



Department
for Work &
Pensions

The Inter-Parental Relationship and children's outcomes: How research informs policy development

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Dr Francesco Arzilli, Economic Adviser, DWP

Outline

- The 2012 Social Justice Strategy
- The Family Stability Indicator
- The importance of quality of inter-parental relationship
- Harold et al (2016) review main findings
- Recent policy to promote relationship support
- Inter-Parental Relationship quality, improved outcomes and associated savings

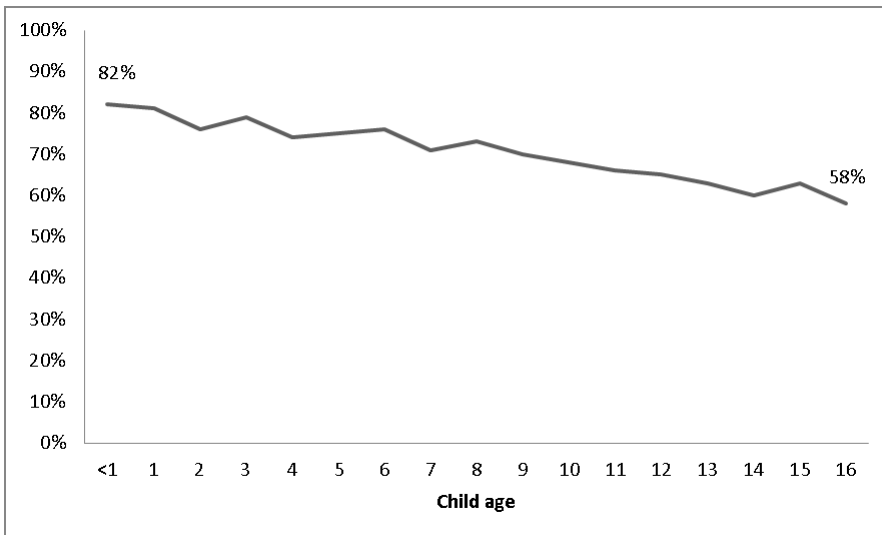
The 2012 Social Justice Strategy

- Before 2010 various government publications drew attention to the negative outcomes for children when parental relationships become acrimonious (eg DCSF, 2008).
- In 2010 the coalition government introduced a shift by stressing the importance of the couple relationship (DWP/DfE, 2011; PM speech, 2010).
- In 2012, Social Justice Strategy (DWP,2012a) was launched. Supporting families is one of its five themes of the strategy.
- The key indicator for supporting families is the Family Stability Indicator (DWP,2012b); it was developed to monitor family instability/breakdown and the overall quality of the parental relationship.
- £30 million fund was dedicated to relationship support interventions (universal and targeted support) for the period 2011-15.

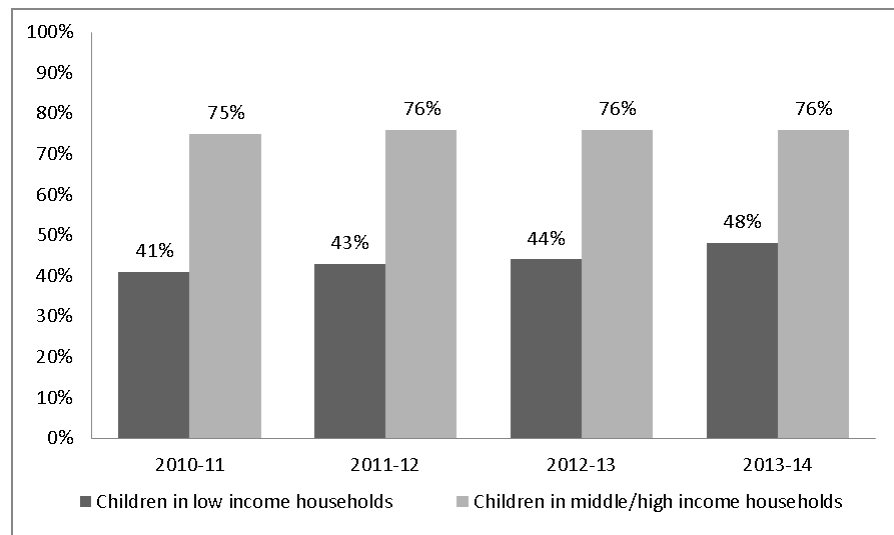
The Family Stability Indicator

The FSI measures the percentage of children living with both birth parents (DWP, 2016). In 2013-14 this percentage is 71%.

(1) By age



(2) By income



(3) The proportion of children living with both birth parents where their parents report happiness in their relationship is 76%.

The importance of quality of inter-parental relationship (ipr)

- 22% of UK couples with children experience relationship distress; and adults in distressed relationships are three times more likely to experience depression (Relate, 2016).
- A growing body of evidence focuses on the importance of good-quality relationships for children outcomes. There are two main reasons for this:
 - (i) Children exposed to frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflicts between parents (whether they are together or not) are at elevated risk of negative outcomes in the short and long-term (Harold et al, 2016).
 - (ii) Poor quality relationship leads to parental separation which comes with an economic penalty for both parents and children (HM Government, 2014; Barnes et al, 2015).

