

# Examining the Post-School Decision-Making and Self-Determination of Disabled Young Adults in Ireland

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# Self-determination

- Self-determination, or self-determinism, refers to people acting volitionally, through conscious choice, decision, and intention. People who are self-determined are causal agents in their own lives through self-caused action (causal agency) or through the actions of others taken on one's behalf, referred to as proxy agency (Bandura et al., 2001).
- Self-determination has been conceptualised as 'individuals exercising the degree of personal control they desire within the context of their relationships with other individuals, groups, systems, or cultures, over those areas of life that are important to them' (Abery et al., 2017).
- Self-determination is viewed as involving, but not synonymous with, independence and autonomy (Abery & Karapetyan, 2018).

## Objectives & Literature

- Disabled youth remain less likely to attain and maintain competitive, integrated employment or pursue postsecondary education to prepare for long-term careers (Chatzitheochari & Platt, 2019; Newman & Madaus, 2015). These gaps have been linked to individual characteristics as well as home and school related factors.
- School-based interventions by increasing self-determination and transition skills (Gothberg et al., 2019; Lindsay et al., 2019; Lindstrom et al., 2020; Lombardi et al., 2022) have shown promise in decreasing achievement gaps, but less effectiveness in increasing quality of life outcomes (Levy et al., 2020).
- But, there is lack of research understanding how disabled young adults reflect on self-determination and the post-school opportunities open to them, and critically how school context shapes opportunities and decision-making.

## Research Questions

1. What are the processes shaping causal and proxy agency for disabled young adults?
2. What role do relationships with parents, teachers, expectations play in the levels of self-determination among disabled young adults, after accounting for a diversity of personal and context characteristics?

- **Descriptive analyses + Multivariate regression**
  - Descriptive analyses map post-school decision-making and self-determination of disabled and non-disabled young adults at 20 years.
  - Multivariate regression modelling seeks to understand both variation in self-determination levels and the factors that promote self-determination.
- **Theoretical framework**
  - Bronfenbrenner's (1989; 2006) bioecological theory & Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model to understand educational decisions of young adults.
  - Development = interactions between person and their environment that produce both constancy & change in their characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

## Data Source: Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) data – Cohort' 98

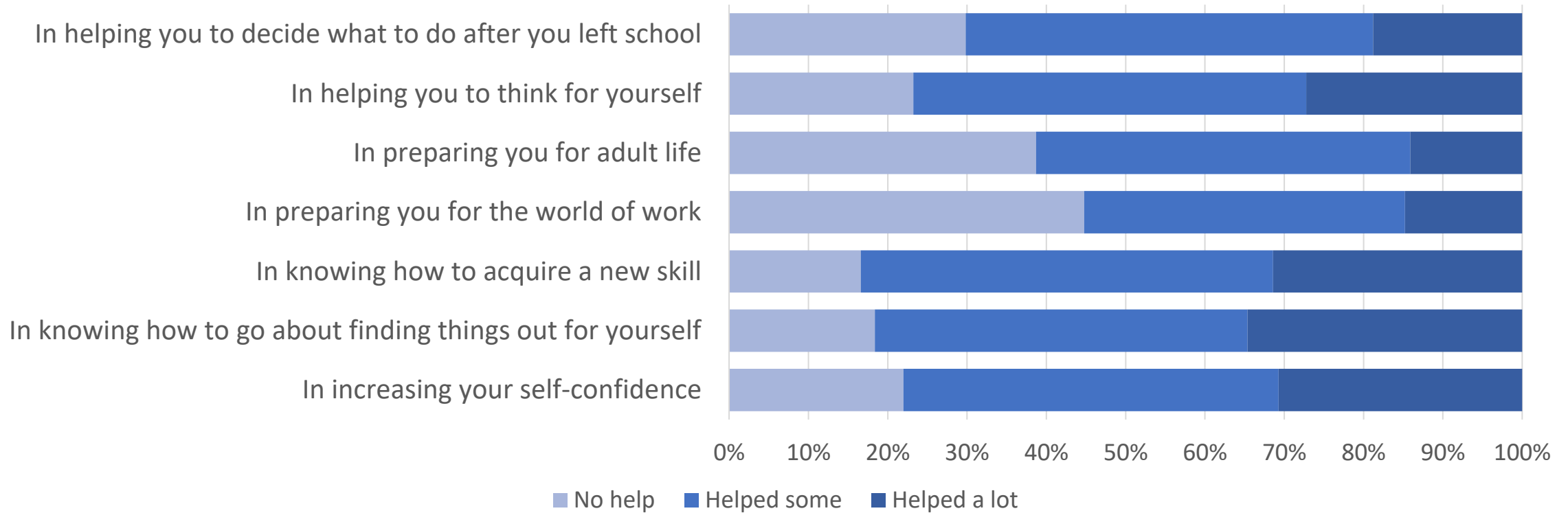
- The initial sample: 8,570 nine-year-old children (representing 1 in 7 9-year-old children in Ireland).
- Randomly selected through 910 primary schools.
- The selected children were subsequently followed up at age 13 (wave 2), 17/18 (wave 3) and 20 (wave 4) in 2018/2019.
- 4,729 respondents who participated in all four waves are included in the analysis (fixed panel design).
- Data were statistically adjusted to ensure the representativeness of the sample.

