



# Education, child poverty and ACEs

*Tayside Regional Improvement Collaborative*

*Professor Morag Treanor*

*3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020*

# Outline

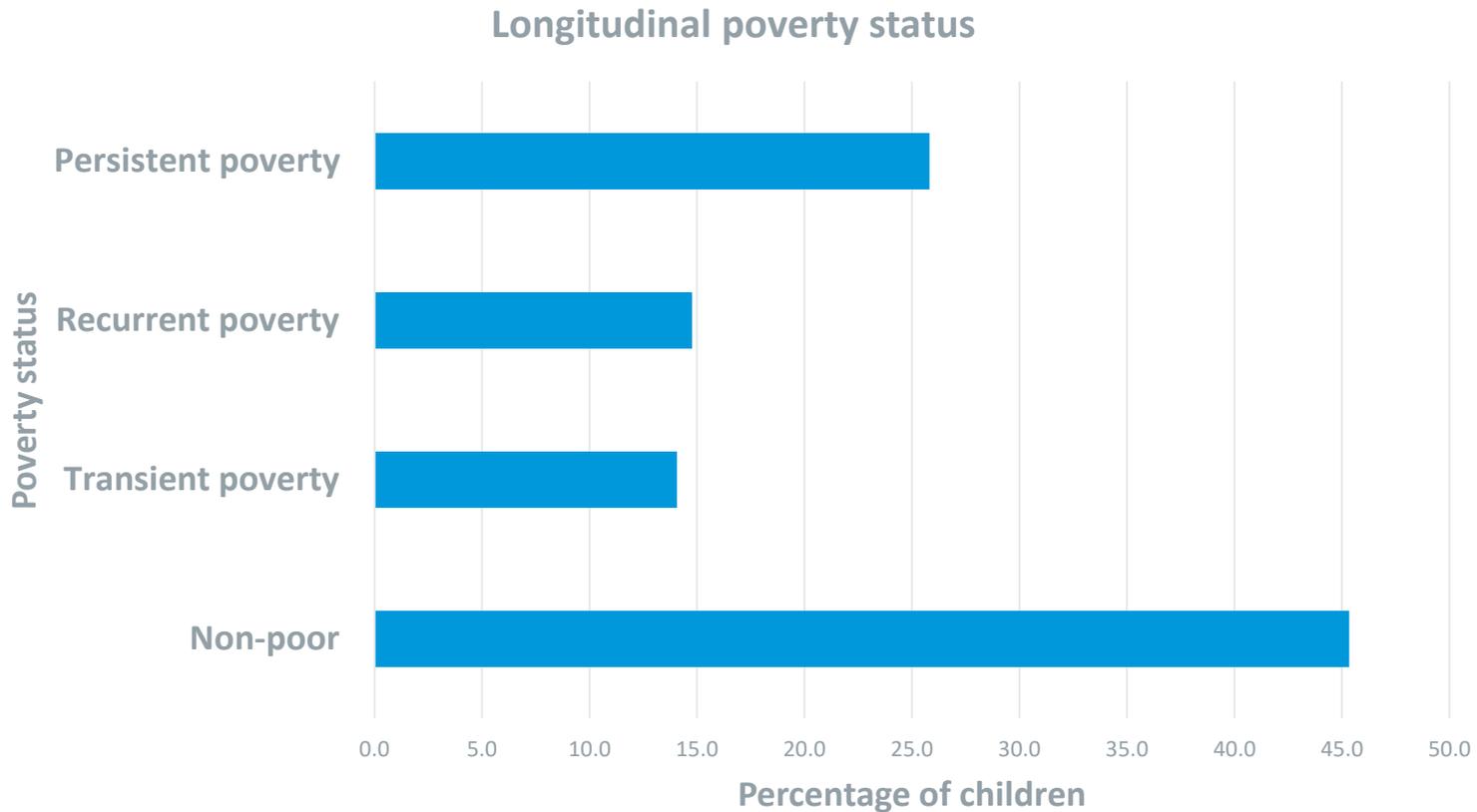
1. Poverty
2. Poverty and education
3. 'Poverty of aspirations'
4. ACEs

# 1. Poverty (2017-18)

- 20% child poverty rate before housing costs
  - 24% child poverty rate after housing costs
  - 65% of children in poverty are in in-work poverty
- 
- What these statistics do not convey...

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/poverty-income-inequality-scotland-2015-18/>

# Poverty is dynamic...



Source: Growing Up in Scotland sweeps 1 – 7  
Weighted by longitudinal weight from sweep 7

# What causes poverty?

- Child poverty in Scotland is mainly due to causes, or drivers, partially or wholly outside parents' control and usually completely outside children's control.
- These include aspects of
  - social security
  - income from employment
  - the costs of living.

<http://www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups/children/child-poverty/child-poverty-overview/causes-of-child-poverty>

# Welfare expenditure exercise

Benefit	Percentage
State pension	
Tax credits	
Housing benefit	
Disability benefits	
Incapacity benefits	
Child benefit	
Jobseekers allowance	
Other	
Total	100%

# Welfare expenditure exercise

Benefit	Percentage
State pension	45%
Tax credits	13%
Housing benefit	11%
Disability benefits	8%
Incapacity benefits	7%
Child benefit	5%
Jobseekers allowance	1%
Other	11%
Total	100%

