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CHILDREN IN LOW TO MIDDLE INCOME FAMILIES START SCHOOL 5 MONTHS BEHIND

Children in low to middle income families are already behind their most affluent peers when they start school, because of their upbringing - according to a major new study for the independent think tank, the Resolution Foundation.

The study of over 15,000 five year olds, carried out by child development experts Jane Waldfogel and Elizabeth Washbrook, found that children from low to middle income families were 5 months behind on vocabulary skills when they began school and exhibited more behavioural problems, compared to children in higher income families.

The most significant factor in explaining why children from low to middle income families fell behind with their vocabulary was that higher income families were able to create a richer learning environment in the home, for example spending more time reading to their children and taking them to museums and libraries. Among the higher income group, 75% of children were read to daily at age 3, compared to 62 percent of children in low to middle income households. 42% were taken to a library at least once a month, compared to 35% of children in low to middle income households.

The most significant factor explaining their children's worse behavioural problems was the poorer mental health and greater social isolation of mothers in low-to-middle income households. Mothers in this income group are at greater risk of post-natal depression, report lower self-esteem and less sense of control over their lives.

The remainder of the gap between outcomes for children from higher income and low to middle income families is explained by other factors associated with income and parental education, such as parenting styles and background factors such as mother's age at childbirth.

The study shows that parents in low-to-middle income households are three times more likely than better off parents to have no formal qualifications beyond GCSE. It also reveals that their household income is only half of the

better off group. These differences in income and education feed through into the differences of approaches parents take to bringing up their children.

Vidhya Alakeson, director of research at the Resolution Foundation said ‘policy makers tend to focus on trying to improve outcomes for children in the very poorest families, where it is well documented that they start off – and remain - disadvantaged. But this new study shows the perils of ignoring the low to middle group – who are after all a third of our future workforce. With parents increasingly squeezed for time and money, this only creates more stress and even less positive environments for their children’.

Notes to editors

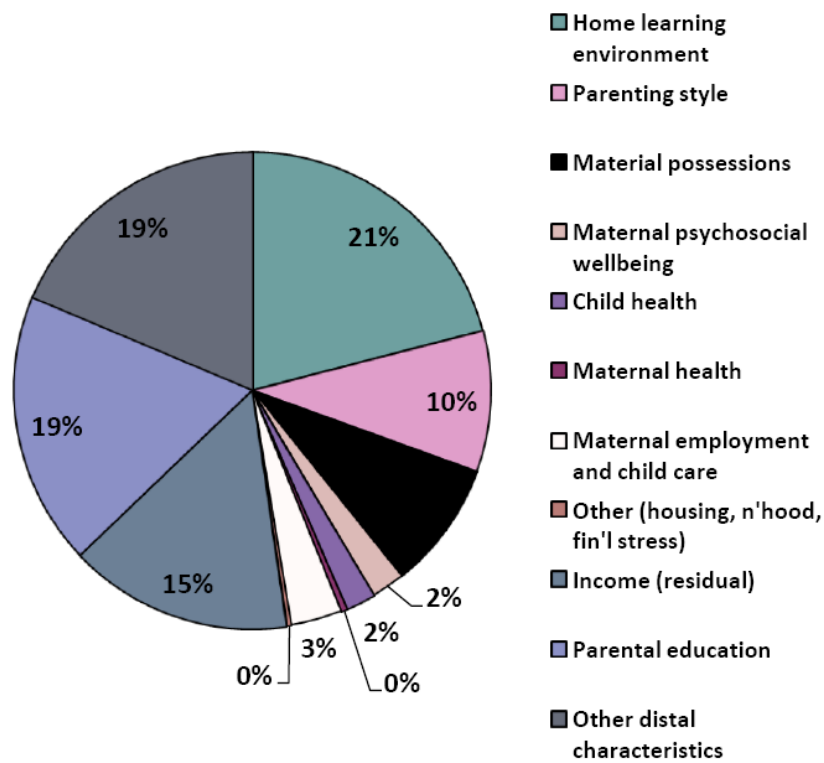
The findings are based on data from the Millennium Cohort Study, a nationally recognised representative sample of around 15,000 children born in 2000 and 2001, so aged 5 in 2006.

