



# Organized leisure activities in early childhood and social inequalities in cognitive and social skills

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## Background:

- Organized leisure activities have several benefits for children's skill development (Covay & Carbonaro 2010, Cabane, Hille and Lechner 2016)
- However, too much structured leisure time activities may lead to stress and lower creativity of children (Lareau 2002)
- Children of higher social classes are more often enrolled in organized leisure activities (Schober & Spieß, 2013)
- Hence, organized leisure may represent educational reproduction mechanisms
- Most research focused on adolescence, yet "investment" in early childhood may be particularly beneficial (Cunha et al., 2006)
- Little research is based on German data

## Research questions:

- To which extent is enrollment into organized leisure during childhood related to children's cognitive and social skills?
- To which extent does enrollment into organized leisure mediate the relation between parental socioeconomic status (SES) and children's cognitive and social skills?

## Theoretical model:

Lareau's (2002, 2011) argument



## Hypotheses:

- H1** Enrollment into organized leisure is related to higher **cognitive skills**.
- H2** Enrollment into organized leisure is related to higher **social skills**.
- H3** Enrollment into organized leisure partially mediates the association between parental socioeconomic status (SES) and children's **cognitive skills**.
- H4** Enrollment into organized leisure partially mediates the association between parental socioeconomic status (SES) and children's **social skills**.

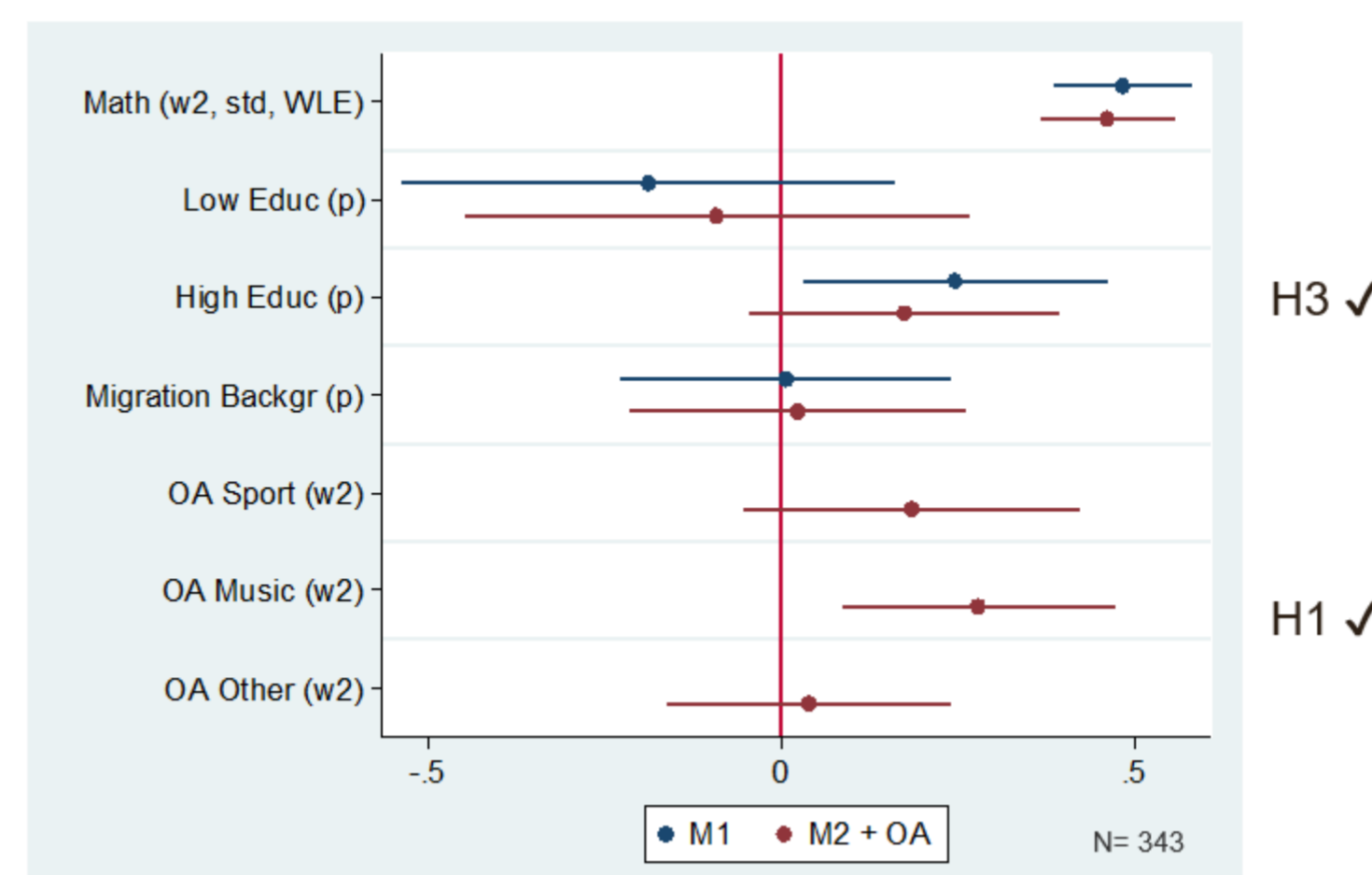
## Data and Operationalization:

