Disability, Gender and Social Class in Education: Making the Connections

Professor Sheila Riddell
Centre for Research in Education Inclusion & Diversity (CREID)
Moray House School of Education & Sports
University of Edinburgh
www.creid.ed.ac.uk

Structure of the Presentation

- Current debates in social science on social structures & identity formation.

- Growing acceptance of the idea of reflexive self-constitution and the need for an understanding of intersectionality.

- For many people, identity is both hybrid and shifting.

- Administrative data are used to provide an understanding of the relationship between key variables, including gender, social class and disability in school and higher education.

- Pupil and student case studies provide insight into the way in which complex identity plays out on people's lived experiences.

Theorists of 'late modernity' suggest that individuals create their own social identity. Defining aspects of identity may change over time.

Increasingly everyone has to choose between different options, including as to which group or subculture one wants to be identified with. In fact one has to choose and change one's social identity as well and take the risks in doing so. (Beck 1992:88)

Disability has been described as 'the ultimate post-modern category'

Considering the range of impairments under the disability umbrella; considering the different ways in which they impact on individuals and groups over a lifetime; considering the intersection of disability with other axes of inequality; and considering the challenges which impairment issues to the notion of embodiment, we believe it could be argued that disability is the ultimate post-modern concept.
(Corker & Shakespeare, 2002: 15)

Counter-arguments

Social class continues to be major determinant of individual life-chances. Individuals have only limited room for manoeuvre and negotiation.

> *The individualism which is assumed in a great deal of theorising on subjectivity is the product of, and in the interests of, privileged groups in very specific national and historical circumstances…Concepts of individualism legitimate powerful groups and render other groups unworthy of the designation 'individual'*. (Skeggs, 1997: 163)
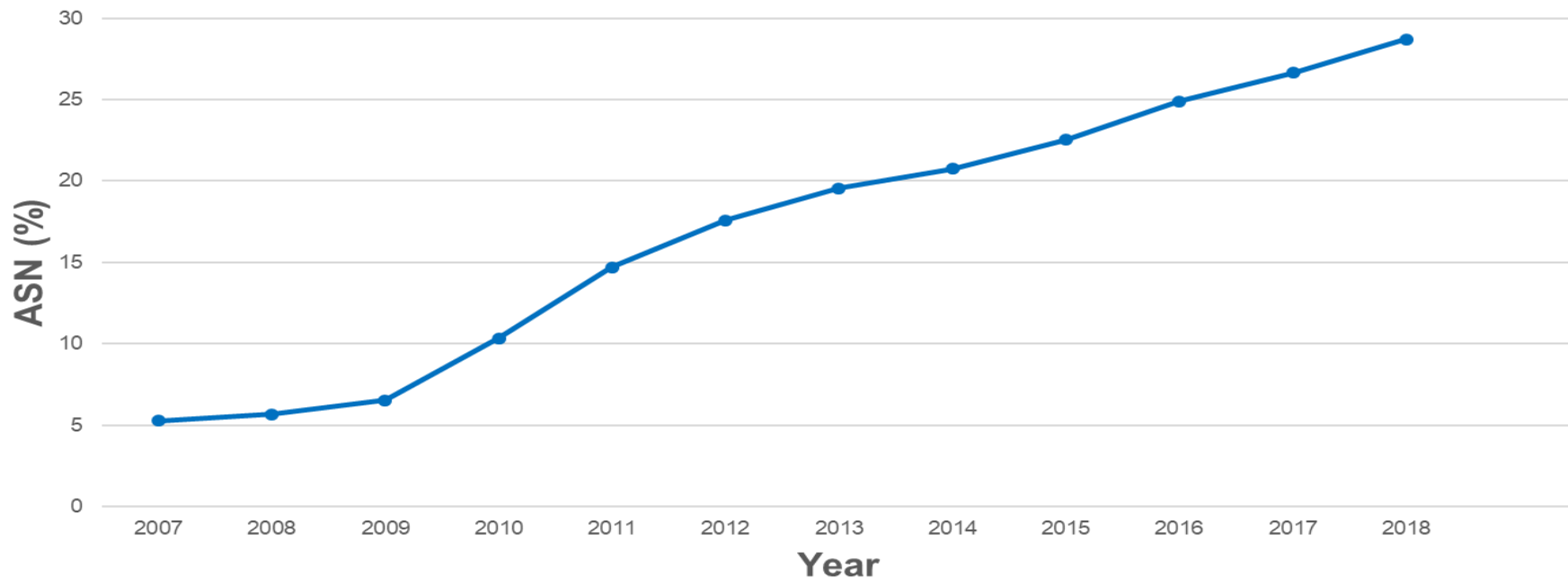
What can we learn from official statistics about the relationship between gender, social class and additional support needs/disability?