Harold et al (2016) review main findings

- Inter-parental conflict can adversely affect both the mother-child and father-child relationship; children of all ages can be affected by destructive inter-parental conflict.
- The quality of inter-parental relationship, specifically how parents communicate and relate to each other, is increasingly recognised as the primary influence on effective parenting practices as a way to influence children mental health and wellbeing.
- There are well-evidenced interventions (mainly from the US) that indicate that couple/inter-parental relationship programmes can be effective at improving couple/inter-parental outcomes and as a result child outcomes.
- This in the UK is in the early stages of development.

Recent policy to promote relationship support

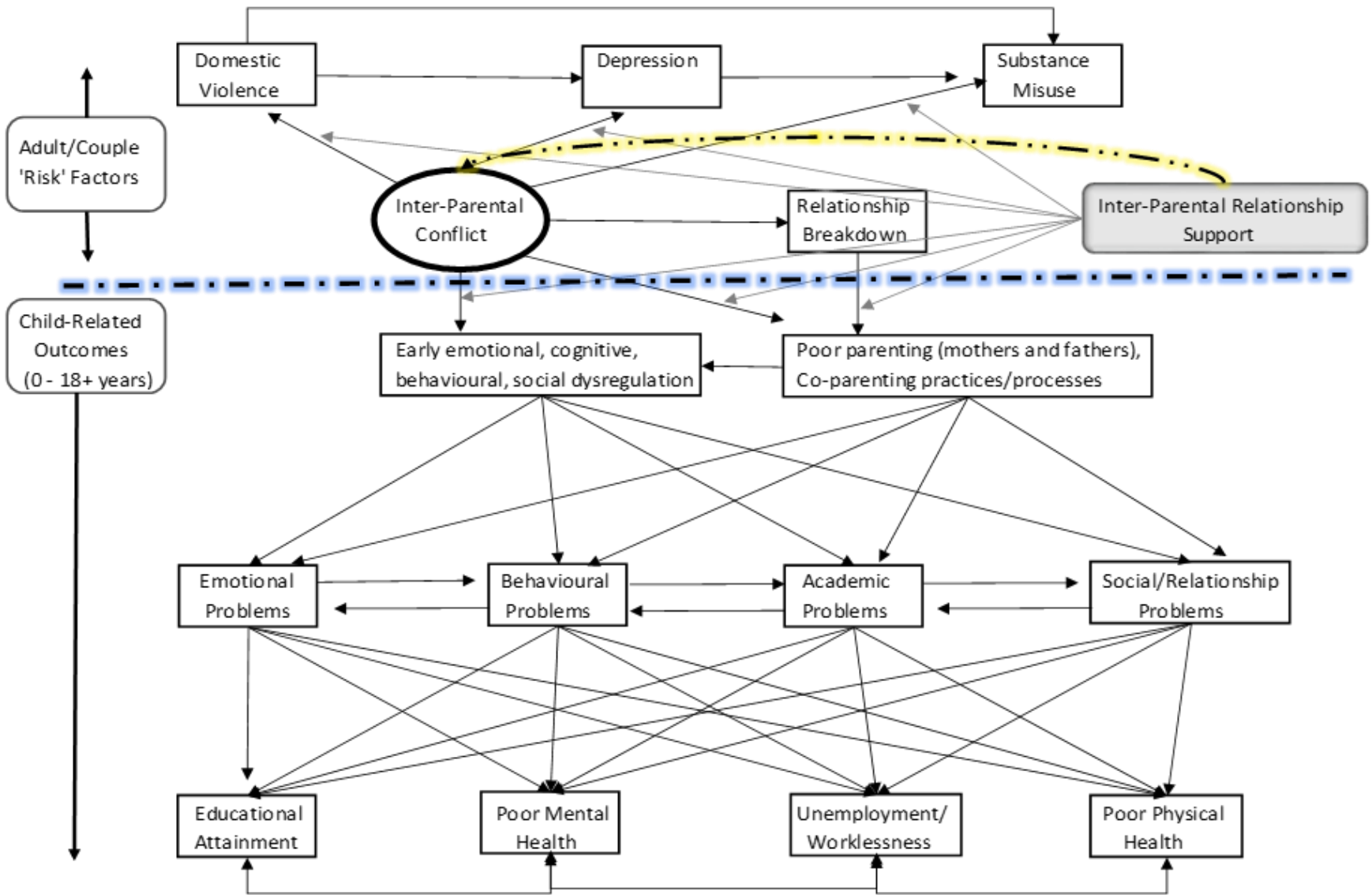
- Earlier this year the Government announced a doubling of funding to £70 million for relationship support over the next 5 years.
- This includes a £7.8 million DWP relationship support programme from April 2017; it provides a national offer of preventative support to help parents to protect and strengthen their relationships, which in turn will secure better outcomes for children.
- Evidence-based targeted interventions for families of the most disadvantaged children.
- Harold et al (2016) review (and subsequent work) as main guidance.

Inter-Parental Relationship quality, improved outcomes and associated savings

Do interventions that target ipr and improve outcomes for children/parents also generate savings in the short/long term? If so, can we quantify these savings?

- A *Process-orientated* approach is implemented to develop a framework that allows capturing the pathways between inter-parental conflict and outcomes for children.
- Specific programmes evaluation evidence combined with fiscal costs allows quantifying pathways and generating costs savings estimates.

Figure 1: A Cascade Model of Inter-Parental Conflict Effects on Outcomes for Children (0-18 years)





Questions?

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