



Parenting and children's health

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Background

Parents may influence children's health by

- Resource provision - diet, access to health care, housing & neighbourhood
- Modelling health behaviours
- Health-related parenting practices eg logistical support for physical exercise, diet restriction
- Day-to day parenting behaviour and parent-child relationships



Background

Aspects of day-to-day parenting behaviour important for child health

Connection: love, care and commitment

All ages: warmth, affection, support

Infancy: sensitivity, attunement, containment

Control: Appropriate levels of control/consistent limit setting

Pre-school & primary years: behaviour management, discipline, praise

Low negativity: lack of hostility, rejection

All ages: conflict management, problem solving

(Adapted from Stewart-Brown 2007, and Hoghugh & Speight 1998)

Background



Parenting behaviours and parent-child relationship may influence children's

- Mental health
- Physical health

(reviews Repetti 2002, Stewart-Brown and Shaw, 2004)

- Health behaviours

(eg Darling and Steinberg 1993, Kremer et al 2003, Davison et al 2003)

Limitations to evidence base

- Few studies of parenting and health (especially physical health) in young children
- Little UK research

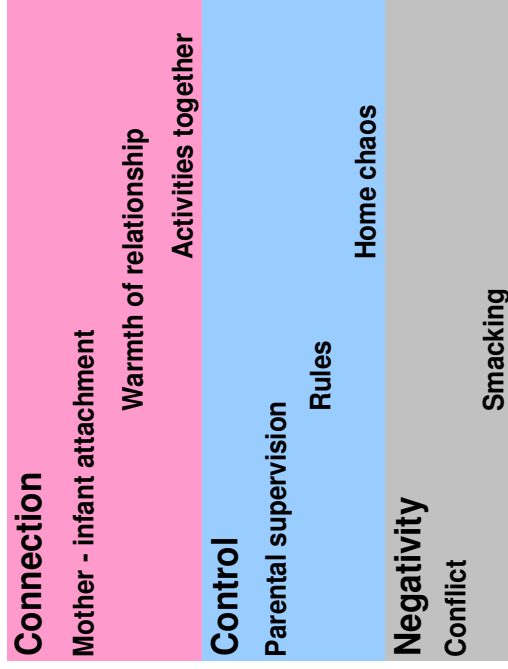
Research questions

1. Is day-to-day parenting important for young children's health and health behaviours?
2. Do variations in parenting account for social inequalities in children's health and health behaviours?



Measuring parenting

Parenting measures
(child aged 10 to 58 months)



Parenting index

Combined measures

High skills	High connection	High control	Low negativity
Average skills	Medium connection	Medium control	Medium negativity
Low skills	Low connection	Low control	High negativity

Measuring health

Health measures

(child aged 58 months)

Health

Fair/poor general health

Limiting longterm illness

Behavioural / emotional difficulties

Health problems (3+ last year)

Accidents/injuries (3+ since birth)

Dental decay

Health behaviours

Physical activity (<1hr daily)

