

Risk and protective factors in adolescent behaviour

DATE

May 12, 2021

VENUE

ESRI, Whitaker Square,
Sir John Rogerson's Quay,
Dublin 2

AUTHOR

Emer Smyth, Merike Darmody



Acknowledgements

- Minister
- Research partnership with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)
- Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) Study Team
- GUI young people and their families



Background to the study

Introduction

Use Growing Up in Ireland Cohort '98 data to examine:

1. What patterns of (mis)behaviour are found among young people at 9, 13 and 17 years of age?
2. To what extent do these patterns relate to differences in family resources (social class, parental education and household income)?
3. To what extent does adolescent behaviour reflect the social mix of the school?
4. To what extent does adolescent behaviour reflect the social composition of the neighbourhood?
5. What family, peer, school and neighbourhood factors help to reduce the incidence of behaviour difficulties among young people?

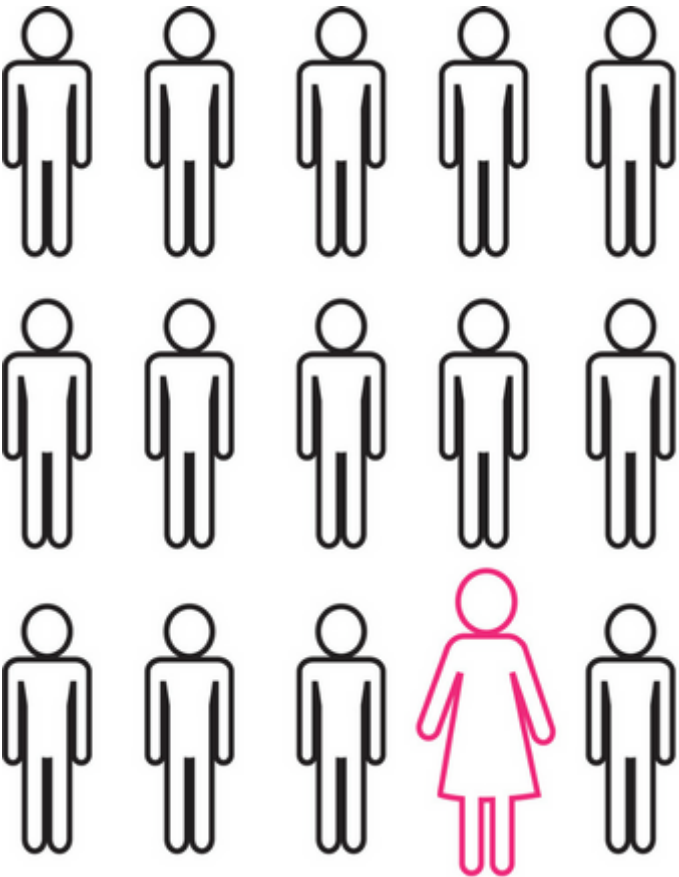
Adolescent behaviour

Domain	Type of behaviour
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Externalising difficulties (acting out)• Internalising difficulties (emotional and peer problems)• Prosocial behaviour (interaction with others)
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School-based misbehaviour• Truancy
Neighbourhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

Family behaviour is reported by the young person's mother;
school and neighbourhood behaviours by the young person themselves