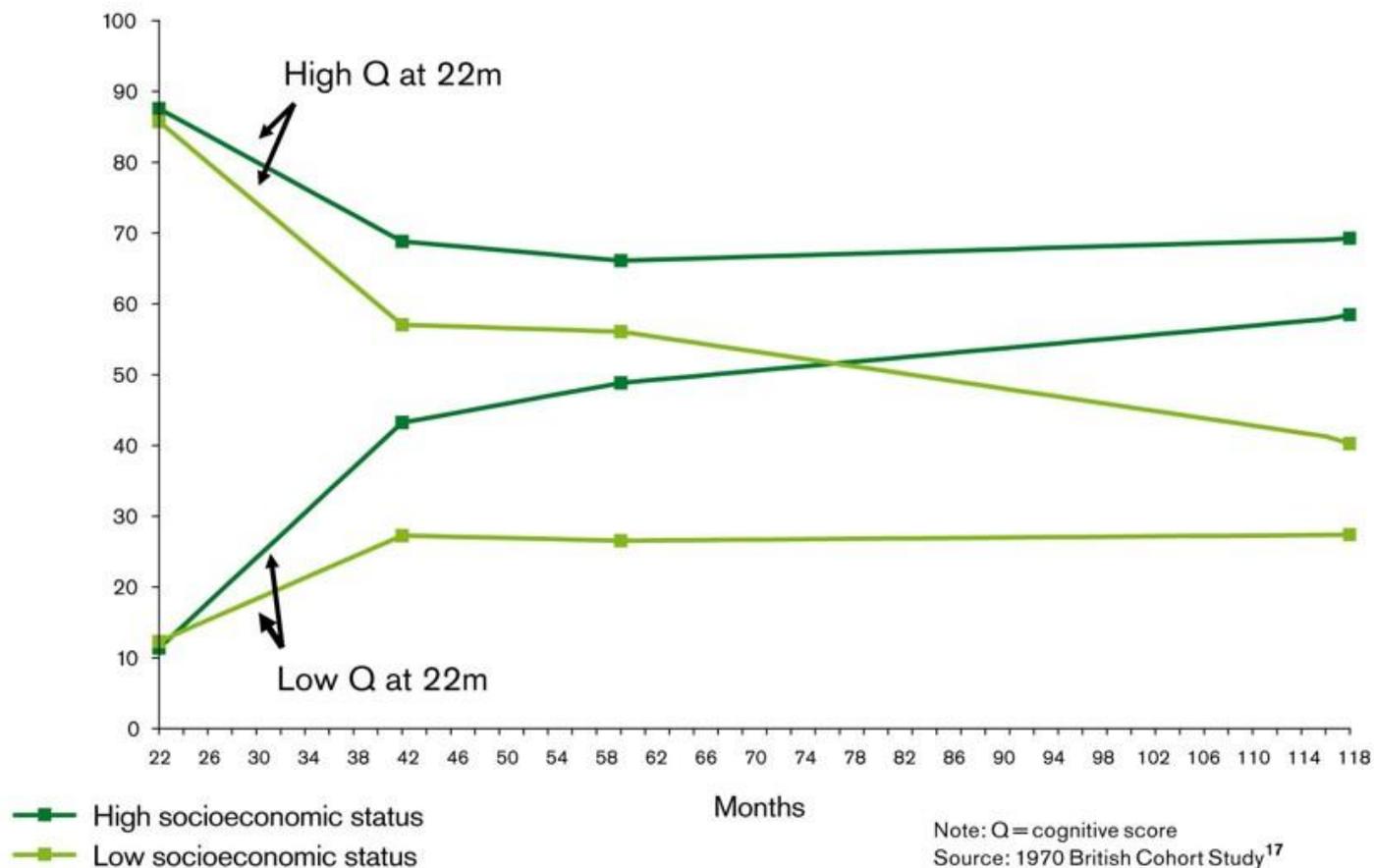
# 1. Poverty and education



# Feinstein 2003

**Figure 6** Inequality in early cognitive development of children in the 1970 British Cohort Study, at ages 22 months to 10 years

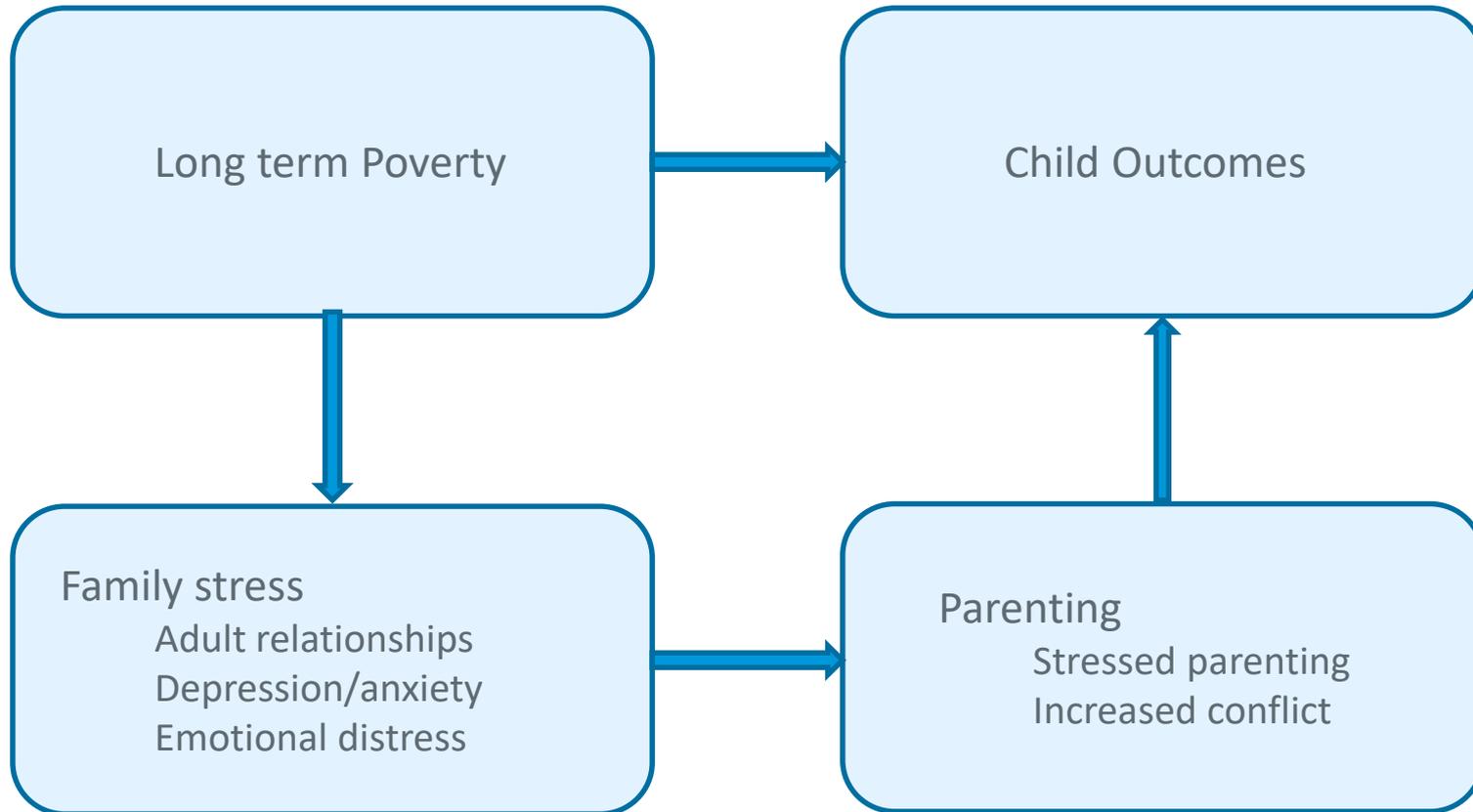
Average position  
in distribution



# Why?

- Why children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds do worse in school than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds
  - Family Stress Model
  - Family Investment Model

# Family Stress Model



# Family Investment Model

- Education as desirable consumption good;
  - Buying housing in good catchment areas;
  - Paying tutors;
  - Private education;
  - Private education *and* tutors (yes really!)
- Social and Cultural capital
- When funding is put into schools to raise attainment it will raise the attainment of *all* children and the gap between rich and poor will remain the same or widen.

