



Beyond child poverty: Following the Evidence to a Multidimensional Approach to Childhood Disadvantage

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Montreal, Quebec

December 1, 2011



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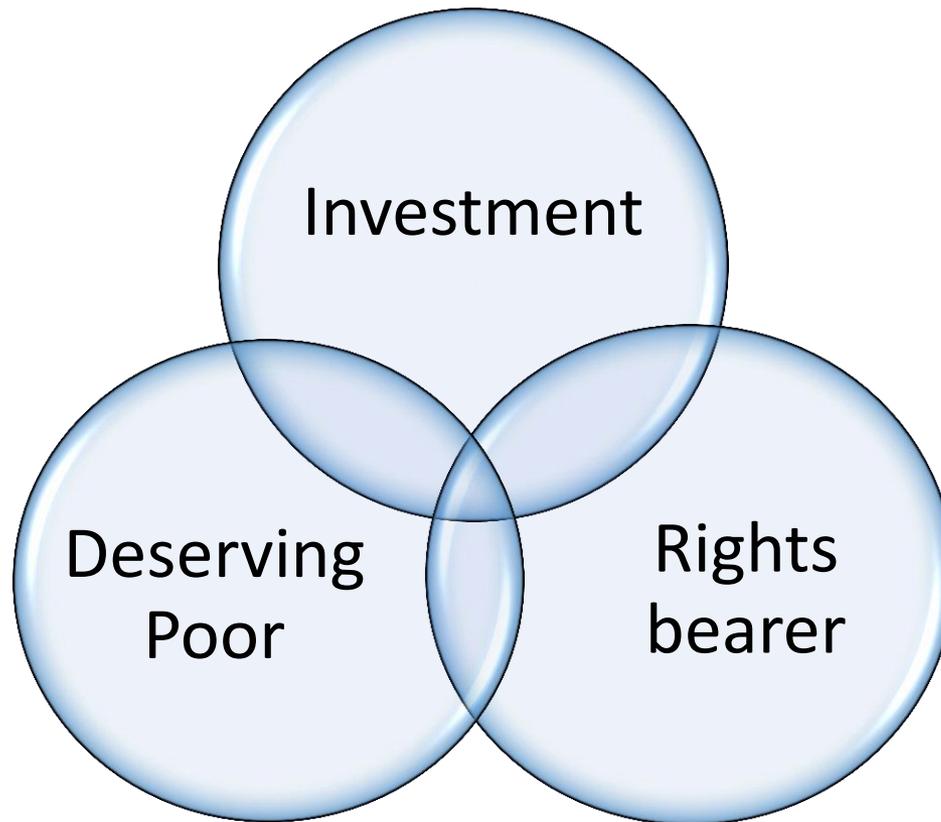
Objectives

1. Introduce three paradigms of child policy and explain the current policy focus on child poverty
2. Present the case for a shift to a “childhood disadvantage” approach
3. Explore the implications of a childhood disadvantage approach

Context:

- The “social investment state”: invest to prevent causes of future government provision
- An increasing focus on early investment through child policy
- Enduring poverty focus to child policy
- 9.5% Canadian children lived in low-income families in 2009 (StatsCan 2011)
- Current federal benefits/tax system reduces child poverty by 38% (Battle 2008)

Three overlapping child policy paradigms:



Child as deserving poor

- Children blameless
- A moral imperative to act
- Advocacy cover for broader social policy motives?

Focus: Families below the poverty line

Policies: Poverty-relief, income transfers, broader social security system

Child as investment

- Children as “citizen-workers” of the future
- Preventative policy
- Invest to give equality of opportunity instead of equal outcomes
- Assumes causal understanding

