

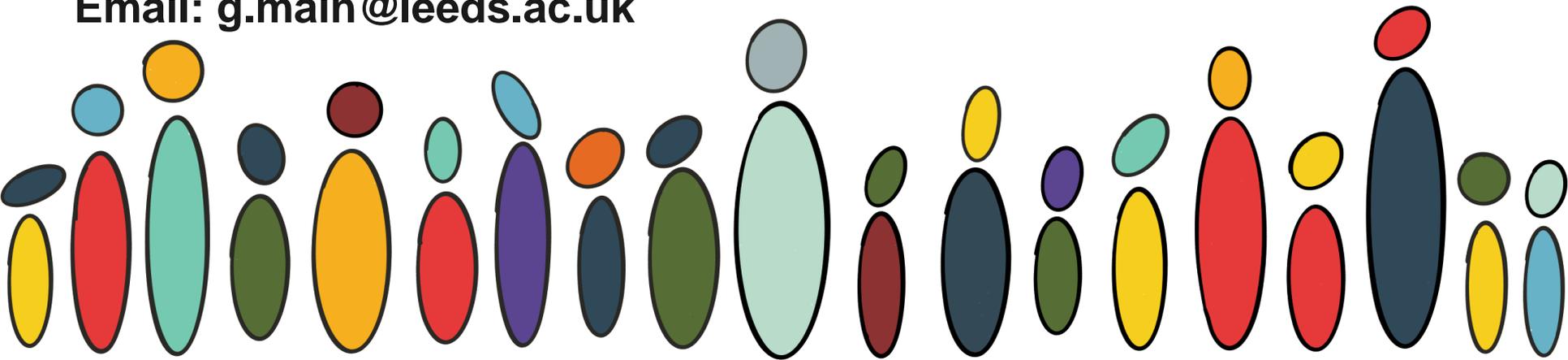
# Fair Shares and Families: What children's perspectives can add to our understanding of the relationship between child poverty and subjective well-being

What makes children unhappy? New research findings  
The ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change  
London, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2017

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# Fair Shares and Families



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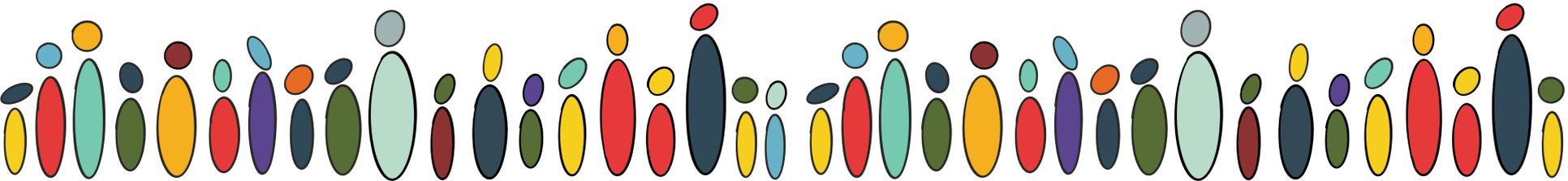
## Overview

- Background to the Fair Shares and Families project
- Research questions and methods
- Conclusions
- Implications for policy and practice



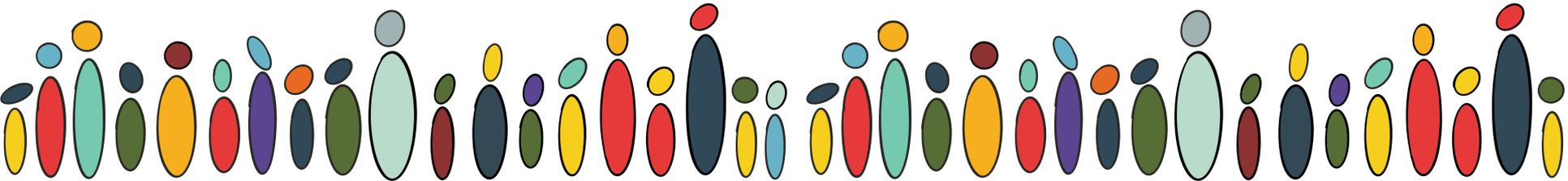
## Background: why child poverty?

- Importance of child poverty to child well-being and well-becoming (Bradshaw, 2016; Griggs and Walker, 2008)
  - For children during childhood
  - For the adults children become
  - For the societies in which poor children live
- Policy attention to child poverty at national and international levels
  - UK: 2010 Child Poverty Act
  - EU
  - UN



## Background: why children's perspectives?

- **Studies of intra-household allocation:** Family sharing practices not necessarily equitable, and how money is spent and different needs are prioritised varies depending on who receives payments (Pahl, 1989; Bennett, 2013)
- **The sociology of childhood:** Viewing children as competent reporters on their lives, and of interest in their own right – becomings and beings (James and Prout, 1997)
- **Children's rights:** UNCRC - especially Article 27 (right to an 'adequate' standard of living) and Article 12 (right to have a say in decisions affecting them)