# Poverty, children and education

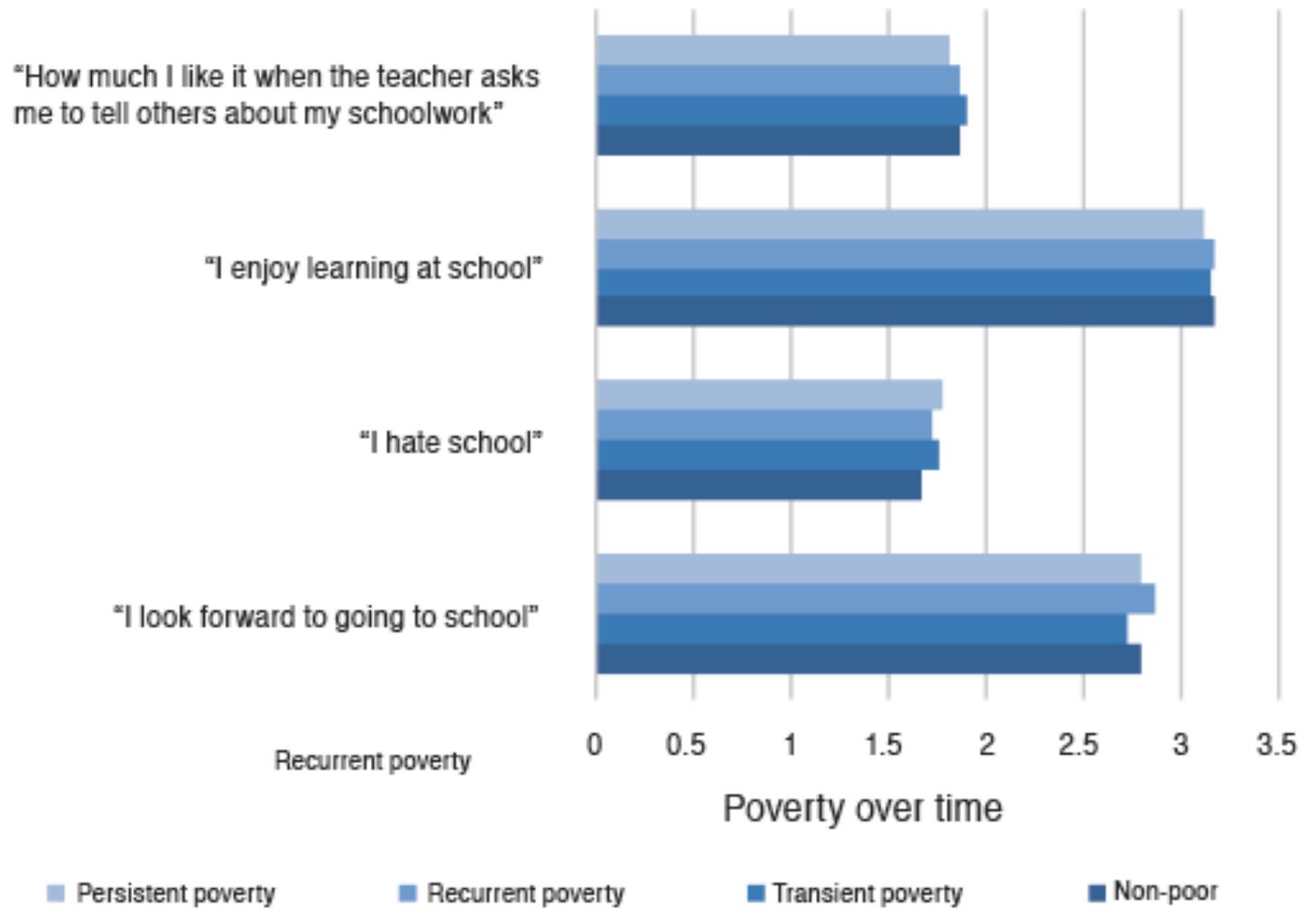
- problems are more likely to arise, at school, for working class children because *the form of participation that is required of them at school doesn't closely match the one that is required of them at home and in their immediate surroundings.*
- Educated middle class parents, in contrast, tend to be better off, better educated *and require of their children at home a form of participation that matches more closely what is expected of children at school.*
- This means that compared to their middle class peers, *working class children tend to be at a disadvantage when they get to school where they first have to learn all about a new form of learning, which is called education.*

Evans (2006: 7)

# Poverty, children and education

- Working-class parents valued education no less than middle-class parents, but depended on the teacher to educate their child (Crompton).
- Middle-class parents, however, **had no such deference to professionals**, and saw education as a shared enterprise (Crompton).
- *'Middle-class parents, in supervising, monitoring and overseeing the educational experience of their children, behave in ways that mirror the requests of schools. This appears to provide middle-class children with educational advantages over working-class children'* (Lareau 1997: 714).

Children's experiences of school



# Poverty, parents and education



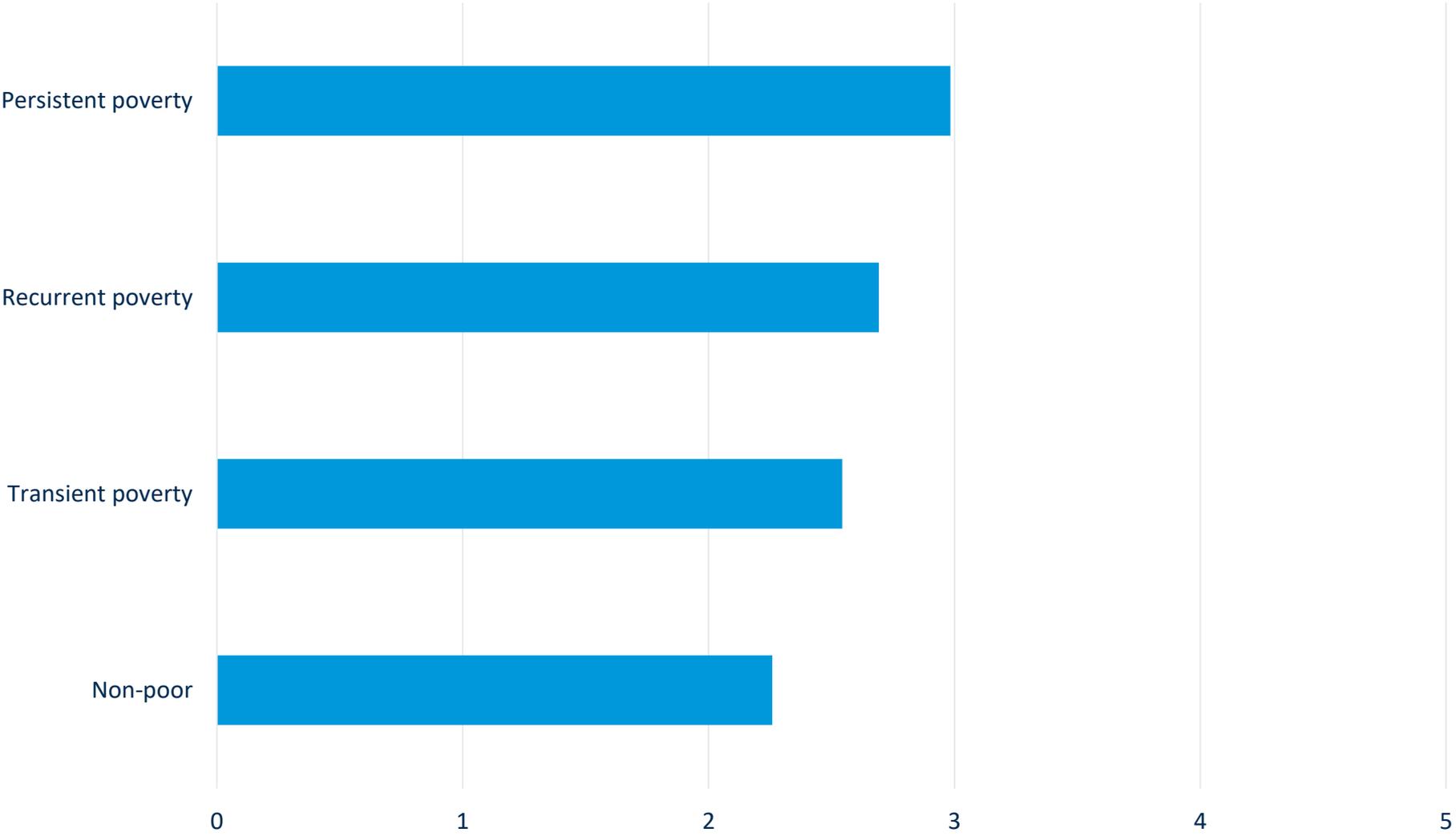
# Contradictory experiences of school

- Parents' living in poverty report both positive and negative experiences of school.
- They say they struggled, and that they didn't get on with teachers, but that they loved school.
- School was sometimes considered a sanctuary.
- Don't assume children living in poverty, the young person who might act up in class and you may think of as a pain, or the children dealing with other family adversities - which are more likely to occur when you're living in poverty - isn't glad to be there, or enjoying school.
- Children and young people living in poverty say that school is extremely important to them. The things that are most important to them are their relationships with teachers and with peers (feeling valued, belonging and acceptance).

# Growing up in Scotland

- The following graphs are taken from sweep 7 of the growing up in Scotland study where parents are asked about their own experiences of school.

