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The relationship between family socio-economic status and children's personal well-being, quality of school life and out-of-school activities

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Research aims

- to examine consequences on child outcomes related to the economic deprivation
- to determine to what extent various indicators of family SES predict children's academic achievement, personal well-being, well-being at school and out-of-school activities

Methods

- The data presented in this research are a part of a larger study on primary education and schooling in Croatia, conducted during the school year 2005/2006.

Participants

- 10222 elementary school students
5302 male, 4920 female
- age $M=12.5$; $SD=1.19$ (grades 5 to 8)

Measures and variables

- **Child characteristics**
 - Gender (1=male, 2=female)
 - Age (grade 5 to 8)

- **Family characteristics**
 - Mother's level of education
 - Father's level of education

1= primary education or less

2= three-year vocational (craft, industrial school) 3= four-year vocational or grammar school

4= college

5= university or graduate degree

Measures and variables

- Family living arrangements
(1=one-parent, 2=two-parent)
- Perceived family economic status
 - 1= much worse than average
 - 2= somewhat worse than average
 - 3= average
 - 4= somewhat better than average
 - 5= much better than average
- ✓ Data on family characteristics were obtained from 8990 parents (79% mothers, 21% fathers)

Measures and variables

■ Child outcomes

• *Academic achievement*

GPA (1-failed to 5-excellent); M=4.2, SD=0.81

• *Out-of-school activities:*

- studying
- doing homework
- resting and hanging out with friends
- watching TV
- helping parents with household chores
 - scale: 1 (less than an hour a day) to 4 (4-5 hours and more)

Measures and variables

- Well-being at school
- Two general scales from the Quality of School Life questionnaire (Ainley and Bourke, 1992):
 - *General satisfaction with school*
 - 6 items, $\alpha=0.85$
 - (e.g. My school is a place where I feel happy, ... like to be)
 - *Negative affect*
 - 5 items, $\alpha=0.73$
 - (e.g. My school is a place where I feel worried, ... tense)
 - Scale: 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

Measures and variables

- *School misconduct*
- 4 items, $\alpha=0.76$
 - (e.g. chatting during class, cheating on homework)
- *Problem behaviours*
- 4 items, $\alpha=0.74$
 - (e.g. cutting classes, missing school)
 - scale:1(never) to 5 (almost every day) during the past 30 days
- *Victimisation (being bullied by peers)*
- 4 items, $\alpha=0.71$
 - (e.g. teasing, physical violence, social exclusion)
 - scale:1(never) to 6 (every day) during the past 30 days

Measures and variables

■ Personal well-being

• *Perceived health status*

- scale: 1 (very bad) to 5 (excellent); M=4.3, SD=0.89

• *Somatic complaints (Achenbach, 1991)*

• 6 items, $\alpha=0.76$

- (e.g. headaches, stomachaches)
- scale: 1 (never) to 6 (every day during the last 30 days)