- German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS)
- Starting cohort 2 "Kindergarten"
- Two measurement time points: age 5 & 7
- 343 parents and their children in preschool (with multiple imputation)

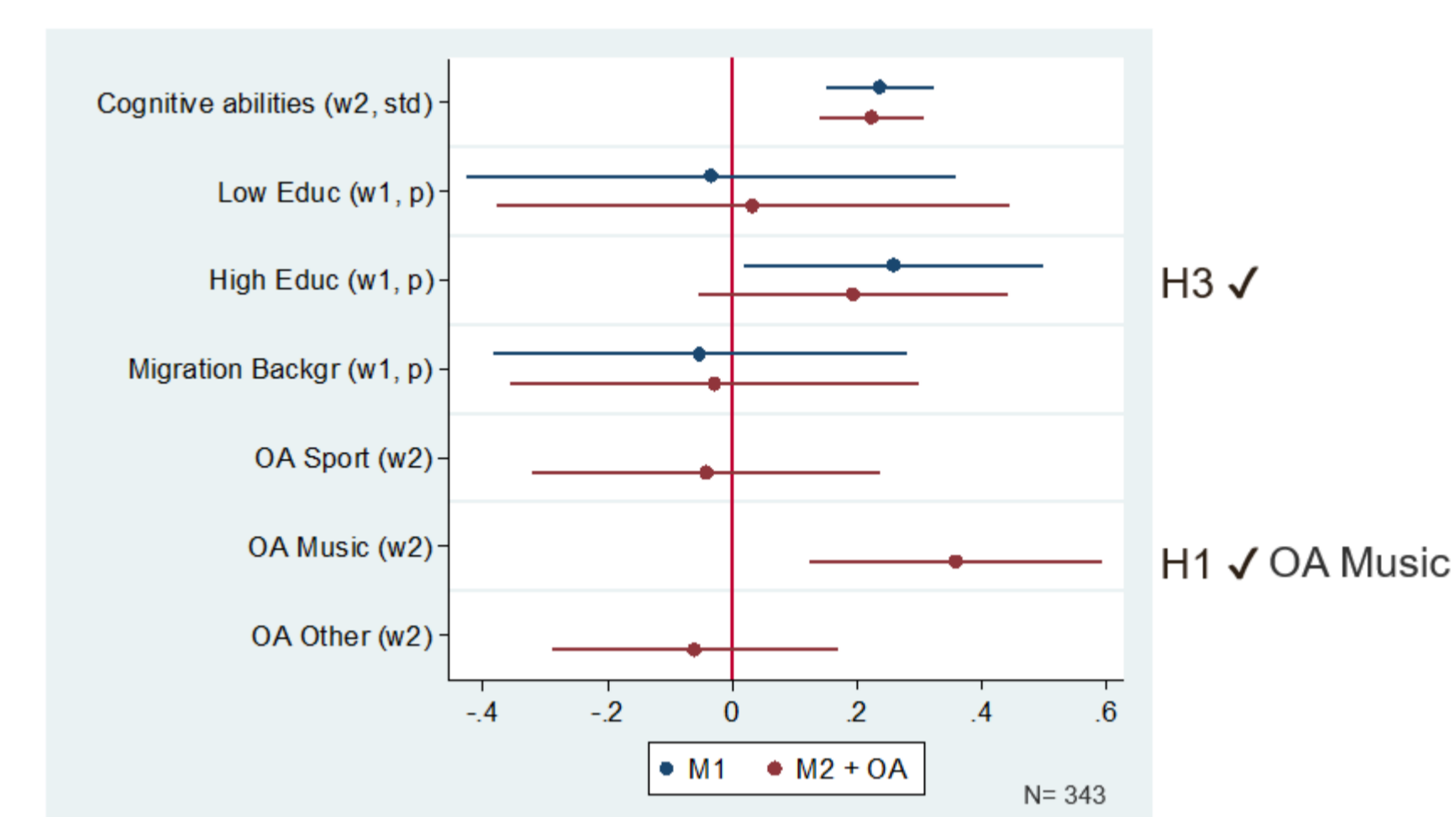
Independent variable		preschool	elementary
Parental Socio-Economic Status	Education level (CASMIN, categorical)	w1	
Organized-leisure activities	Sport, music, other (yes/no)	w2	
Dependent variables (z-std)			
Cognitive skills	Math scores (WLE)	w2	w4
	Concentration skills (teacher rated)	w2	w4
	Basic cognitive skills (reasoning)	w2	w4
Social skills	Social skills (teacher rated)	w2	w4

