



Disaffection Among Irish Primary School Children

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Outline of the presentation

- Background to the study
- Definition of disaffection and existing research
- Aim and focus
- Methodology
- Research findings
- Concluding comments



Introduction

- Growing body of research on student school engagement.
- Importance of school engagement on academic outcomes.
- Association of school engagement with a range of social, behavioural and academic outcomes – much of this research focuses on adolescents.
- Less is known about factors predicting disaffection across different dimensions among young children.
- Scarcity of research drawing on nationally representative datasets



What is disaffection?

- “Disaffected students” can be considered a somewhat contested term
- Disaffection has a complex and multidimensional nature
- In educational research it has often been used as an “umbrella term”, describing a number of different behaviours and attitudes
- Disaffection is used as an explanatory term to account for a range of behaviours, including low attainment, persistent disruption, truancy and other forms of self-exclusion. Disaffection implies behaviour that is reactive to the school as an institution, though this is usually treated as an individual rather than a group phenomenon (Osler and Starkey, 2005).



Existing research

- **Behavioural domain:** truancy, absenteeism, passivity, withdrawal (Skinner et al. 2008)
- **Cognitive and affective domain:** low expectations; and lack of goals and aspirations (Heathcote-Elliott and Walters 2000)
- **Individual characteristics:** temperament, dispositions towards school (Rowe and Rowe, 1992)
- **Parent/family characteristics:** social class, migrant background, gender (Willms, 2000)
- **School characteristics** (Kinder et al. 1995; Boaler, 2005)



Aim and focus

Factors associated with disaffection among primary school children

- Behavioural
- Cognitive and affective
- Individual characteristics
- Family
- School



The Current Study

- Data from Growing Up in Ireland – The National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland is the first study of its kind ever to be carried out in Ireland and its principal objective is to describe the lives of Irish children, to establish what is typical and normal as well as what is atypical and problematic
- 9-year data used here - 8568 households



Measures

Measures used:

School disaffection (outcome)

- **School disaffection was based on the child's report of liking school. They were asked 'Do you like going to school' and answer categories were *always*, *sometimes*, and *never*. Those who responded that they never liked school (n=577) were categorised as being disaffected with school.**



Measures

Child's behavioural characteristics

- **Child report of behavioural adjustment. *Behavioural Adjustment* subscale of the Piers-Harris self-concept scale was used. Scores are standardised and categorised – *very low, low, low average, average, high average*. Here we look at those who are *low average or below***
- **Teacher report of emotional and behavioural difficulties as limiting child's activity**
- **Parent report of child involved in fighting or bullying others**



Measures

School achievement

- **At age 9 the children completed the Drumcondra Maths and Reading tests. Scores from these tests were standardised to account for different class (age) groups and scores split into quartiles. This analysis uses the lowest quartile maths and reading scores.**

Individual characteristics

- **Child's temperament was measured using the EAS Temperament scale (Buss & Plomin, 1984) which has subscales for shyness, emotionality, activity and sociability.**



Measures

Family characteristics

- **Household social class was grouped into four categories – *professional/managerial; non-manual/skilled manual; semi-skilled/unskilled manual; unemployed***
- **maternal education was grouped into four categories – *lower secondary or primary education; higher secondary education; non-degree; degree or postgraduate degree***
- **Relationship with siblings**