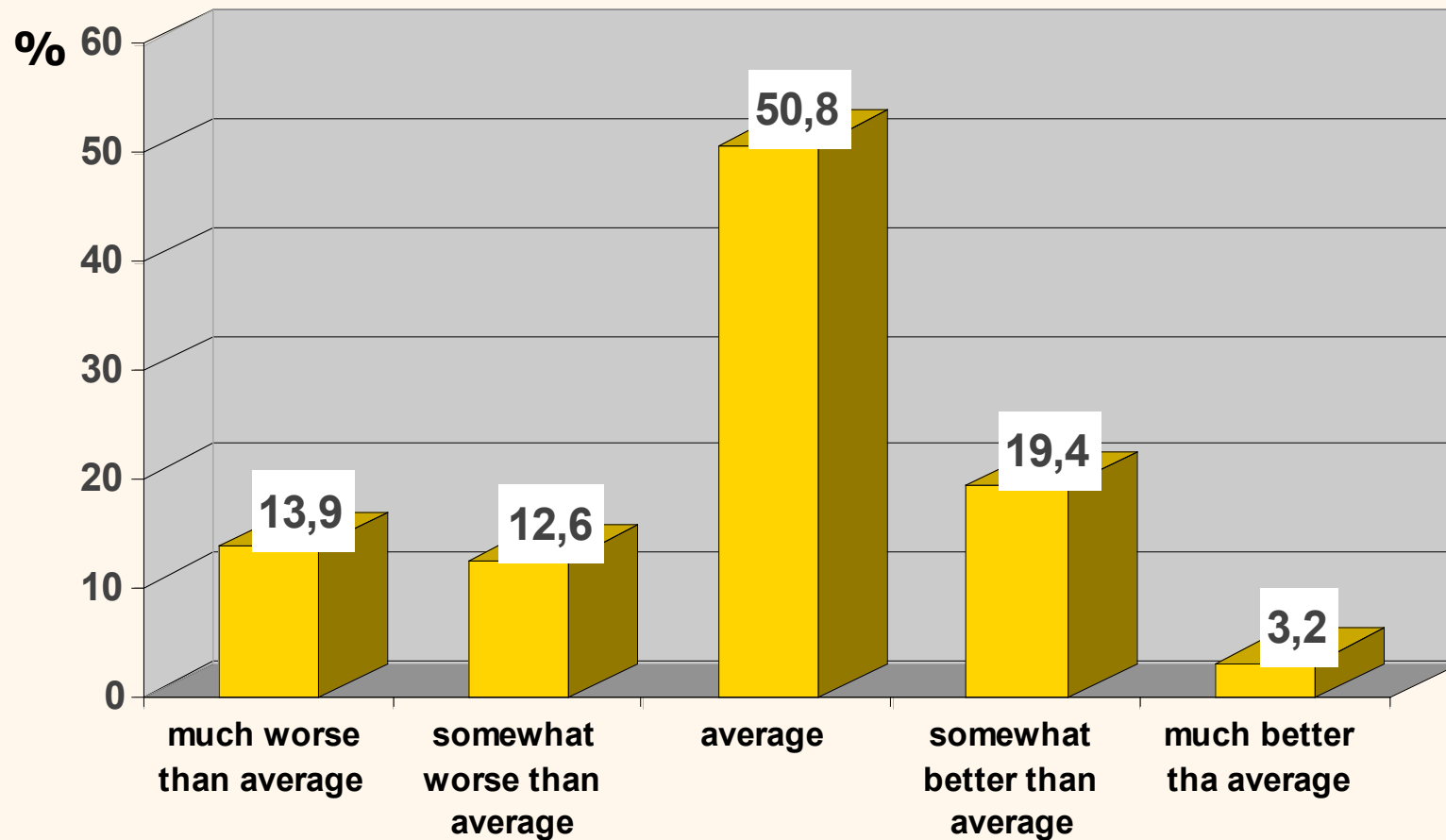
• *Self-esteem (Niemi, 1999)*

• 5 items, $\alpha=0.65$

- (e.g. being satisfied with oneself as a person)
- 5-point scale (1-strongly disagree, 5-strongly agree)

Results

Picture 1. Parents' ratings of family economic status (N=8893)



- Twenty six percent of parents were dissatisfied with the financial situation in their families.

Results

- One-way ANOVAs were performed to test the differences in child outcomes measures between participants grouped into four categories according to their family economic status, while controlling for the effects of children's gender and age.
- Due to a large number of participants small differences in the mean results of children who belong to different economic status groups are statistically significant.
- Family economic status was most strongly related to children's academic achievement (Table 1).

Table 1. Ranges and means for low to high family economic status groups and ANOVA between group F-values on the dependent measures