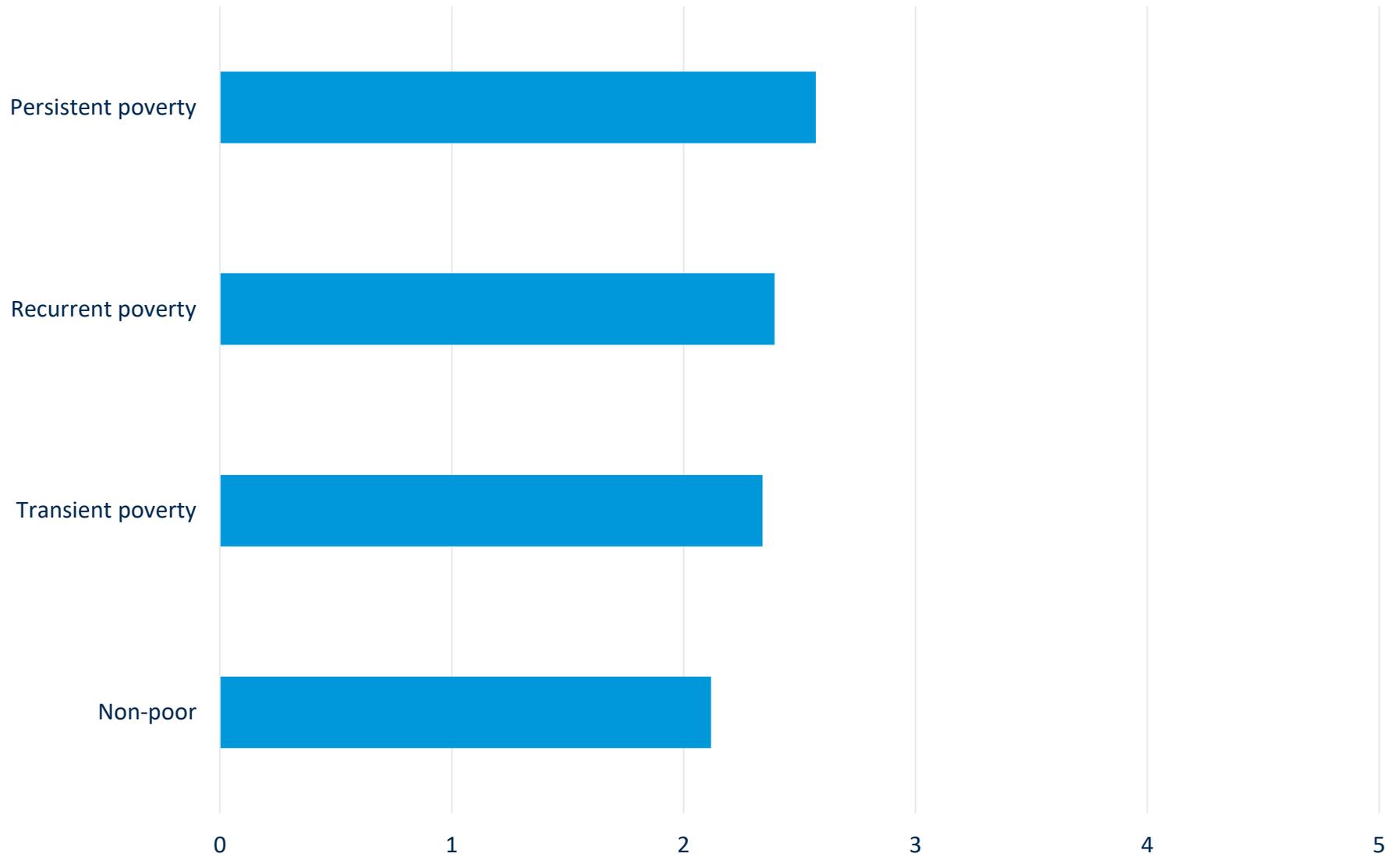
# I enjoyed being at school (mean)