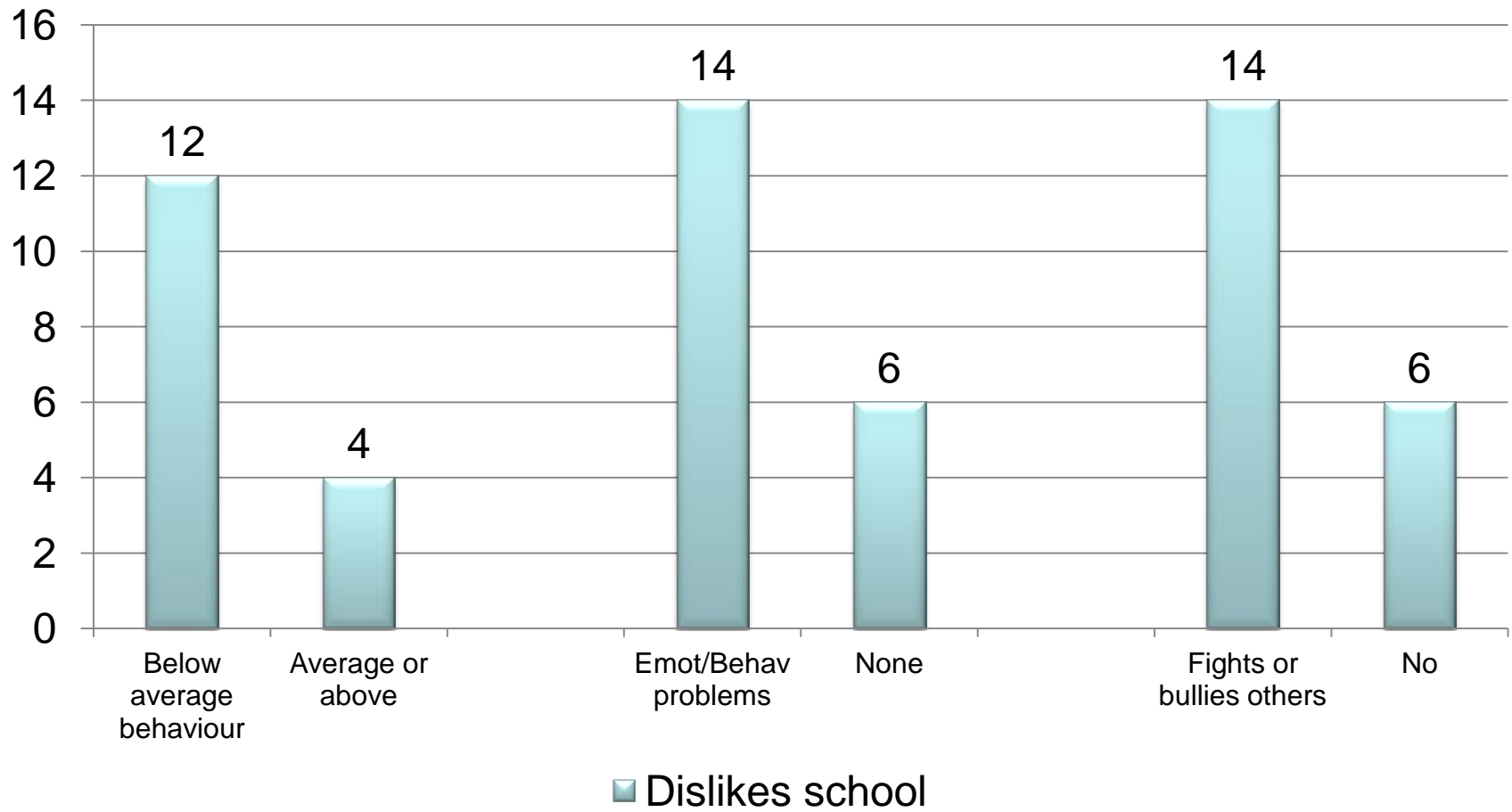


Measures

School characteristics

- **Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) is the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, and remains the Department of Education and Skills policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. There are four DEIS statuses – *Urban band 1, Urban band 2, rural DEIS, non-disadvantaged***
- **Principal perception of adequate numbers of teachers**