Children with ASN are a percentage of the total school population in Scotland, 2007-2018
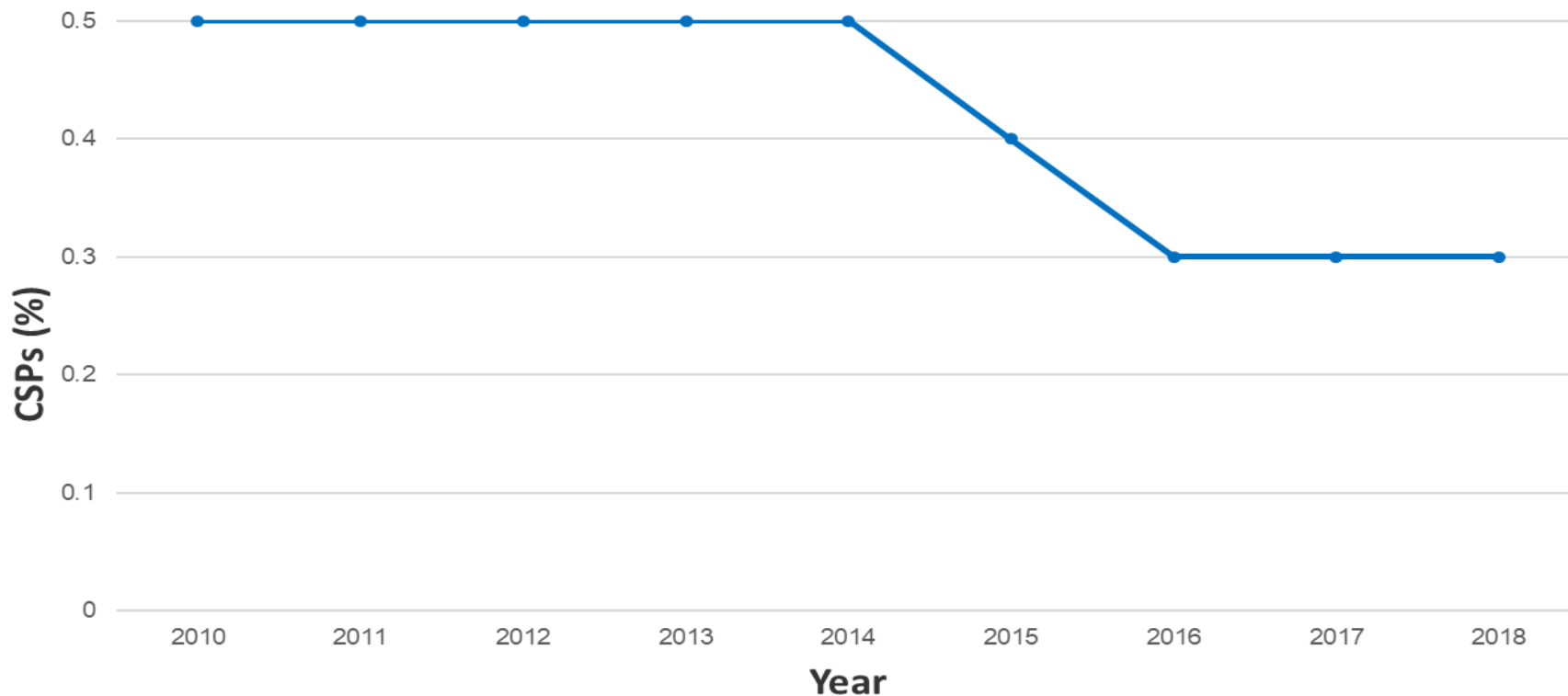

Source: Scottish Government, 2019

ASN numbers in Scotland have increased sharply year on year, reaching 28.7% of all pupils in 2018.

This increase in ASN numbers is due predominately to changes in the way ASNs are classified and recorded

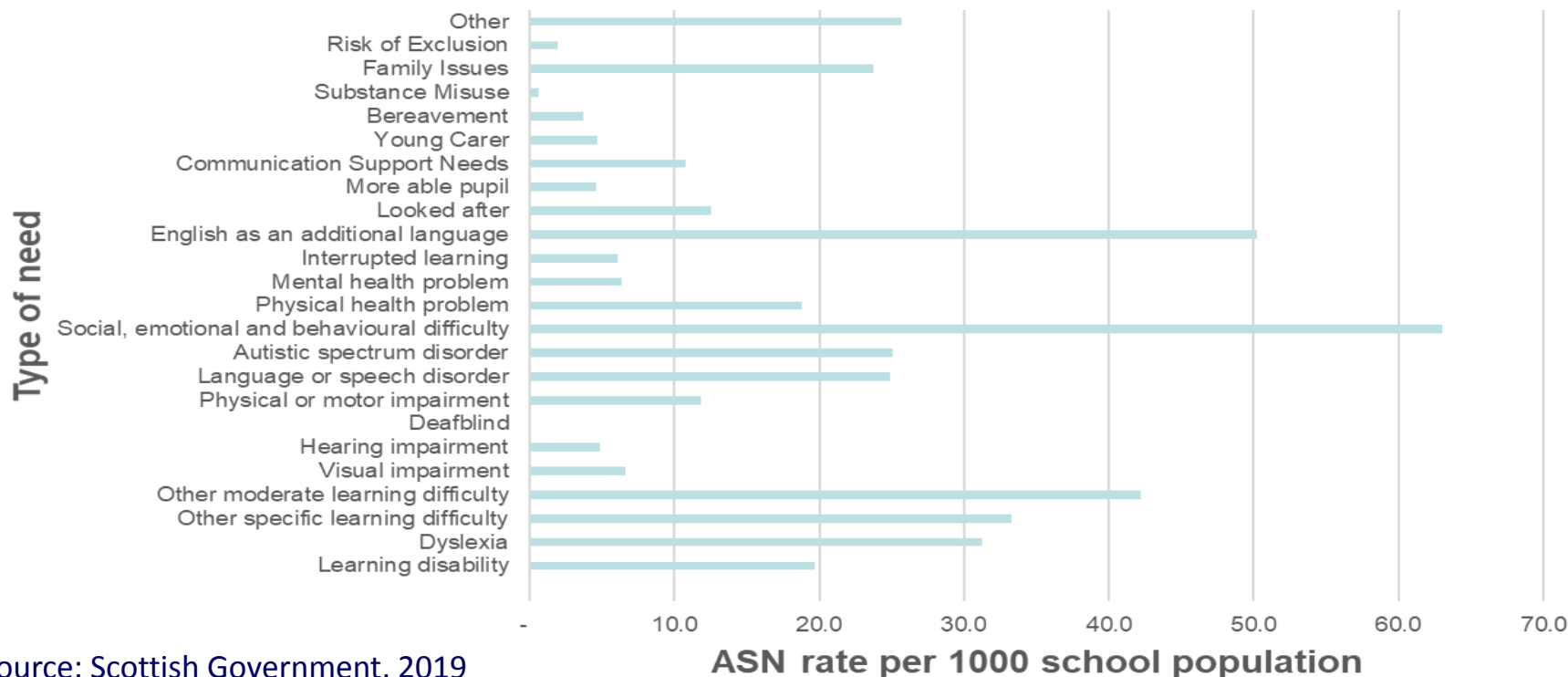# Percentage of whole school population with a CSP in Scotland, 2010-2018