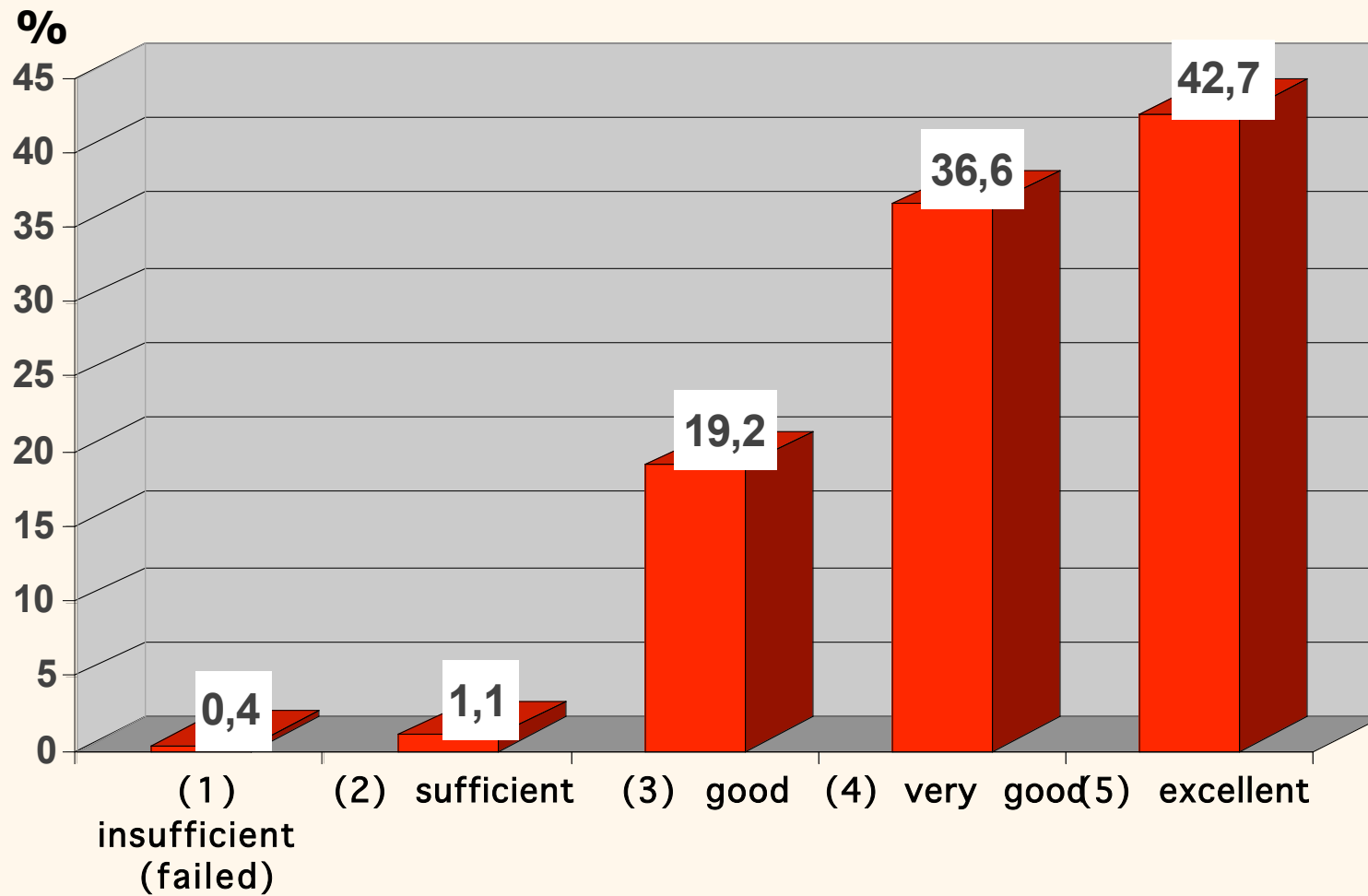
Variables	Groups	1 (MWA)	2 (SWA)	3 (A)	4 (BA)	F
	Range	M	M	M	M	
Achievement (GPA)	1-5	3.89	4.09	4.24	4.51	172.8*
<i>Learning</i>	1-4	2.03	2.02	2.02	2.01	0.4
<i>Homework</i>	1-4	1.71	1.70	1.63	1.60	9.1*
<i>After school activities</i>	1-4	2.37	2.37	2.39	2.46	3.7 ^a
<i>Resting & hanging out</i>	1-4	2.75	2.75	2.70	2.67	2.6
<i>Watching TV</i>	1-4	2.42	2.36	2.33	2.22	10.4*
<i>Household chores</i>	1-4	2.33	2.18	2.07	1.91	53.0*
Satisfaction with school	1-4	3.00	3.00	2.89	2.89	16.6*
Negative affect	1-4	1.81	1.76	1.75	1.73	3.2
School misconduct	1-5	2.87	2.95	2.95	2.93	2.5
Problem behaviour	1-5	1.26	1.22	1.21	1.19	4.8 ^a
Victimisation (peer bullying)	1-6	1.74	1.71	1.66	1.58	11.1*
Health status	1-5	4.22	4.26	4.25	4.31	2.6
Somatic complaints	1-6	2.39	2.39	2.32	2.31	3.6 ^a
Self-esteem	1-5	3.76	3.83	3.94	4.09	31.9*