Results - behaviour



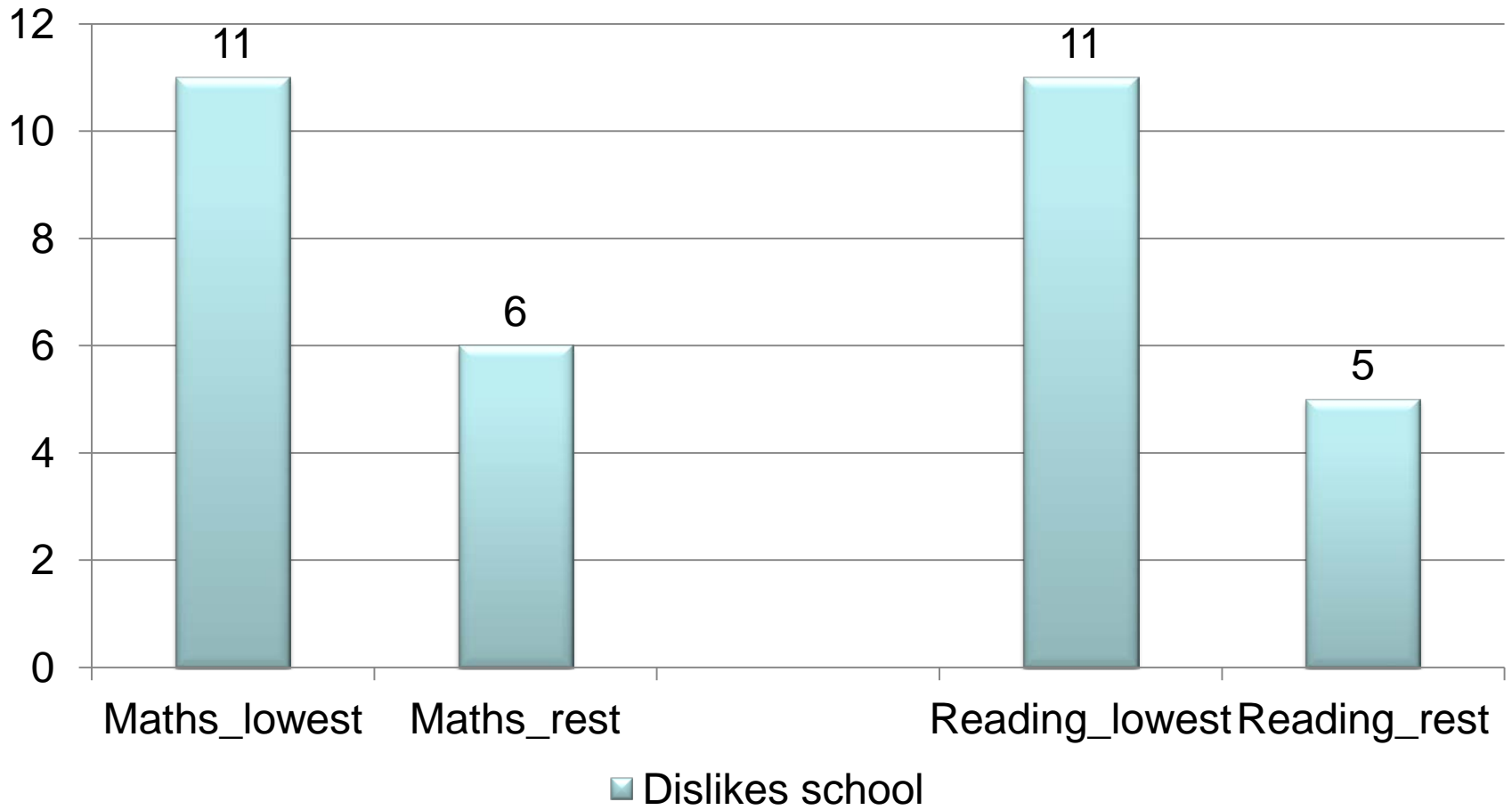


Results - behaviour

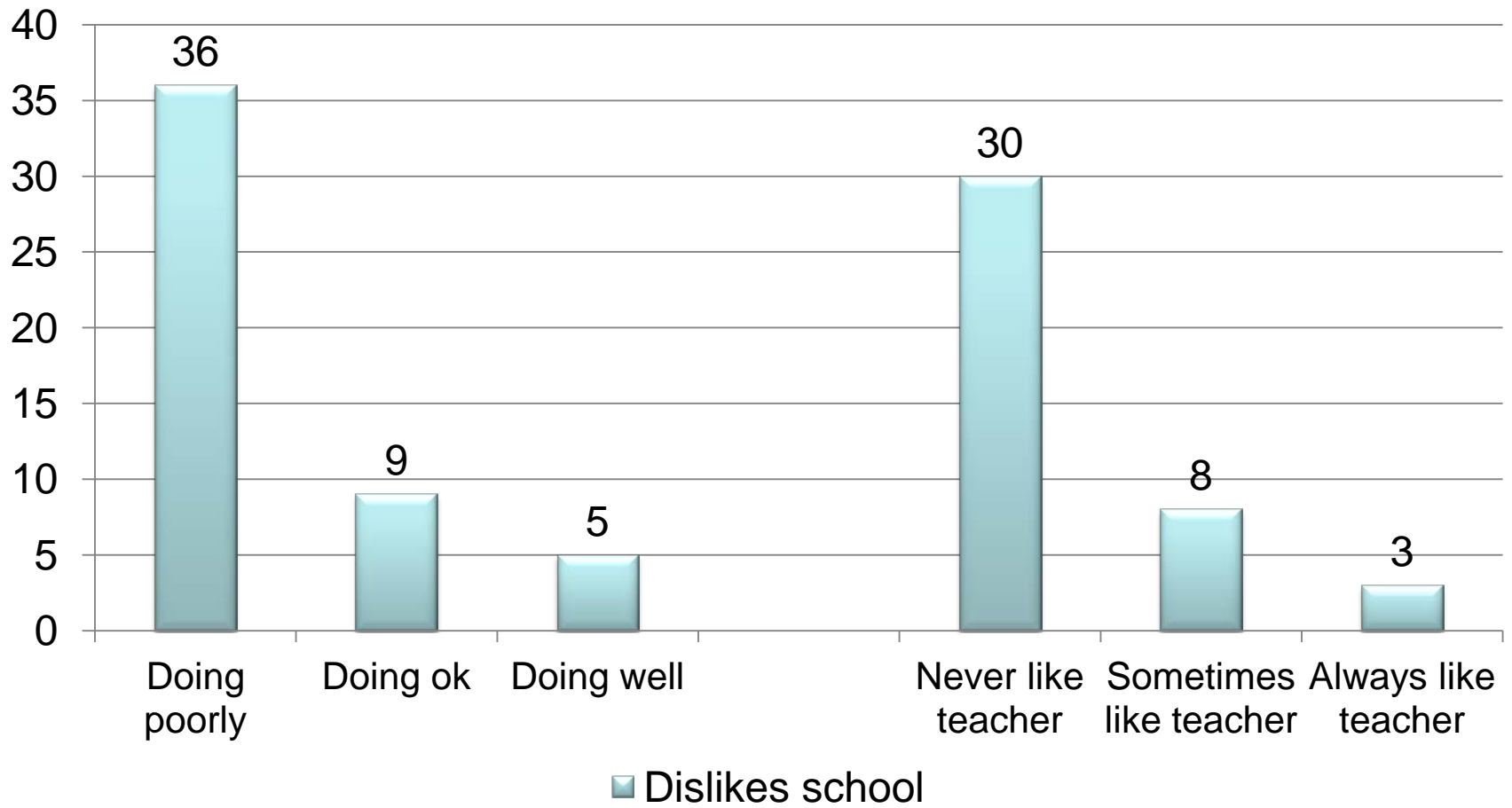
- **Where teacher reported occasional or regular incompleteness of homework, disaffection was higher (10%) compared to 5% of those who always did their homework, and high levels of absenteeism (i.e., 20 or more days) were also associated with higher levels of disaffection (although numbers here were small).**