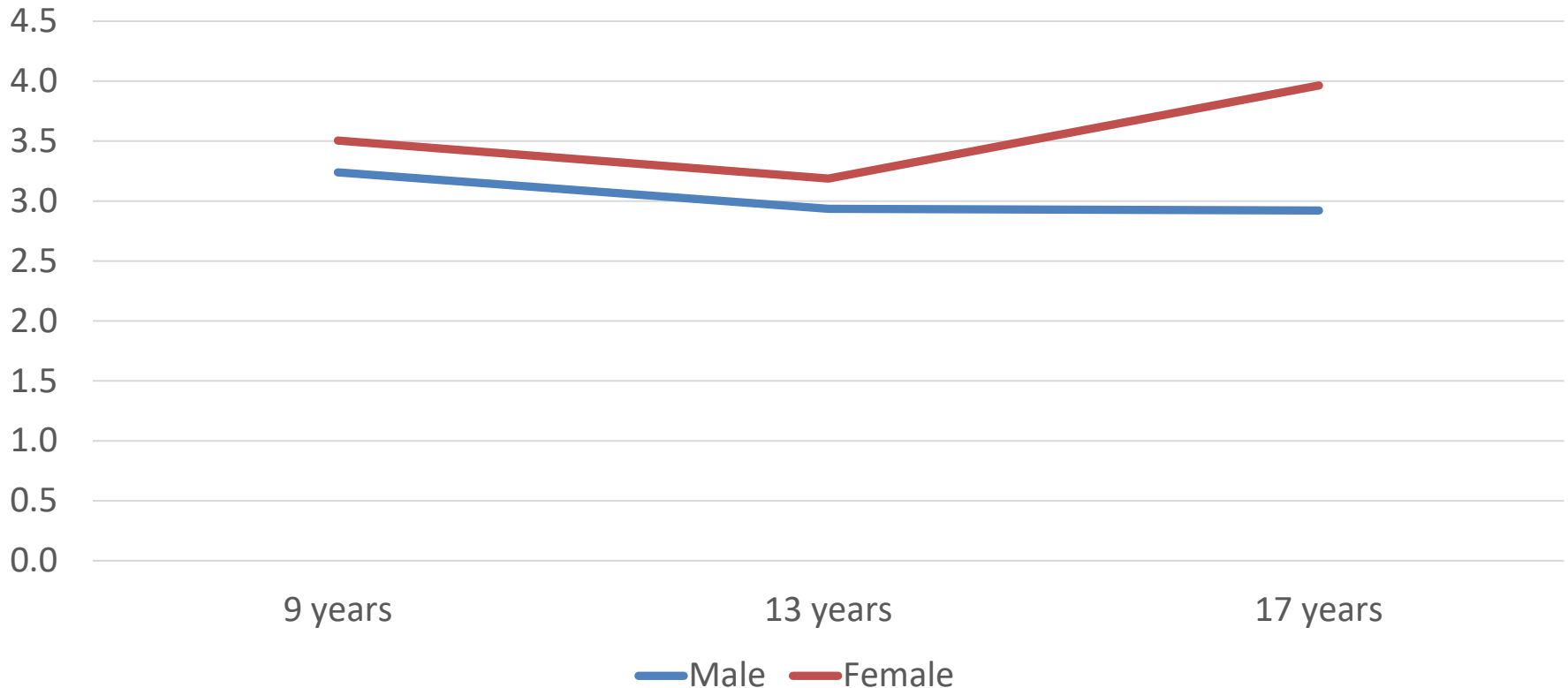
Overall pattern

- Low levels of behaviour difficulties at 9, 13 and 17 years of age
- Few young people consistently ‘act out’ at home, at school and in the community – importance of understanding behaviour in context
- Stability and change in difficulties over time: early difficulties are a signal of later difficulties but, for most, behaviour difficulties are temporary
- More stable – externalising difficulties; less stable – anti-social behaviour



Gender and family background

Gender differences in internalising difficulties



Males more externalising, anti-social and school (mis)behaviour and females more internalising difficulties but also more prosocial behaviour

Socio-economic background

- Multidimensional approach: social class, parental education, household income, family structure
- Complex picture re behaviour and disadvantage
- Lower education levels among mothers linked to externalising and internalising difficulties but not to ASB or school-based behaviour
- Financial strain related to externalising, internalising and school (mis)behaviour
- Lone parent or separated families – poorer behaviour outcomes across domains, not accounted for by financial strain or social class/parental education



