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# Seminar 3

## #SUIIPAW

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**Strathclyde**
Glasgow

# Interrogating the relationship between poverty, attainment and children's mental health and wellbeing: A Scottish perspective

Making schools a place where *all* children and young people have a sense of belonging

**tes** Essential weekly intelligence for the education professional

**Does care hold education together**

**or is it just a sticking plaster?**

What does 'care' mean to you as a teacher or a professional working with children and young people?
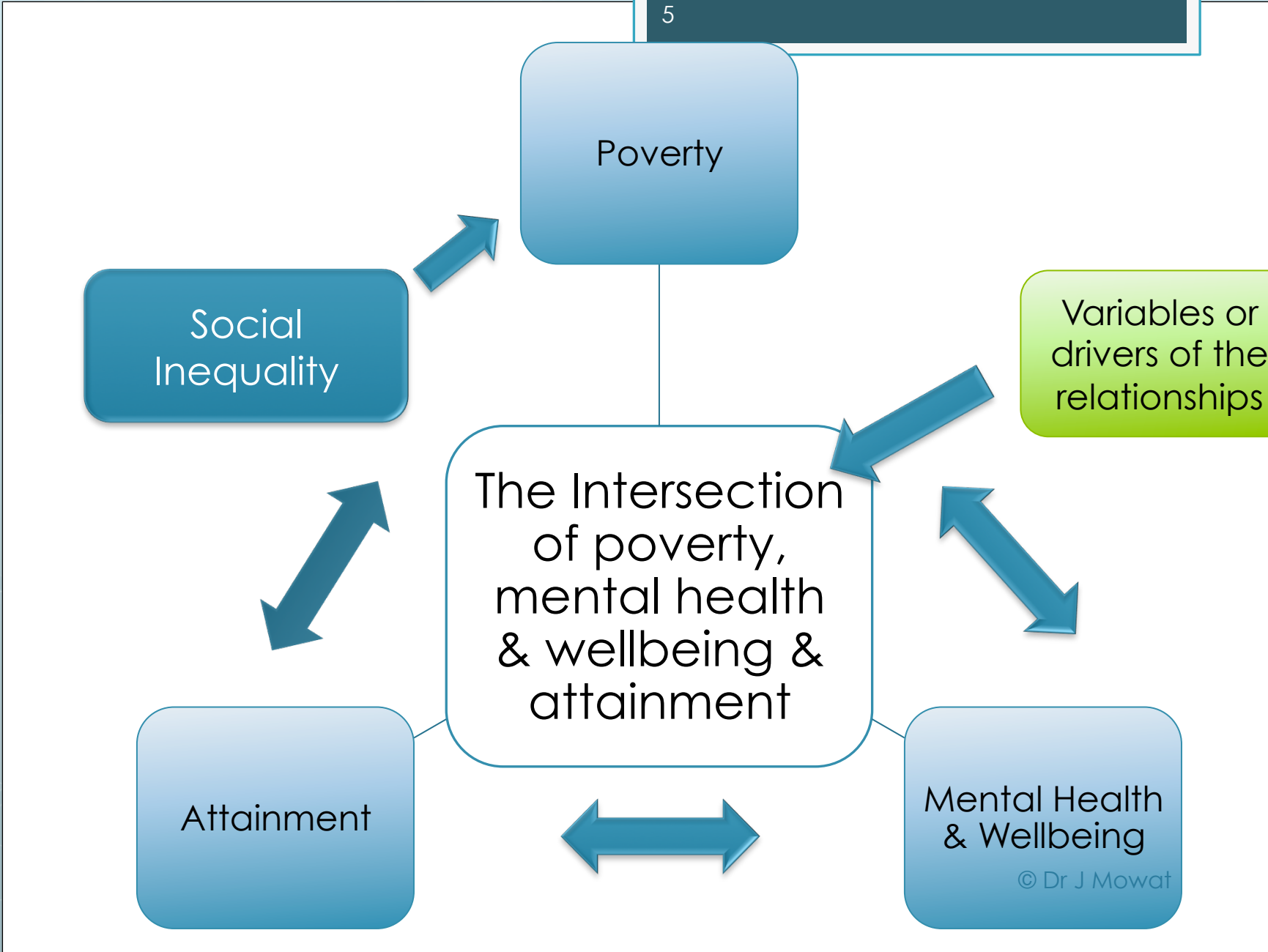
Expectations

High **Compassion** Valuing

**Love** Tough

Being **Children** Knowing Holding

Listening **Individuals** Affirming

Advocating Treating

© Dr J Mowat

# Understanding the Nature of the Poverty-related attainment gap

What's the problem? Why should we be concerned?
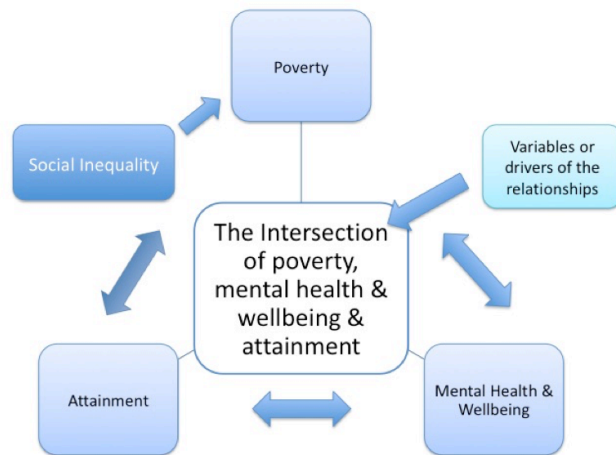
Poverty

Social Inequality

Variables or drivers of the relationships

The Intersection of poverty, mental health & wellbeing & attainment

Attainment

Mental Health & Wellbeing

© Dr J Mowat

# Methodology

**Not a literature review!**

Given the complexity of the problem, it cannot be understood through a single lens – it is multi-disciplinary in nature.

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# Research Questions

- Drawing from the literature and statistical data, what is the relationship between attainment, poverty and children's mental health and wellbeing as far as it can be ascertained?

- What are the variables which impact on the aforementioned relationships and the risk and protective factors at the individual, social, societal and political levels which interact with each other to shape the experience of the child or young person?

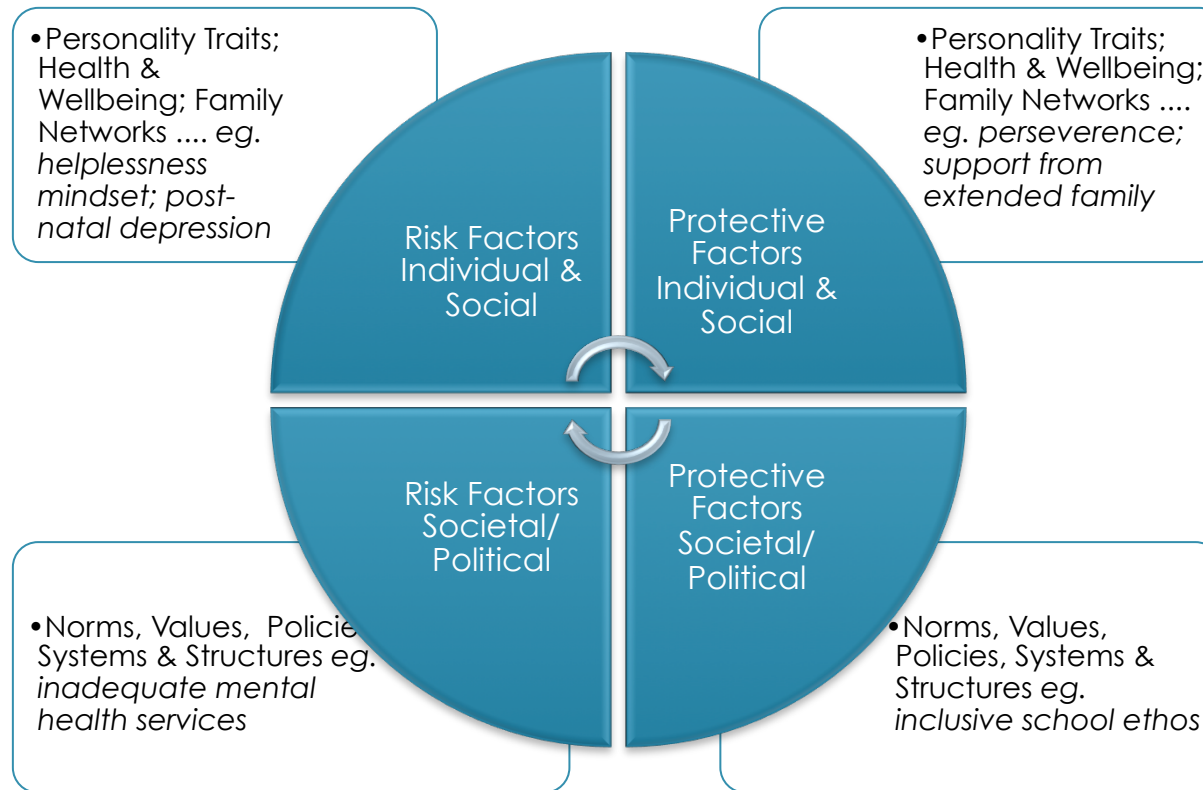- What are the implications of the above for public policy at an international and national level?