Source: Growing Up in Scotland Sweep 7

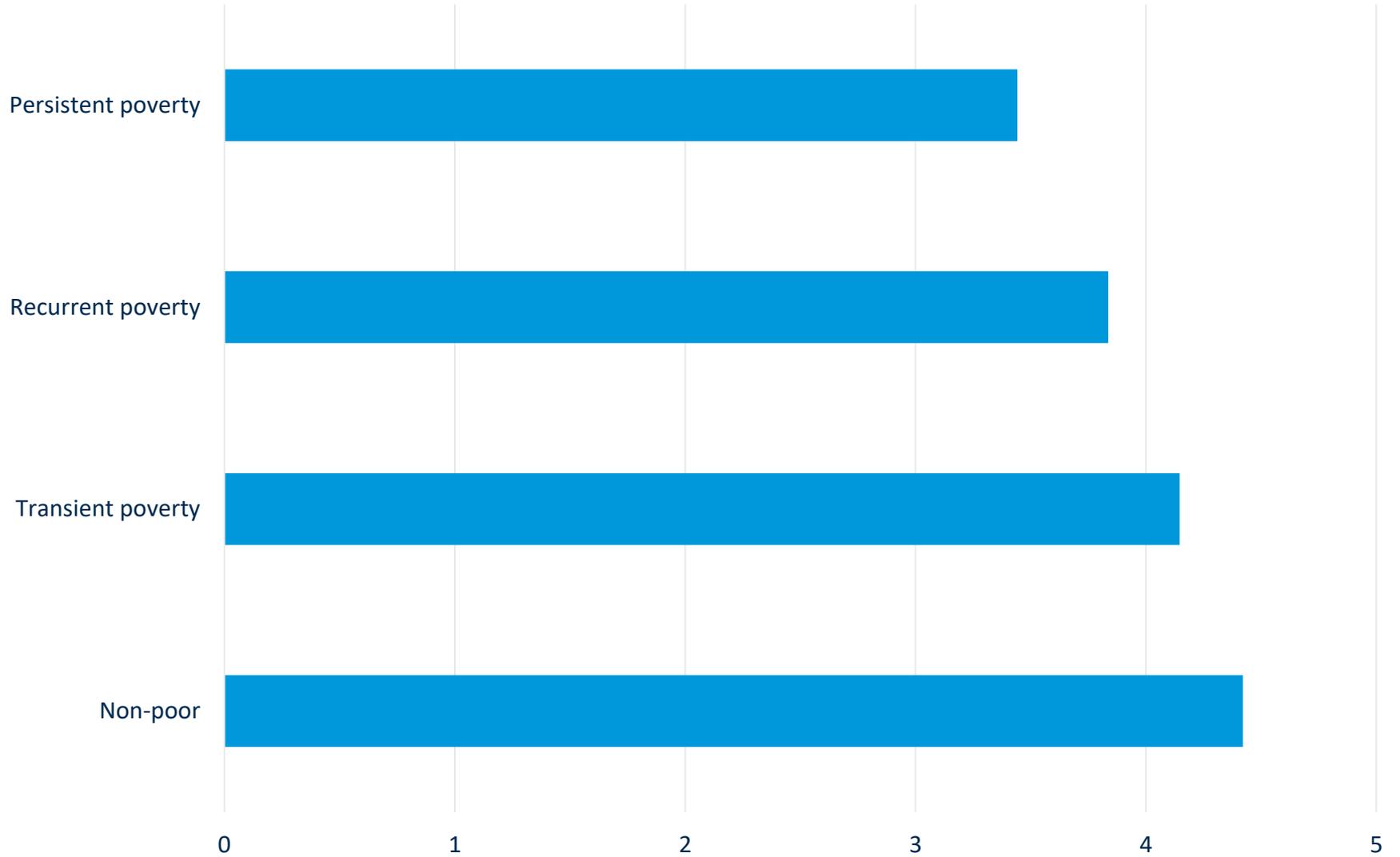


## I tried really hard to achieve at school (mean)



Source: Growing Up in Scotland Sweep 7

# I often played truant at school (mean)

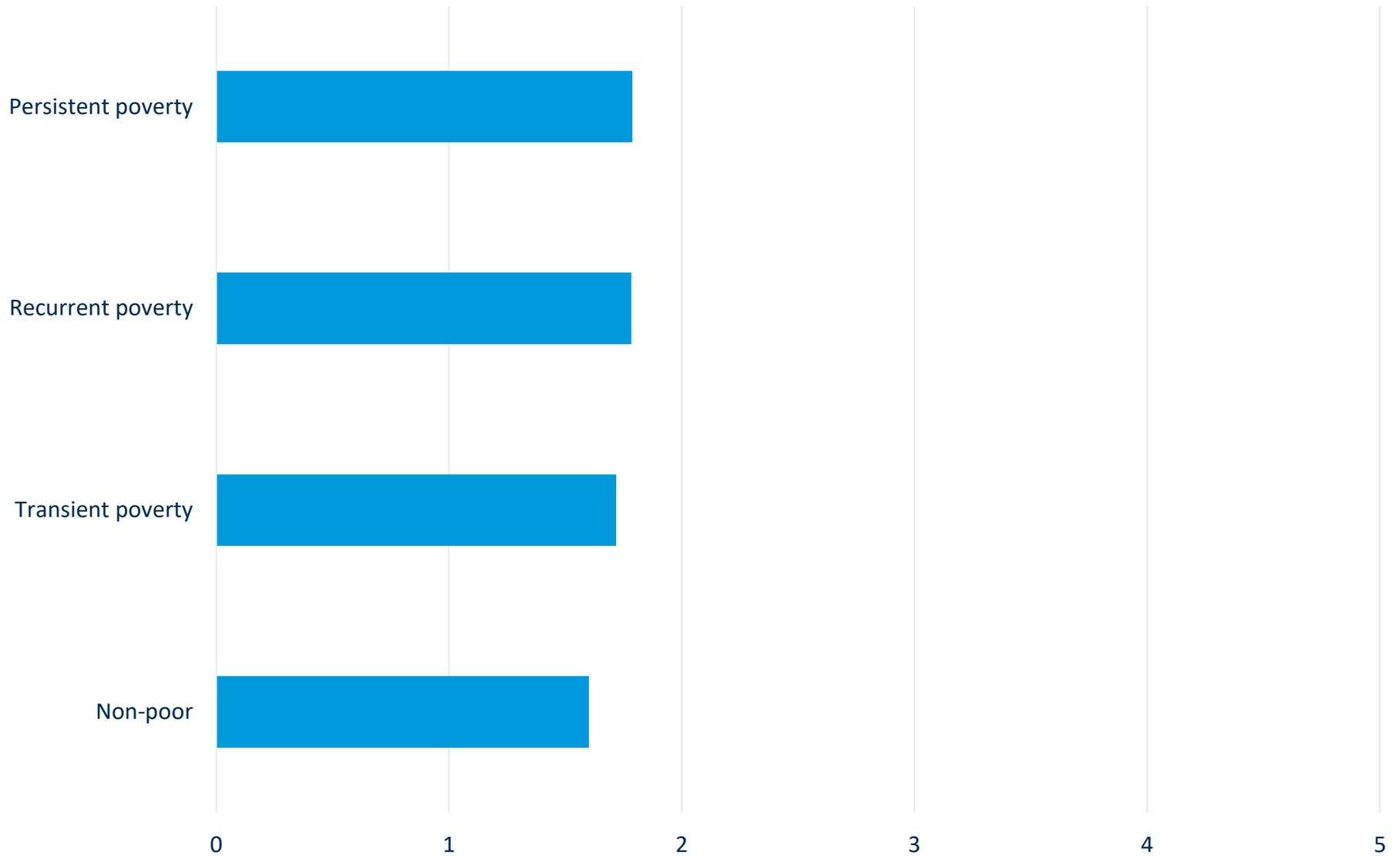


Source: Growing Up in Scotland Sweep 7



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# I believe I can positively influence my child's achievement at school (mean)



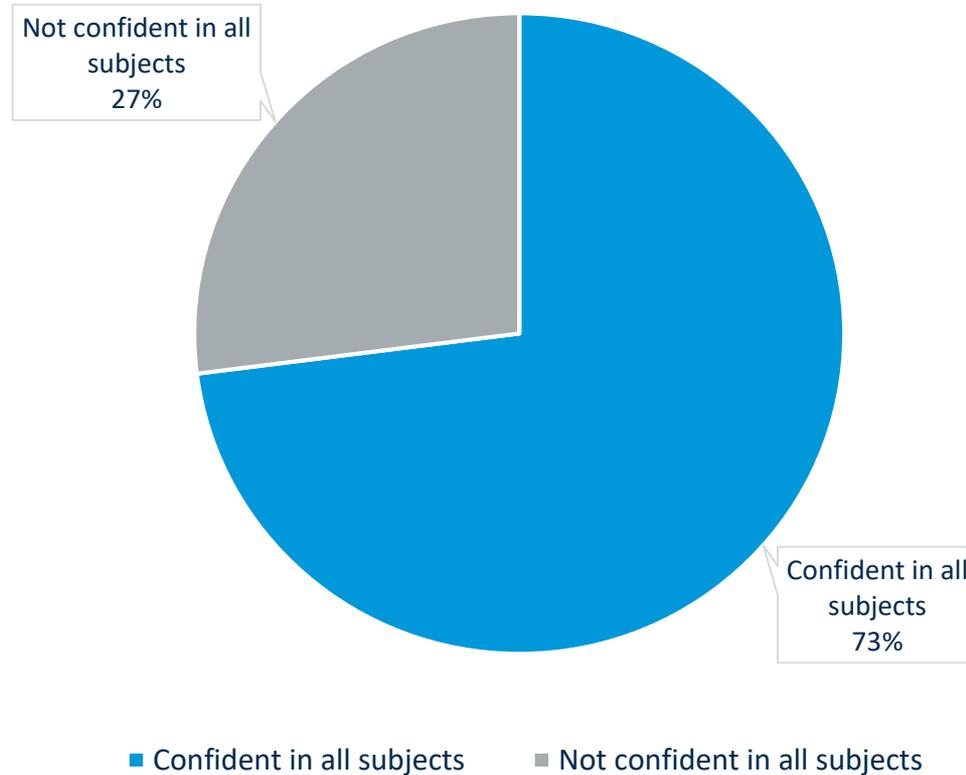
Source: Growing Up in Scotland Sweep 7



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# Parental confidence

How confident I am helping child with homework



Source: Growing Up in Scotland sweeps 1 – 7  
Weighted by longitudinal weight from sweep 7

seemed a little careless when, informed by a teacher of some misbehaviour in the playground, they would – instead of reprimanding the child – begin shouting at the teacher. But we understood our mothers a little better. We knew that they, in their own time, had feared school, just as we did now, feared the arbitrary rules and felt shamed by them, by the new uniforms they couldn't afford, the baffling obsession with quiet, the incessant correcting of their original patois or cockney, the sense that they could never do anything right anyway. A deep anxiety about 'being told off' – for who they were, for what they had or hadn't done, and now for the deeds of their children – this fear never really left our mothers, many of whom had become our mothers when they were not much more than children themselves. And so 'Parents' Evening' was, in their minds, not so distant from 'detention'. It remained a place where they might be shamed. The difference was now they were grown and could not be forced to attend.

# Poverty, teachers and education



# Poverty, teachers and education

- There are misunderstandings, among teachers and student teachers, that the causes of poverty-related educational underachievement lie with pupils or their parents as individuals, rather than within institutional structures and practices (Thompson et al., 2016).
- Such misunderstanding leads to teachers and student teachers falling back on negative stereotypes of children and parents (Thompson et al., 2016).
- Poverty is not always taught in initial teacher training, nor in continuing professional development, and so teachers are often uninitiated in the differences between the causes and consequences of poverty.
- This leads some teachers' to express views linking poverty with '*parental values, choices and financial skills*' (Spencer, 2015: 45).

# Poverty, teachers and education

- This makes them more likely to display attitudes that cause (unintended) exclusion for poor children within schools.
- It can trigger low well-being, frustration, disengagement, truancy and exclusion.
- Yet, teachers and student teachers, unless otherwise taught, cannot be expected to understand the causes and consequences of poverty and its effects on children's education.
- This suggests that educating the educators on these issues is an essential part of alleviating the effects of poverty on children's education.