School influences

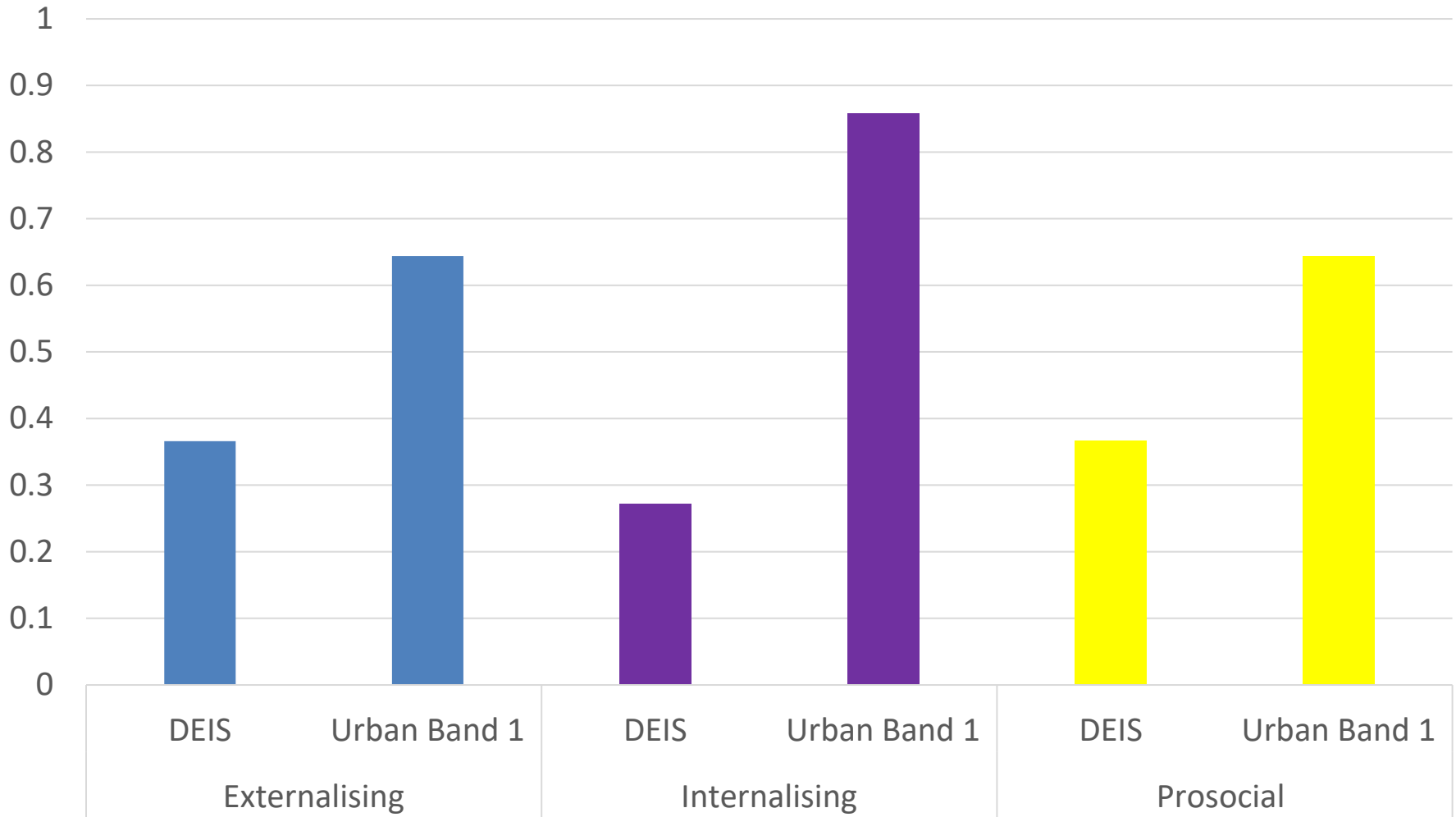
Schools or neighbourhoods?

- In many countries, almost all young people attend their local school, making it hard to distinguish between the effects of the school they attend and the neighbourhood they live in
- In Ireland, around $\frac{1}{2}$ of those in second-level education do not attend their nearest (or most accessible) school
- So there is no simple mapping between school and neighbourhood
- Use cross-classified multilevel models to distinguish school and neighbourhood effects, showing how much behaviour varies across schools and neighbourhoods

