

A STUDY ON THE PREVALENCE OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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Outline

- Aims
- SEN discourse
- Methodology
- Existing data sources, previous estimates
- A new prevalence estimate: *Growing Up in Ireland*
- Additional findings
- Summary
- Policy recommendations



Aims

- Quantify the potential cohort of the population on whom EPSEN Act 2004 will confer rights when fully implemented – existing and new data sources
- Scope and assess data sources and data issues relating to disability and SEN – explore the potential for improved data collection

SEN discourse – inclusive education

- Shift from deficit, medical model towards integration and inclusive education
- Broadening of the SEN definition and its impact on SEN prevalence estimates

SEN discourse - definition

The EPSEN Act defines SEN as meaning:

A restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition (EPSEN, 2004).



Estimating prevalence – some considerations

- Lack of debate around definition, terminology
- Prevalence linked to resource requirements?
- Getting base data perpetuating difference?
- Approaches used to estimate prevalence

The international context

- International policy approaches and prevalence estimates – wide variations
- Variations in prevalence estimation
- SEN classification systems
- Case study countries



Existing data sources

- Census of Population
- National Disability Survey
- National Intellectual Disability Database and National Physical and Sensory Disability Database
- Annual Returns of Department of Education and Skills
- Special Education Administrative System (SEAS)
- *NCSE Implementation Report (2006)*



Existing prevalence estimates

- Census of Population 2006: 3% of children
- National Disability Survey 2008: 11% of children
- NCSE SEAS data 2010: 4% (primary & post-primary students)
- Department of Education and Skills: 17% of primary students)
- NCSE 2006: 17.7% (of population)



Growing Up in Ireland

- First large-scale longitudinal study of children
- Nationally representative of all children in Ireland
- Includes over 8,500 nine-year olds \approx 1-in-7
- Rich data on many aspects of children's lives:
 - Family life and parenting
 - Health and well-being
 - School experiences
 - Out of school lives

Growing Up in Ireland

- Complementary information from multiple sources:
 - Parents
 - Teachers
 - School principals
 - Children
- Key indicators of SEN, broadly defined as in EPSEN Act



Estimating Prevalence

Stepped Approach to Estimating SEN Prevalence:

- **STEP 1: Teacher Report of:**
 - Physical disability
 - Speech impairment
 - Learning disability
 - Emotional-behavioural problem (ADD, ADHD)



Estimating Prevalence

- **STEP 2: Additional Children, reported by Parent:**
 - Learning difficulty, communication or coordination disorder
 - Speech difficulty
 - Chronic physical or mental health problem, illness or disability (which hampers daily activities)



Estimating Prevalence

- **STEP 3: Additional Children with Mental Health Difficulties, reported by teacher:**
 - Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ)
 - Detailed list of 25 statements ...
 - Identify 'high risk' group in respect of emotional-psychological wellbeing; validity well established
 - Four scales:
 - Emotional symptoms
 - Conduct problems
 - Hyperactivity
 - Peer problems

Stage - Source	Type of SEN	Prevalence Rate		
		Percentage Reported	Additional Group	Total SEN Prevalence
Step 1 - Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical Disability Speech Impairment Learning disability Emotional or behavioural problem (ADD, ADHD) 	14.1%	14.1%	14.1%
Step 2 - Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning difficulty, communication or co-ordination disorder 	10.6%	+ 5.9% »	20.0%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speech difficulty 	1.4%		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chronic physical or mental health problem, illness or disability hampering daily life 	4.8%		
Step 3 - Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional/psychological wellbeing/EBD (SDQ): 'high risk' group 	10.5%	+ 5.0% »	25.0%



How Does This Compare?

- Highly consistent with recent international research
 - ▣ **The Netherlands:**
 - ▣ Van der Veen et al., 2010: 26% parent & teacher reports

 - ▣ **UK:**
 - ▣ Croll & Mosses 2003: 26% identified by teachers
 - ▣ Hills et al., 2010: 22% of 16 years olds