The Intersection of poverty, mental health & wellbeing & attainment

- Poverty
- Social Inequality
- Variables or drivers of the relationships
- Attainment
- Mental Health & Wellbeing

# Understanding the Problem through the lens of resilience

What are the risk and protective factors which act to either create and/or exacerbate the problem or to ameliorate it?
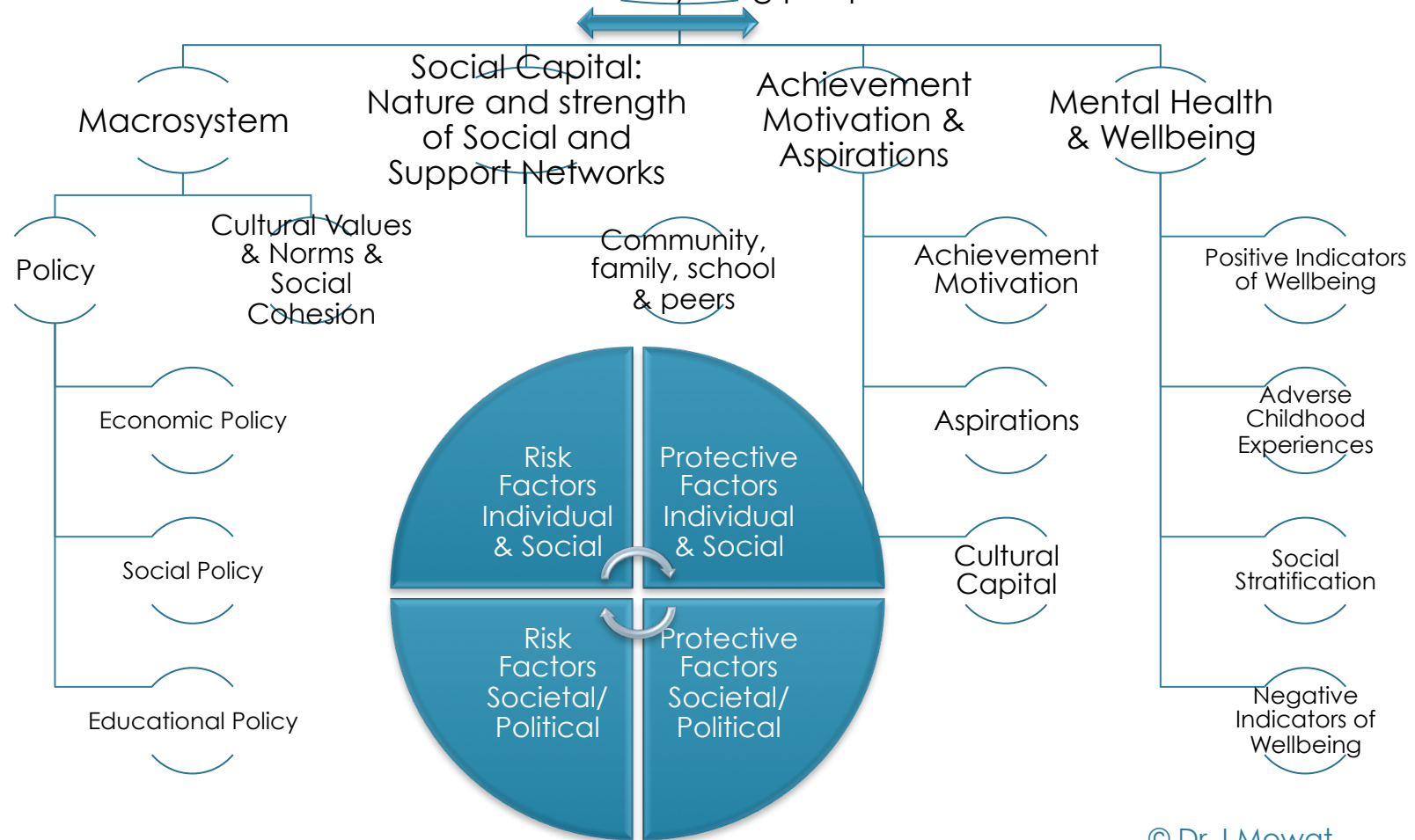
© Dr J Mowat

# A lens through which the problem can be understood: a bio-ecological perspective on resilience

- Personality Traits; Health & Wellbeing; Family Networks .... *eg. helplessness mindset; post-natal depression*

**Risk Factors Individual & Social**

**Protective Factors Individual & Social**

- Personality Traits; Health & Wellbeing; Family Networks .... *eg. perseverence; support from extended family*

**Risk Factors Societal/ Political**

**Protective Factors Societal/ Political**

- Norms, Values, Policies Systems & Structures *eg. inadequate mental health services*

- Norms, Values, Policies, Systems & Structures *eg. inclusive school ethos*

**Resilience Matrix** (building on Olsson et al., 2003) (Mowat, 2015)

© Dr J Mowat

The intersection of poverty, attainment and mental health and wellbeing in children and young people

**Macrosystem**

**Social Capital: Nature and strength of Social and Support Networks**

**Achievement Motivation & Aspirations**

**Mental Health & Wellbeing**

Policy

Cultural Values & Norms & Social Cohesion

Community, family, school & peers

Achievement Motivation

Positive Indicators of Wellbeing

Economic Policy

Aspirations

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Risk Factors Individual & Social

Protective Factors Individual & Social

Social Policy

Cultural Capital

Social Stratification

Risk Factors Societal/ Political

Protective Factors Societal/ Political

Educational Policy

Negative Indicators of Wellbeing

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Every
child,
every
chance

The Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan
2018-22

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Exploring how poverty manifests itself in the lives of children and young people and its relationship to social inequality

From an International and National perspective

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Households below a Minimum Income Standard: 2008/09 to 2016/17
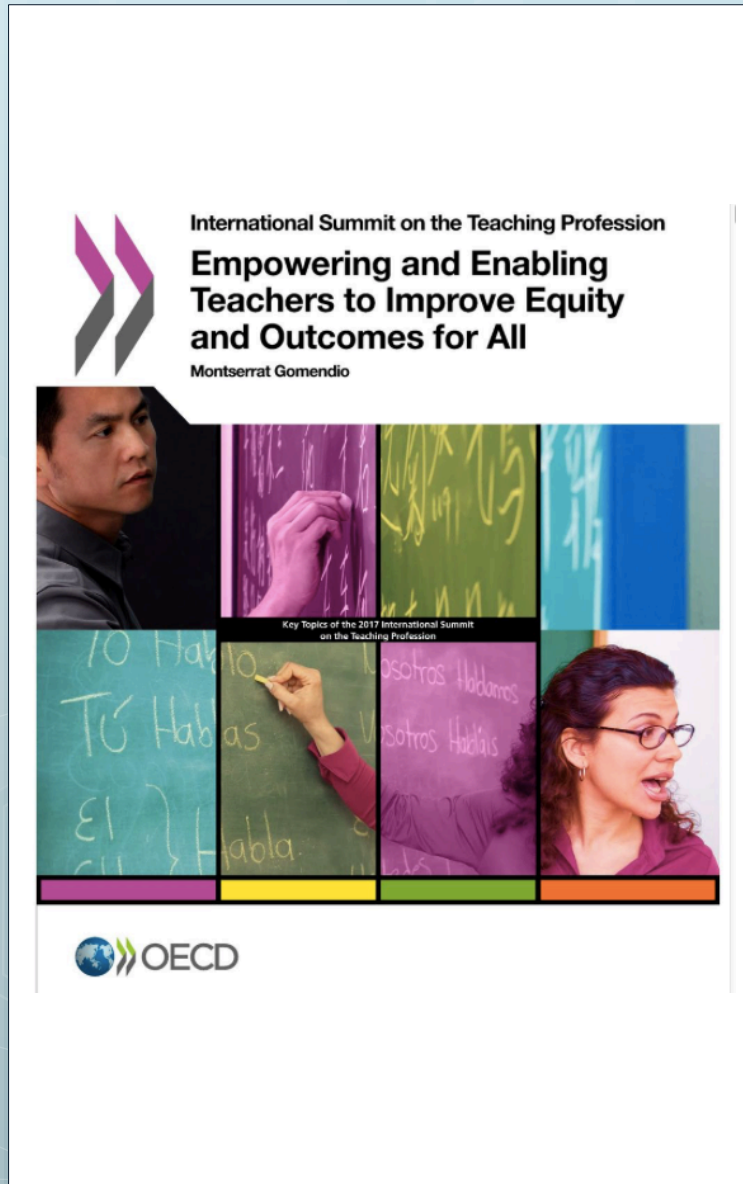
# Definitions of Poverty

◆ Absolute
◆ Relative
◆ Persistent
◆ Severe

McKendrick, Mooney, Dickie, & Kelly, 2011

'Living at a level of income that does not allow one to take part in the normal or encouraged activities for one's society'

Wolff, Lamb & Zur-Szpiro, 2015

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International Summit on the Teaching Profession

**Empowering and Enabling Teachers to Improve Equity and Outcomes for All**

Montserrat Gomendio

Key Topics of the 2017 International Summit on the Teaching Profession

**OECD**

# The poverty-related attainment gap is an international problem

Gomendio, 2017; OECD, 2018b; Schleicher, 2014, UNICEF Office of Research, 2016, 2017

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# The problem needs to be understood holistically

Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018

# Correlation between income inequality & index of health & wellbeing problems
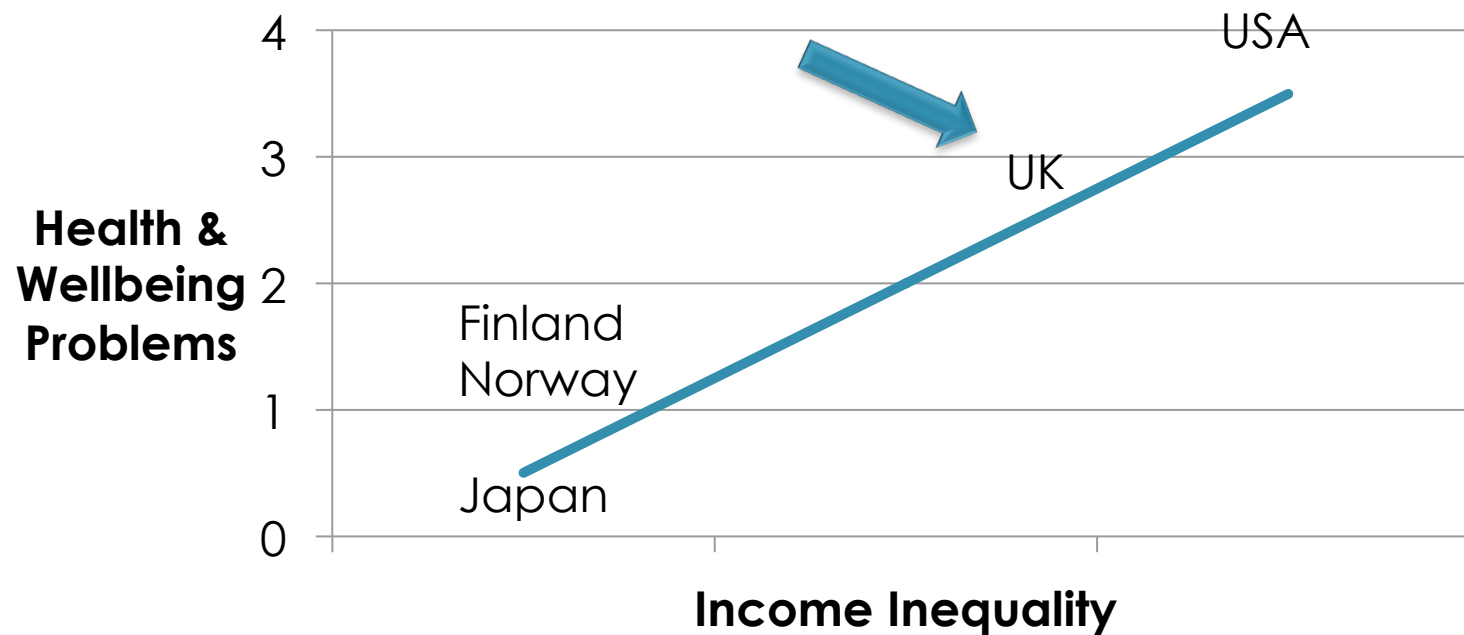


Health & Wellbeing Problems (y-axis): 0, 1, 2, 3, 4

Income Inequality (x-axis)
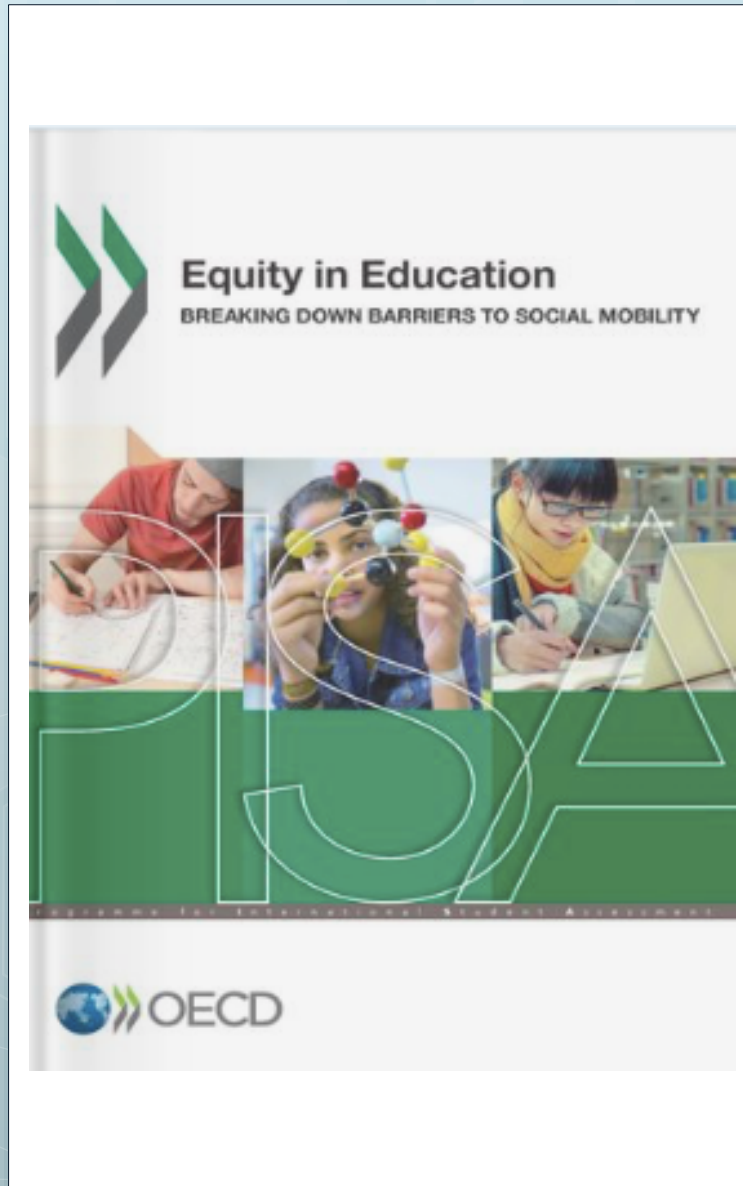
Countries plotted: Japan, Finland, Norway, UK, USA

Approximation of chart from Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018

# Correlation between income inequality & child wellbeing
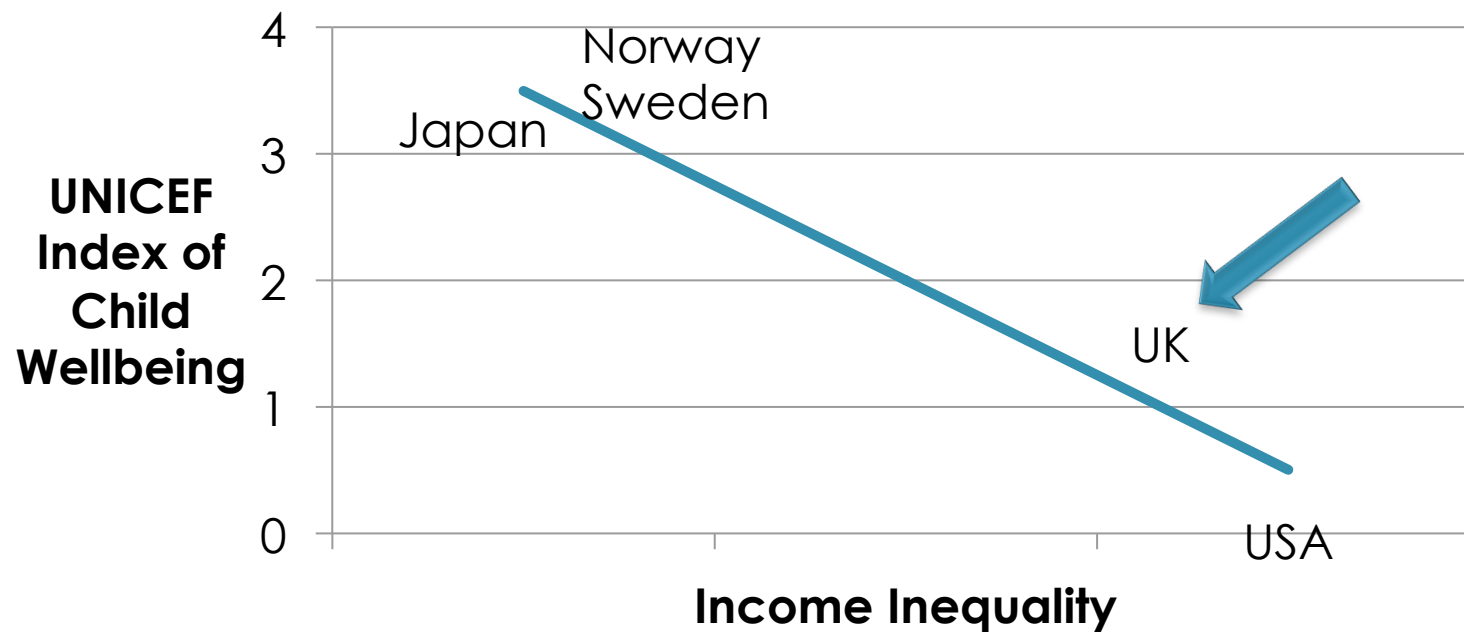


Approximation of chart from Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018

# The impact of under-achievement is enduring

OECD, 2018a; UNICEF Office of Research, 2010, 2017

# The problem resides within a culture of performativity

Ainscow, 2012
Ainscow & Sandill, 2010
Apple, 2001
Ball, 2003; Solomon & Lewin, 2016
D'Agnese, 2018
Dickerson & Popli, 2012
Scottish Government, 2016a & b
Scottish Government, 2017a
Schleicher, 2014
Sosu & Ellis, 2014
The New Policy Institute, 2013
Parsons, 2016
UNICEF Office of Research, 2016

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'… the primary commitment of … any educational institution … should be education, pure and simple: education in its own right.'

D'Agnese, 2018, p.21

# Scotland's performance in international tests (PISA)

- Decline in performance in international and national tests
- Above average Improvements in the performance of Scottish pupils in the lowest decile

Scottish Government, 2016a & b
Scottish Government, 2017a

© Dr J Mowat

# The Nature of childhood poverty



- Families trapped in 'cycle of deprivation'
- Reduction in child poverty levels in Scotland greater and more sustained than in the UK

Barnard, 2017
Pearson, 2016
McKendrick, 2018
Scottish Government, 2017a & c
Glasgow Council, 2014
Currie et al., 2015
McKinney, 2014
Lister 2004, 2010
Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010 & 2018
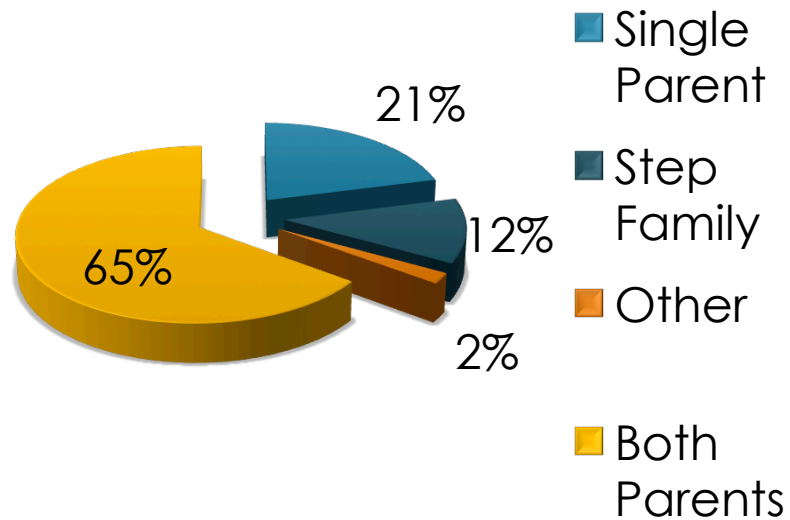
© Dr J Mowat

# Scotland: Family Demographics



- 21% ■ Single Parent
- 12% ■ Step Family
- 2% ■ Other
- 65% ■ Both Parents

Fig. 2.1

Currie, C., Whitehead, Van der Sluijs, Currie, D., Rhodes, Neville & Inchley, 2015

- Childhood poverty dispersed across communities
- More than 25% of children living in relative poverty
- 4% rise in childhood poverty
- 59% of children in poverty come from homes where one parent works
- 37% of lone parents live in poverty

THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY

# The Impact of poverty in Scotland on schooling

Poverty = lack of resources + lack of opportunity + limited resources at home

Children in Scotland, 2014

Glasgow Council, 2014
Children in Scotland, 2014

# The Impact of poverty on Scotland's children

**THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY**

Children & Young People's Commissioner, 2017

'In Scotland, we still have almost one in four children affected by poverty. It is a shocking indictment of our tolerance to inequality in our society. As long as we have children living in poverty, Scotland's worthy ambitions in terms of early years development, educational achievement and life chances for our children will be thwarted.' (p. 4)

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# The Nature of the Attainment Gap



World Health Organisation, 2016
Parsons, 2016
Cooper and Mulvey, 2015

- Correlation between family affluence and attainment
- Attainment gaps not restricted to poverty
- Impact of poverty extends across the lifespan

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# Scottish Government Approach to Eradicating Child Poverty

- Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland (Scottish Government, 2014)
- Action Plan (Scottish Government, 2016)
  - Maximising family incomes
  - Boosting life chances
  - Helping build sustainable communities, articulating with the UNICEF goals for sustainability
- Child Poverty Act (Scottish Government, 2017)
  - Fewer than 10% of children in relative poverty and fewer than 5% in absolute and persistent poverty by 2030
- Child Poverty Delivery Plan 'Every Child, Every Chance' (2018-2022)(Scottish Government, 2018)

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# Pausing to Reflect

- The problem is global and social inequality lies at its root

- Social inequality impacts negatively on children's attainment and wellbeing in an extensive range of ways and the effects are enduring, impacting on life chances and perpetuating intergenerational poverty