Source: Scottish Government, 2019

The percentage of the total school population in Scotland with a CSP has decreased from 0.5% in 2010 to 0.3% in 2018

ASN pupils by each type of need in Scotland 2018: Rate per 1000 school population

Source: Scottish Government, 2019

There are currently 24 categories of ASN in Scotland.

The largest category is Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulty (63 pupils per 1,000 pupils in the total population).
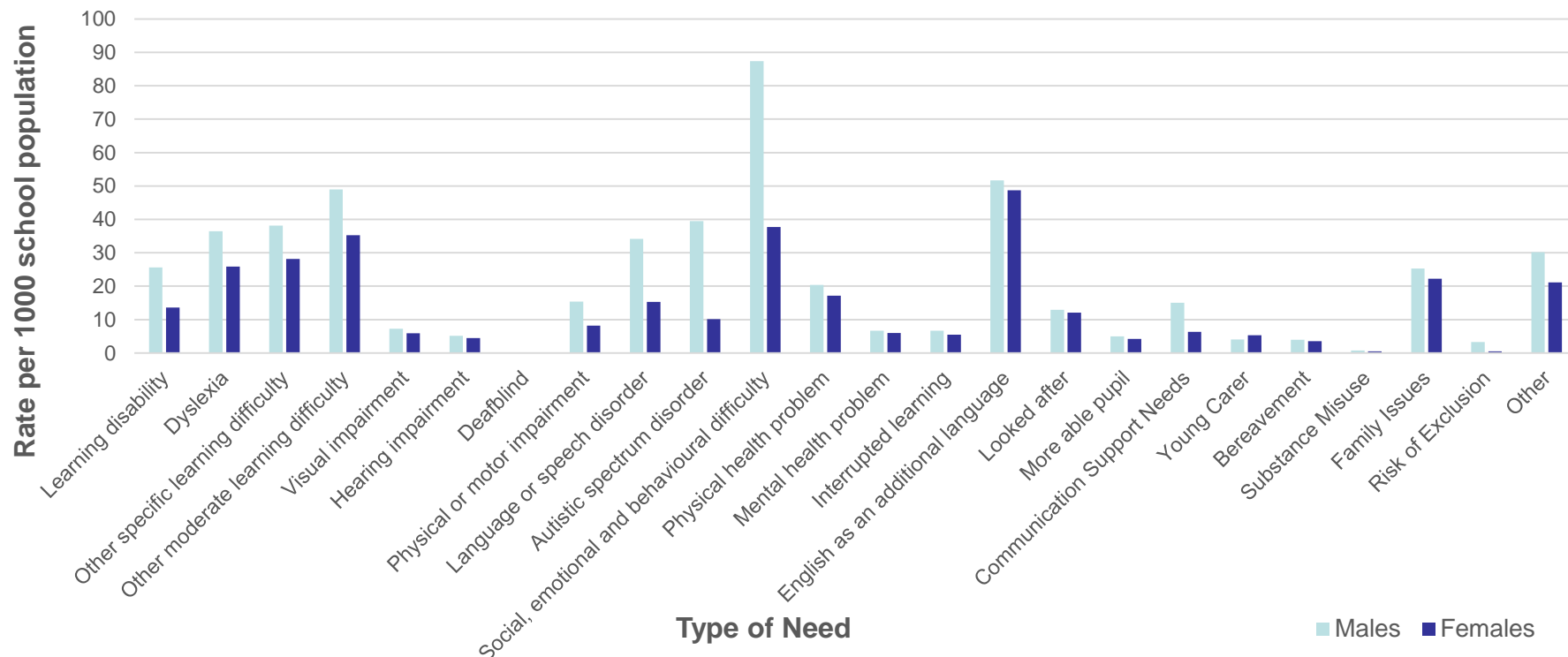
The second largest category is English as an additional language (50 pupils per 1,000 pupils).