# Poverty, teachers and education

- Teachers blame parents for many of the problems their children face (Horgan, 2011).
- Teachers often display misunderstandings towards the causes and consequences of poverty BUT they do report being keen to reduce stigma for children living in poverty and want to do more to ensure they have a successful education (Horgan, 2007).
- It is vital for the inclusion and success of poor children's education that some teachers' negative assumptions are supportively challenged and their desire to improve children's outcomes encouraged.

# Poverty of aspirations

- Aspirations have become a key educational policy driver in the UK and are seen as one of the critical levers for improving educational attainment and raising skills.
- children and their parents are seen as lacking ambition
- leads to a deficit view of aspirations, holding young people and their parents 'responsible' for their 'lack of' ambition.
- but aspirations expressed by young people and their parents reflect the expectations and constraints inherent within their setting, rather than a free choice of desired outcome.

Ralf St Clair & Amanda Benjamin (2011) Performing desires: the dilemma of aspirations and educational attainment, British Educational Research Journal, 37:3, 501-517



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## GORDON BROWN

So my argument, and my starting point today, is it is time for Britain to leave behind once and for all this culture of pessimism, any acquiescence in defeatism, any acceptance of low aspirations that holds us back. Poverty of aspiration is as damaging as poverty of opportunity and it is time to replace a culture of low expectations for too many with a culture of high standards for all.

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## TONY BLAIR

Their poverty is, not just about poverty of income, but poverty of aspiration, of opportunity, of prospects of advancement. We must not in any way let up on the action we take to deal directly with child poverty. But at the same time, we have to recognise that for some families, their problems are more multiple, more deep and more pervasive than simply low income. The barriers to opportunity are about their social and human capital as much as financial. Universal services are not reaching them. And thus it follows that pre-fabricated services cannot answer to individual needs.

# Despite excellent work on child poverty by the Scottish Government, myths persist...

Alex Cole-Hamilton (LD)

Naturally, the bill commands the support of the Liberal Democrats. I am heartily glad that that support is shared across the Parliament. There is now a recognition in this chamber that our efforts to tackle the scourge of child poverty must go far beyond just the financial health of our nation's families. I refer to the range of other forms of poverty that are in many ways as pressing as financial poverty and which might have as profound an impact on life outcomes. There is poverty of aspiration, whereby children grow up in families that have experienced generations of unemployment and economic inactivity and do not seek social mobility for themselves; poverty of attachment, particularly among the 15,000 children in our care system who will find it difficult to form lasting adult relationships due to childhood trauma and loss; and poverty of health, whereby poor housing, health inequalities and depression diminish life outcomes and life expectancy.

Michelle Ballantyne (C)

Alex Cole-Hamilton hit the right note when he talked about the other impacts of poverty. The poverty of attachment is something that I have seen through my professional life, and I certainly acknowledge that the poverty of aspiration needs to be addressed. He also highlighted the importance of community planning and the need to ensure that looked after and accommodated children have a voice in the process.

Ruth Maguire (SNP)

**Ruth Maguire:** 

Can the member understand how offensive the term "poverty of aspiration" is to people who simply do not have enough money?

Scottish Parliament 8 November 2017. *Official report of the Stage 3 debate on the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill* [Online]. Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament. Available: <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11177&i=101890> [Accessed 6 December 2017].

“Five or six miles down the road in Glasgow Govan it’s four per cent. Now that’s not ~~because of tuition fees,~~ because we don’t have them in Scotland, that’s because of the lack of investment, or **aspiration of young people** that don’t even grow up thinking that’s an option for them. That’s where we need to focus that early years intervention if we really want to tackle inequality.”

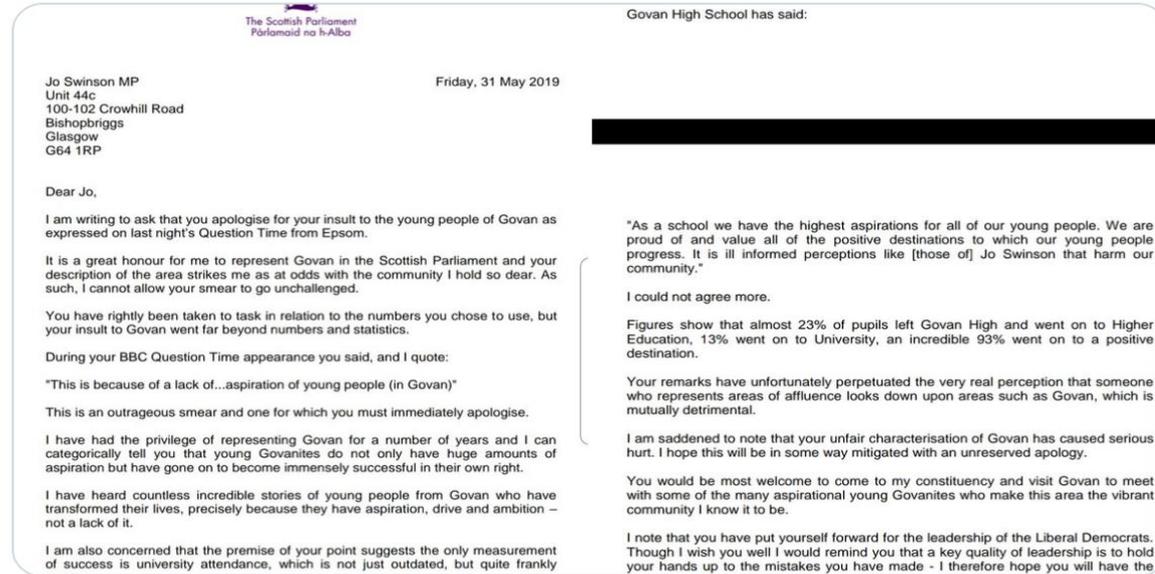
<https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/snp-and-jo-swinson-clash-over-question-time-comments-on-scottish-education-1-4938790>



**Humza Yousaf** @HumzaYousaf · May 31

I've written to @joswinson asking her to apologise to Govanites for her unacceptable slur. If you have ever stepped foot in Govan you'll know young Govanites certainly do not lack aspiration!

Hope Jo will show some Leadership qualities and have the good grace to apologise.