Focus: Children-at-risk

Policies: Future outcome-oriented

Child as rights bearer

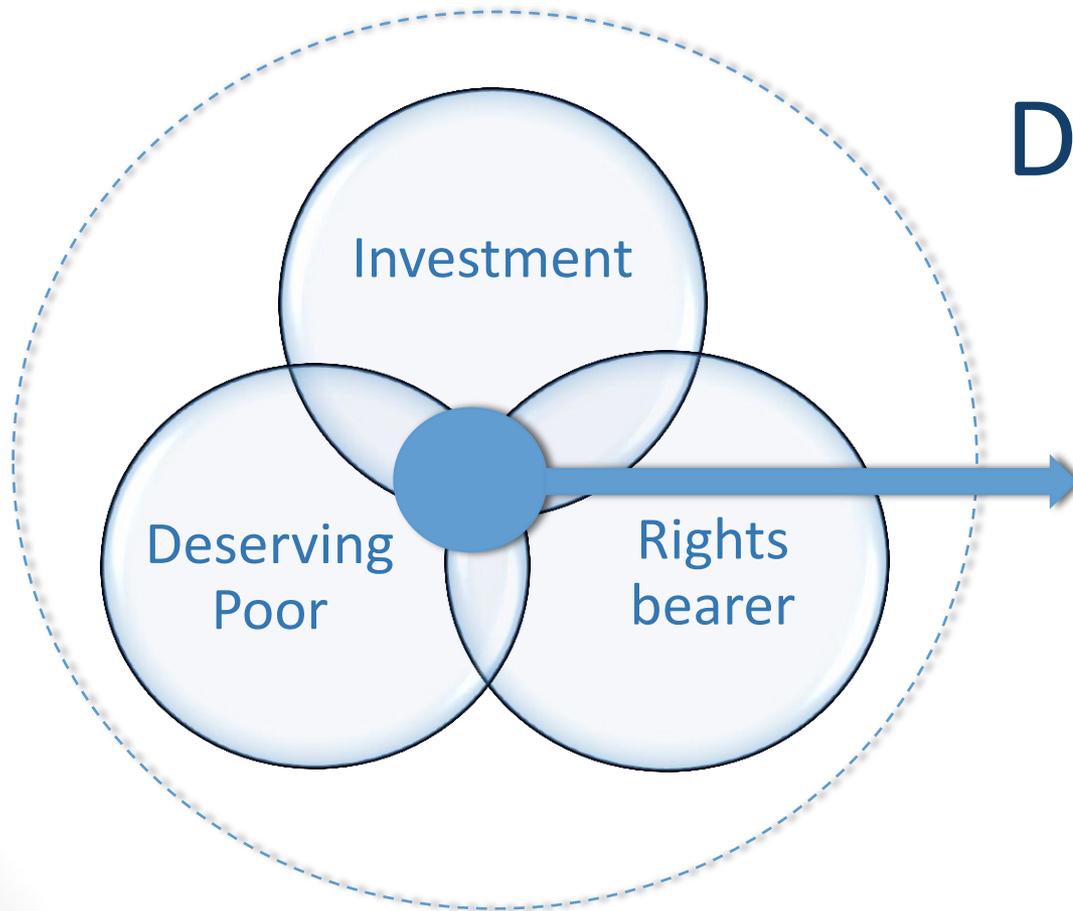
- Children are citizens now
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Right rather than charity
- Well-being and immediate outcomes

Focus: All children

Policies: rights fulfillment (income, housing, education)

Child Poverty vs. Disadvantage

Childhood
Disadvantage



Child Poverty
*The lowest common
denominator*

Child poverty approach:

- Confusing means and ends:
 - Problem definition:** children living in poverty
 - Policy prescription:** reduce child poverty by increasing family income
 - Goal/Performance measure:** reduction in level of child poverty
- Policy focus on reducing income inequality without considering effect on outcomes
- Assumes what matters for child outcomes, rather than understanding the evidence

Childhood disadvantage:

Multiple factors in childhood that negatively affect a child's current condition or decrease chances for positive outcomes later in life

Childhood disadvantage policy

Problem definition: children have unequal advantages and disadvantages for well-being and future outcomes