# ASN by type of need and gender, Scotland 2018: Rate per 1,000 school population

The magnitude of this gender difference varies between categories of need, with the largest gender discrepancy shown in the Autism Spectrum Disorder category (approx. 4 times as many males as females). For low incidence, normative categories of need such as hearing impairment, the gender difference is very small.
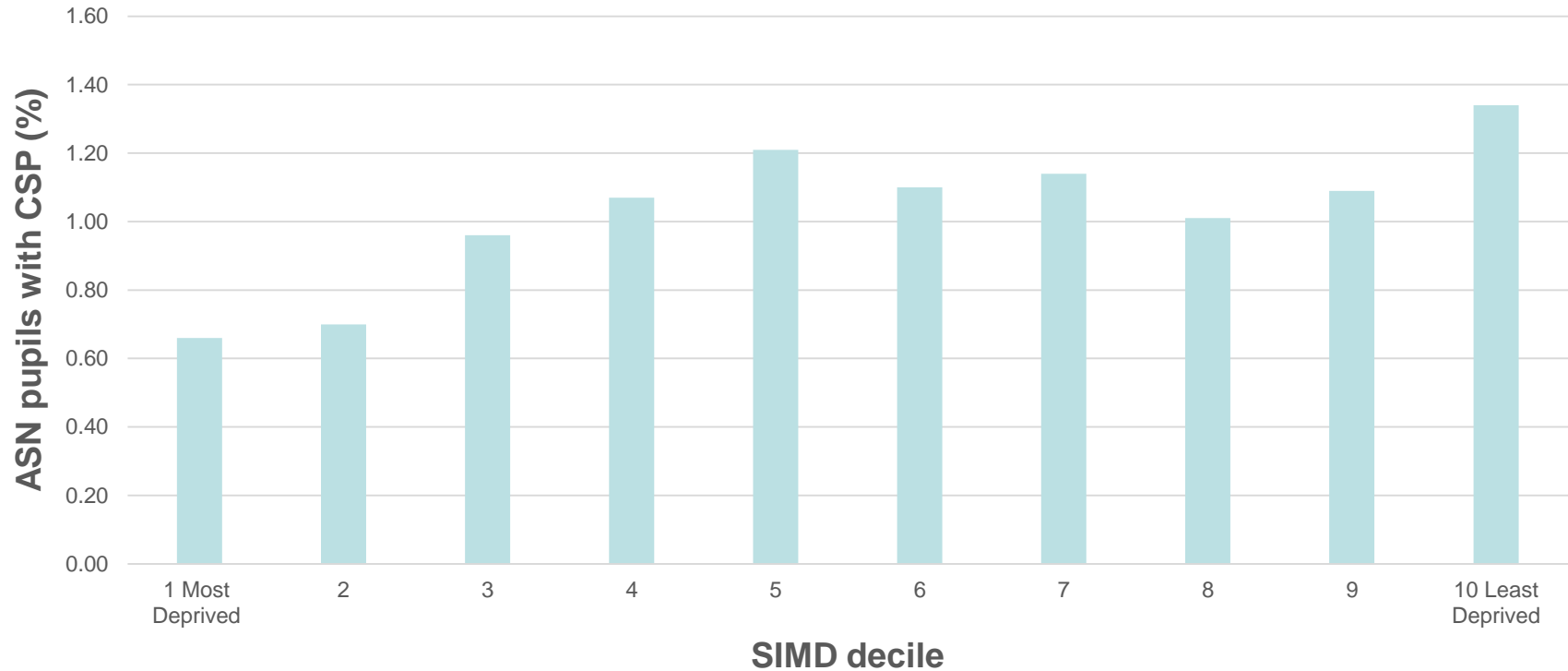
Total ASN pupils by SIMD deciles, 2018
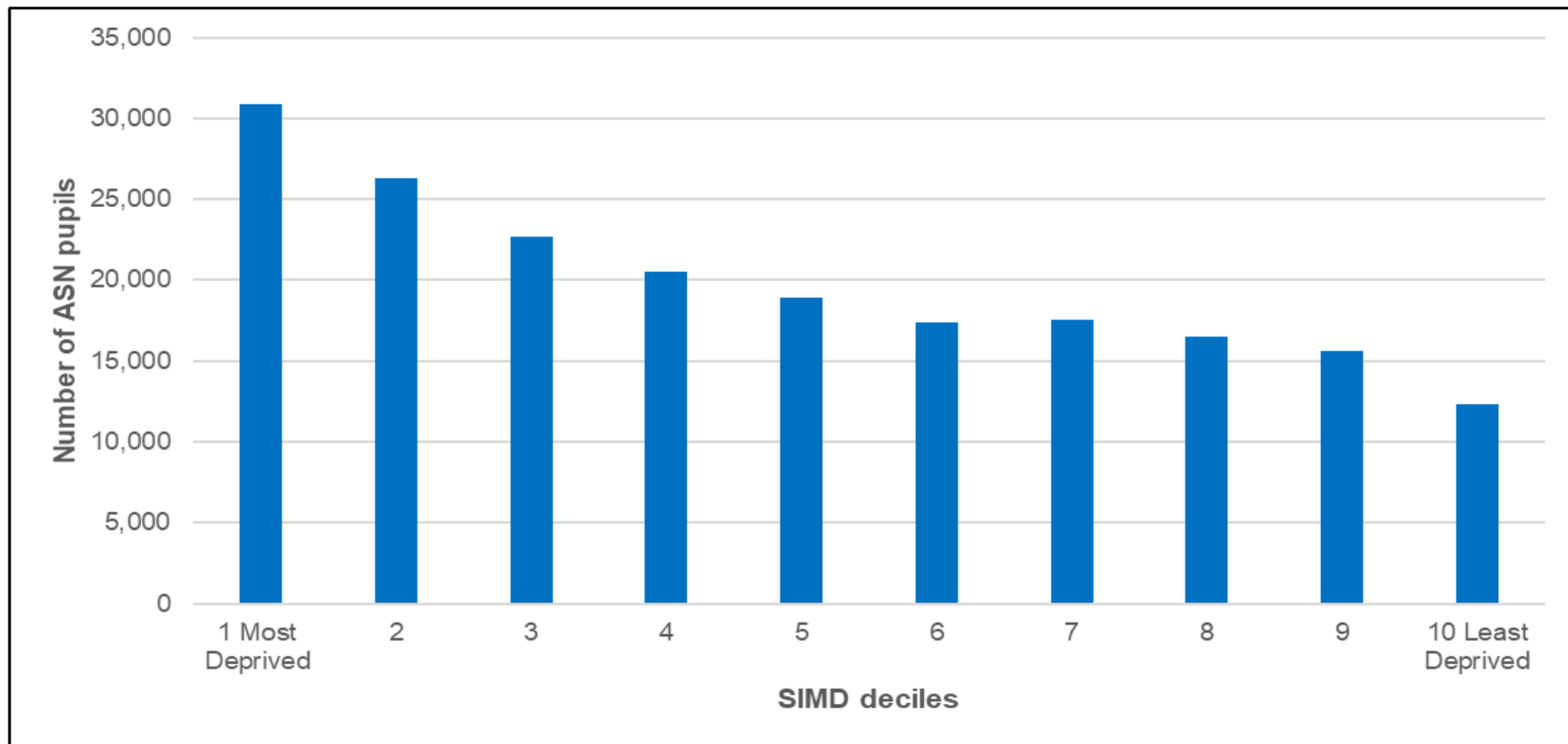
Source: Scottish Government, 2019