## Background: key findings from previous research

- **Parental sacrifice:** Parents attempt to protect children from exposure to poverty, and sacrifice their own needs to provide for their children (Middleton et al, 1997; Main and Bradshaw, 2016)
- **Children as active agents:** Children play an active role in their experiences of poverty (e.g. Ridge, 2002; The Children's Society, in press); and are highly engaged with discussions of the nature of poverty (Main, 2013)
- **Child poverty and subjective well-being:** Mismatch between qualitative (e.g. Ridge, 2002; The Children's Society, in press) and quantitative (e.g. Rees et al, 2011; Knies, 2011) findings. Including child perspectives on needs helps bridge this (Main, 2013)



## Research questions and methods

- Economic and Social Research Council UK-funded project examining children's and families' perspectives on sharing resources.
  - How children understand and contribute to resource- and financial decision making in their families
  - How families' socio-economic status relates to resource allocation patterns and practices
  - How different patterns of resource allocation relate to child subjective well-being
- Mixed methods
  - 9-month ethnographic study with 10 families in Leeds and York
  - Panel survey (3 waves, every six months) of children and parents
  - Iterative process of findings from each strand informing progress of the other



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## Ethnographic strand

- Children and families are very concerned with issues of fairness – but their perceptions of what is fair sometimes differ (age, social norms, desert)
- ‘Family’ and ‘household’ are very different, and ‘family’ (including people who might not be considered family ‘officially’) are important contributors to and consumers of ‘household’ resources
- Family sharing practices are often invisible until brought into focus (e.g. childcare)
- Children value some autonomy in acquisition and use of resources – and adopt varied and creative strategies to achieve this
- Perceptions of (un)fairness go beyond the family, and are often a source of frustration (e.g. minimum age for paid work; minimum wage legislation)



## Survey strand

- Key measures
  - Household income (parent report)
  - Child deprivation (child report)
  - Subjective poverty (child and parent reports)
  - Family sharing (child and parent reports)
  - Child involvement in family financial decisions (child and parent reports)
  - Child contributions to household economy (child report)
  - Subjective well-being (child report; overall well-being and happiness in range of domains)



## Survey strand: do poor families do things differently?

- Asked about child's involvement in various household financial decisions (expensive purchases, everyday shopping, borrowing money, use of home, holidays and trips, expenses for the child, clothes and shoes, no involvement)
- From both parent and child reports, very few significant differences:
  - **Parent report:** children in poor households slightly less likely to be involved in decisions about holidays, expenses for child
  - **Child report:** children in poor households slightly less likely to be involved in decisions about holidays, more likely to not be involved in any decisions
- **Association with child SWB:** participation in decisions about everyday shopping, use of home, holidays and trips, expenses for child, child's clothes and shoes associated with higher SWB; participation in more decisions associated with higher SWB

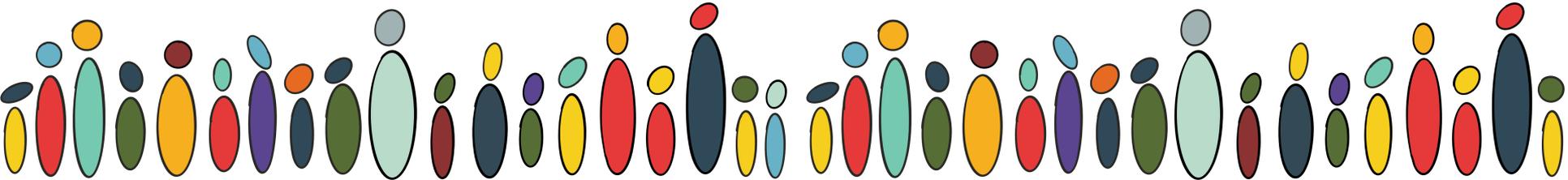
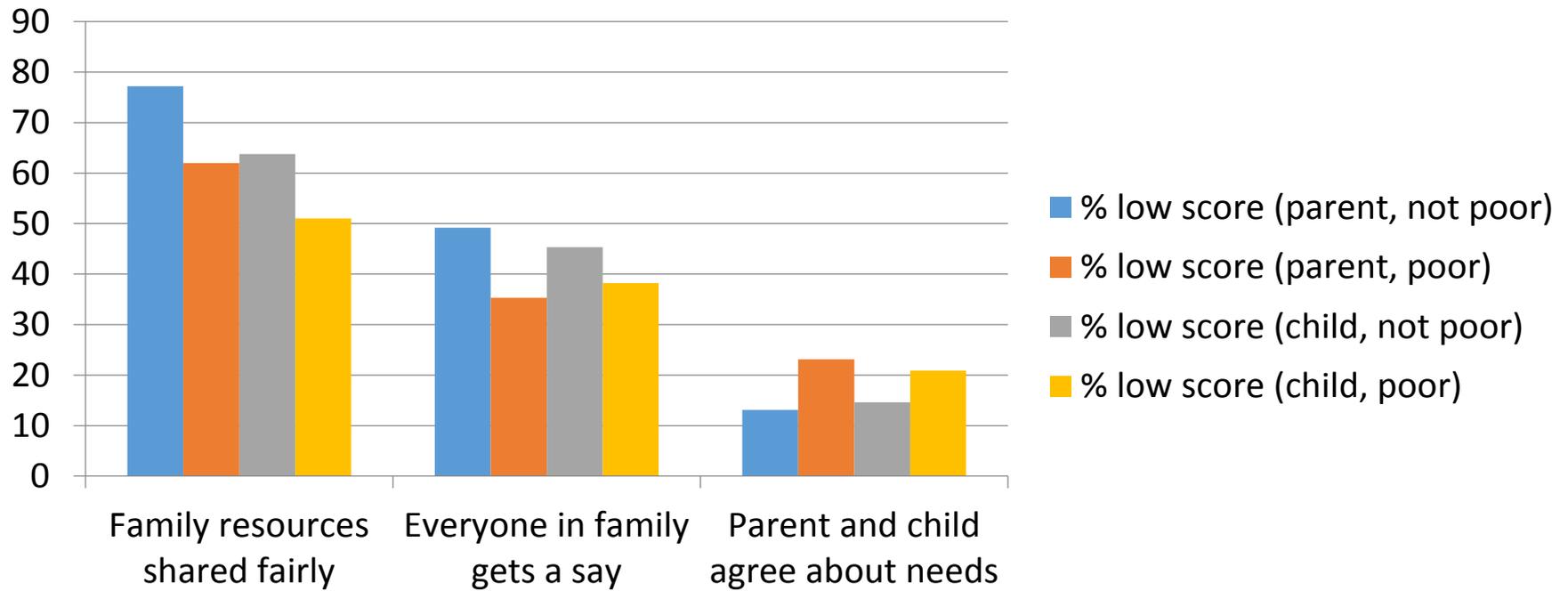