- Poverty can be understood in a range of different ways and how it manifests itself can confound expectations

- The problem is complex – a multitude of different factors are at play

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Exploring the problem through Scottish Government Statistics

© Dr J Mowat

**% of children growing up in poverty**
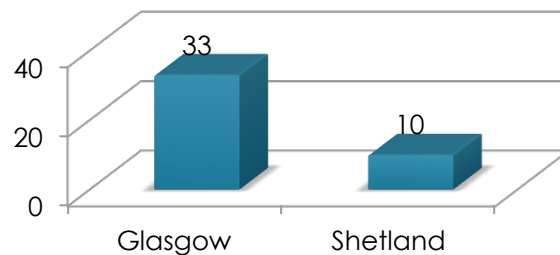


McKendrick, 2018

# Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

- ◆ Income
- ◆ Employment
- ◆ Health
- ◆ Education
- ◆ Housing
- ◆ Access to Resources
- ◆ Crime

**BUT!**

NHS Scotland, 2018, McKendrick, 2018

© Dr J Mowat

- A wide disparity in attainment, positive leaver destinations and exclusions according to SIMD status
- The gap in attainment widens as pupils progress through schooling
- The gap is widest at the highest levels of attainment
- Some tentative indications of the attainment gap beginning to close over time

# The link between SIMD status and attainment

## Some Key Trends

- Attainment according to expected CfE levels
- The (former) surveys of literacy and numeracy
- Attainment in national qualifications
- Positive destinations
- Temporary exclusions from school

Scottish Government 2017a, 2018 a,b,c

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Who is a looked after child?
**Some children go through life experiences which result in the need for extra care, support or protection.**

CELCIS, University of Strathclyde

# Individual children can be disadvantaged in multiple ways

- Additional Support Needs (ASN), including mental health difficulties & Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties/Needs
- Looked after Children

Scottish Government, 2016, 2017b, c, 2018b
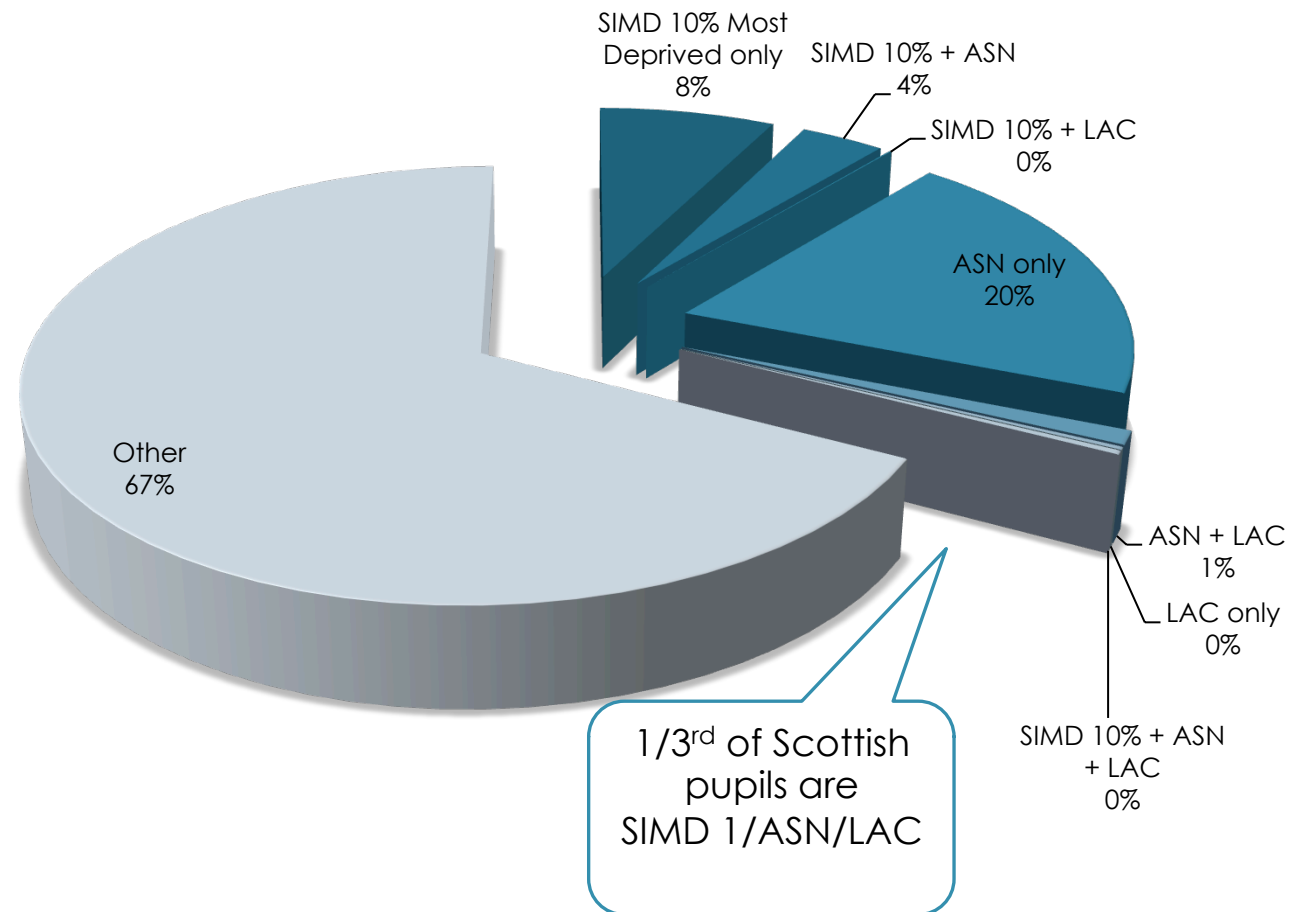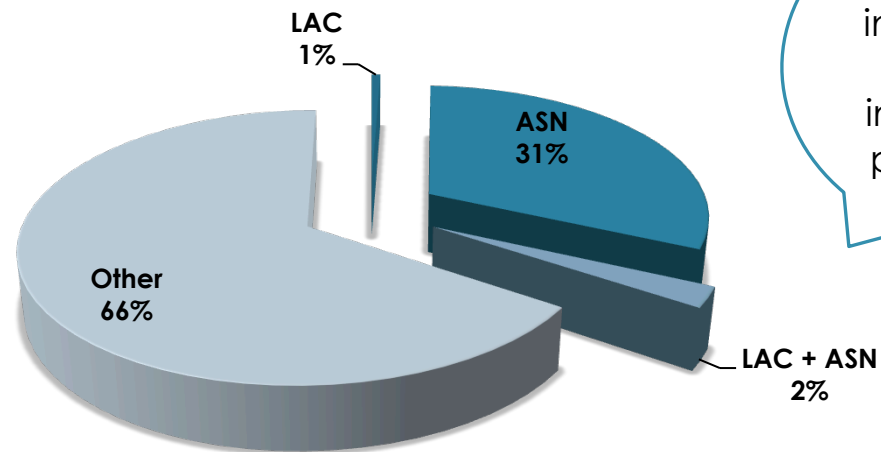
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**Composition of Scottish school pupils according to SIMD 10%, ASN & LAC 2016**

SIMD 10% Most Deprived only
8%

SIMD 10% + ASN
4%

SIMD 10% + LAC
0%

ASN only
20%

Other
67%

ASN + LAC
1%

LAC only
0%

SIMD 10% + ASN + LAC
0%

1/3rd of Scottish pupils are SIMD 1/ASN/LAC

Scottish Government, 2017b

© Dr J Mowat

# The Intersection of poverty, Additional Support Needs (ASN) & Looked After Children (LAC)

**Composition of pupils within 10% most deprived SIMD (N=77,450)**

LAC 1%

ASN 31%

Other 66%

LAC + ASN 2%

1/3rd of Scottish pupils in SIMD 1 lie at the intersection of poverty/ASN/ LAC

Scottish Government, 2016

© Dr J Mowat
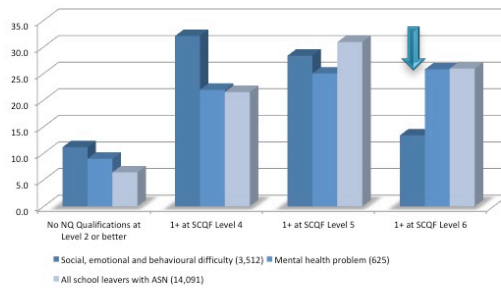
Image © Education Scotland



'*There is clear evidence that most primary schools are providing good support for children with SEBN, frequently in partnership with other agencies.*'

# PSE Under Review

◆ Most schools are effective at identifying and meeting the needs of children with SEBN in ways which are 'responsive, flexible and targeted to individual needs'

◆ Need to ensure opportunities for 1-1 support and improved access to counselling services

◆ Need to have a more informed workforce relating to mental health

Education Scotland, 2018

# A conundrum

**% of School Leavers by attainment according to ASN status 2016/2017**



Social, emotional and behavioural difficulty (3,512) ■ Mental health problem (625)
All school leavers with ASN (14,091)

A disjunct between the findings of the Education Scotland thematic review and Scottish Government statistics for children with SEBN

If schools are catering so well for the needs of these children and young people, why are there such wide disparities in their attainment and rates of exclusion in comparison to other children? What does this tell us?

# Reflecting on the Statistics

- Whilst the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, local authorities and schools are right to be proud of the gains for children from the most deprived communities what is clearly in evidence is the scale of the problem

- There is a need to recognise *intersectionality* – the multiple ways in which individual children can be disadvantaged - and to focus on individual need and removing the barriers to participation and progress

- There are particular concerns around children with SEBN and LAC and greater priority needs to be given to identifying how we can meet the needs of these specific groups more effectively, working with centres of excellence, such as CELCIS (Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland)

# Reflection Point

- What are the main messages you would take away from the presentation to this point?

- What are the implications for your practice?

www.syp.org.uk                    #SYPSpeakYourMind

# Mental Health of Children & Young People in Scotland

- ◆ Prevalence
- ◆ Access to CAHMS & quality of services
- ◆ Perceptions of young people
- ◆ Mental Health Policy

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# Prevalence of Mental Health Problems in children & young people in Scotland

- Around 10% of children and adolescents have a diagnosable mental health disorder, representing a 13.5% increase in referrals to CAMHS over a two-year period from 2013-2015

- ¼ fewer Scottish 11-year olds present with severe mental health difficulties than in the UK as a whole

Murphy, 2016
Gutman, Joshi, Parsonage, & Schoon, 2015

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# Access to CAMHS & Quality of Service

- 4,222 children and young people started treatment at CAMHS in Scotland in the quarter ending in Dec 2016, 82.5% of whom commenced treatment within 18 weeks of referral

- Variability with regard to waiting times across Scotland

- Concerns expressed about availability and geographical location of in-patient services and placements in non-specialist units catering for young people

NHS Information Division, 2017
Murphy, 2016
Scottish Government, 2016

© Dr J Mowat

# Our generation's epidemic

**Our generation's epidemic: What did young people say?**

• Mental Health Information – "The Internet is a very scary place. It over-exaggerates and the scaremongering is extreme. It's a great place to get resources, but should never be used to gure out what you're feeling. I was feeling sad at the start of the year. I googled how I was feeling, and by the end I was convinced I had paranoid schizophrenia. It was terrifying."