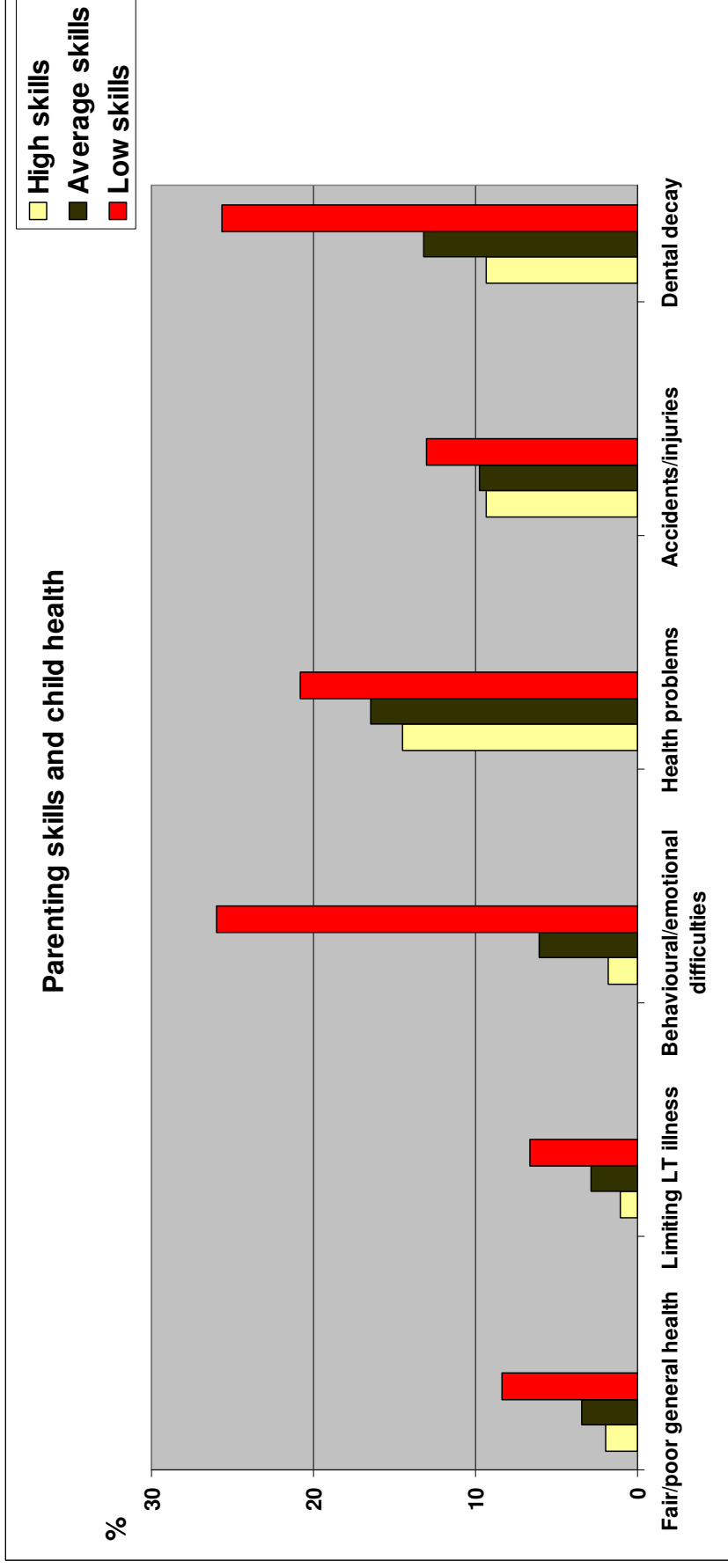
Screen time (2+ hrs daily)

Fruit/vege (low variety)

Sweets/crisps/sugary drinks (>daily)