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Survey strand: do poor families do things differently?

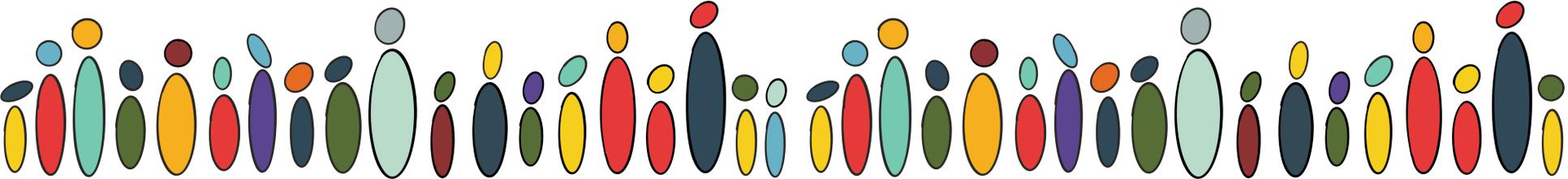
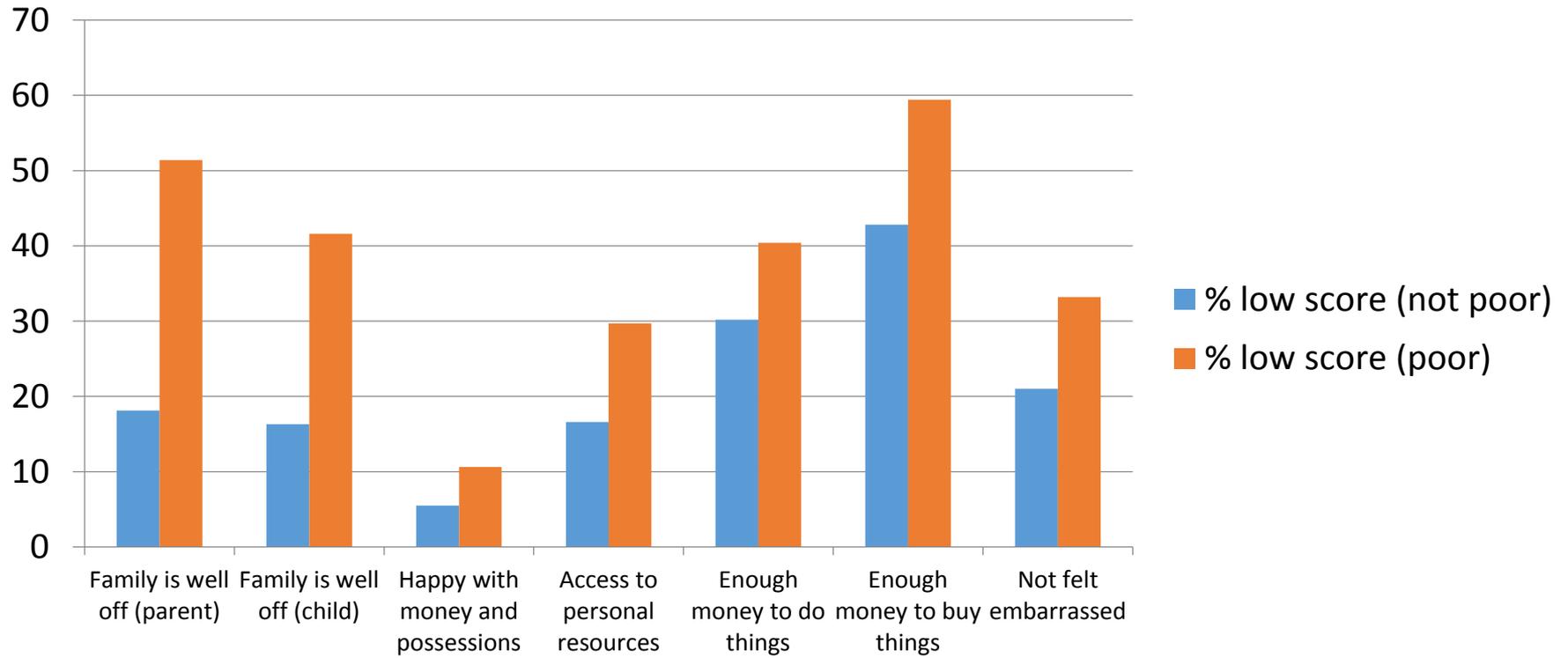