## Methodology & Data Source (Cont.)

- **Outcome variable:** Whether students feel their self-determination skills development was supported by their school (using wave 4 data)
- **Individual Characteristics:**
  - Gender
  - Disability: information provided by teachers, parents & teacher reported 'Strengths and Difficulties (SDQ)' at age 9
- **Academic achievement:** Teacher reported performance (9); Drumcondra reasoning test scores (13); achieving 9 higher-level honours in Junior Cert (17); educational pathways at 20
- **School engagement:** School attendance (9), relationship with teachers & engagement (13)
- **Parental expectation:** Expected child to achieve degree vs lower
- **Young people's expectations:** Academic self-image, Adult identity resolution scale (17)
- **Family resources:** Parent education, economic vulnerability, books @ home, neighbourhood
- **School characteristics:** Attended a socioeconomically disadvantaged school (DEIS)

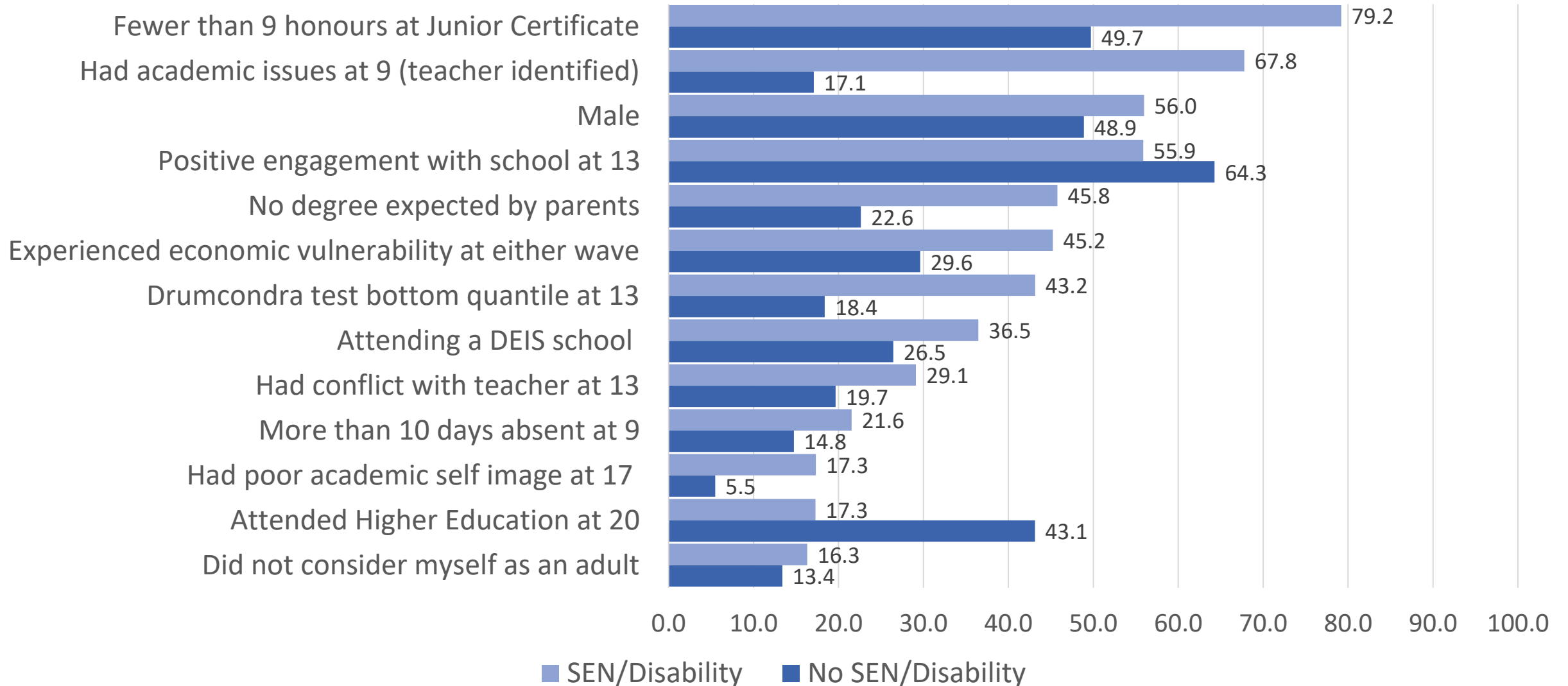
# Preliminary Results

How students felt their schools prepared them for making decisions for themselves