^ap≤0.01; *p<0.001

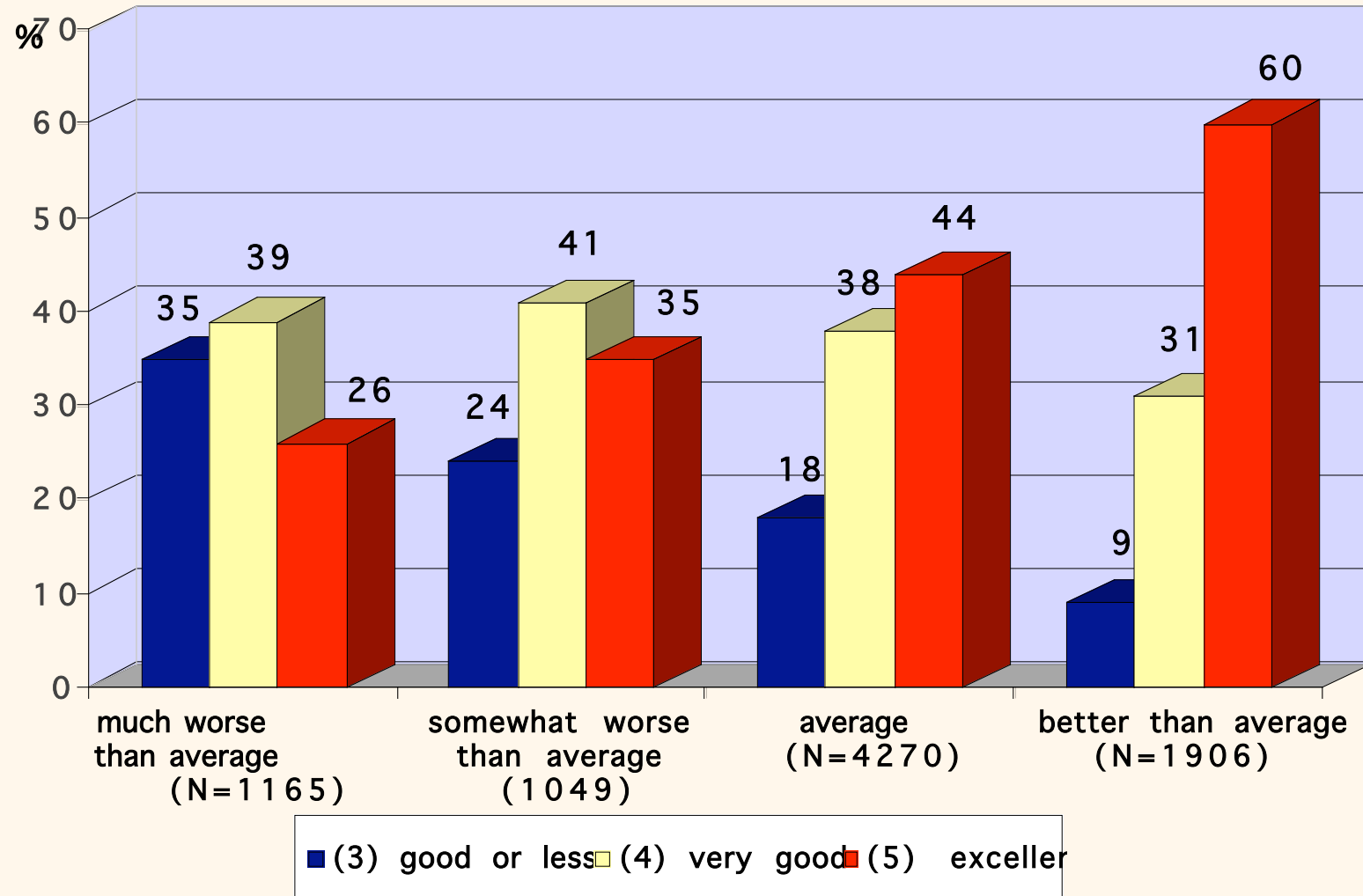
Results

- Children living in families with lower economic status:
 - ✓ had lower grade point average
 - ✓ reported higher general satisfaction with school
 - ✓ spent more of their out-of-school time in activities related to school, participating in chores and watching television and less time in organised after school activities
 - ✓ were more frequently bullied by their peer
 - ✓ had lower self-esteem
 - ✓ more frequently experienced psychosomatic symptoms
 - ✓ more frequently engaged in problem behaviours.