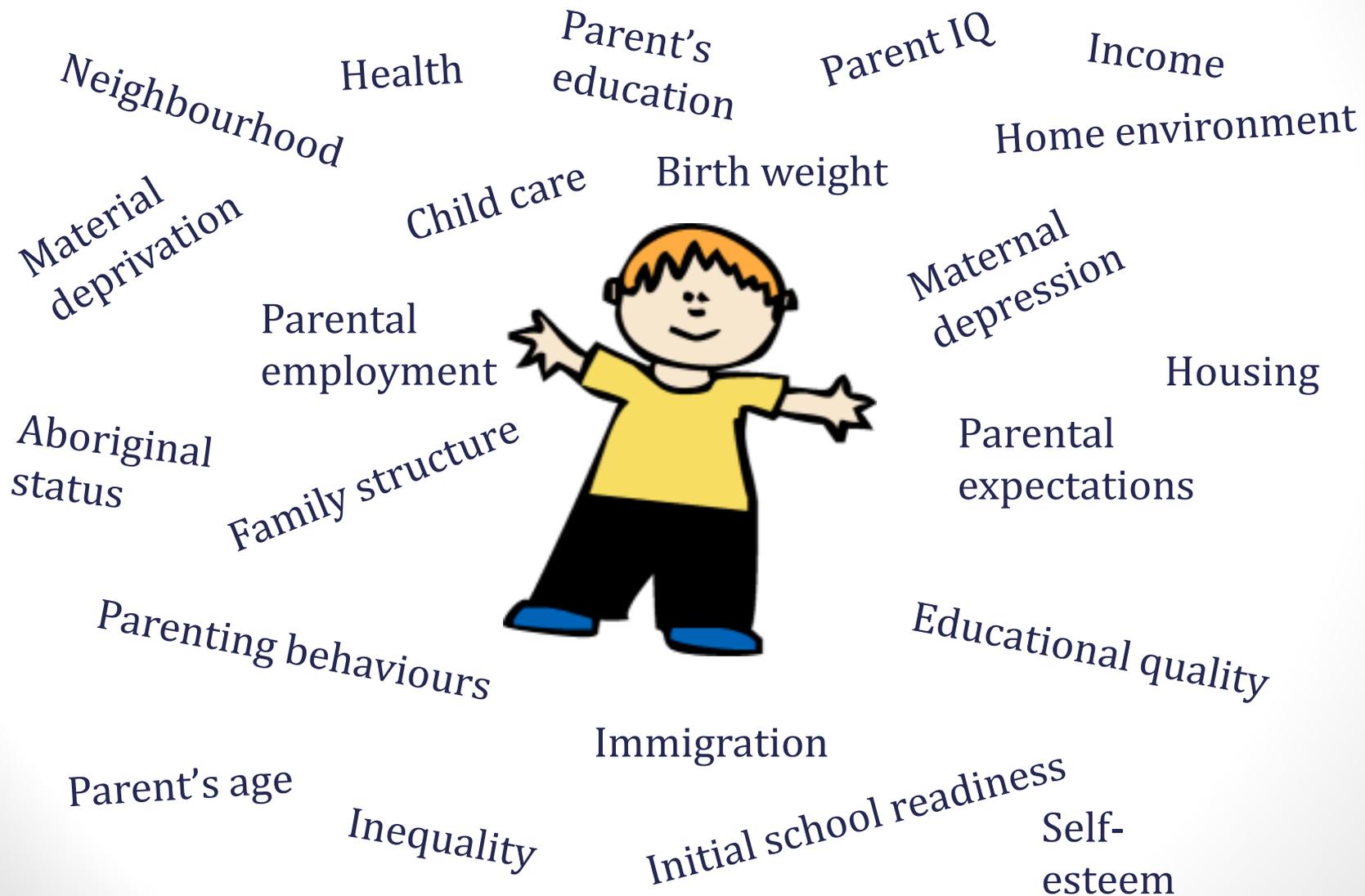
Policy prescription: reduce or mitigate disadvantaging factors, equalize advantages

Goal/Performance measure: improved future and immediate child outcomes, increased equality of chances of outcomes

Advantages of a childhood disadvantage approach:

- Child-centered, disentangling child policy from parent policy
- Future development *and* immediate well-being
- Probabilistic rather than deterministic
- Multiple effective policy levers
- Evidence-driven (factors determined by evidence)
- Inequality rather than arbitrary poverty-line

Researched factors of advantage and disadvantage



Income's effect on outcomes:

- Effects are significant; magnitude disputed
- Mediated, effect not directed
- Timing is important
- Early outcomes persist
- (Un)observed heterogeneity: parental characteristics at least as important