260

520

1.4K



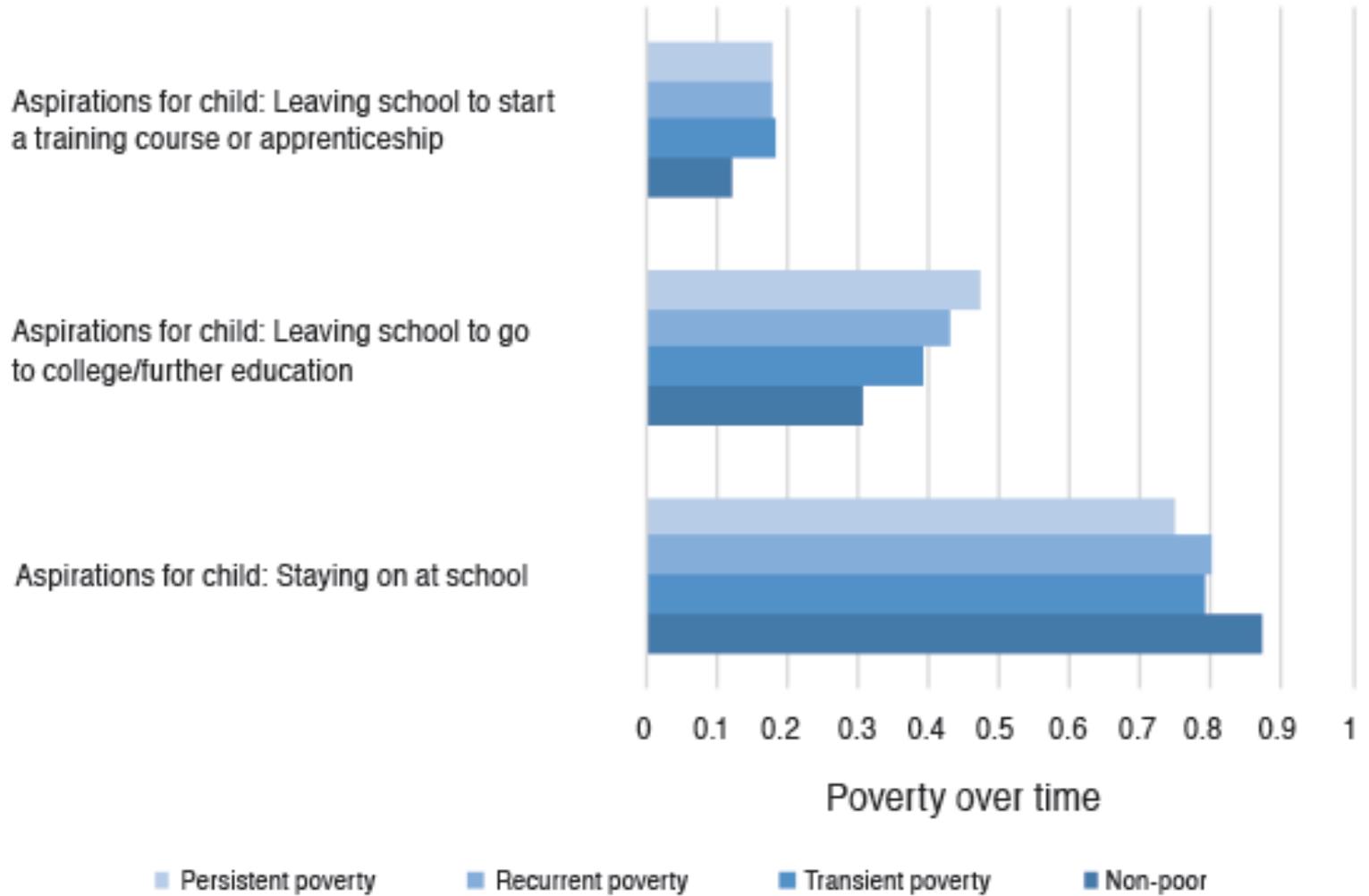
**Kerry McKenzie**

@kezkenzie

Replying to @HumzaYousaf and @joswinson

Setting you some homework Jo. This is essential reading by @MoragTreasor on expelling the myth of poverty of aspiration [era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/25...](http://era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/25...)

Parental aspirations for child



Poverty over time

■ Persistent poverty    ■ Recurrent poverty    ■ Transient poverty    ■ Non-poor

# Poverty of aspirations

- Children living in poverty **do** have high aspirations for themselves, although the jobs they aspire to are often of the gendered variety familiar to them within the context of their knowledge and experience, such as hairdressers or mechanics (Horgan, 2007).
- That is to say that *'aspirations expressed by young people reflect the expectations and constraints inherent within their setting, rather than a free choice of desired outcome'* (St Clair and Benjamin, 2011: 502).
- Children do not start off with low expectations. When they are younger they have the same hopes and dreams as all children, however, their confidence in their ability to attain their aspirations becomes diminished over time.
- Aspirations, even in communities struggling with poverty, are very high—the missing element is the knowledge of how to make these aspirations real and obtainable.
- Parents living in poverty also have high aspirations for their children but feel unable to engage with their child's learning in the home and feel inadequate in their knowledge and experience to help their children.

# Mary's story



# Mary's ACEs

- That's right, she doesn't have any.
- But she does have:
  - Bereavement
  - Parental physical illness/disability
  - Overcrowding
  - Young carer
  - Poverty
  - Deprived neighbourhood
  - Problems at school (bullying?)

# ACEs

ACEs – repackaging old problems in shiny new (Emperor's) clothes: Professor Morag Treanor



# ACEs – methodological problems

- The original study is not a population-based study, it comprises a sample of predominantly white, middle-class, adult, private health insurance (Kaiser Permanente) patients.
- This makes it a biased sample, one that, for example, excludes the study of socioeconomic disadvantage (privately insured) and ethnicity (predominantly white).
- retrospective questionnaires with adults – recollections of childhood experiences biased according to adult outcome.
- But, it was never intended for how it has come to be used.
- <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/CRFRresilience/2019/08/01/repackaging-old-problems/>

# ACEs – biology, brains and epigenetics

- Medical model - issues are often only taken seriously if they can be labelled as a medical problem or considered a disease.
- Why the medical professions has discovered adversity.
- The epigenetic ‘evidence’ is supposition.
- ACEs advocates talk of a cumulative ‘dose response’ and of the ‘toxic stress’ induced by negative experiences as though these are matters of medical fact. They are not, they are overly fatalistic metaphors
- <https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/parentingculturestudies/files/2018/01/The-Problem-with-ACEs-EY10039-Edwards-et-al.-2017-1.pdf>

# ACEs – deterministic and catastrophic

- ACEs is a particularly deterministic concept: the effects of having ACEs is thought not only to lead to a degraded life and early death, but also to defective parenting, which, it is asserted, will lead indisputably to ACEs in the next generation.
- No attention paid to severity, timing or duration of adversity.
- Types of ACEs – can we bundle parental separation with sexual abuse?
- Is parental separation always bad?
- When is an ACE not an ACE?

# ACEs – biased and deficit-based

- As with other family-deficit models that seek to explain inequalities in childhood, the parenting of those from a lower social class and/or non-white ethnicity, particularly mothers, is being held up against upper-middle class white standards and found lacking.
- Parenting and family is culturally specific. Hartas (2019) finds that there is a very low prevalence of ACEs reported in Asian families compared to white, Hispanic and other groups, suggesting that there are cultural and ethnic influences on perceptions of parenting and childhood experiences.
- NZ researchers have called it a racist tool.
- The ACEs concept does not include assets, or protective factors, or family and community support, or other resources.

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/CRFRresilience/2019/08/01/repackaging-old-problems/>

# ACEs – families, gender and mothers

- The ACEs approach is not a neutral, evidence-based diagnosis.
- based on a deficit model of the family, of parents, and of mothers especially: they are centred on the quality of parental caregiving, particularly mothers', making the family the cause of, and the solution to, adversities experienced.
- Adverse Child Experiences is the latest in a long line of diagnoses of, and simple solutions to, complex social issues.
- risks pathologising a huge number of people and blurring the boundaries of normal and abnormal experiences.
- ACEs turn the individual into an object who is subjected to experiences, not a human being who interprets them.
- Humans reflect, respond, learn and create new narratives. Very dynamic and adaptable.

# ACEs – follow the money

- Original study of privately insured health patients.
- Suggestions insurance companies have already and will start to ask about ACEs for health/life insurance etc (I couldn't find direct evidence of this at present).
- Private consultants making a lot of money. Money for old rope? Snake oil?
- Event in Glasgow in September 2018, 2500 attendees paying £100-£150 per head (of public money). That equates to £250,000 - £375,000. Where did the money go?

# Summary of ACEs

- Deterministic
- Catastrophic
- Sample of white, middle-class, privately insured Americans in one city
- Gendered
- Home-based
- Culturally insensitive
- Lack nuance: severity and chronicity
- Ignores poverty and inequality

# ACEs

'The Problem with ACEs'. Edwards et al.'s submission to the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee Inquiry into the evidence-base for early years intervention (EY10039). 12 December 2017.

## THE PROBLEM WITH 'ACEs'

**EY10039: Edwards et al.'s submission to the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee Inquiry into the evidence-base for early years intervention. (12 December 2017)**

Authors: Professor Rosalind Edwards, Professor Val Gillies, Professor Ellie Lee, Dr Jan Macvarish, Professor Susan White, Professor David Wastell.