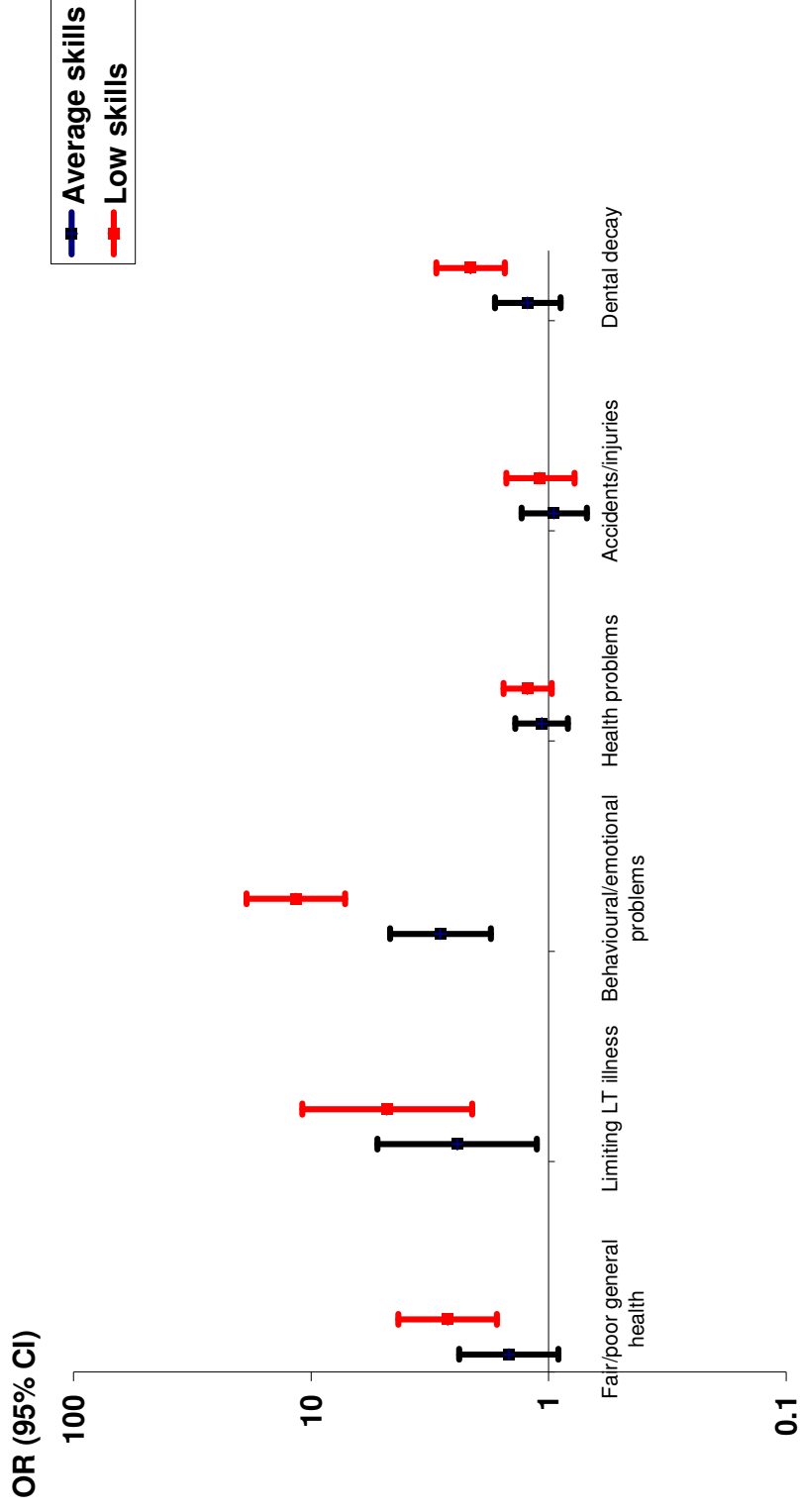
Sample: N=3,486 Growing up in Scotland families

Is parenting associated with children's health?

