiences with focus on developing language, pre-reading, non-verbal reasoning  
*(Fricke et al., 2013; 2017; Sammons et al., 2007)*
- Funding to reduce poverty  
*(Hutchings et al., 2012; Hampden-Thompson, 2013)*



# Thank You

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