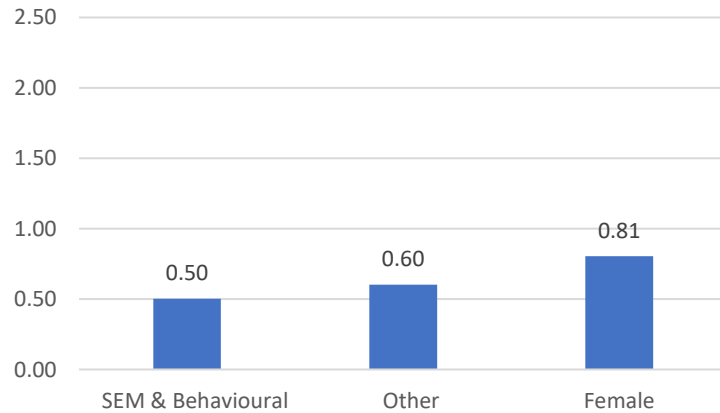


# Preliminary Results: Key Characteristics by Disability Status

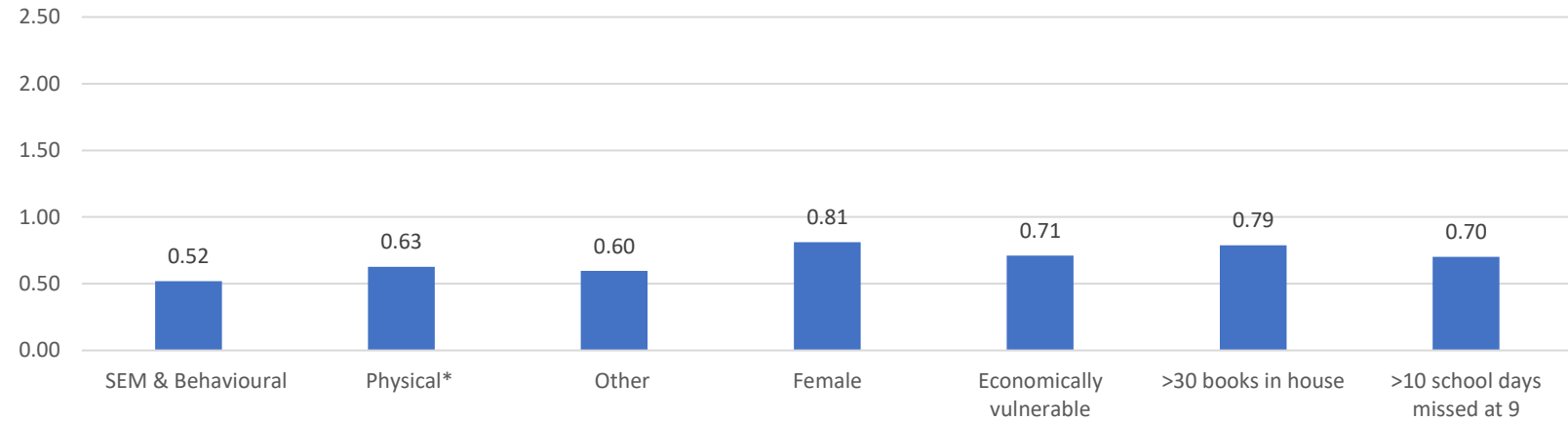


# Probability of schools supporting greater self-determination skills

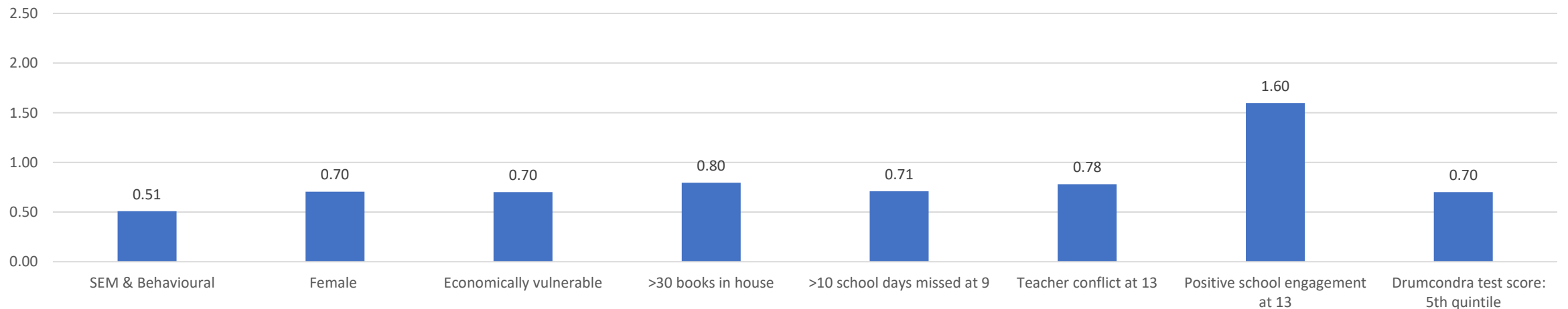
Model 1: SEN & Gender



Model 2: + Wave 1 controls



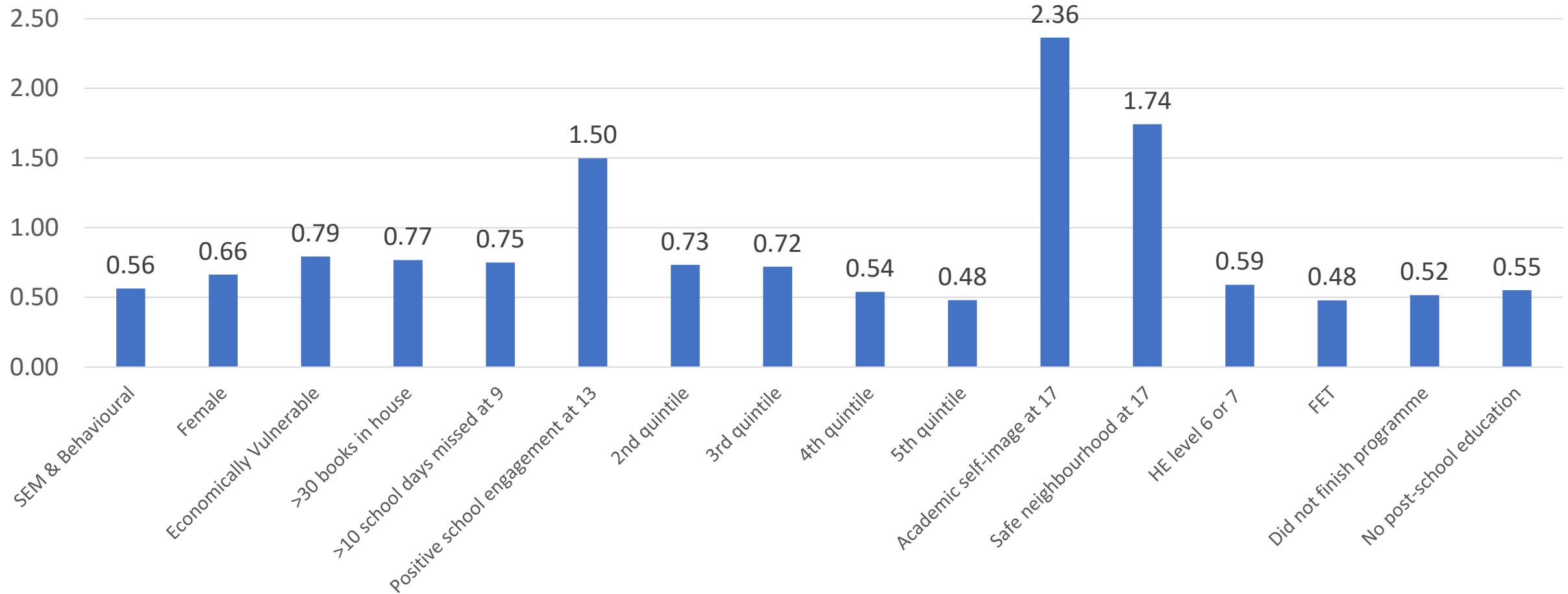
Model 3: + Wave 2 controls



Note: this slide only shows the results statistically significant at 5% level.

# Probability of schools supporting greater self-determination skills

Model 5: + Wave 3 & 4 controls



## Discussion

- Gender & disability type matter (Carroll et al., 2022; Carter et al., 2006)
- Family resources/socioeconomic background does not seem to have a strong direct impact, but may have secondary impact
  - Students with higher achievement and greater cultural capital at home may have higher expectation on their schools or rely on family/private support to help them develop self-determination skills
- Positive school climate serves as a protective factor; negative school climate diminishes students' perceived chance of schools facilitating their self-determination skills
  - School-based interventions have the potential to improve self-determination and transition skills (Lindsay et al., 2019; Carter et al., 2009)

## Discussion

- Young person's expectation & perception about themselves seems to matter more
  - Parental expectation is not significant: impact of parental self-efficacy & aspirations on their children's perceived career efficacy and choice is entirely mediated through the children's perceived efficacy and academic aspirations (Bandura et al., 2001)
  - (though many studies found it is, e.g. Chatzitheochari & Platt, 2009)
  - Having a positive academic self-image at 17 is strongly associated with how well their schools help develop their self-determination skills
  - Important to recognise and increase YP's self-agency
- Students attending non-HE courses might be less happy about their current setting ('second best option'), thus reflected less positively about their school experience – future research could look into whether they are happy about their current settings

## Limitations & Future Research

- Plan to consider the severity of SEN/Disability, changing SEN/disability status from 9 to 20, & the relationship between gender & SEN/disability type.
- Future data on students' experience in non-higher-education settings (e.g. FET programme); re-examine results once the most recent wave becomes available.
- Investigate further by using primary data on school leavers with additional needs in 2022, using more direct measures assessing self-determination skills.

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