Results - achievement



Results - affective



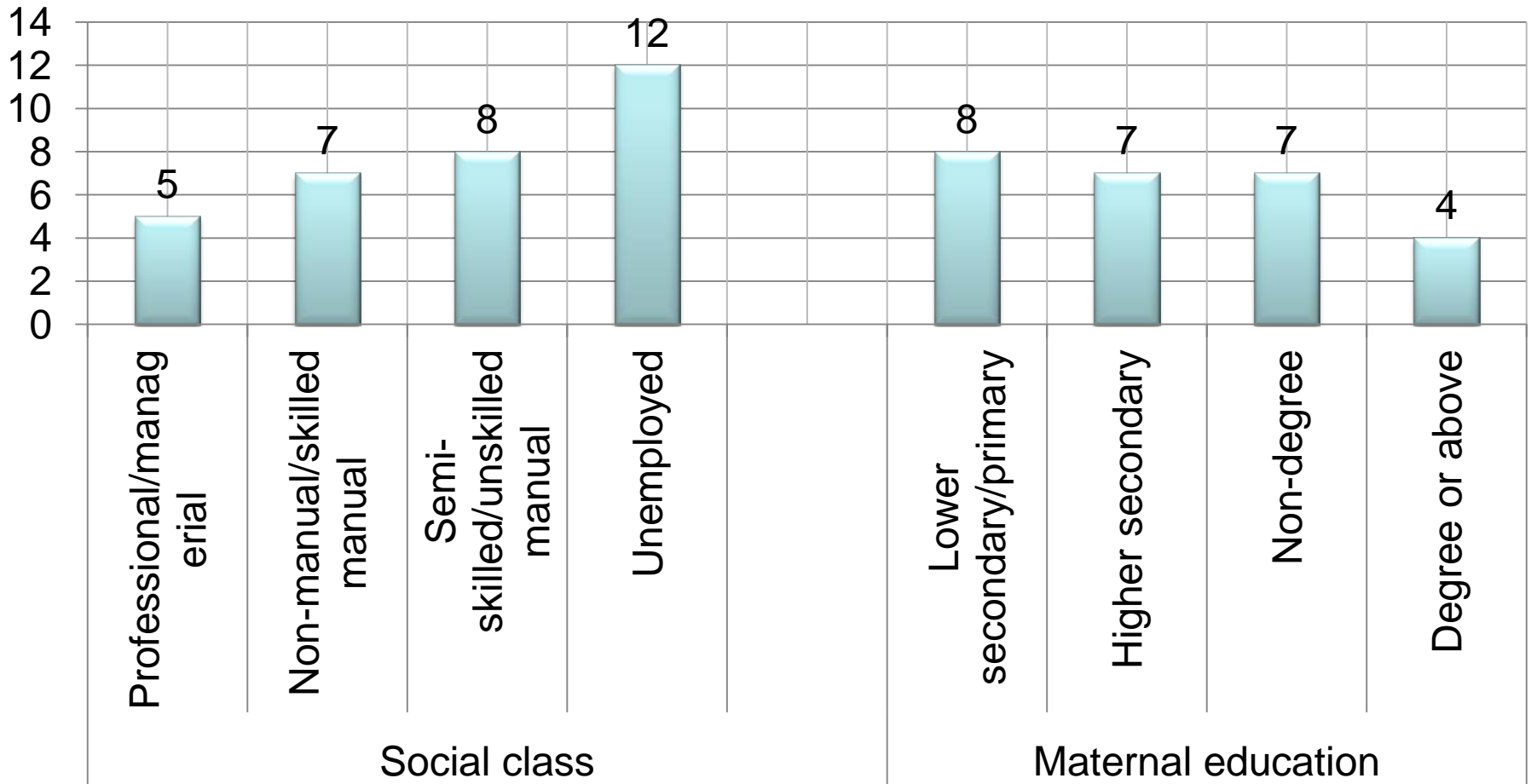


Results - child

- **In terms of the child's individual characteristics, 10% of boys reported never liking school compared to 4% of girls.**
- **Aspects of the child's temperament were also associated with attitudes towards school in that those with a shy temperament were more likely to dislike school, as were those with a more emotional temperament.**