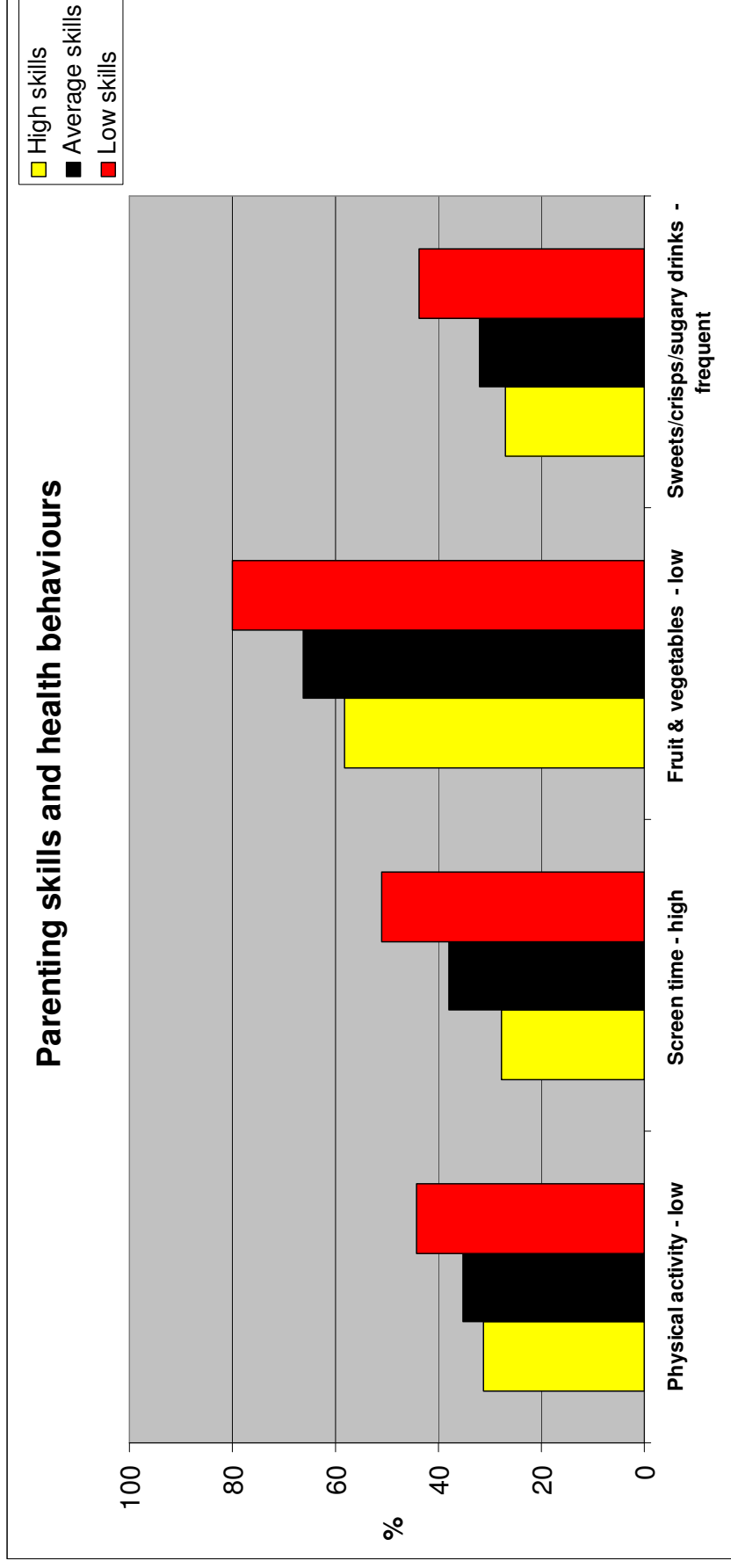


Is parenting associated with children's health?