## Results of Lagged Dependent Variable (DV) regression:

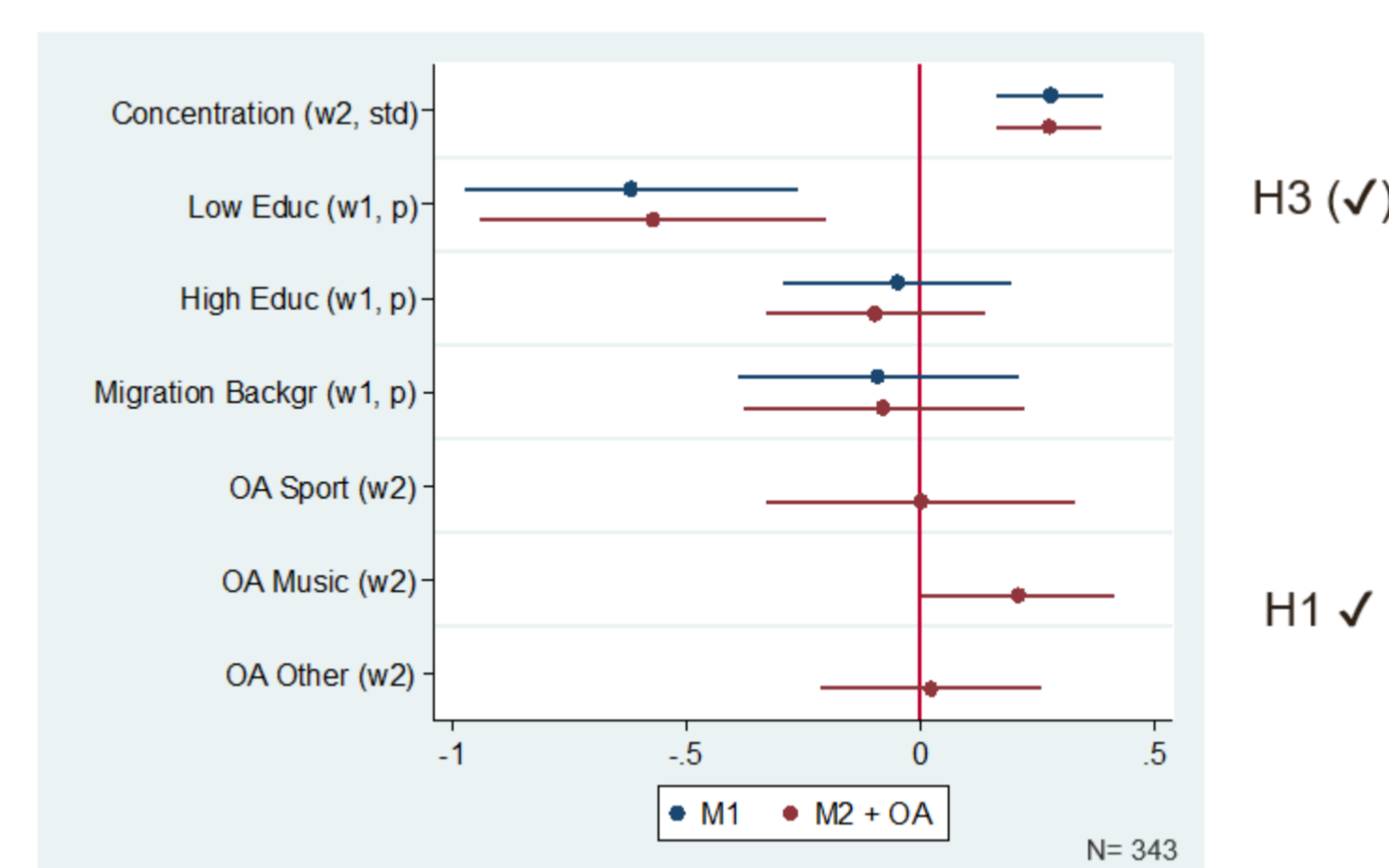
### DV Math score



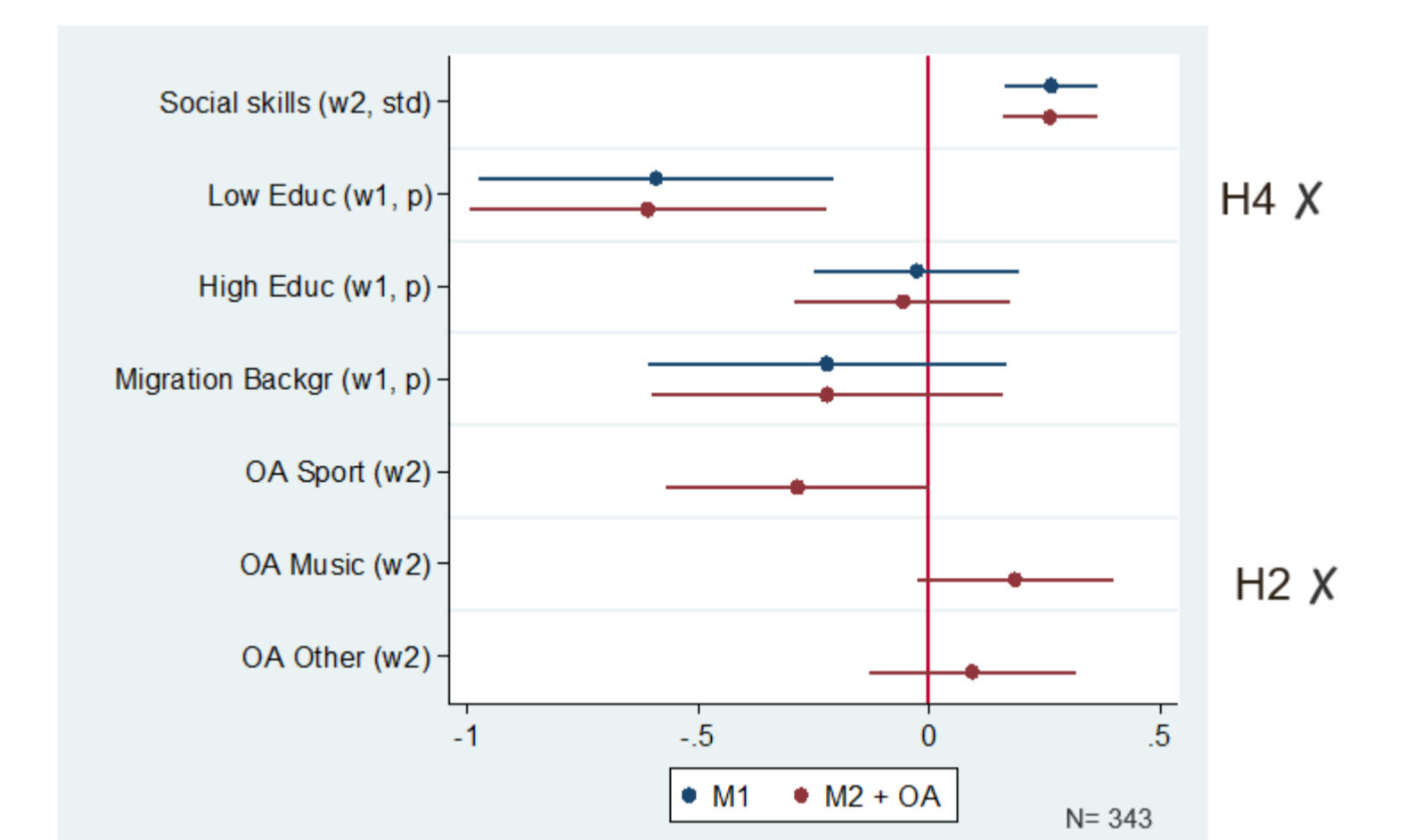
### DV Basic cognitive skills



### DV Concentration skills



### DV Social skills



CV child: activities at home/preschool, age, gender, cogn. abilities, time spent in preschool  
CV parent: income, single parent, unemployment, West GE

## Summary:

- Music participation, but not organized leisure activities in general, explains the relation between parental SES and cognitive skills
- Non of the organized leisure activities (w2) is positively related to social skills (w4), in fact, sport enrollment is negatively related to social skill ratings
- The results suggest that future studies should pay close attention to the type of organized leisure examined

## Limitations:

- Small sample
- Exact type of organized leisure unclear (e.g., type of sport)
- Hours spend on each activity unknown
- Only subjective measures of concentration & social skills



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