Results - socioeconomic





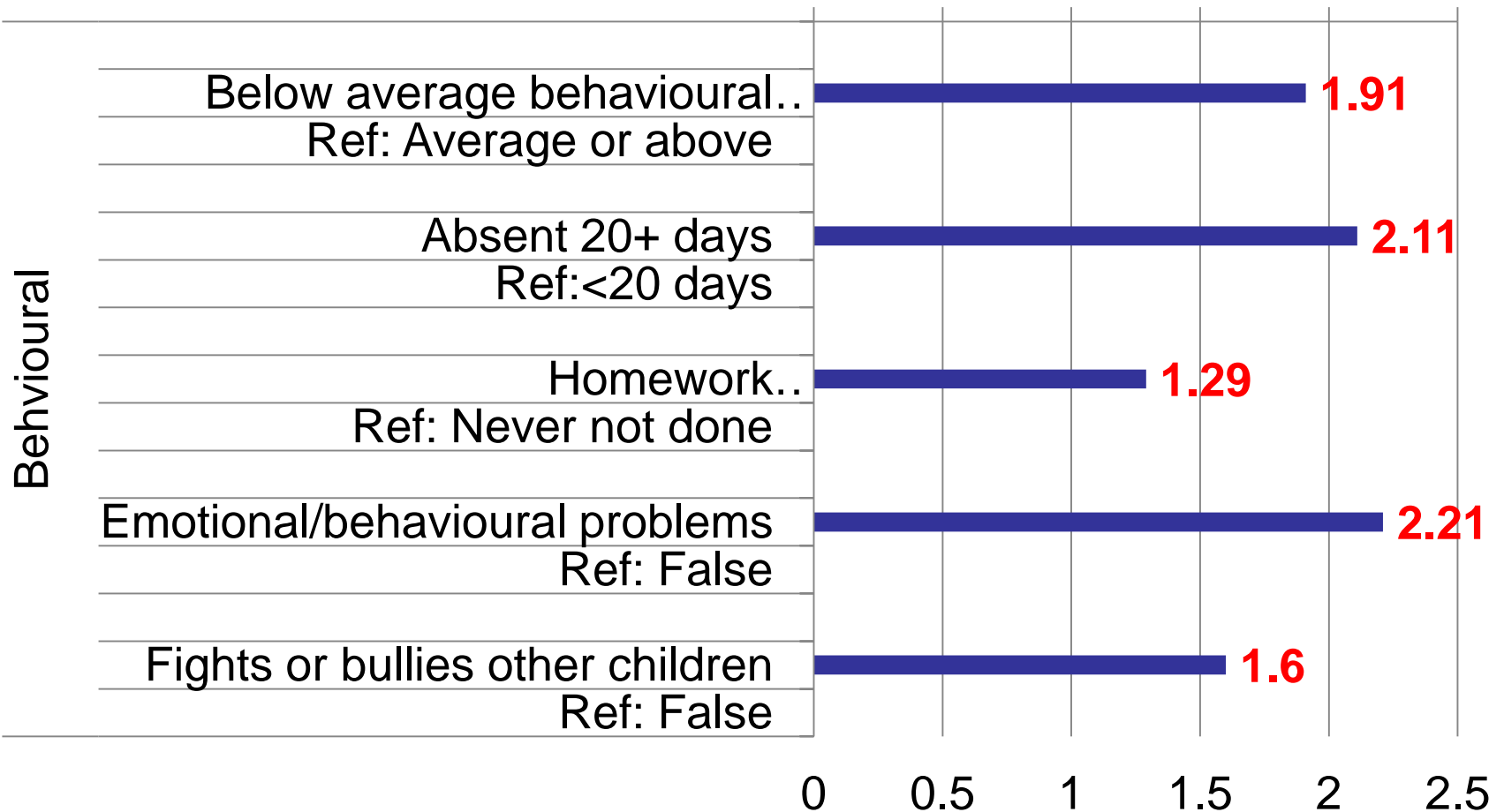
Analytical Strategy

Logistic regressions reporting the Odds Ratios for membership of 'disaffected' group. Variables were added in blocks but here will report on the final model results

- Behavioural
- Cognitive and affective
- Individual characteristics
- Family
- School