Parenting skills and child health - adjusted for family circumstances

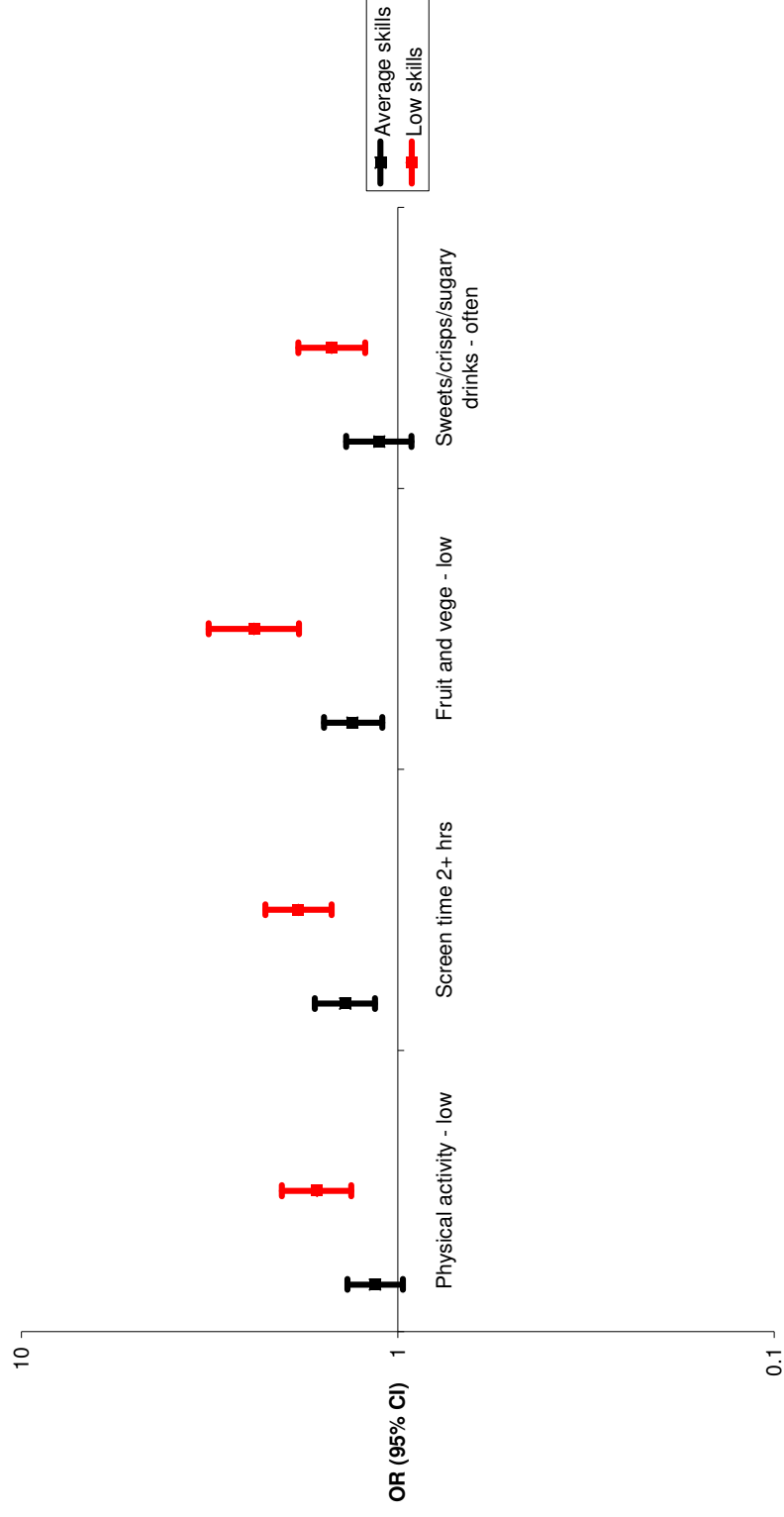


Is parenting associated with children's health behaviours?