Picture 2. The distribution of children by grade point average
(N=9661)



Picture 3. Children's academic achievement by family economic status



Results

- Significant correlations were also found between children's academic achievement and their mothers' ($r=.37$, $p<0.001$) and fathers' ($r=.33$, $p<0.001$) level of education. In addition, family economic status was significantly related to parents' education ($r=.41$, $p<0.001$ for both parents).
- Multiple regression analyses showed that, after controlling the differences in parents' educational status, the effects of family economic status on child outcome variables were substantially reduced (Tables 2a and 2b).

Table 2a. Child and family characteristics as predictors of students' achievement, activities and subjective well-being (standardized betas)

Criterion variables Predictors	Achievement (GPA)	Learning	Homework	After school activities	Resting & hanging out	Watching TV	Household chores
Gender	.17	.15	.07	-.16	-.10	-.08	.08
Age (grade)	-.15	-.07	-.10	.04		.05	-.09
Mother's education	.26	-.03	-.07	.05	-.05	-.05	-.15
Father's education	.14					-.06	-.06
Family structure	.05						.02 ^a
Economic status	.06		-.03 ^a				-.05
R	.464	.172	.149	.171	.112	.135	.251
R²_{adj.}	.214	.029	.022	.029	.012	.018	.062
F	361.9	81.1	45.3	78.7	50.1	36.7	89.2

Note: all ps ≤ 0.01 except ^ap < 0.05

Table 2b. Child and family characteristics as predictors of students' achievement, activities and subjective well-being (standardized betas)