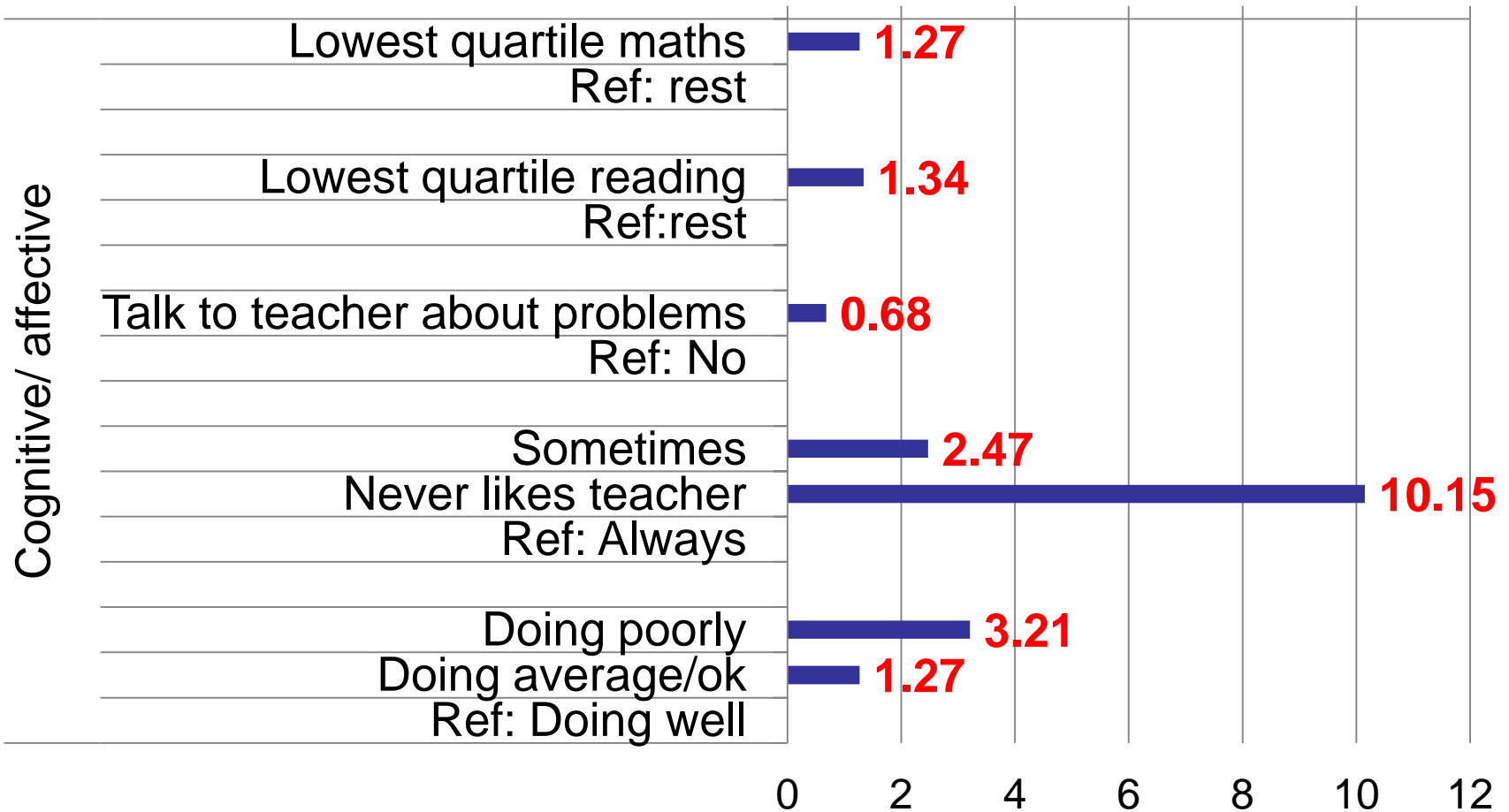


Multivariate (behavioural)



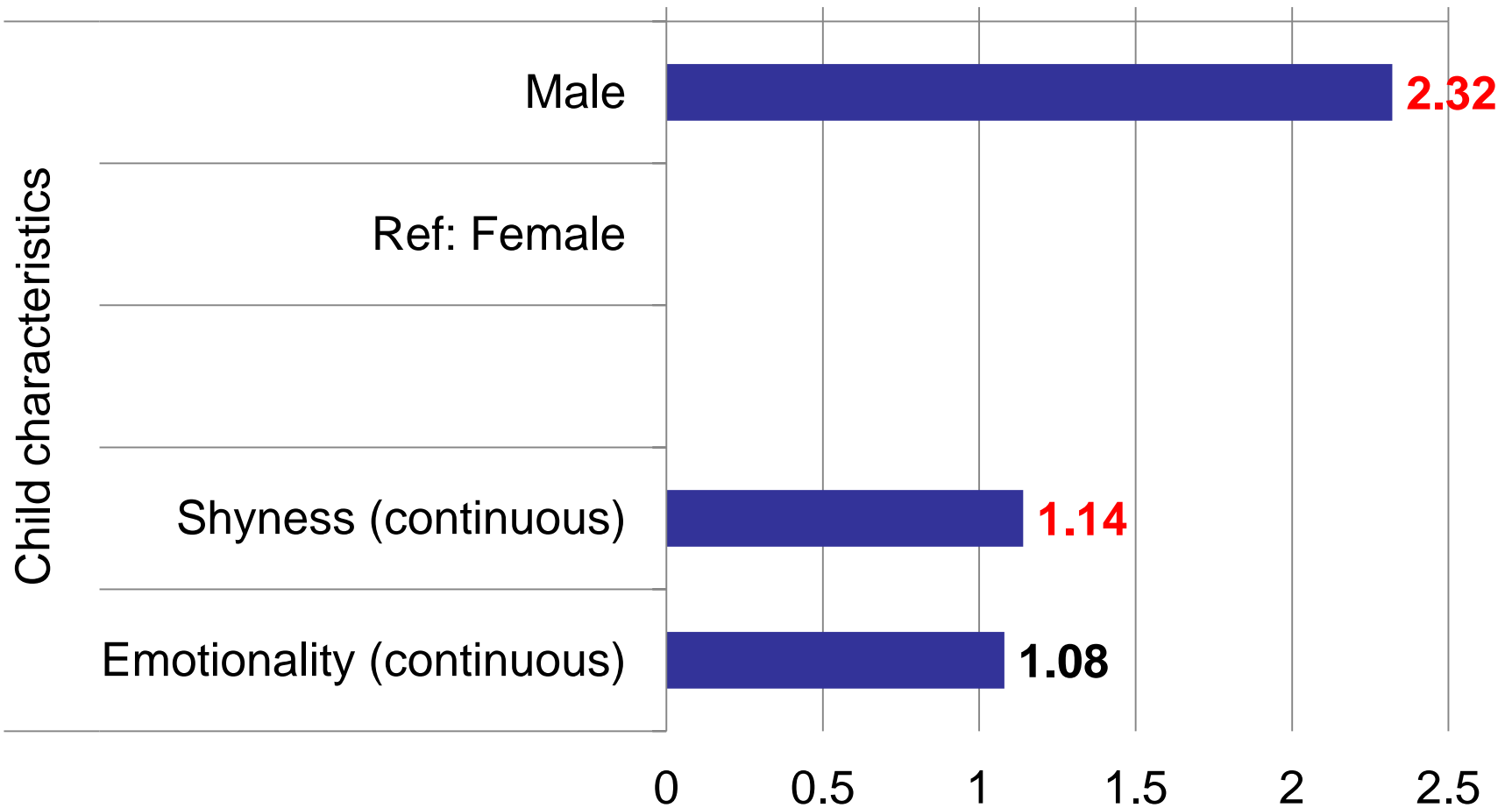


Multivariate (Cog/Aff)