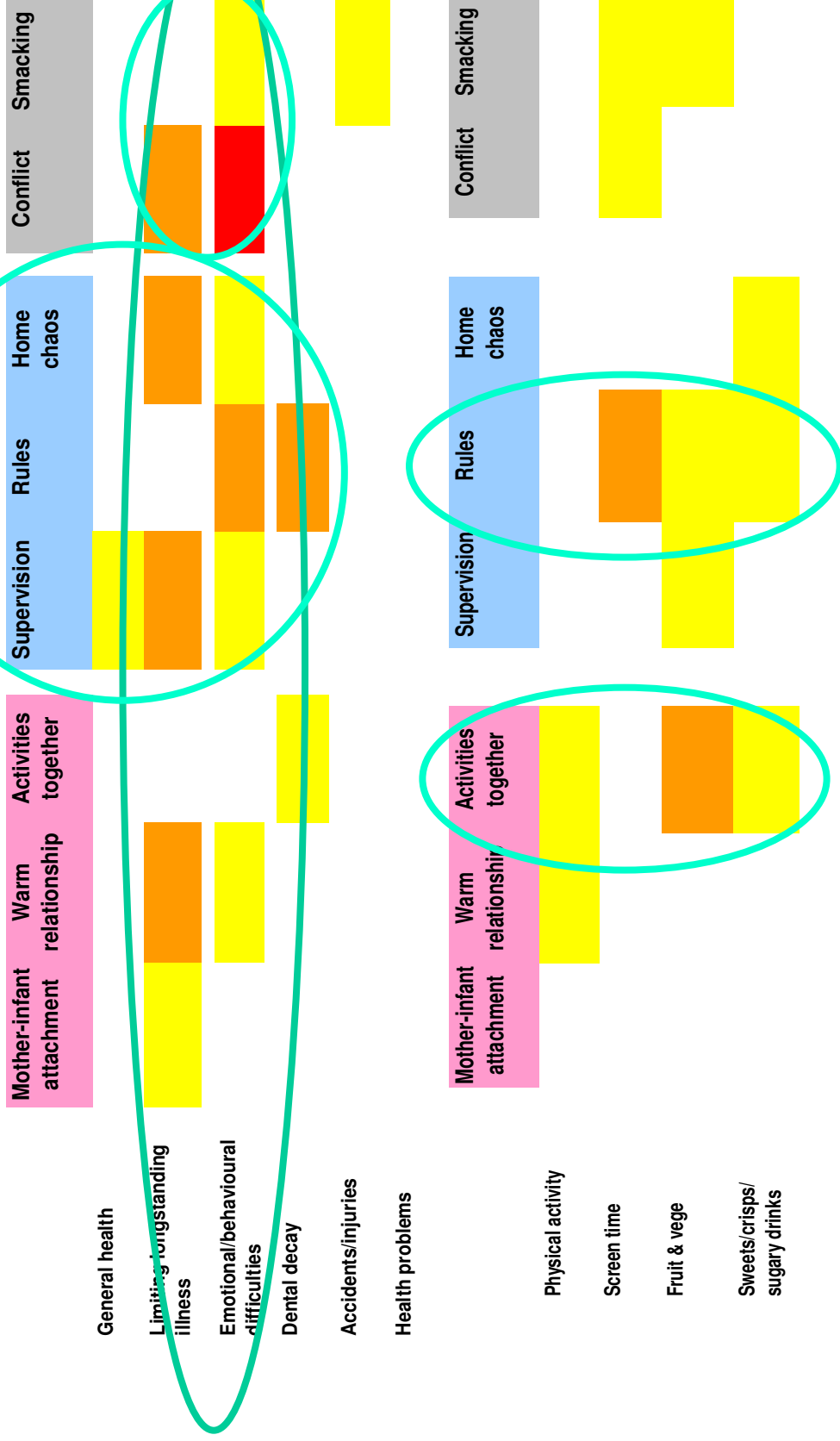


Is parenting associated with children's health behaviours?

Parenting skills and child health behaviours - adjusted for family circumstances



Which aspects of parenting are most important?