Scottish Youth Parliament

Services focussing specifically on the needs of young people were highly regarded

- Information relating to mental health for young people lacks credibility
- Unaware of their rights in relation to mental health care
- Lack of awareness of where to locate reliable information
- Support, when offered, was often too late and at the point of crisis

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# The Scottish Government Health Strategy 2017-2027



www.syp.org.uk          #SYPSpeakYourMind

Scottish Government, 2017

- Support from teachers and other school staff can be vital
- Appropriate access to emotional and mental well-being support in school
- Evidence-based interventions to address behavioural and emotional issues in children and young people
- Mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of pupils is the 'Responsibility of All'
- Appropriate pastoral care and access to Educational Psychologists

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CHILD AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH RESEARCH UNIT

cahru

Lunch

Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Scotland (HBSCS) Study

# Subjective Wellbeing of Scottish School Children

- Feelings of happiness
- Life satisfaction
- Feelings of stress
- Finding peers helpful
- Not feeling excluded
- Liking of school
- Support from teachers
- Sense of academic achievement

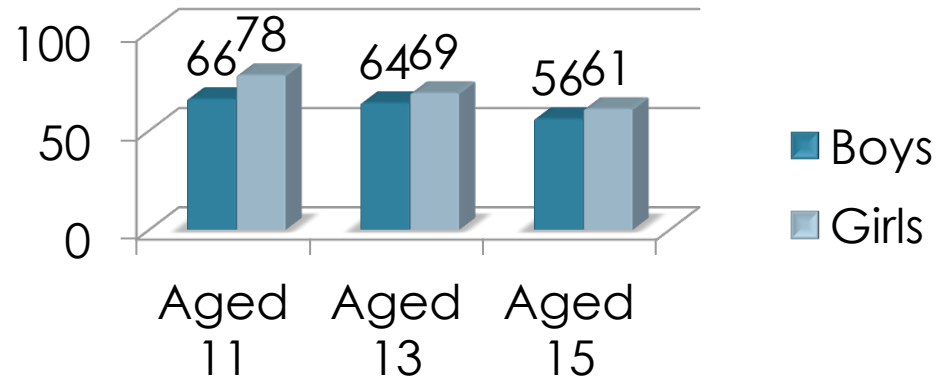© Dr J Mowat

# % identifying with being very happy
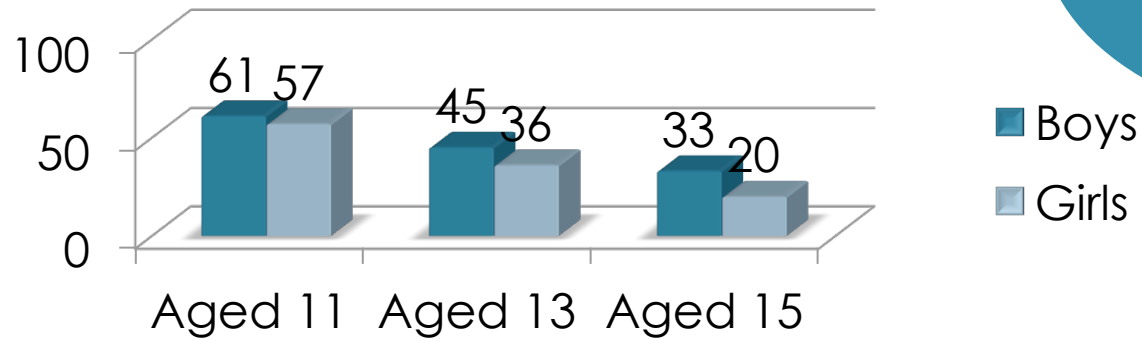


Over time, Scottish children appear to be less happy and satisfied with their lives but boys consistently rate themselves more highly than girls in this respect.

# % expressing high life satisfaction



Currie, 2016

© Dr J Mowat
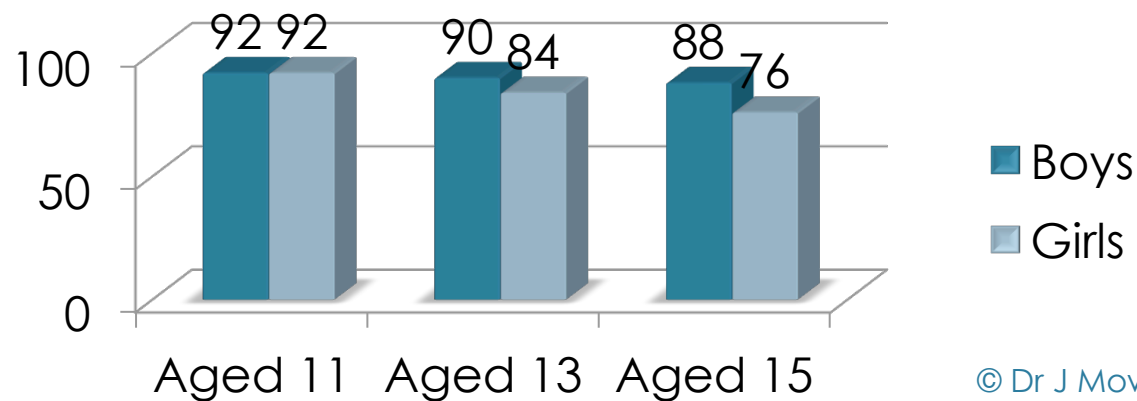
# Good Academic Achievement (%)

Boys
Girls

Over time, Scottish children's perceptions of their achievement reduces but girls consistently rate their achievement more highly

Aged 11: Boys 66, Girls 78
Aged 13: Boys 64, Girls 69
Aged 15: Boys 56, Girls 61

# Scores on a self-report stress scale

Self-reported stress levels increase in adolescence and girls report being more stressed than boys

Aged 13: Boys 5.6, Girls 6.7
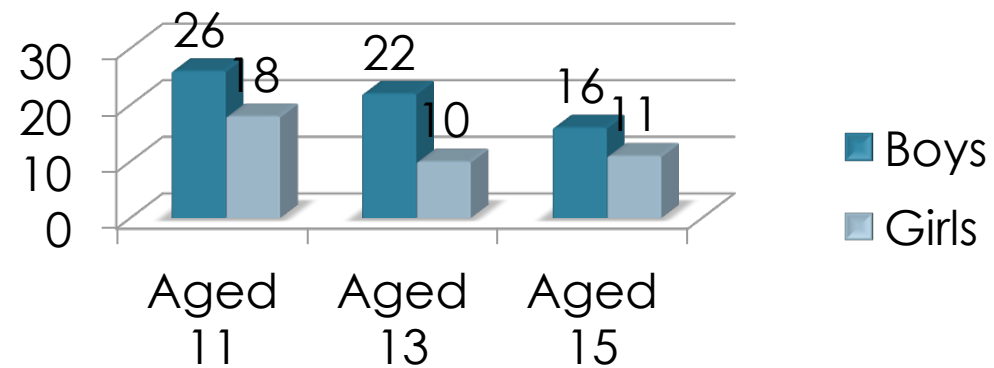Aged 15: Boys 6.5, Girls 7.7

Boys
Girls

Currie, 2016
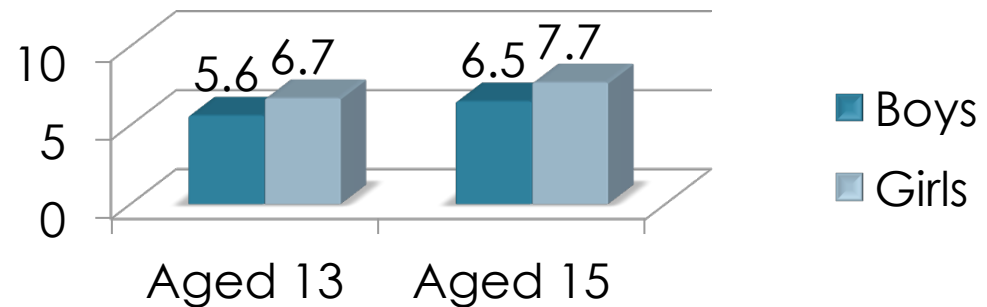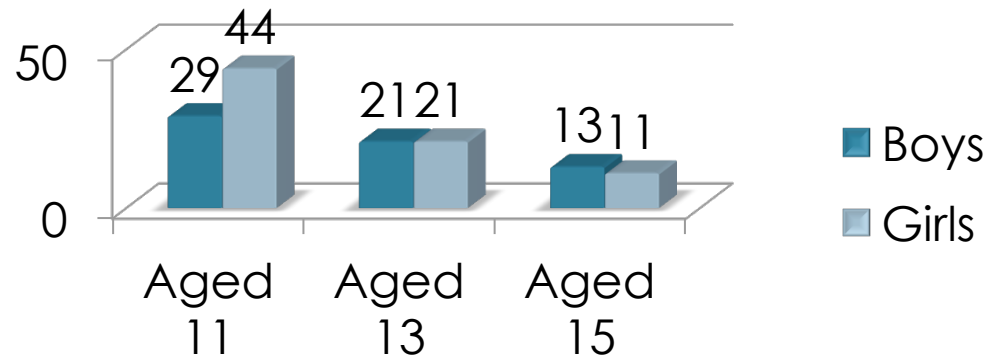
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# % who found their classmates helpful
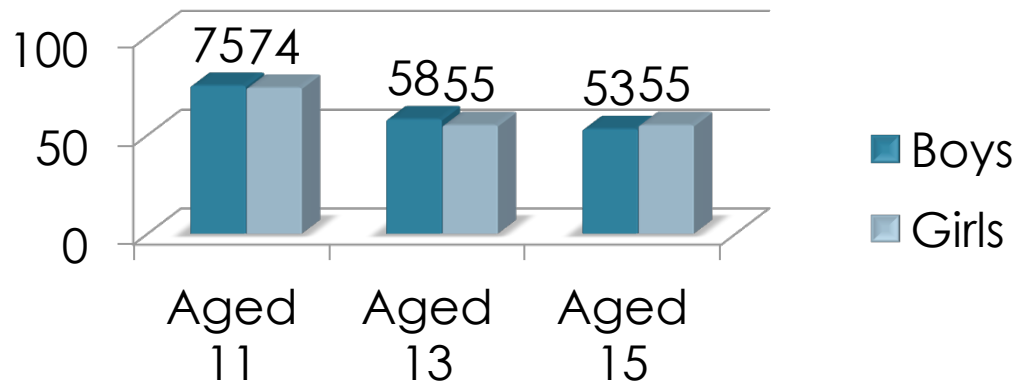