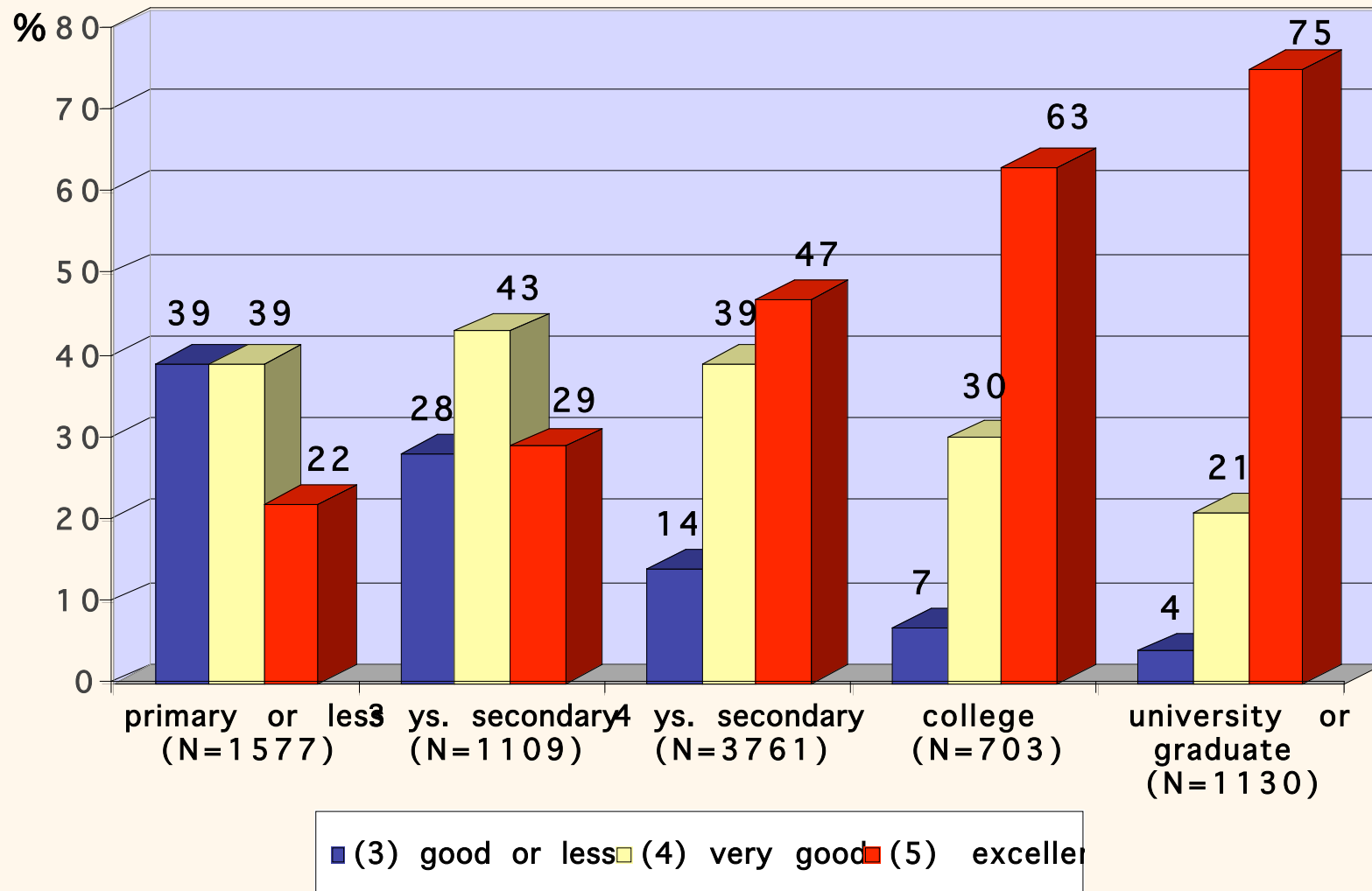
Criterion variables Predictors	Satisfaction with school	Negative affect	School misconduct	Problem behaviours	Victimisation	Health status	Somatic complaints	Self-esteem
Gender	.15	-.11	-.04	-.18	-.08	-.04	.08	.04
Age (grade)	-.21	.07	.33	.02 ^a	-.12	-.03 ^a		.08
Mother's education	-.08	-.04		-.05	-.05			.08
Father's education	-.04		-.03 ^a	-.06	-.05		-.06	.07
Family structure				-.02 ^a	-.04	.03 ^a	-.03	.04
Economic status			.03					.03
R	.281	.142	.332	.208	.172	.060	.104	.184
R²_{adj.}	.079	.020	.110	.043	.029	.003	.010	.033
F	171.6	54.7	496.3	72.4	49.0	7.0	29.2	46.9

Note: all $p \leq 0.01$ except ^a $p < 0.05$

Results

- **Mother's level of education had the strongest effect on children's educational attainment** and was significantly related to 12 of the 15 dependent variables.
- 22% of children whose mothers have an elementary school education were high achievers (excellent GPA) compared to 75% of those whose mothers have a university degree.
- Similarly, only 4% of children whose mothers are highly educated had “good” (3) GPA compared to 39% of children whose mothers have an elementary school education (Picture 4.).

Picture 4. Children's academic achievement by levels of mother's education



Results

- Academic achievement is affected not only by the demographic variables such as education levels of parents and their economic status, but also by children's school experiences and global self-worth.
- Poor academic achievement could also influence children's school experiences and self-perceptions putting them at risk of becoming victims of bullying and engaging in problem behaviours.

Variables	GPA
Mother's education	.38
Father's education	.33
Family living arrangements	.05
Family economic status	.24
Self-esteem	.26
Self-defined health status	.06
Somatic complaints	-.09
Satisfaction with school	.09
Negative affect	-.16
Victimisation	-.13
School misconduct	-.14
Problem behaviours	-.23

Note: Pearson's r; all $p \leq 0.01$

Conclusions

- SES variables (especially mother's level of education) are most strongly related to children's educational attainment. The direct effects of family economic status on child developmental outcomes are weak after controlling for other variables, suggesting that there may be a number of paths through which family economic hardship affects children.
- Further research is needed to explain the processes by which poverty affects parenting and family relations and to examine how these processes may differ by characteristics of children (e.g. children of different ages) and contextual circumstances of their families.