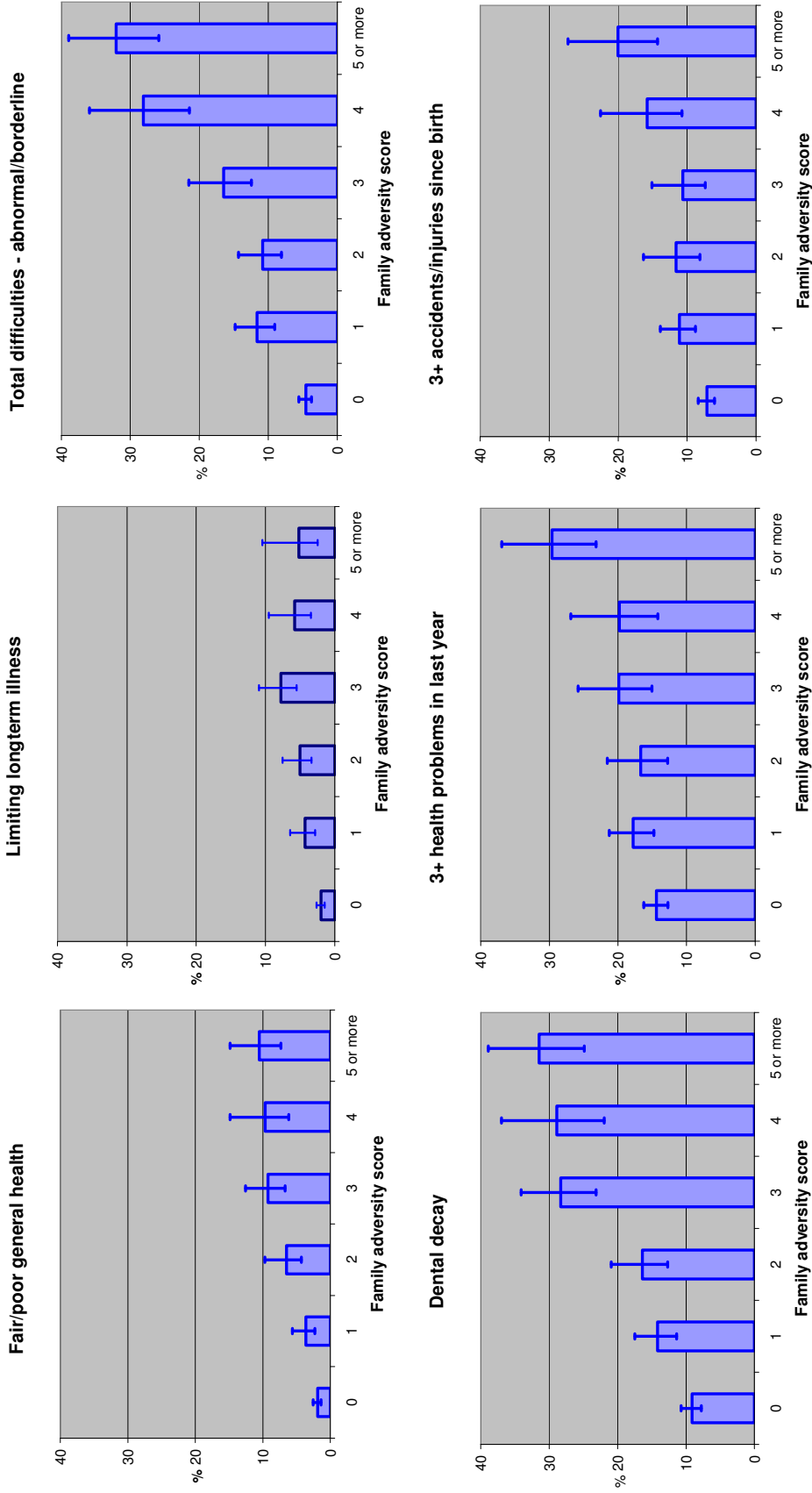


Measuring family adversity

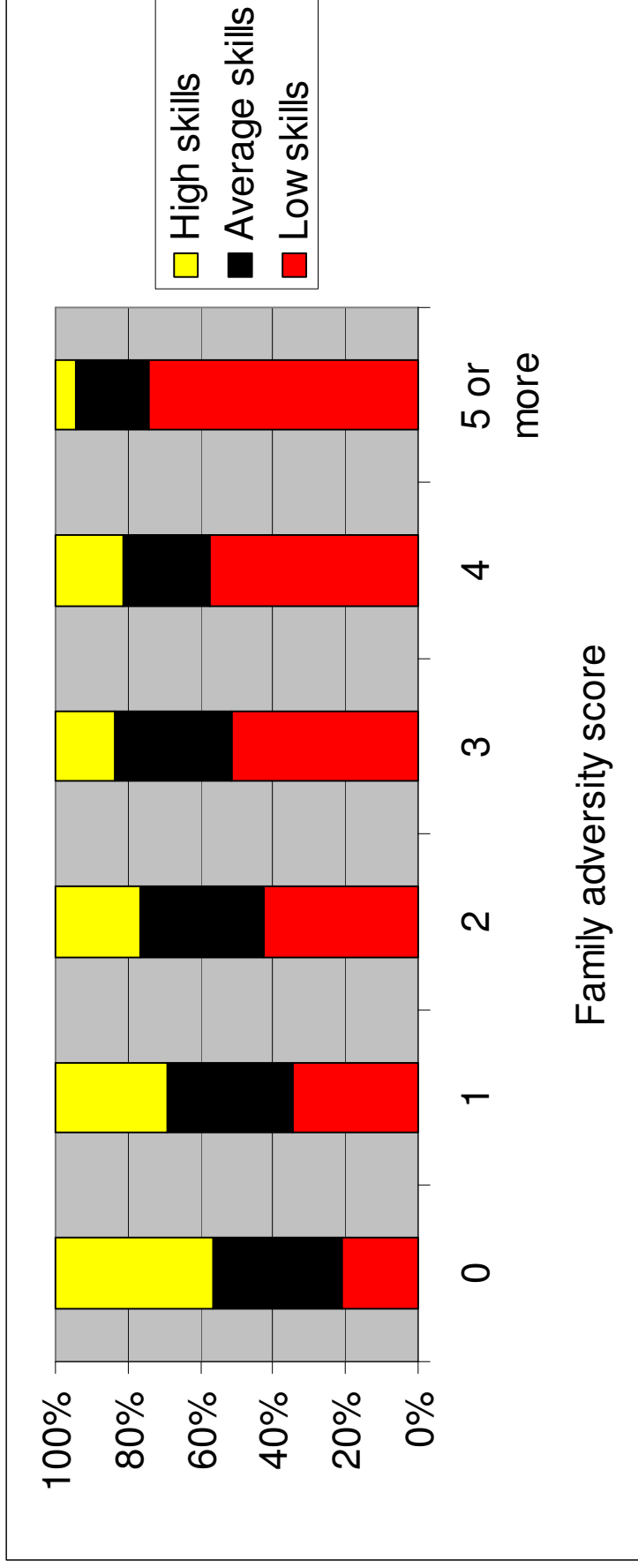
Family adversity index:

- Maternal risk factors
 - Low education
 - <25 years at birth of child
 - Minority ethnic group
 - Depression
- Family circumstances
 - Absent father
 - Low income
 - Social housing
 - High area deprivation