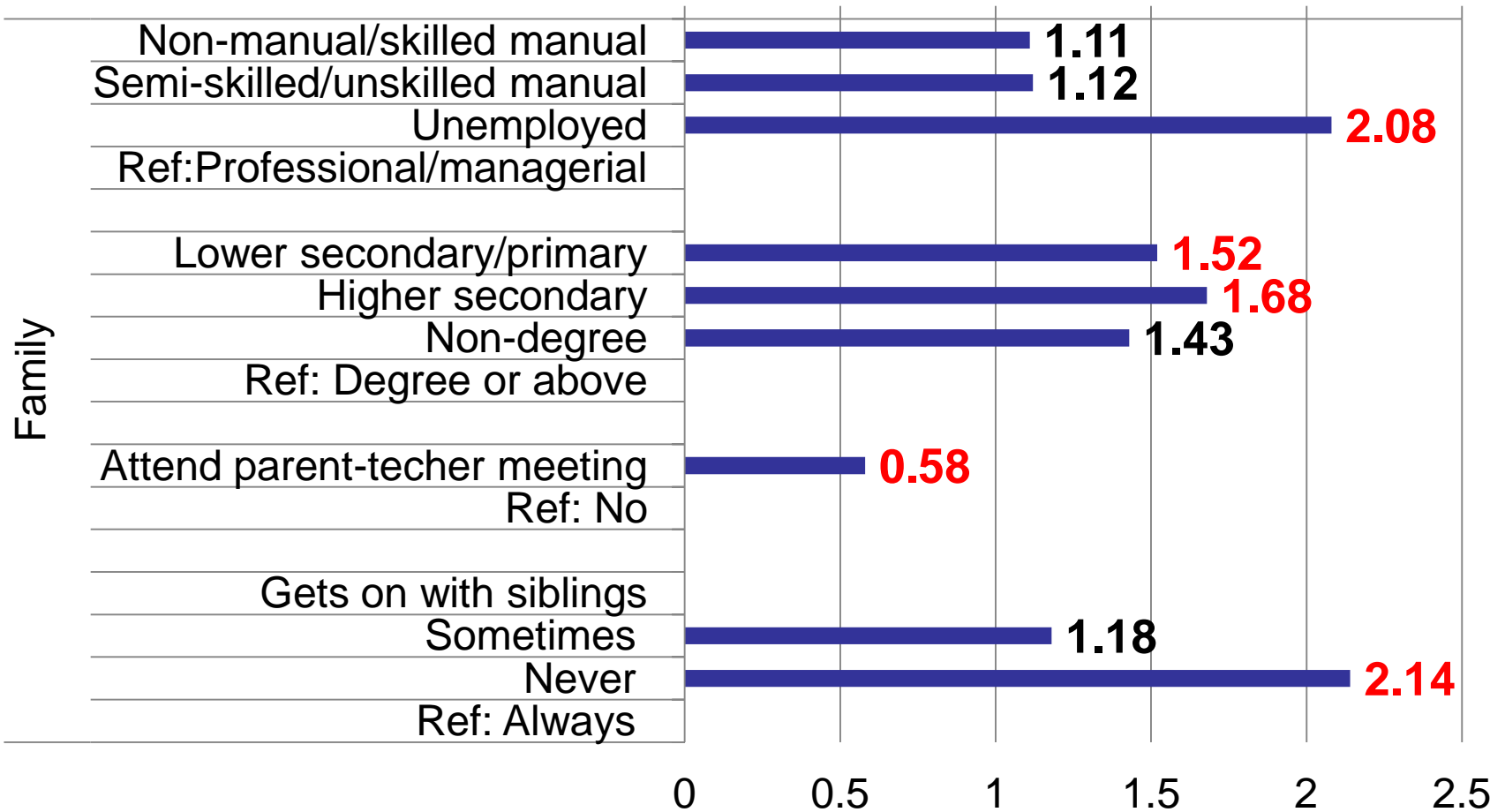


Multivariate (child)