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## Survey strand: Subjective poverty

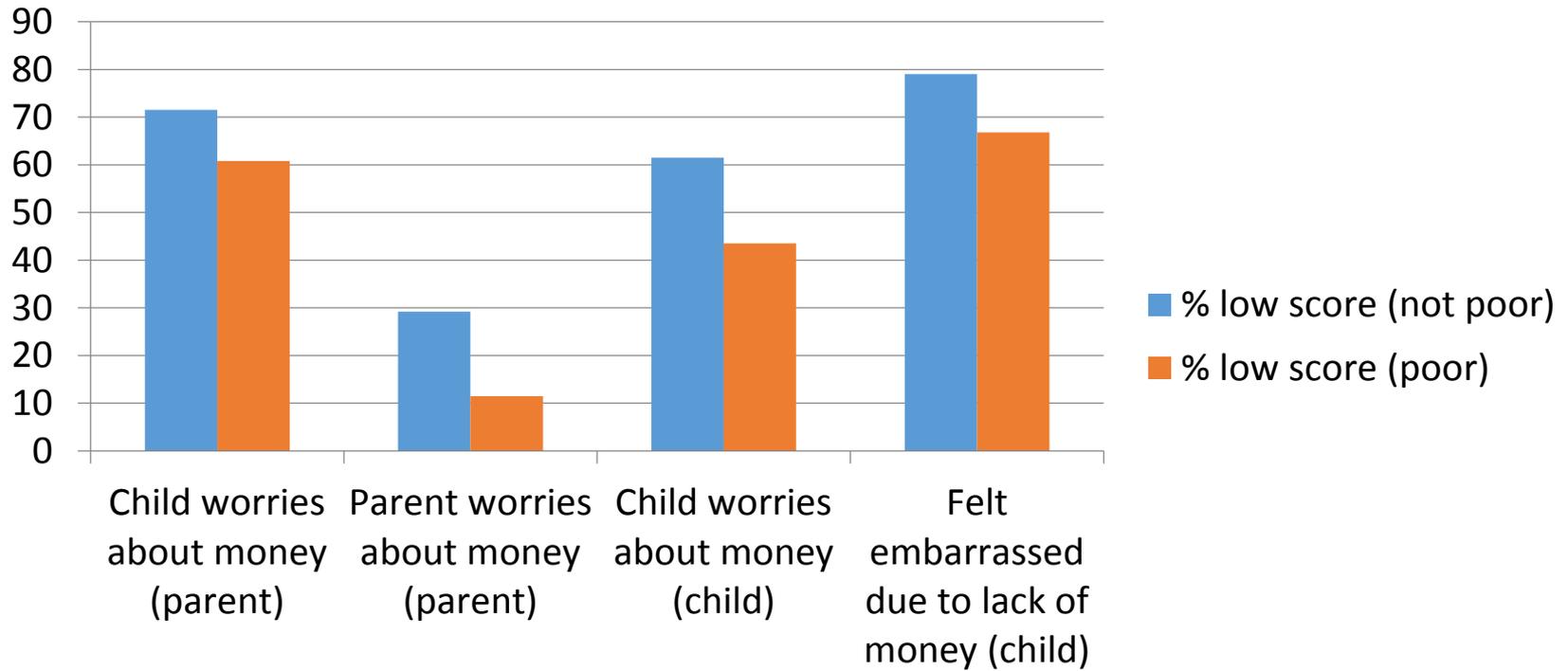


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## Survey strand: Worry about money



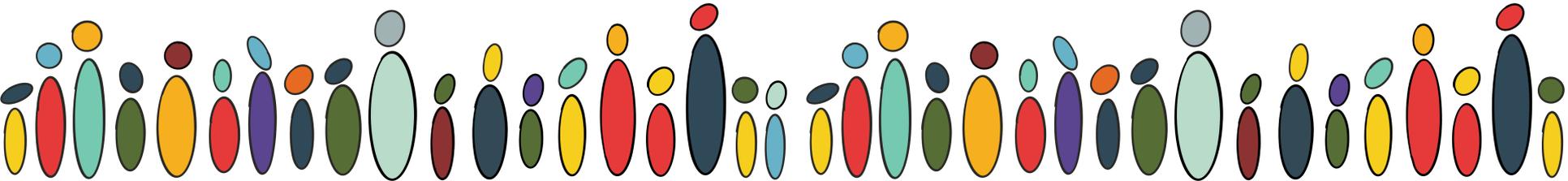
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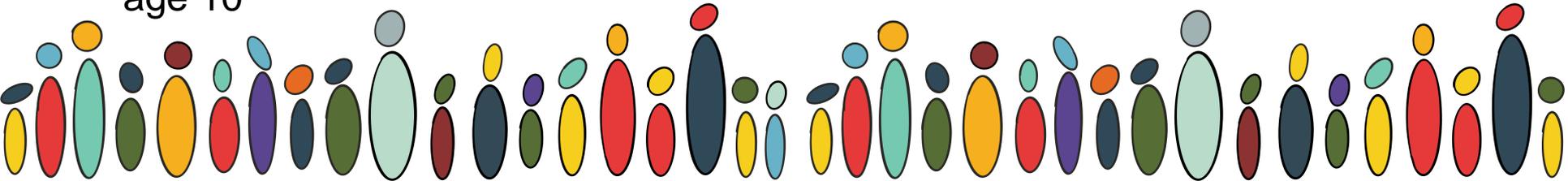
## Survey strand: do poor families do things differently?