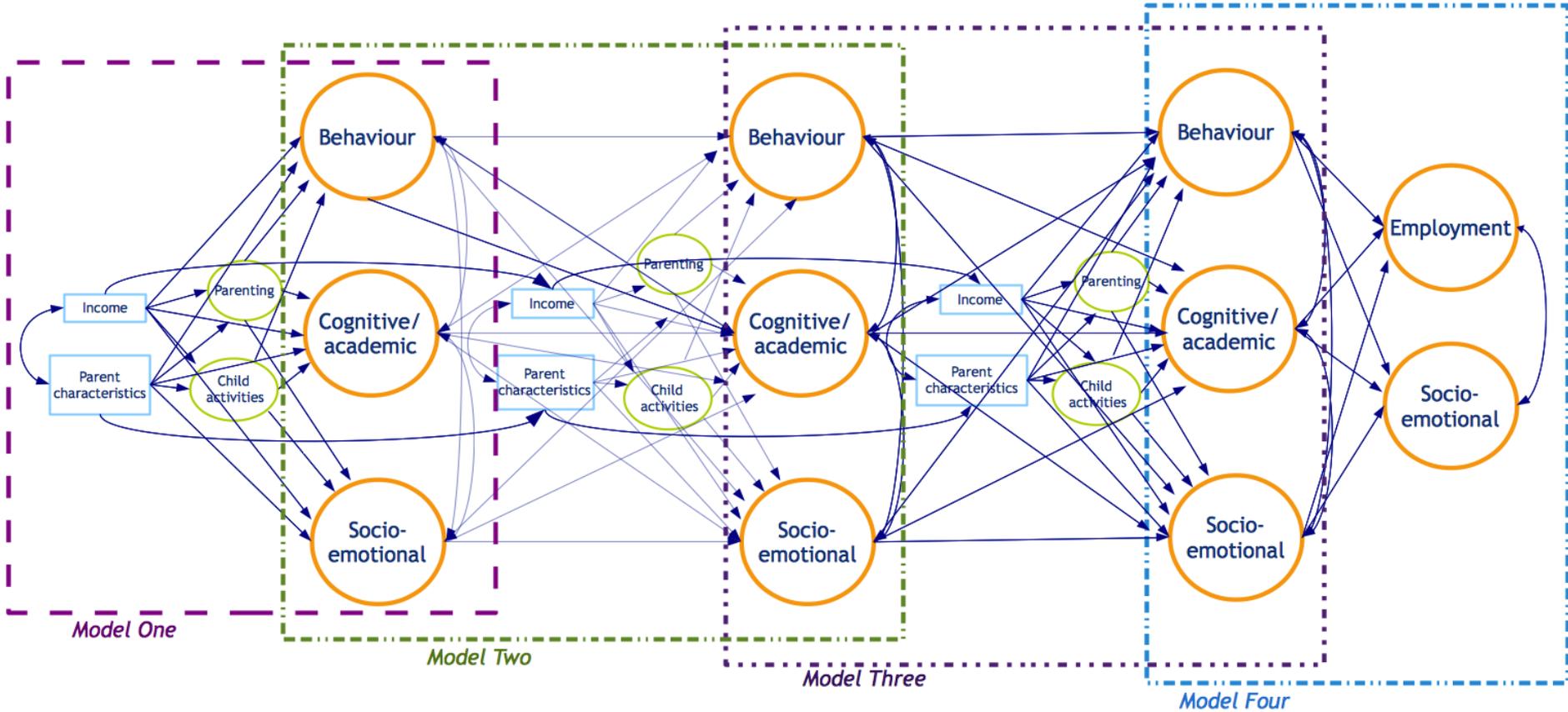
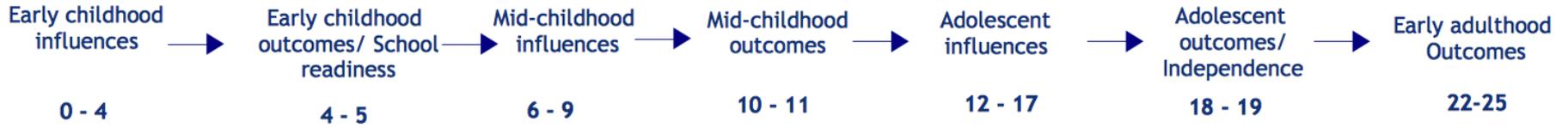
Childhood disadvantage in practice

- Policies targeted to counter the specific effects of poverty and correlated factors, eg. parent literacy, early-childhood education
- An increase to child benefits?
 - Does an increase help equalize children's odds of future success?
 - Has it substantially improved children's well-being?
 - More efficiently and effectively than alternative use of spending?
- Moving past ideology on tax-credit vs. programmatic spending

My continuing research program

“Why do poor children do poorer?”

- A multidimensional SEM analysis of the effects of socioeconomic status on child development
- Using National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY)
- Mediating pathways of income’s effect on social, cognitive and behavioural outcomes (ages 0-25)
- Comparing provincial income-transfer policy and programmatic social spending



Conclusion

- We are selling children short by focusing solely on poverty
- Need to refocus on what matters to children
- All three paradigms better-served by broadening to childhood disadvantage approach
- Child policy needs a better understanding of existing evidence, and better evidence
- Getting the investment right really matters

Thank you

For references and bibliography please see paper

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