Contact: Dr Jan Macvarish, [J.Macvarish@Kent.ac.uk](mailto:J.Macvarish@Kent.ac.uk)



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# The ACE Index: mapping childhood adversity in England

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## ABSTRACT

**Background** Studies of adults show that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are associated with health and social problems and are more common among people living in deprived areas. However, there is limited information about the geographical pattern of contemporary ACEs.

**Methods** We used data from the police, social services, schools and vital statistics in England to calculate population rates of events that represent childhood adversity. We constructed an 'ACE Index' that summarizes the relative frequency of ACEs at local authority level, informed by the methods of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. We explored associations between the ACE Index and local characteristics in cross-sectional ecological analysis.

**Results** The ACE Index was strongly associated with the proportion of children that live in income-deprived households (child poverty). In addition, the ACE Index was independently associated with higher population density and was higher in certain regions, particularly the north-east.

**Conclusions** The association between ACEs and child poverty provides evidence of a process in which deprivation increases the risk of adverse experiences in childhood. The ACE Index can inform allocation of resources for prevention and mitigation of ACEs.

**Keywords** children, public health, social determinants

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View the padlet



# ACEs

Social Epidemiology (J Dowd, Section Editor) | Published: 08 November 2019

## The Role of Socioeconomic Interventions in Reducing Exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences: a Systematic Review

[Emilie Courtin](#) , [Emily Allchin](#), [Annie J. Ding](#) & [Richard Layte](#)

[Current Epidemiology Reports](#) **6**, 423–441(2019) | [Cite this article](#)

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## Blog

# Off to hell in a hand cart? Challenging a simplistic view of ACEs and their impact

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### Published

26 Feb 2020

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### Author

Isabelle Trowler

Isabelle Trowler, chief children's social worker for England, responds to EIF's major new evidence review on ACEs, and questions the notion that adverse childhood experiences should be taken as fixed determinants of future outcomes.



Image created using canva.com

This website has been created by a group of professionals, activists and academics in Scotland ([read about us](#)) to represent a simple idea:

 All children have the right to a hopeful childhood and a hopeful future  
[#HopefulChildhoods](#)



The website is designed for practitioners, policy makers and researchers working with or on behalf of children and families in social work, education, health and other sectors. The aim is to share some thoughts, ideas and materials that can help to change our thinking in relation to support for children and families, creating a shift

# Child Poverty

## Aspiring to Survive

By Morag C. Treanor

Paperback

Hardback

EPUB

### Published

26 Feb 2020

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978-1447334682

### Page count

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234 x 156 mm

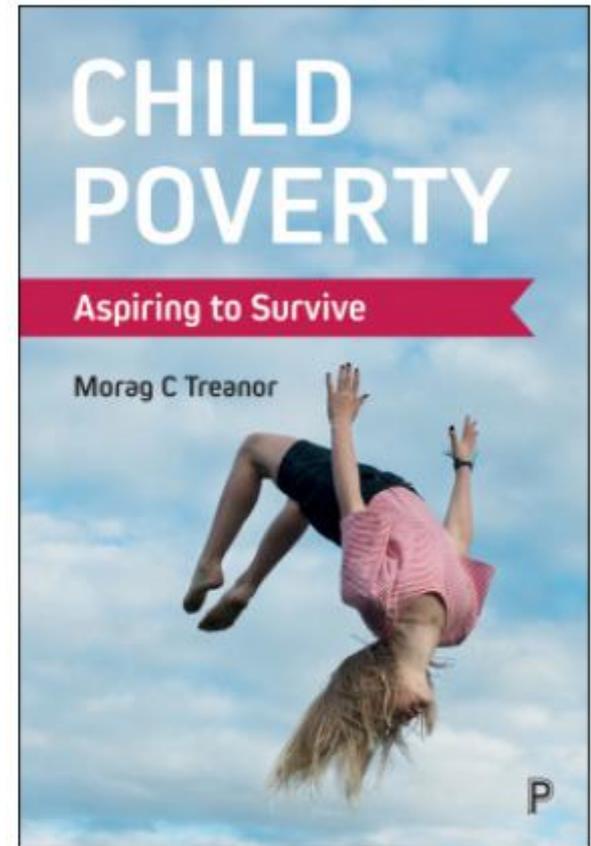
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# Falling Through the Cracks: The Cost of the School Day for Families Living in In-work and Out-of-work Poverty

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## Abstract

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Poverty is known to deleteriously affect children's experience of, and success in, education. One facet of this relationship is the financial costs associated with full participation in education in what has become known as the 'cost of the school day'. This paper draws on a small-scale longitudinal qualitative study of families living in poverty, drawn from a wider study called the 'Early Warning System', carried out in collaboration with the Child Poverty Action Group Scotland. The paper explores the experiences of parents in out-of-work and in-work poverty, and cycling between the two, in relation to school costs for their children and the effects this has on their wider financial situation. The findings show that families experiencing in-work poverty, especially those who have recently moved from receipt of out-of-work benefits, face the financial hurdle of not being entitled to passported benefits such as free school meals, school clothing grants, and initiatives such as schools' subsidies of activities and trips. The longitudinal aspects of the study design allow the impacts that changes in entitlement to benefits have on families. The paper concludes that the costs of the school day can be unseen and not well understood by educators but keenly felt by children and families living in low-income and makes recommendations to mitigate this.

## Scottish Affairs

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Ron Johnston, Charles Pattie and Todd K. Hartman  
Published in *Scottish Affairs* 28.1

*The Long Road: Catholic Schools and Catholic social integration since 1918 (Cardinal Winning Lecture, 2017)*

Tom Devine

# Can we put the ‘poverty of aspiration’ myth to bed now?

This briefing paper uses responses from parents and children in the birth cohort study Growing Up in Scotland<sup>1</sup> to dispel the myth of the ‘poverty of aspiration’ widely used in education and policy circles in Scotland and beyond.

## Background

Children’s less successful progress in education is often blamed on their, and/or their parents’, poor aspirations<sup>1a</sup>. This has become known as the ‘poverty of aspiration’. Aspirations have become a key educational policy driver in Scotland and the rest of the UK and are seen as critical levers for closing the attainment gap between children and young people of high and low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Yet the existing evidence claims that children living in poverty *do* have high aspirations for themselves, although the jobs they aspire to are often of the gendered variety familiar to them within the context of their knowledge and experience, such as hairdressers or mechanics<sup>1a</sup>. That is to say that *‘aspirations expressed by young people reflect the expectations and constraints inherent within their setting, rather than a free choice of desired outcome’<sup>1a</sup>*. The evidence shows that children do not start off with low expectations. When they are younger they have the same hopes and dreams as all children, however, their confidence in their ability to attain their aspirations becomes diminished over time<sup>1a</sup>. Aspirations, even in communities struggling with poverty, are very high – the missing element is the knowledge of how to make these aspirations real and obtainable<sup>1a</sup>.

Parents living in poverty also have high aspirations for their children but feel unable to engage with their child’s learning in the home and feel inadequate in their knowledge and experience to help their children<sup>1a</sup>. There is no crisis in aspirations but rather difficulty for poor parents ‘to sustain those aspirations over time or turn them into reality’<sup>1a</sup>. Yet, it is not only politicians that suggest parents have low aspirations for their children<sup>1a</sup>. Teachers too cite low aspirations on the part of parents for children’s poorer educational attainment<sup>1a</sup>. This has an effect on how teachers and school staff engage with children and parents living in poverty.

## Key points

- The poverty of aspiration is a myth that transfers responsibility for aspirations and achievement from governments and schools to parents and children.
- School is important to, and for, children living in poverty.
- All parents want the best for their child(ren) but lower income parents are less likely to know what is possible or how to achieve it.
- Lower income parents are less likely to know how to support their child’s education.

<sup>1</sup><http://growingupinScotland.org.uk/about-gus/> (Accessed 20 October 2017)