- No significant differences between poor and non-poor families in response to several questions:
  - Child's understanding of family finances – both parent and child report
  - Whether child can persuade parent to get them things they want – both parent and child report
  - Whether child knows when parent is worried about money – both parent and child report



## Survey strand: Children's contributions to household economies

- **Protecting others:** 24.4% children reported pretending they did not want something Children's contributions to household economies
- **Contributing financially:** 10.2% children reported getting a job to earn money for themselves, 1.9% to support their family
- **Stealing:** 1.8% children reported shoplifting for themselves; 1.4% shoplifted for other family members; 3.2% stole from other members of their household
- **Making do:** 14.9% reported using old or worn-out thing
- **Housework:** contributions to household tasks – highly gendered even at age 10

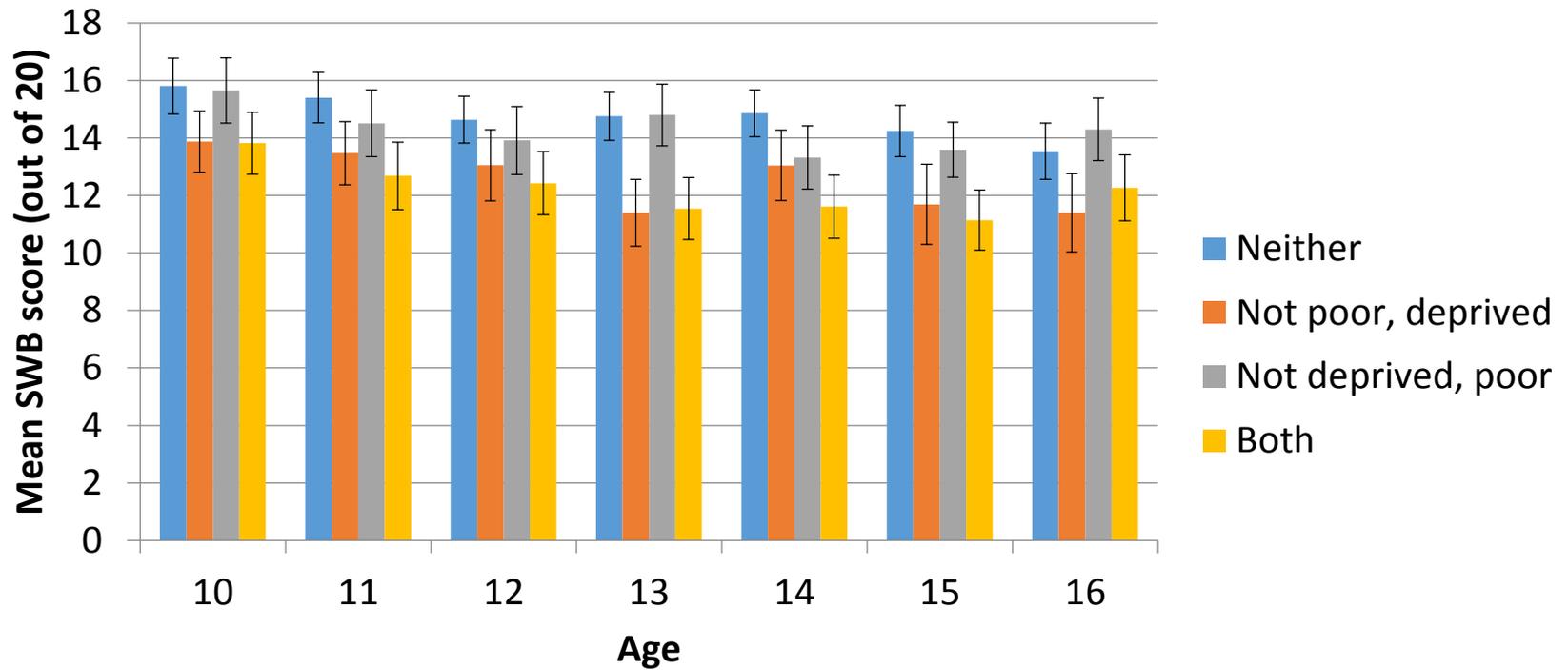


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## Survey strand: Income, deprivation and SWB



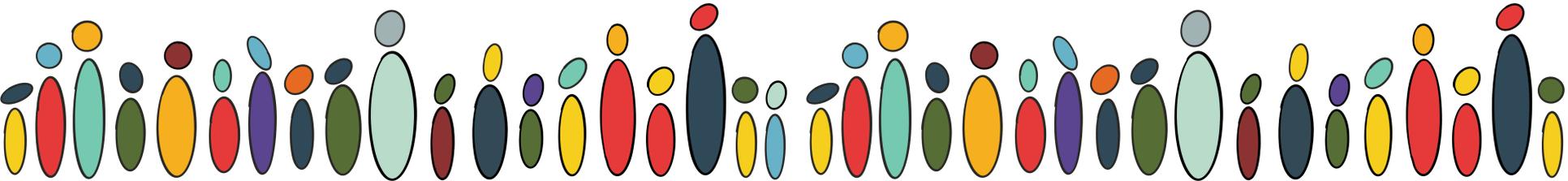
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## Survey strand: what can children's perspectives on poverty and household sharing tell us?