Characteristics of 5 years olds born in 2001, Millennium Cohort Study

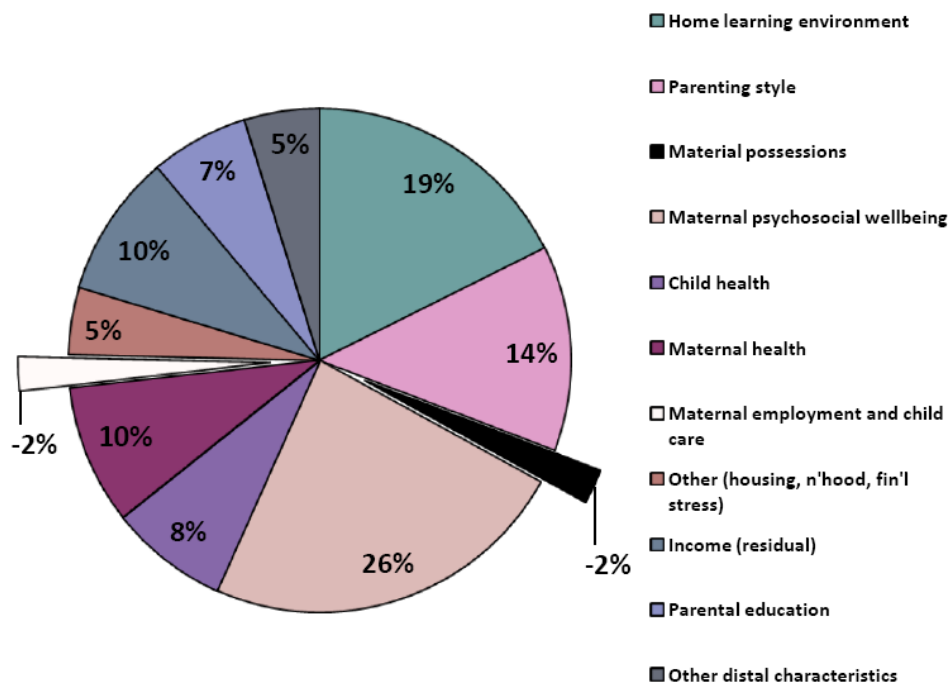
	Low income	LMIs	Higher earners
Mean before-tax income (SD)*	10,900 (8,000)	21,800 (6,600)	52,600 (24,100)
Mean after-tax income (SD)*	9,900 (6,100)	18,300 (4,900)	39,900 (16,800)
Ethnic minority	19%	9%	6%
Immigrant parent	17%	11%	13%
Foreign language in home	14%	7%	5%
Parent no quals beyond GCSE	64%	36%	12%
Parent degree	13%	30%	67%
Co-resident biological parents at 5	41%	84%	94%
Mother<25 at birth	41%	18%	6%
Mother>=35 at birth	13%	16%	26%
2+ older siblings	27%	20%	10%
England	83%	82%	84%

*Incomes are equivalized for household size such that a couple with no children receives a unit weight, expressed in constant 2010 prices and averaged over the three MCS waves.

Contribution of different early childhood environments to the gap in vocabulary skills for children in low to middle incomes households compared to higher income households



Contribution of different early childhood environments to the gap in behaviour problems for children in low to middle income households compared to higher income households



In this report, low to middle income households are defined as those with below median household income, excluding the poorest 10% and those in receipt of major state benefits (which comprises the lowest income category). A low to middle income broadly equates with a household income of between £24,000 and £42,000 for a couple with 2 children.

Previous research has found that falling behind at an early age affects later success. Research on a cohort of adults now in their fifties showed that those who were in the bottom 25 percent for reading at age seven were almost half as likely to have achieved an O-level (equivalent to a GCSE at grade C or above today) than those in the top 25 percent and their wages were 20 percent lower at age 33 (Janet Currie and Duncan Thomas, 1999 *'Early test scores, socio-economic status and future outcomes'*).

Previous research from the Resolution Foundation has also shown that academic attainment matters for social mobility in adulthood, with those failing to achieve a degree being more likely to drop down the earnings ladder

compared to their better educated peers - Lee Savage, 2011, '*Snakes and ladders: Who climbs the rungs of the earnings ladder?*' .

The Resolution Foundation is an independent think tank focused on improving the lives of families on low to middle incomes www.resolutionfoundation.org

The authors of today's report *On your marks: Measuring the school readiness of children in low-to-middle income families* are Jane Waldfogel, Professor of Social Work and Public Affairs at Columbia University and Elizabeth Washbrook, research associate at the Centre for Market and Public Organisation, University of Bristol.

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