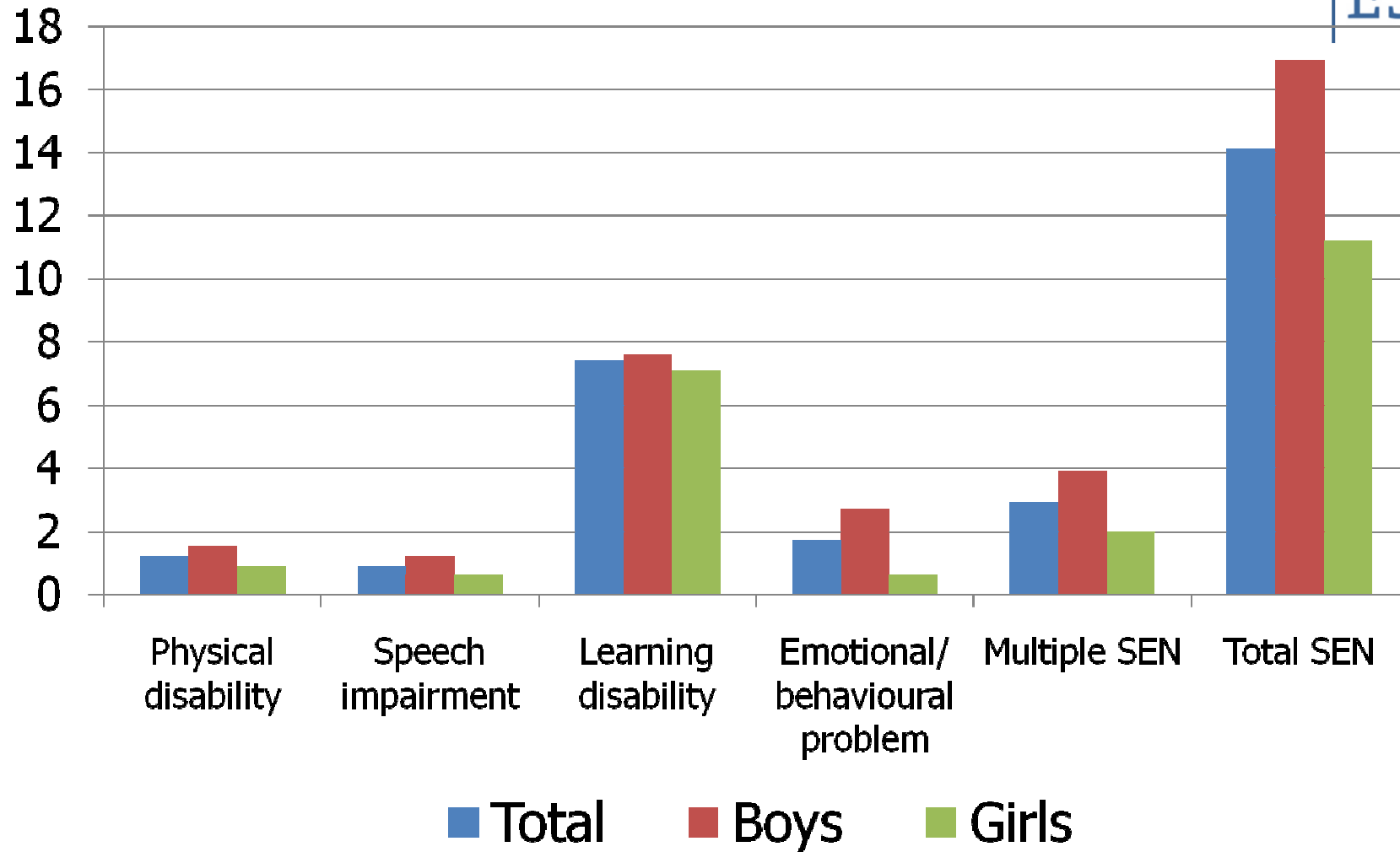
Who Are They?

- Evidence of strong social and gender differences
- **Gender:** greater for boys - particularly for EBD & multiple disabilities
- **Social Class:**
 - Clear Social Gradient - substantially higher among economically inactive; overall prevalence ranges 30% (semi- unskilled) to 16% (professional)
- **Income:**
 - Big increase for lowest income quintile .. teacher reported SEN 22% lowest Vs 12% & 9% middle & highest income groups

Percentage 9-Year-Olds with SEN



Teacher-Reported SEN



Where Are They?

- *Adapting to Diversity Study*: representative sample of primary and post-primary schools
- Literacy & numeracy problems & EBD
- Evidence of high concentrations in certain schools:
- **Primary**
 - DEIS schools, particularly Urban Band 1 – 40% have large numbers (over 40%) with literacy problems
 - Low levels in Rural DEIS



Where Are They?

- **Post-Primary**
 - DEIS schools – 1-in-5 high concentrations of numeracy difficulties compared to 1% in non-DEIS
 - Fee-paying schools & Gaelscoileanna – few had large numbers
 - School type – greater concentrations in vocational schools



Additional Research

- School context and SEN identification
- Identification of EBD
- School Engagement among SEN students



Summary of Findings

- Issues around definition and the use of categories for measuring prevalence internationally
- Similarly in Ireland much variation in the definition of SEN (across agencies), ways of collecting data (e.g. for administrative purposes) leading to wide variation in estimates
- Limited inter-agency communication, lack of awareness of data available



Summary of Findings (2)

- Overall prevalence rate of 25% (9 year olds)
- Wide differences across social class groups, high rates for boys from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Large differences in SEN concentration across DEIS and non-DEIS schools but also within DEIS categories – Urban Band 1 much higher proportions of students with numeracy & literacy difficulties and EBD



Some considerations

- Comparing provision with prevalence
- Previous prevalence estimates - comparing the NCSE Implementation Report



Policy Implications

- Greater dialogue around the definition of SEN and terminology used (without regard to financial considerations)
- A non-categorical system – categories need to be revised and harmonised, a move away from such categories?
- Administrative Data:
 - Role and function of October Returns
 - Post Primary Pupil Database
 - Primary level data



Policy Implications Contd.

- Characteristics of students with SEN
- Distribution of SEN students across schools
- Implications for funding allocation for the GAM, DEIS
- Implications for school climate and curriculum
- Value of GUI longitudinal study as evidence base on children and young people with special needs
- Importance of teacher and parent information