- Investigating links between household income, deprivation, family sharing, subjective material well-being (MWB), and subjective well-being (SWB)
- Hypotheses based on previous research:
  - Child-derived deprivation indicators will have a stronger association with SWB than household income
  - Subjective MWB will mediate the relationship between objective MWB and SWB
  - Perceptions of how families share resources will mediate the relationship between objective and subjective MWB



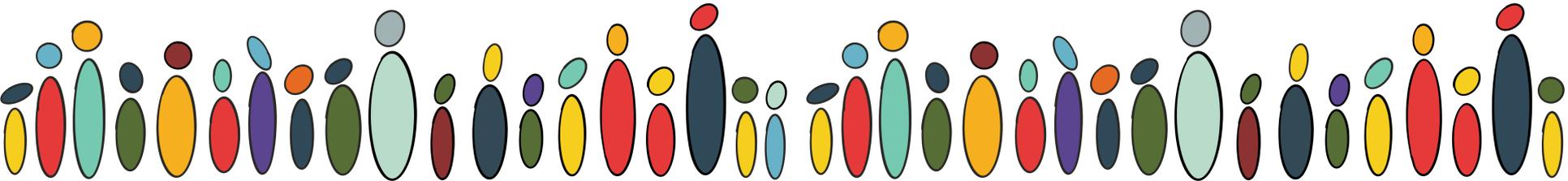
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## Emerging findings: Survey strand

- Predictors:
  - Household income (parent report, £thousands)
  - Child deprivation (child report, CDS)
  - Perceptions of fairness of family resource sharing (child report)
    - Everyone in family gets a say in resource use (5-point scale)
    - Everyone in family gets a fair share of resources (5-point scale)
  - Subjective material well-being (child report)
    - Wealth of family compared to others child knows (5-point scale)
    - Child's resources compared to others child knows (5-point scale)
    - Happiness with the things they have (11-point scale)
- Outcome:
  - Modified Student's Life Satisfaction Scale
- Controlled for age and gender

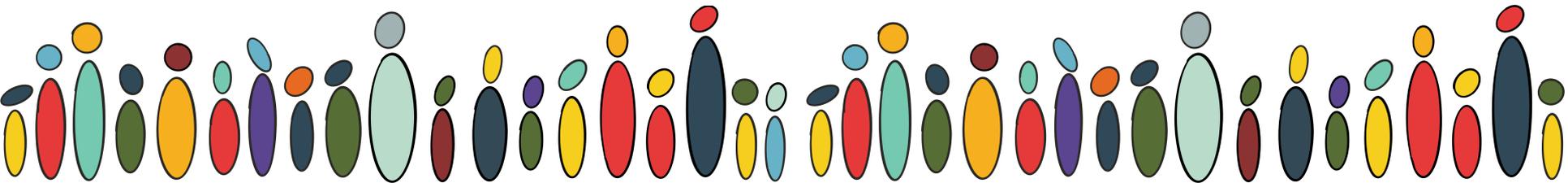
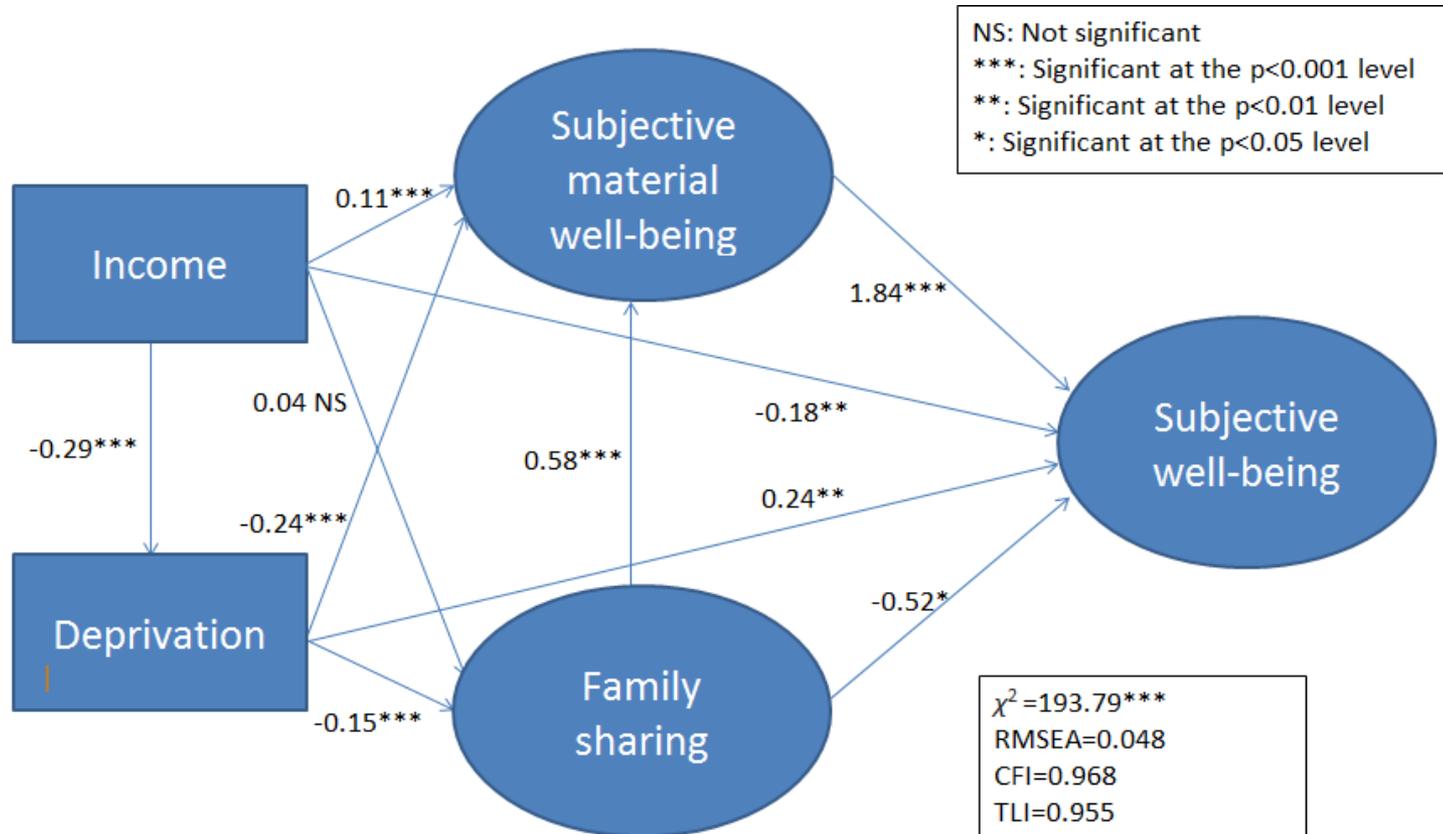