Pupils living in the most deprived areas are more likely to have ASN identified.

Percentage of ASN pupils with a CSP per SIMD decile, 2018

Source: Scottish Government, 2019

A child with ASN living in the **least deprived** neighborhoods in Scotland is **more likely** to have a CSP (1.34% in SIMD10) than a child with ASN living in the most deprived neighborhoods (0.66% in SIMD 1).

Percentage of ASN pupils per category of need in the most (quintile 1) and least deprived (quintile 5) areas, 2018
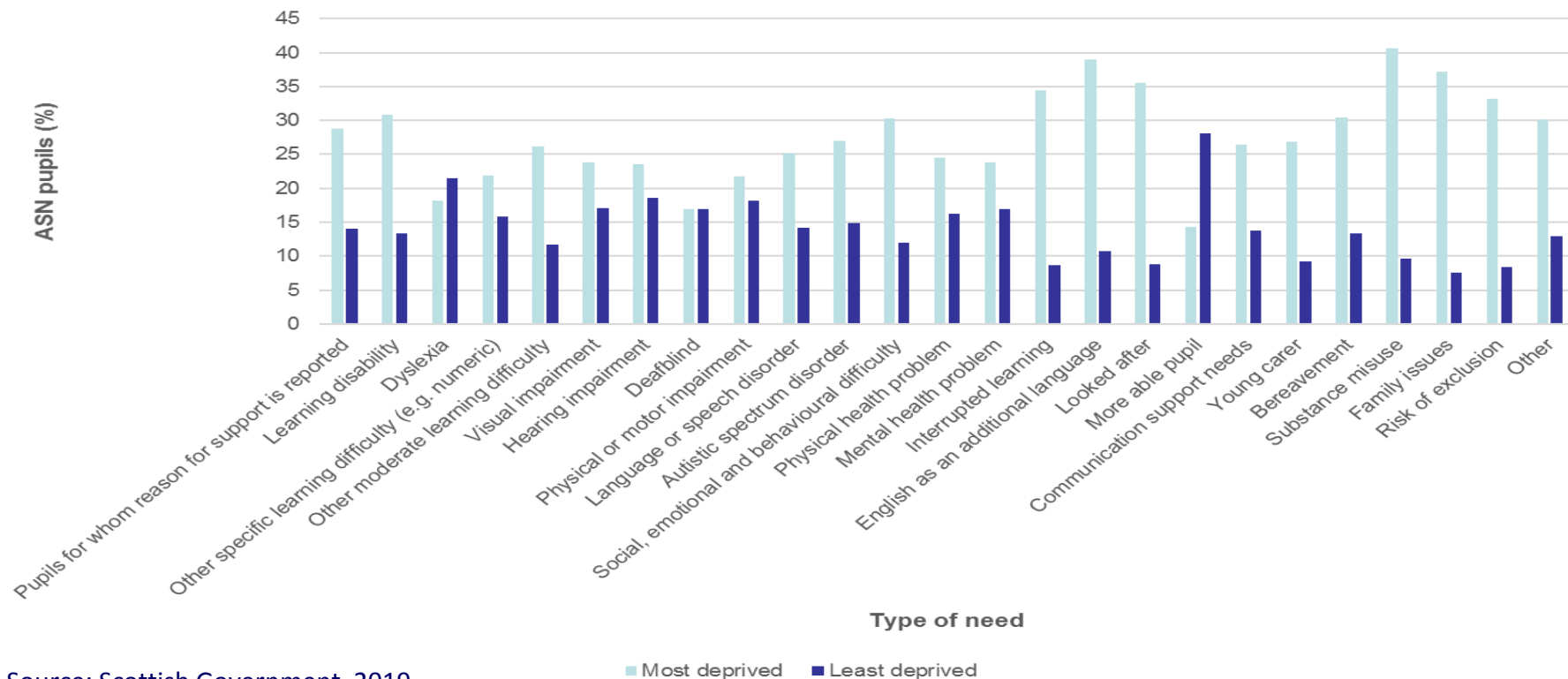
Source: Scottish Government, 2019

The association between ASN and deprivation is evident across all categories, apart from Dyslexia and more able pupils where there is higher identification of ASN among pupils living in the least deprived areas.

The association between ASN and deprivation is strongest in relation to high incidence, non-normative categories (e.g. social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and EAL).

Key messages

Overall, twice as many boys as girls are identified as having ASN.

ASN is more than twice as likely to be identified in pupils living in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

Disproportionalities relating to gender and social deprivation are greater in high-incidence, non-normative categories (e.g. learning difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties), as opposed to low incidence, normative categories (e.g. visual and sensory impairments).