Perceptions of peer support decline over time

Children feel less included as they get older with girls feeling more excluded than boys

# % identifying with 'not being left out'



Currie, 2016

© Dr J Mowat

# % Liking school a lot



50

44

29

2121

1311

0

Aged 11    Aged 13    Aged 15

■ Boys
■ Girls

Liking of school decreases for all Scottish children over time but the trend is most marked for girls

# % who identified high teacher support

This pattern is replicated for teacher support



100

4758

2120

1515

0

Aged 11    Aged 13    Aged 15

■ Boys
■ Girls

Currie, 2016
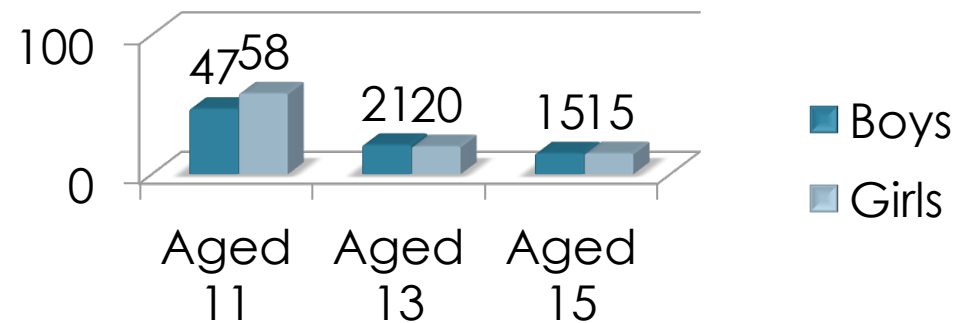
# Reflection on findings

- Mental health services for children and young people in Scotland are falling far short of what is required and these statistics do not represent children who are waiting for a referral or those who have been rejected by CAMHS, an issue currently under review
- This is not a reflection on the people working 'in the front line' but of resource and priorities within the Health Service
- There are positive aspects, such as the positive appraisal of age-specific specialist services by young people which implies that this is a priority
- Not all of the concerns raised by young people are resource-related implying that more can be done to raise awareness of this issue and to address concerns
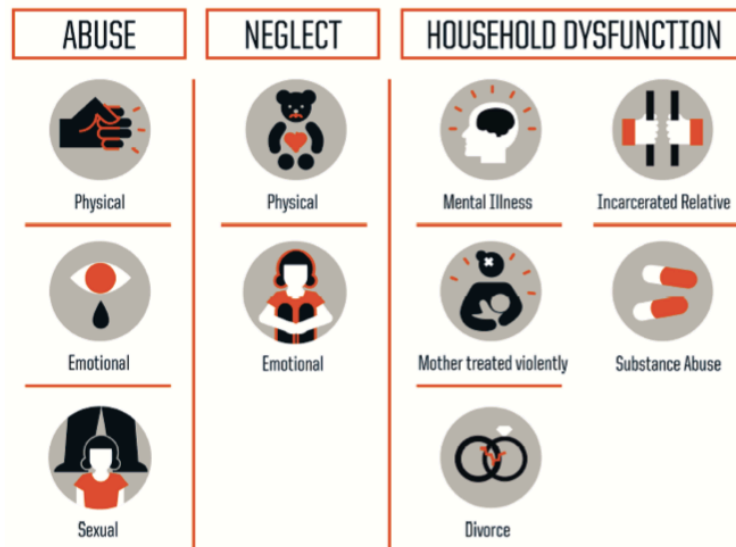
© Education Scotland

# Examining the problem in greater depth

◆ ACEs
◆ A Sense of Belonging to School
◆ The 'School to Prison' Pipeline
◆ Lessons from the 'Growing up in Scotland' Study

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# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

**ABUSE**
- Physical
- Emotional
- Sexual

**NEGLECT**
- Physical
- Emotional

**HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION**
- Mental Illness
- Incarcerated Relative
- Mother treated violently
- Substance Abuse
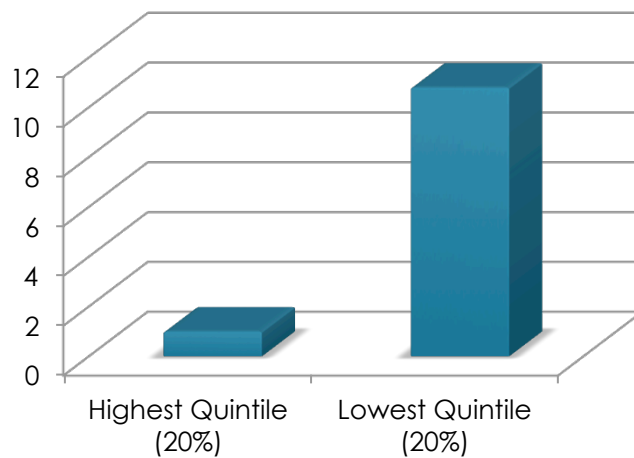- Divorce

Couper and Mackie, 2016, National Health Service Scotland, 2017

- Abuse
- Neglect
- Household Dysfunction

➢ Impact through life on physical and mental illness and mortality

➢ Impact on health-harming behaviours, education & employment

➢ Impede cognitive function and capacity of the child to respond in a positive way to stress

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## % of 8-year old children with 4+ ACEs according to SIMD (GUS)



Bar chart y-axis: 0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12

Highest Quintile (20%) — Lowest Quintile (20%)

Emotional Neglect and Physical Abuse were not measured

Marryat and Frank, 2019

## ACEs: Clear socio-economic patterns in evidence



Poverty, stigma, discrimination ⟷ ACEs
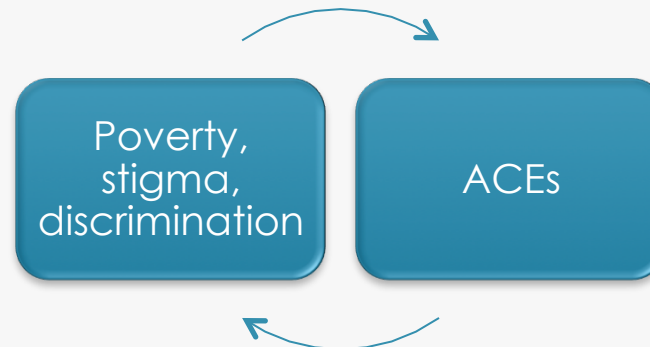
Living in poverty puts children at greater risk of being exposed to ACEs and the effects can be intergenerational.

Smith, 2018

© Dr J Mowat

## ACEs have their limitations

Image © Scottish Government



Having a 'significant other' in the life of the child and creating a nurturing environment in schools can mitigate the negative impact of ACEs in a child's life.

- They don't take account of factors extending beyond the home environment, such as bullying, bereavement and poverty
- It is proposed that the scope of ACEs should be widened to encompass a broader range of adverse circumstances providing a more realistic representation of the reality of children's lives

NHS Scotland, 2017, Smith, 2018

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**Our second guest blog about the links between poverty and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is by Dr Morag Treanor, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology at Stirling University.**

https://www.children1st.org.uk/blog/poverty-and-adverse-childhood-experiences-aces/

"We cannot improve the lives of all children in Scotland without also addressing the needs of their families."

# Not all are in agreement that poverty should be considered as another ACE

- Poverty is a structural issue governed mainly by political factors – it's important not to conflate the two things
- ACEs manifest themselves across all socio-economic spheres although better-off families often have the resource to counter the negative effects

© Dr J Mowat

Image © Scottish Government



Whilst the increased understanding of the impact of ACEs on children's lives is to be welcomed, this body of work should be not be approached uncritically.

## A note of caution!

- The potential dangers of making false assumptions
- The potential dangers of stigmatisation and labelling
- The dangers of overlooking children presenting with mental health difficulties who do not have ACEs

© Dr J Mowat

Image © Scottish Government



Whilst the increased understanding of the impact of ACEs on children's lives is to be welcomed, this body of work should be not be approached uncritically.

# A note of caution!

- The lack of account accorded to culture, context or situation
- The equal weighting given to adverse circumstances which may have profoundly different impacts on individual children
- The lack of account of the protective factors in children's lives

© Dr J Mowat

Image © Scottish Government



Whilst the increased understanding of the impact of ACEs on children's lives is to be welcomed, this body of work should be not be approached uncritically.

# A note of caution!

- In its extended form, the danger of pathologising what may be normal, but painful, aspects of life
- The 'solution' being seen as the psychological construct of resilience
- Such a positioning shifts the focus away from the societal and political factors which impact on the resilience of communities, families and children

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# A Sense of Belonging to School Matters

'A sense of somewhere you can feel confident that you will fit in and feel safe in your identity.'

Having strong social ties within the school community leads to better attainment and is a key aspect of promoting positive mental health & wellbeing in children and young people.

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Riley, 2017, World Health Organisation, 2016

# School as a place where you can flourish and belong

Is this school a place where everybody feels that they belong?

'Schools need to be places of opportunity. Environments where all can flourish.'

Riley, 2017, p. 6

'Schools remain one of the few places of stability and belonging for many children, and not more so than for those whose lives are uncertain and fluid.'

Riley, 2017, p. 63

**BUT!**

© Dr J Mowat

# Not all children have a sense of belonging to school

'Them and us'

The young people were on the periphery of school life, their learning experience often fragmented inconsistent and fragmented. Unable to conform in institutions which were alien to them, their behaviour could become inappropriate, challenging or even threatening. .. While school life offered them the possibilities of social networks which could be sources of friendship and fun, the experience was more likely to be one of sadness, rejection and loneliness.

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Riley, 2017, pp.35 & 123
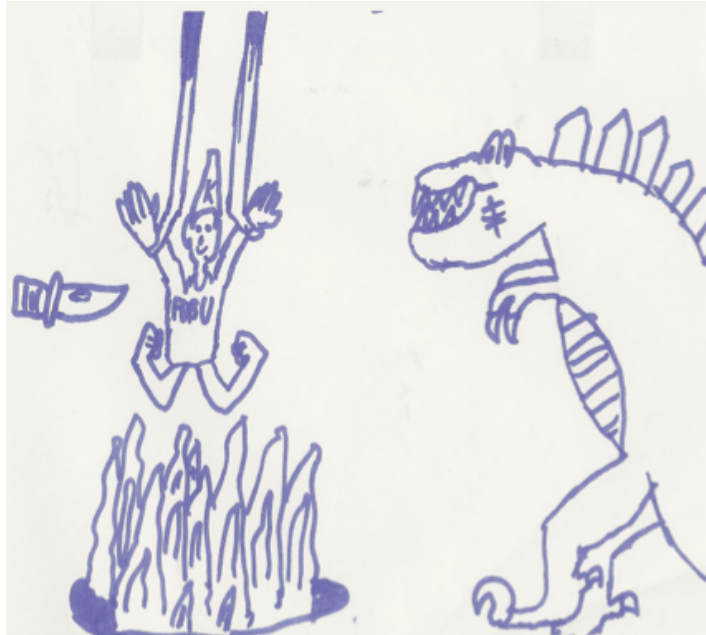
# Not all children have a sense of belonging to school



## 'Them and us'

I think that there's an assumption made that students belong in a school, and actually, it's not until you give them a voice can you truly appreciate if they do belong. Are we doing enough to make them feel part of our school community?