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## Structural equation model

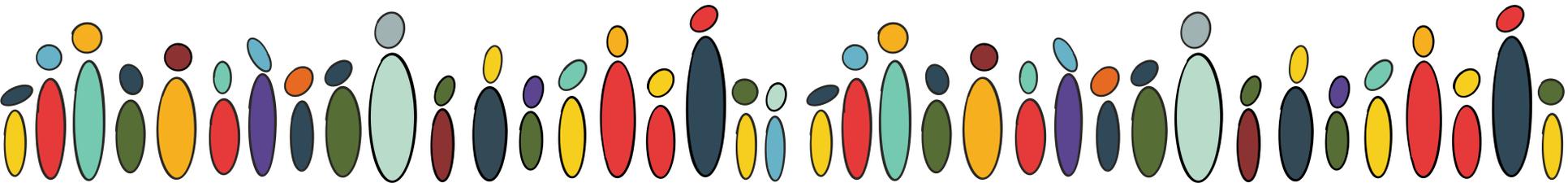
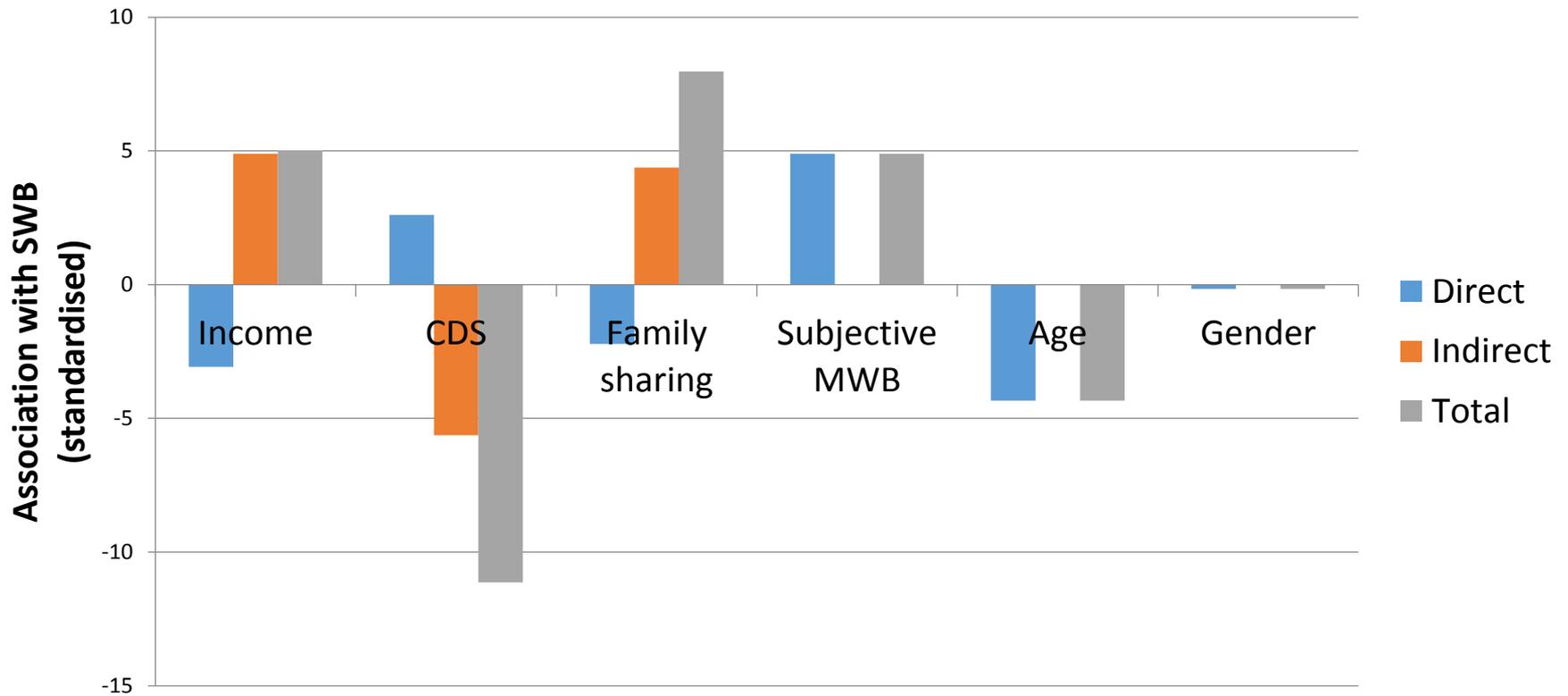