Statutory plans (CSPs) are more than twice as likely to be opened for pupils with ASN living in the least deprived neighbourhoods compared with pupils living in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

Higher Education

- Expansion in proportion of disabled students in total student population – from 2% of total in 1995 to 9% of total in 2017

- Strong links between gender, disability and social class

- Dyslexia biggest & fastest growing category (accounts for more than half of all disabled students)

- Middle class students predominate in this group

- Different pattern from schools – more women than men participate in HE – and greater proportion of women then men in all disability categories – except autistic spectrum disorder & visual impairment.

UK under-graduates by gender and disability

HESA, 2019
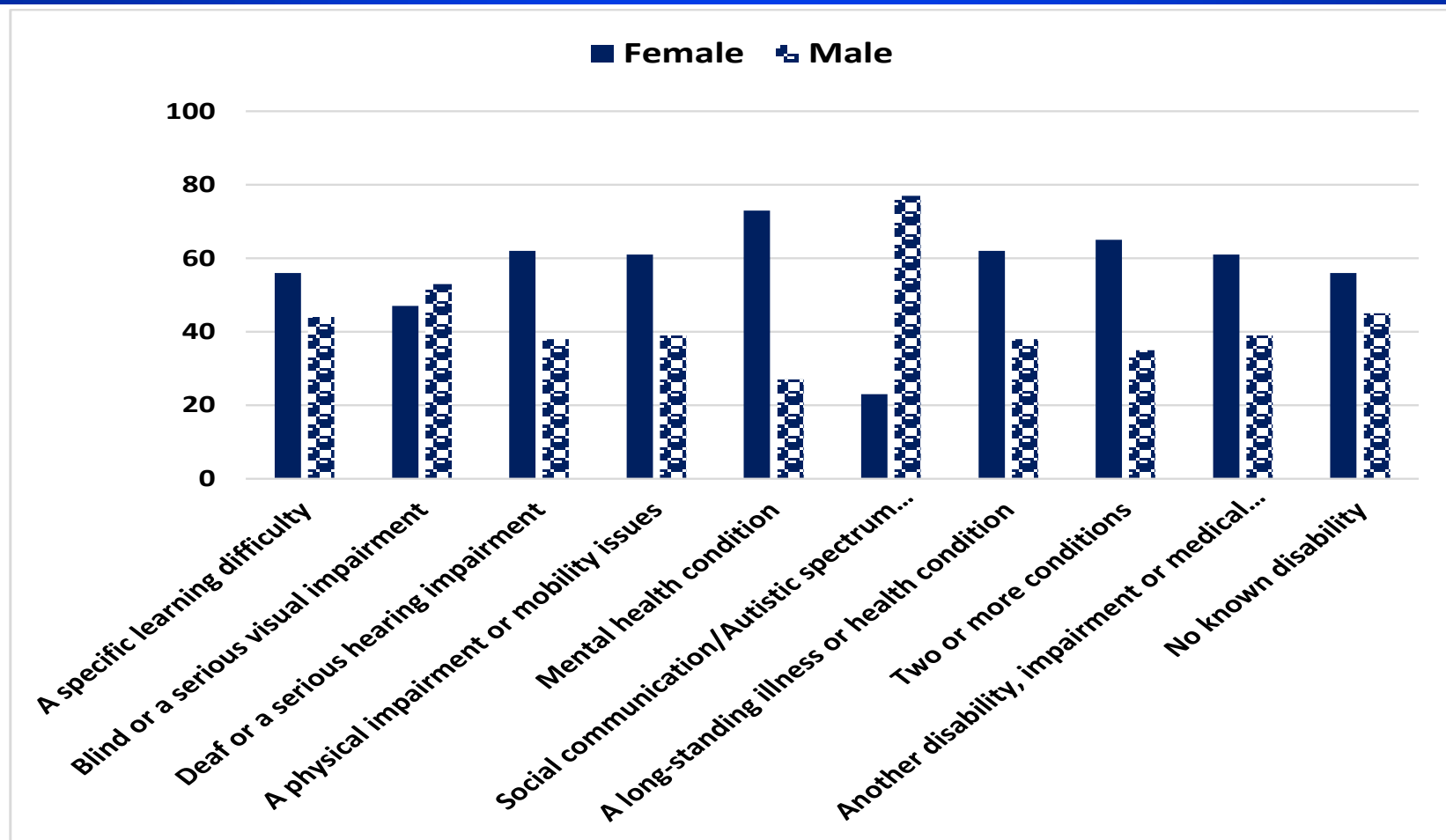
Also strong links between disability and social class – but contrasting patterns between school and university

Disabled students are more likely to come from professional/managerial backgrounds than non-disabled students (opposite in schools)

Type of impairment also matters- significant majority (60%) of disabled students have diagnosis of dyslexia – and are predominantly middle class