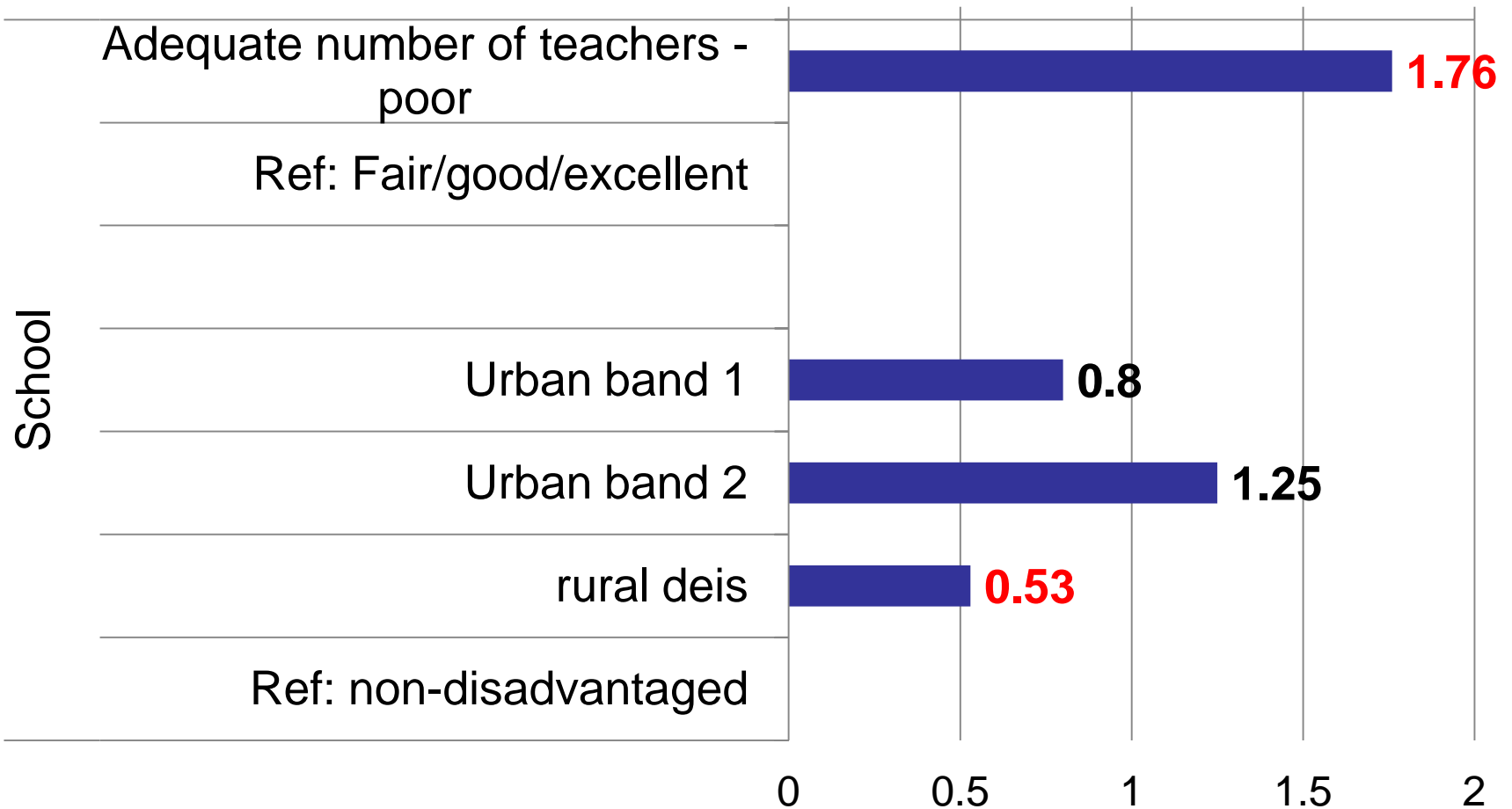


Multivariate (family)





Multivariate (school)





Multivariate model

	OR sig.
Behavioural	
Behavioural adjustment (child report)	1.91***
Absent 20+ days	2.11*
Homework occasionally/regularly not done	1.29*
Fights or bullies other children (parent report)	1.60*
Behavioural/emotional problems (teacher report)	2.21**
Cognitive	
Lowest quartile maths	1.27<
Lowest quartile reading	1.34*
Affective aspects	
Talk to teacher about problems	0.68**
Sometimes likes teacher	2.47***
Never likes teacher	10.15***
Doing poorly in school	3.21**
Doing average/ok in school	1.27*
Child characteristics	
Male	2.32***
Shyness (continuous)	1.14<
Emotionality (continuous)	1.08



Multivariate model cont.

	OR sig.
Family factors	
Non-manual/skilled manual	1.11
Semi-skilled/unskilled manual	1.12
Unemployed	2.08***
Lower secondary/primary	1.52*
Higher secondary	1.68**
Non-degree	1.43
Parent-teacher meeting	0.58*
Sometimes gets on with sibs	1.18
Never gets on with sibs	2.14**
School characteristics	
Adequacy of number of teachers	1.76**
Urban band 1	0.80
Urban band 2	1.25
Rural Deis	0.53*



Summary

- We find that disaffection is a problem among a minority of primary school children and that it is multidimensional
- Pupils with behaviour problems – self, parent and teacher reported all significant
- These also include attendance/homework issues (can't determine the direction of this, though)
- Actual *and* perceived progress in academic sphere
- Also includes the pupil-teacher relationship
- Being boy and lower social class continue to be an issue
- Perception of adequate numbers of teachers



Discussion

- Processes leading to disaffection start early, may become entrenched and can culminate in early school leaving



Implications

- Issue is clearly multidimensional in nature – therefore regular and effective communication between school and students **and** families to identify problems as early as possible
- Teacher-pupil interactions very important – therefore need to monitor academic, personal and social progress consistently and regularly
- Teacher expectations important – high expectations and encouragement
- Persistent gender effect matter of concern – more alternatives for boys?



Future research

- Longitudinal approach – how have these children settled into secondary level – are they still disaffected? – evidence from the 13-year-olds
- Can evidence of problems be identified even younger than 9? – evidence from the 5-year-olds



THANK YOU