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## Direct, indirect and total effects



## Conclusions

- New evidence suggests that there is an important relationship between income and child subjective well-being, but the relationship is complex
- Identifying the relationship between child poverty and subjective well-being depends on what questions we ask, and who we ask
- Involving children in how we define and measure poverty, and in reporting on experiences of poverty, are vital to respecting children's rights and understanding the association between poverty and subjective well-being
- Family (and non-family) external to children's households can be contributors to and consumers of household resources – e.g. provision of childcare – with implications for the poverty status of multiple households
- Little evidence that poor families are doing family sharing or child involvement in family finances any differently to other families



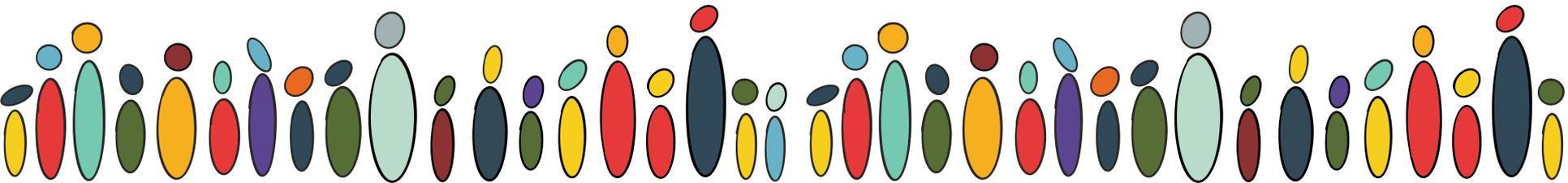
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## Implications

- Child poverty will increase if social security payments are made to a single household representative rather than to the child(ren)'s main carer
- Child poverty is a result of financial constraint, not parental financial mismanagement – increasing household incomes is key to child poverty reduction
- The visible effects of poverty are important – targeted interventions which identify children as poor (however subtly) are likely to have counter-productive effects on subjective well-being
- Some children may be more aware of their family financial situation than adults believe, and may engage in behaviours adults are not aware of to attempt to ameliorate their own and their family's situation
- Non-household and non-family actors can be important contributors to and consumers of household resources, and an understanding of a family's situation may necessitate consideration of such actors



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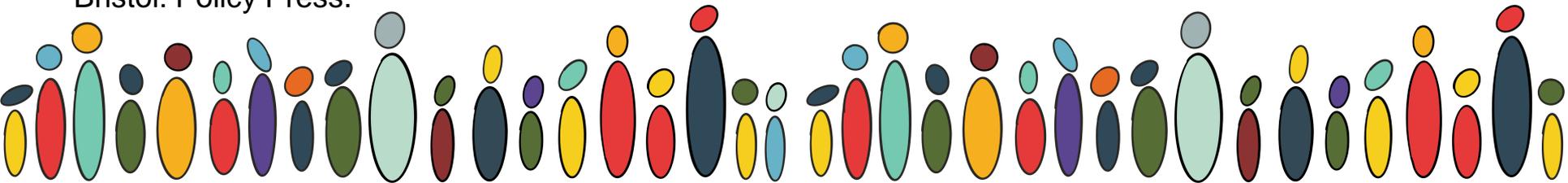


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# Child Poverty and Well-Being: What can we learn from children's perspectives?

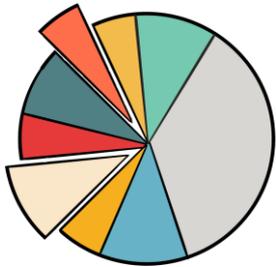


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Website: <http://www.education.leeds.ac.uk/research/projects/fair-shares-and-families>

## Thank you!