Disabled and non-disabled students by SIMD quintiles

Legend: ■ Non-disabled ▨ Disabled

	SIMD 1	SIMD 2	SIMD 3-5
Non-disabled	14.1	15.8	69.7
Disabled	13.3	16.2	70.3
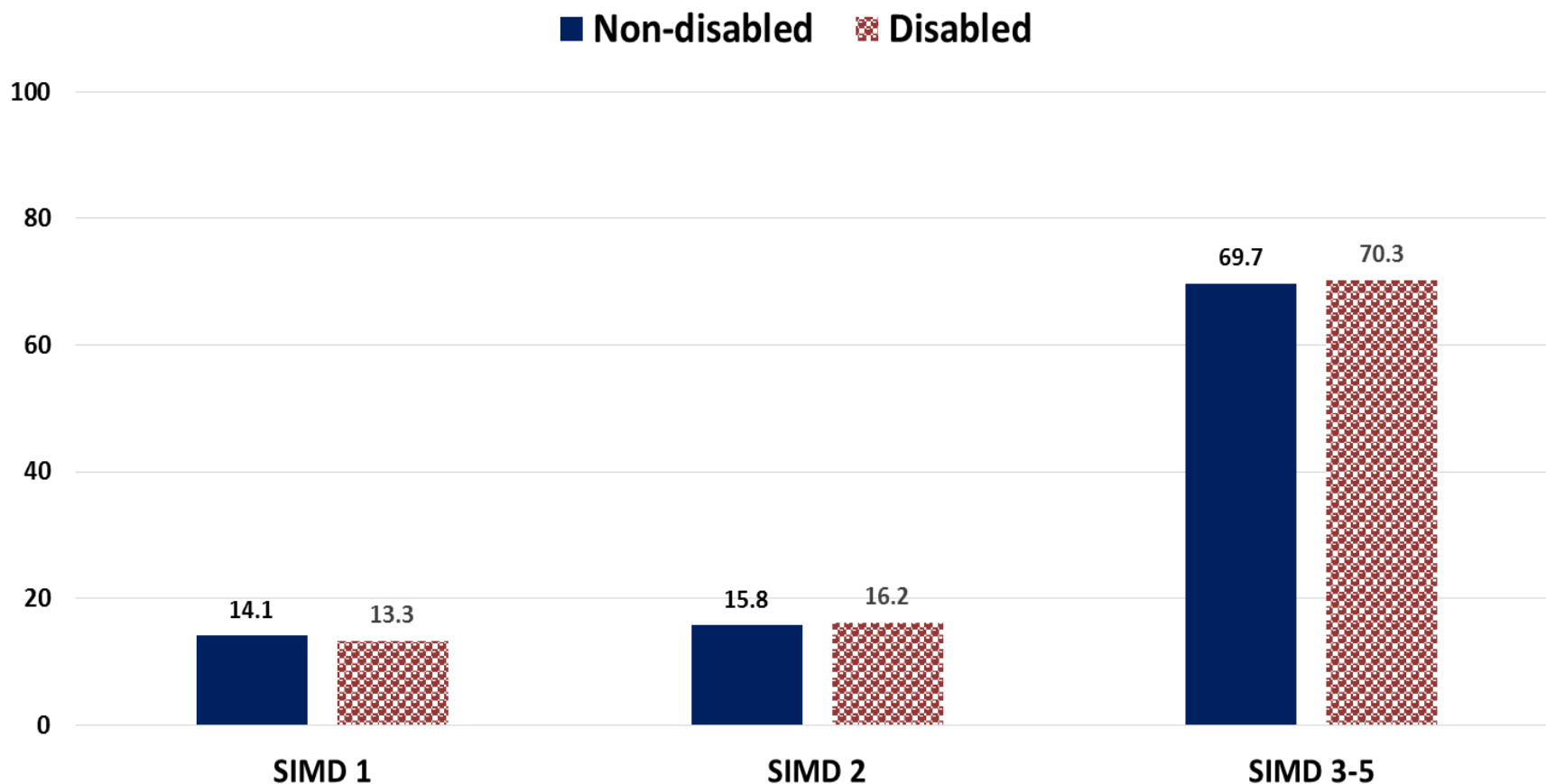
HESA, 2015; SIMD 1 & 2 = most disadvantaged

Disabled students by type of impairment and SIMD quintiles, HESA, 2015 – <u>caution</u> low numbers in some categories
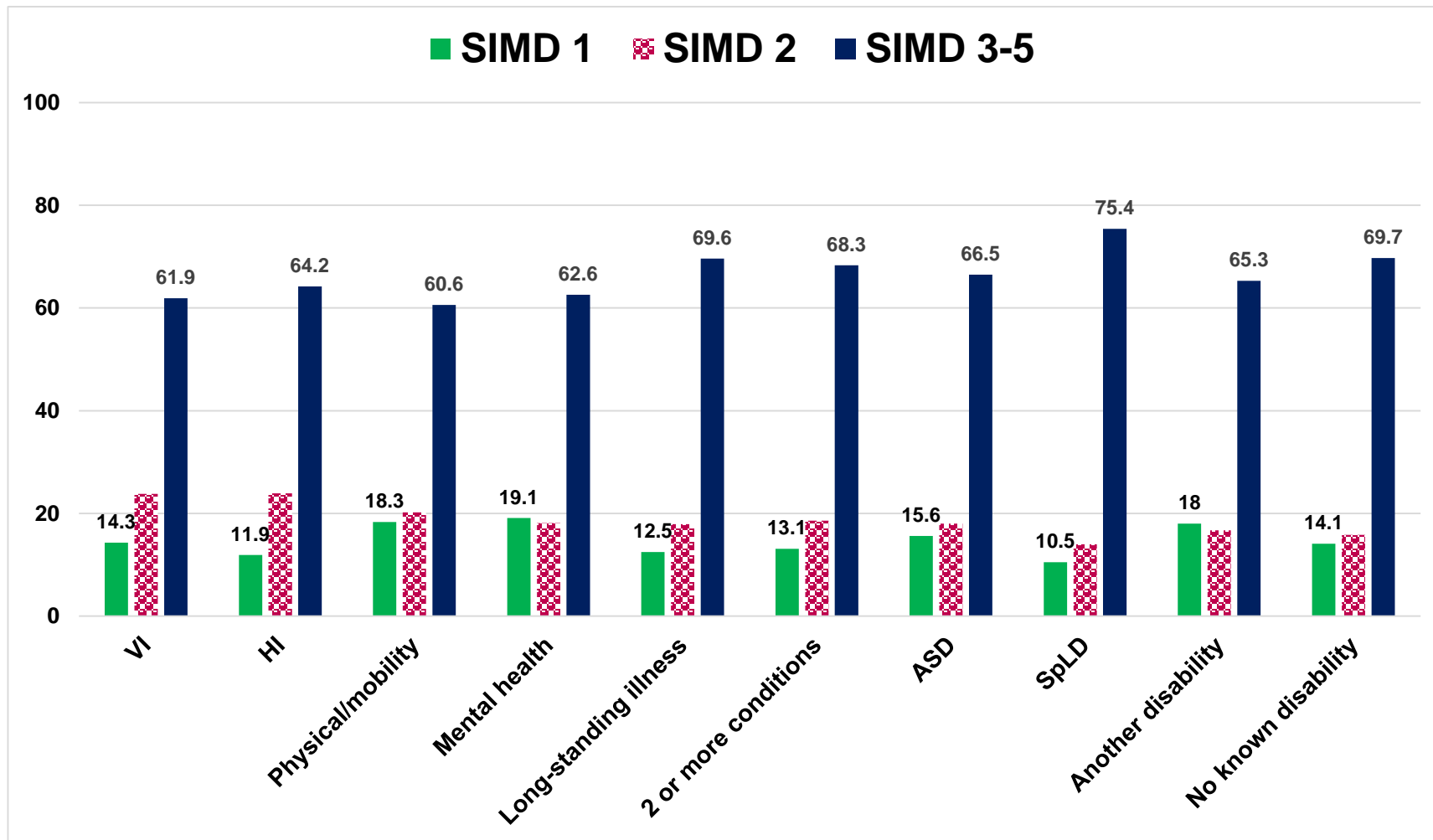
Qualitative data