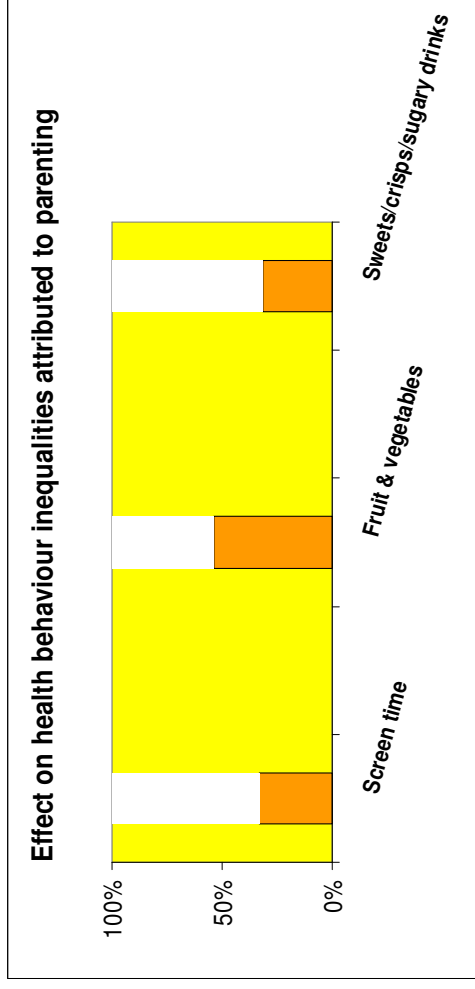
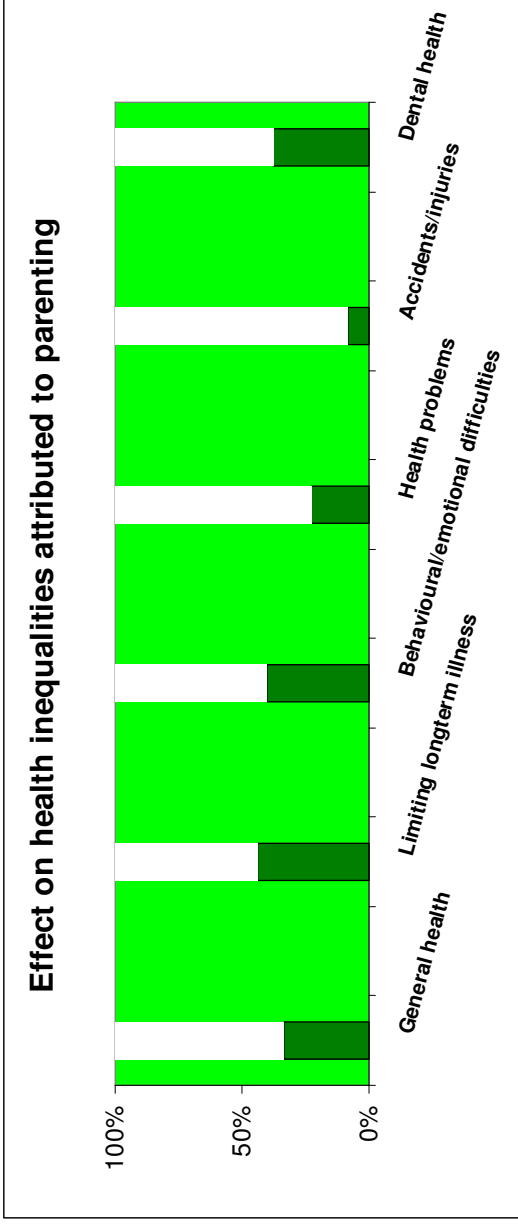
Family adversity and children's health



Parenting skills and family adversity



How important is parenting for health inequalities?



Study limitations

- Relies on mothers' reports of parenting and children's health
 - Bias? - may overestimate associations
 - more work required on role of fathers/other carers, & parenting of older children.
- Causation uncertain
 - child's health may affect parenting, rather than the other way round
 - Unmeasured factors may be responsible, including genetic predispositions

Conclusions

Findings suggest support for day-to-day parenting skills may

- Benefit child physical & mental health, and child health behaviours
- Help reduce social inequalities in health

Many aspects of parenting important - need to support wide range of skills

- Control associated with health, activities & rules with health behaviours
- Conflict associated with behavioural/emotional problems

But

- Impact on health may vary – greatest for children with behavioural/emotional difficulties, least for health problems & accidents /injuries
- Additional measures required to address social inequalities in health