Andy

Riley, 2017, pp.35 & 123

Supporting children across transitions is a key aspect of their wellbeing and academic achievement

Lester, Waters, & Cross, 2013; Riglin, Frederickson, Shelton, & Rice, 2013; Topping, 2011; West, Sweeting, & Young, 2010; Zeedyk et al., 2003; Coffey, 2013; Hopwood et al., 2016; Mackenzie et al., 2012; Topping, 2011; McGee et al., 2003; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008

# Transition Case Study

David's Primary teachers were concerned about his impulsivity and physical aggression and he was described as being moody, withdrawn, stubborn and uncooperative at times.

David is being brought up by a single Mum. His younger brother has a visual impairment. He is very protective of his younger brother and Mum and very defensive of them. This had led him into some highly aggressive incidents with other pupils. He expressed a lot of pent up anger towards his father.

After participating in group work in the period leading up to and after the transition, led by both a Primary and Secondary Support Group Leader working together, David made a smooth transition to Secondary school. He was in receipt of additional support for learning. However, it emerged that he was being bullied by another boy who lived nearby. His mother moved him to another Secondary school mid-way through S1.

Mowat, 2019a, b

# Response to intervention one year beyond

It was a good experience because I could talk to people and share things with them. I was able to talk about people that I didn't like and people would listen and help. Everything was kept secret - nobody was blurbing out everything. I had no worries or concerns about participating.

David

A teacher who's nice to you and cares about you - I was able to express myself. Its more important than rewards.

David

*What have you learned?*

Knowing how to behave and not just walking up to someone and punching them. I've got more self-control. How to actually listen to people without going, "Aye, aye, whatever!" Paying a lot more attention to other people. Improving my learning. No longer needing learning support - I'm independent now. The support group had a lot to do with it. It basically taught me how to learn rather than being a twat. Its true though.

David

**CYCJ**
**centre for youth & criminal justice**

Intervention should be directed towards the critical stage in early-mid adolescence.

McAra & McVie, 2010, Dyer & Gregory, 2014

# School to Prison Pipeline

◆ Children and young people caught up in the youth justice system are particularly prone to mental health difficulties

◆ Children excluded from school arel 4X more likely to be in prison by age 22

◆ Those most likely to be involved in violent offences (most likely to be boys) are amongst the most vulnerable and victimised children within the cohort.

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# Poverty (and the social stratification associated with it) creates stressors in family life which impact negatively on the health and wellbeing of children

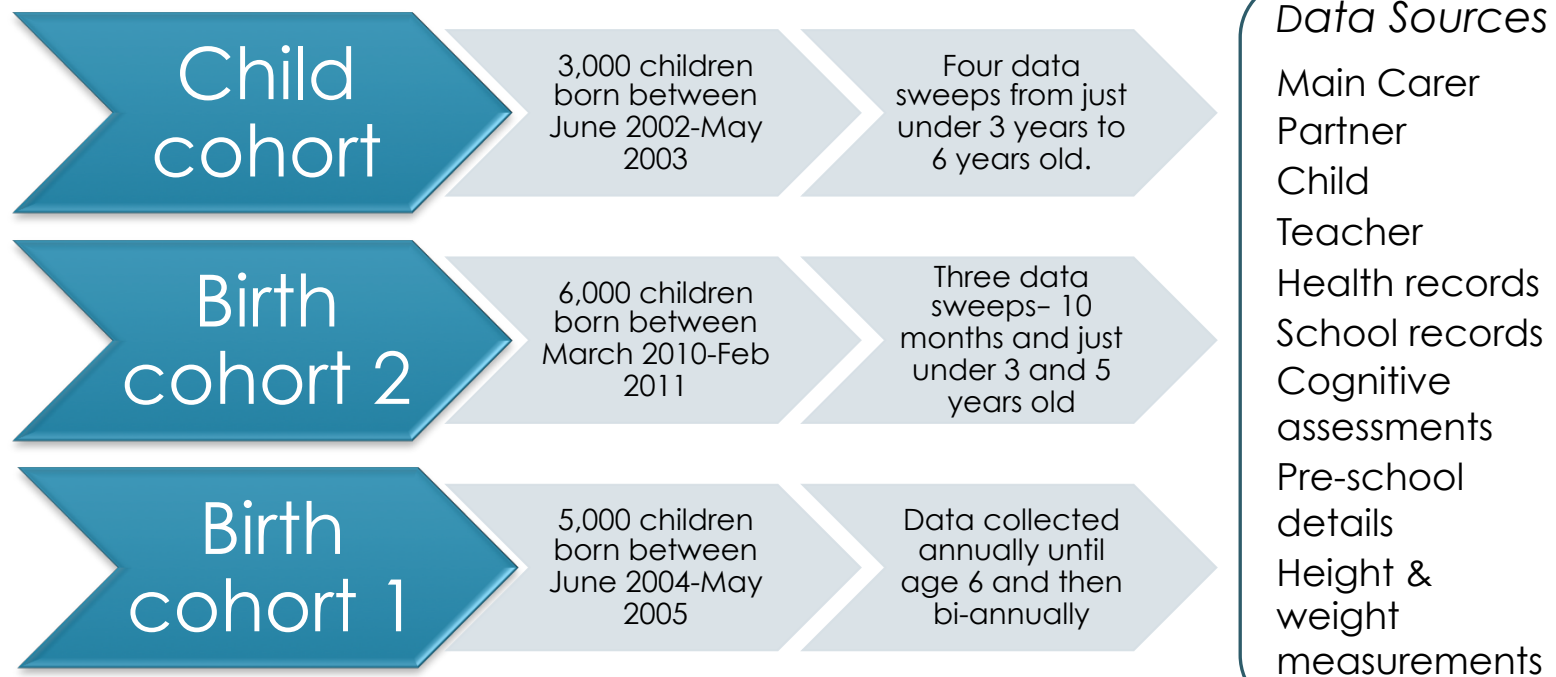Growing up in Scotland longitudinal study and related study

Marryat, Thompson, Minnis, and Wilson, 2015
Parkes, Sweeting and Wight, 2014
Parkes, Sweeting, & Wight, 2016
Scottish Government, 2015
Treanor, 2016

**Growing Up in Scotland**

# GUS study design

| Cohort | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Child cohort** | 3,000 children born between June 2002-May 2003 | Four data sweeps from just under 3 years to 6 years old. |
| **Birth cohort 2** | 6,000 children born between March 2010-Feb 2011 | Three data sweeps– 10 months and just under 3 and 5 years old |
| **Birth cohort 1** | 5,000 children born between June 2004-May 2005 | Data collected annually until age 6 and then bi-annually |

*Data Sources*

Main Carer
Partner
Child
Teacher
Health records
School records
Cognitive assessments
Pre-school details
Height & weight measurements

*Methods*

Interviews, surveys, questionnaires, documentary analysis

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Image © Education Scotland



Marryat, Thompson, Minnis, and Wilson, 2015

Factors impacting on the prevalence of SEBN in 3-year olds in Greater Glasgow in comparison to other areas

# Key Findings (GUS)

The prevalence of SEBN in 3-year old children is mediated by:

➢ parental stress brought about by poverty impacting on poor or harsh parenting;

➢ having fewer psychological resources to create a warm and loving home, leading to conduct problems and a lack of emotional regulation in children;

➢ intergenerational poverty; and

➢ adverse events (such as children witnessing violence in the home).

Factors relating to deprivation are associated with mental health difficulties in 3-year old children.

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## Key Findings (GUS)

Image © JRF



Treanor, 2016

The impact of financial vulnerability on Social, Emotional and Behavioural wellbeing in 4-5 year old children and the nature of the relationship

The financial vulnerability of the mother, creating high emotional maternal distress, impacts negatively on the wellbeing of younger children for whom this is more salient than comparisons with peers. For older children, the impact of poverty is more direct and is felt from (negative) comparisons with their peer group.

Drawn from the account of the main carer (mother) using data also from the Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire.

# Treanor, 2016

Financial vulnerability impacts more on maternal emotional distress than income alone