- Different impairments lead to different educational experiences and different outcomes

- Differences in gender social class background also play an important role

- Social advantage does not always outweigh negative impact of disability

School students and the inter-section of disability, gender and social class

Leah is a full-time mum and a BSL user. She was diagnosed with hearing loss when she was a toddler. She lives in a peripheral estate in an urban area of high social deprivation with her partner and 18 month old baby daughter, who are also deaf. Her parents and siblings are hearing and she communicates with them orally, although she is most comfortable using BSL.

Leah spent most of her school career in schools for the deaf since her mum believed that a mainstream school would not be suitable for her. However, she was unhappy with the teachers' low expectations, became frustrated and disengaged. After two years at the secondary school for the deaf, Leah moved to a mainstream high school with a resource base. There she had full-time support from teachers of the deaf who also acted as interpreters and was happy to be given more challenging work.

In her fourth year, Leah made a sudden decision to leave school without seeking advice and enrolled at a local college where she completed a vocational course in Beauty Therapy. She described the course as enjoyable, although it had been chosen 'at random'. With hindsight, she thinks she would have benefited from more career guidance before she left school.

At the time of her interview, both Leah and her partner were unemployed and were having great difficulty finding work.

Mrs McHarris was 42 years old and a single parent with one child, **Rory**. At primary school, he was identified as having obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), dyspraxia and dyslexia. The family lived in a private rented ex-council property. At the time of the research she was self-employed and working part time, 'taking in ironing'. She explained that she needed to be at home and part time because Rory often missed school or was sent home because of 'bad behaviour'.

Problems began when Rory was in Primary 1, with the school denying there was a problem and describing Rory as 'lazy'. As a result of a private assessment, obsessive compulsive disorder and dyslexia were diagnosed. An assessment by an occupational therapist also suggested that he had dyspraxia. Mrs McHarris described Rory's growing distress at school, manifesting itself in compulsive hand washing and self-harming. The school refused to provide additional support, and the mother's relationship with teachers deteriorated.

Rory's secondary school placement appeared to be more successful, with additional school-based support in place. However, Mrs McHarris continued to mistrust educational professionals, expressing frustration with their 'we know best' approach, which she felt disguised a rather callous attitude.

Teresa:

Mature student of Biological Sciences from a privileged private school background. Diagnosis of epilepsy. Despite enjoying her studies, her epilepsy caused problems and she fell behind. She did not have a close network of friends and did not 'want to bother her family'. Outcome: non completion

Andrew:

Studying Education at university, had cerebral palsy and came from a disadvantaged background. Studied at college to gain entry to university, had a break in study and struggled at one point. He had a close network of friends at the university and his mother and aunt supported him. Outcome: completion of honours degree and work

Staff were supportive in both of these cases

'the social networks and advocacy power of their parents were closely related to their **socio-economic status**. *They played a significant role in shaping the young people's experiences of school education, as well as their post-school journeys'* (Fordyce, et al, 2013, p.113)

Issues and challenges

1. Disabled school and HE students are not a homogeneous group – they:

   - Have different impairments which lead to different needs
   - Come from different social backgrounds
   - Have different gender identities

2. Disabled school and HE students from socially deprived backgrounds are multiply disadvantaged because:

   - They do not necessarily have access to social networks that can help them – though this is not always the case
   - There is a strong intersection between disability, social class and gender – but different gender/class patterns emerge in school and university

Issues and challenges continued

3. We need much more inter-sectional analysis - Indicators that only focus on one characteristic may leave out other factors that are important in ensuring equal access, relevant support and fair outcomes for all disabled school and HE students

4. Quantitative data are useful in showing general trends but we also need qualitative data to understand the experiences of disabled students and the differences between different groups in relation to type of impairment, gender and social class

Conclusions

- Too simplistic to argue *either* that individuals choose their identity and biography, *or* that these are determined by overarching social structures.

- Analysis of quantitative administrative data is useful to understand relationship between variables – provides a snapshot of the 'big picture'

- Qualitative work essential to understand how individuals negotiate and shift identity over time.