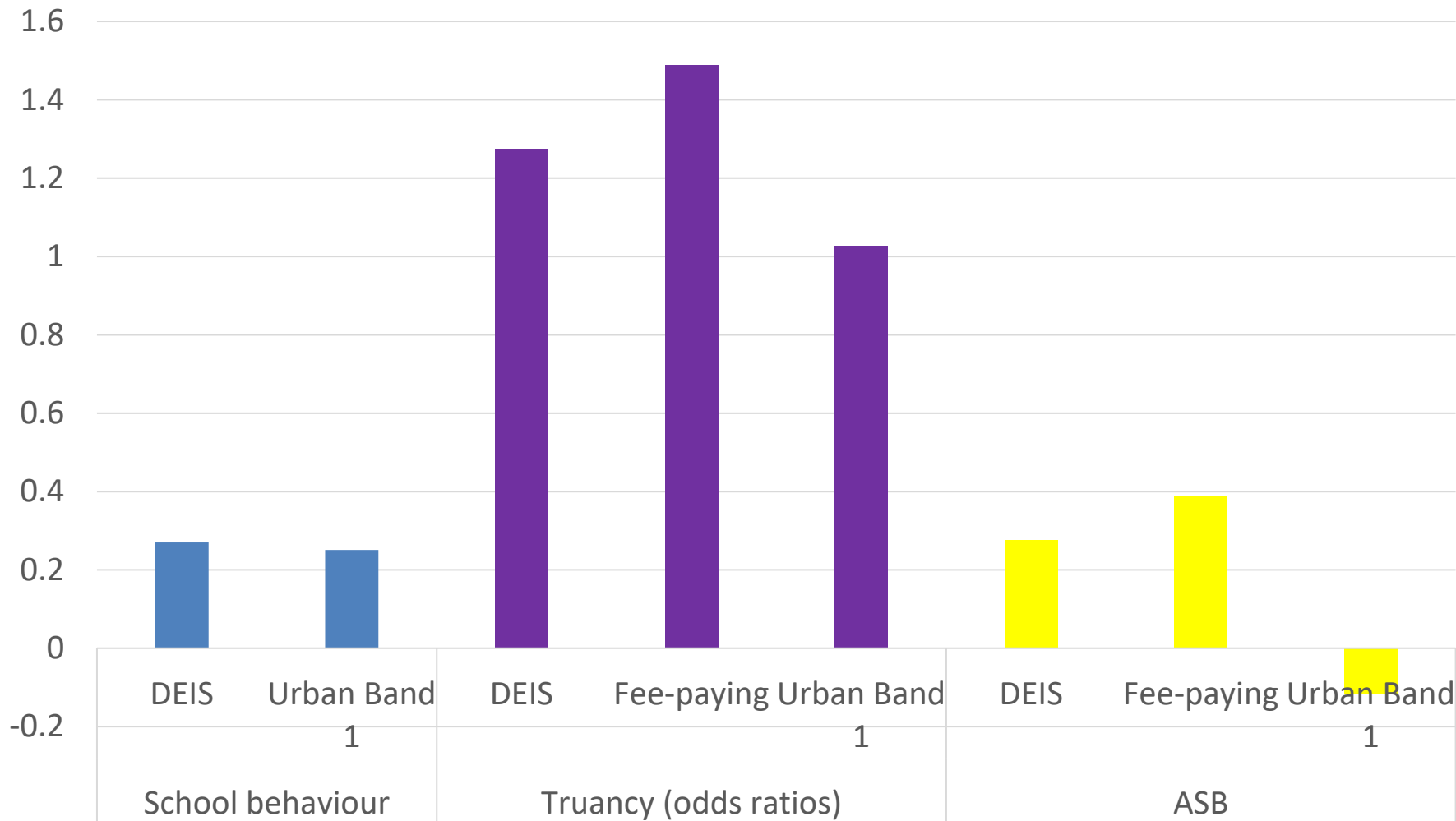
Variation between schools

- Significant variation between individual schools in school-based misbehaviour, truancy, internalising difficulties and prosocial behaviour, even taking account of family background
- Little difference by school gender mix but lower misbehaviour in single-sex (especially girls') schools and lower truancy rates in girls' schools
- Significant variation by school social mix: second-level – DEIS, fee-paying, non-DEIS; primary – Urban Band 1 DEIS v. others

Net effect of school social mix: behaviour at home (compared to non-DEIS schools)



Net effect of school social mix: behaviour at school and in the community (compared with non-DEIS schools)





Neighbourhood influences

Variation between neighbourhoods

- More variation between schools than neighbourhoods
- Little systematic variation by socio-economic profile of neighbourhood (SAPS composite scale), except more externalising difficulties in most disadvantaged areas
- Some effect of living in a large city or small town
- Perceived neighbourhood disorder linked to externalising, internalising and prosocial behaviour
- Concern about local gangs linked to ASB



Risk and protective factors

Family factors

- Conflict with parents +
- Positive relationships less significant (less variation) but were associated with more prosocial behaviour and lower truancy rates
- Parental monitoring -

Peer factors

- Large friendship group – protection (internalising) and risk (externalising, ASB, school behaviour)
- Older friends as a risk factor +
- Trust in friends -
- Alienation from friends +

School factors

- Positive interaction with teachers as protective -
- Negative interaction with teachers as risk +
- School disengagement +
- Engagement with school subjects -
- Academic performance -

Neighbourhood factors

- Strong protective effect of having an adult to talk to (at home, school or in the community) -
- Safe place to hang out and, to some extent, access to facilities -
- Involvement in structured sports -

Conclusions



Implications for policy

- We need to understand adolescent behaviour in context and how behaviour reacts to different risk and protective factors
- Need to take a holistic approach to youth mental health and wellbeing (Sharing the Vision); importance of early prevention but also specialist supports for those with more severe difficulties (to avoid longer-term problems)
- Schools as an arena for intervention as well as an influence; wellbeing in the curriculum; school climate; school (dis)engagement
- Professional development for teachers and other professionals working with children and young people
- Resources and supports for DEIS schools
- Financial strain – broader anti-poverty strategy
- Impact of the pandemic and related restrictions on youth mental health makes a policy response all the more urgent