2/3rds of the effect

High emotional distress of mother

Negative impact on SEB wellbeing of younger children

Financial vulnerability of mother

Negative impact on SEB wellbeing of older children

Unfavourable comparisons with peers

Money worries
Household debt
Manage financially

- Children's SEB wellbeing is highly sensitive to their mother's socioeconomic status
- SEB wellbeing is malleable to change and not fixed
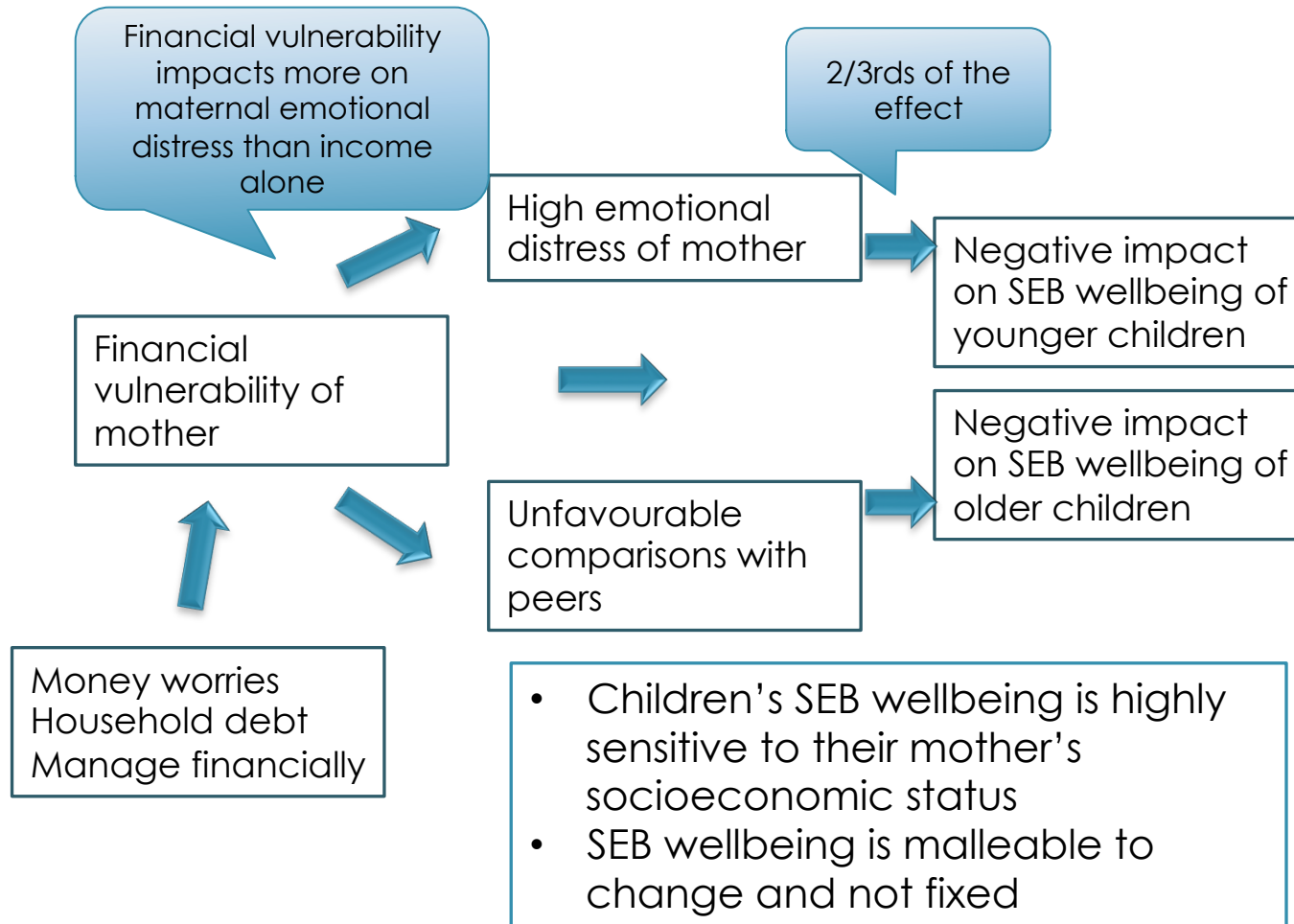
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Image © Scottish Government



Marryat, Thompson, Minnis, and Wilson, 2017

The amplification of social differences in child mental health in children aged 4 and then 7 in Greater Glasgow

# Key Findings

Children from the most deprived backgrounds evidence higher levels of mental health difficulties in comparison to their peers and these differences amplify over the first three years of schooling. After controlling for a range of variables, 'a school effect' was in evidence but the research team was unable to account for this variability.

Drawing on mental health data from education records and demographic data at ages 4 and 7 years, along with administrative school-level data.

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Image © Scottish Government

# Key Findings (GUS)



Parkes, Sweeting and Wight, 2014

Family & school influences on 7-year old children's social and emotional wellbeing

*Social factors* (such as the quality of relationships between child and parents/ peers and poor adjustment to school) emerged as significant with regard to both the *mental health and subjective wellbeing* of 7-year old children whereas economic factors and other aspects of family life eg. family structure) were not.

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Image © Scottish Government

# Key Findings (GUS)

Parkes, Sweeting and Wight, 2014

- Poor child health
- Developmental problems
- Low maternal education & health
- Family illness/substance abuse
- Lack of parental warmth

Family Stressors → Mental Health

Social Factors

Negative Affect → Subjective Wellbeing

Eg. Emotional impact of family illness

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TACKLING INEQUALITIES
IN THE EARLY YEARS:
Key messages from 10 years of the
Growing Up in Scotland study

# Key Messages from GUS

- ◆ A rich learning environment
- ◆ High quality early learning and childcare
- ◆ Being born to an older mother
- ◆ Improving the physical and mental health of mothers
- ◆ Supporting parenting skills

Scottish Government, 2015

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# A Synthesis

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# Reflections and Key Messages
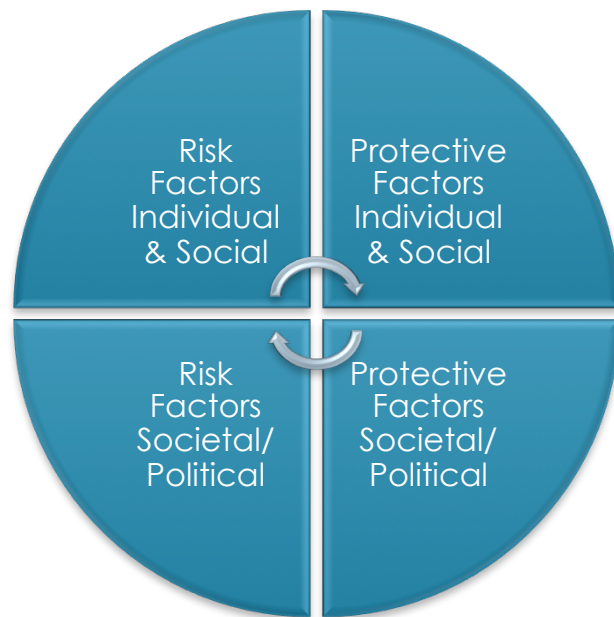
◆ An extensive range of variables has emerged from the literature to inform our understanding of the nature of the problem and the relationships between them are highly complex, some direct and others indirect

◆ It is how these variables interact in the life of the child which will determine the extent to which the child or young person will thrive and reach their potential

Risk Factors Individual & Social

Protective Factors Individual & Social

Risk Factors Societal/ Political

Protective Factors Societal/ Political

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# Risk & Protective Factors at the Individual & Social Levels

| Risk Factors at the Individual & Social Levels | Protective Factors at the Individual & Social Levels |
|---|---|
| *The individual experience of income inequality and poverty* <br> Living in a home where there is limited income & financial stress <br> Financial vulnerability of the mother creating stressors in the lives of younger children <br> Limited access to material resources <br> The stigma of poverty <br> Etc. | *The Experience of the Child or Young Person related to schooling* <br> An inclusive school ethos which affirms the child or young person <br> Having a sense of belonging/ connectedness/relatedness to school <br> Having positive relationships and strong social networks within the school community <br> Having good relationships with teachers <br> Etc. |

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# Risk & Protective Factors at the Societal and Political Levels

| Risk Factors at the Societal & Political Levels | Protective Factors at the Societal & Political Levels |
|---|---|
| ***Provision and Quality of Mental Health Services***<br>Unequal access to mental health services for children & young people at the time of need<br>Lack of access to support services for children and young people from the perspective of schools<br>Geographical location of mental health services<br>Variability in the quality of mental health services for children & young people<br>Lack of 'joined-up' provision for children with mental health difficulties<br>Support for mental health difficulties not timeous or sufficient – 'too little, too late'<br>Etc. | ***Provision and Quality of Mental Health Services***<br>Equitable and accessible access to mental health services for children & young people at the time of need<br>High quality and age-specific mental health services for children & young people<br>Different services & professions coming to a shared understanding & working collaboratively and effectively together<br>Developing shared assessment frameworks and language<br>Early intervention for children and young people at risk<br>Intervention directed toward the crucial stage of early-mid adolescence<br>Etc. |

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# Cross-referencing of findings

| | Health/Mental Health | Wellbeing (eg. life satisfaction, affective responses to adverse events, social inclusion/ exclusion, quality of relationships etc.) | Attainment/ Achievement | Life Opportunities/ Long-term impact |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Income Inequality** | | | | |
| **Family affluence/ poverty** | | | | |
| **Socio-economic status** | | | | |
| **Deprivation/SIMD in Scotland** | | | | |

# Reflections and Key Messages

◆ Children's mental health, development and subjective wellbeing cannot be considered in isolation of the environmental factors which impinge on family life and support for families, in particular, mothers, is crucial in addressing the stark social and economic inequalities

◆ It is not inevitable that children will experience the negative effects of social stratification associated with poverty.

◆ Acting on the stressors on family life through public (economic and social) policy, collective and individual action and building supportive networks around  the family, child or young person can potentially ameliorate these negative effects, promote resilience and lift families out of poverty

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# A potential model

Family affluence/Poverty
Social Stratification
Social, Health &
Educational Inequalities

Family Stressors
Financial Vulnerability & High
Levels of Maternal Distress

Impacts on quality of parenting
& capacity to create a nurturing
home environment

Stigma &
discrimination
associated with
poverty & social
stratification

Exposes children to
a higher risk of
experiencing ACEs

Economic
Inequality underpins
& acts as a driver
for all of the other
relationships

Greater risk of impaired cognitive
function, capacity to regulate
emotions & developmental
problems, acting on wellbeing/
subjective wellbeing

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# A potential model

Greater risk of disengagement from learning, exclusionary sanctions and under-achievement

Limits educational & employment opportunities

Greater risk of engagement with criminal justice system

Greater risk of mental health disorders, SEBD & conduct problems

Impacts on the quality of the learning experience and the quality of relationships within the school environment

Poorer life chances & perpetuation of intergenerational poverty

ACEs

Greater risk of impaired cognitive function, capacity to regulate emotions & developmental problems, acting on wellbeing/subjective wellbeing

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How do schools foster a sense of belonging in children and young people so that they can feel equally valued and make a valued contribution?

# The Role of Schools

What role do schools play in either creating inclusive environments in which children can flourish or creating the conditions in which children are more likely to disengage from learning?

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# Implications & Conclusions

- The need to address fundamental inequalities in society through economic & public policy
- The need to build a strong infrastructure of support around communities, schools & families & to invest in public & health services
- The need to recognise that schools, alone, cannot address the poverty-related attainment gap
- The need for the research community to work across inter-disciplinary boundaries to come to a shared understanding of the problem and its potential solutions

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# Implications & Conclusions

- It is important not to focus solely on poverty in isolation of the many other ways in which children can be marginalised in their lives
- This implies an holistic focus on the needs of the child or young person, examined 'in the round' through the various networks with which the child interacts, supported by strong inter-professional partnerships in which there are shared understandings between professionals based on inclusive values.

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# Implications & Conclusions

- High quality pedagogy lies at the heart of 'closing the gap' but it cannot be separated from school ethos, culture and relational aspects of the school – they are interdependent

- All of what has gone before is dependent on high quality leadership at all levels of the system and a willingness of all who work with communities, families, children and young people to 'imagine what is possible' and  to question their values, beliefs, assumptions, attitudes and prejudices to work collectively together to make change possible.

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# Final Conclusions

- **We need to put inclusion (in its broadest sense) at the heart of 'closing the gap,'** understanding the needs of children holistically and identifying and removing the barriers to participation, **making schools a place where all children have a sense of belonging**, whilst still maintaining a broader focus on policy, systems, structures, school ethos, leadership, partnerships, curriculum, pedagogy and embracing diversity.

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# Thank you for listening

If you would like to follow up on any of the references in the presentation, please contact joan.mowat@strath.ac.uk