



Adolescent mental health, area-level deprivation and young adults categorised as not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the UK

Katie Sarah Taylor, Emily Murray, Yvonne Kelly, Niamh Bridson Hubbard, Baowen Xue, Anne McMunn, Stephen Jivraj





Defining 'NEET'

Young people (16-24) categorised as
Not in **E**ducation, **E**mployment, or **T**raining





Contextualising 'NEET'



1 million, or 1 in 8,
16-24-year-olds are
in the NEET
category in the UK¹



UK has the second
highest rates in EU¹
– Netherlands at 4%
vs UK at 15%²



Scarring on lifetime
employment,
mental and physical
health³





Policy focus on ‘NEET’

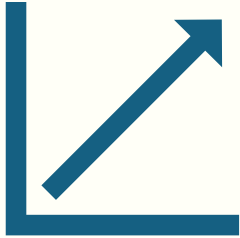


The screenshot shows the GOV.UK website header with the crown logo and 'GOV.UK' text. Below the header is a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > Work > Working, jobs and pensions'. The main heading is 'Independent report' followed by 'Young people and work: interim report' in a larger, bold font. A paragraph below states: 'The young people and work report is an independent review of the increase in the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)'. At the bottom of the page, it says 'From: Department for Work and Pensions', 'Published 28 May 2026', and 'Last updated 8 June 2026 — See all updates'.

Source: GOV.UK, *Young people and work: interim report*, accessed 8 June 2026.



Health as a driver of rising 'NEET' rates



Work-limiting
health conditions
26% → 44%¹



Mental health as
primary condition
24% → 43%¹

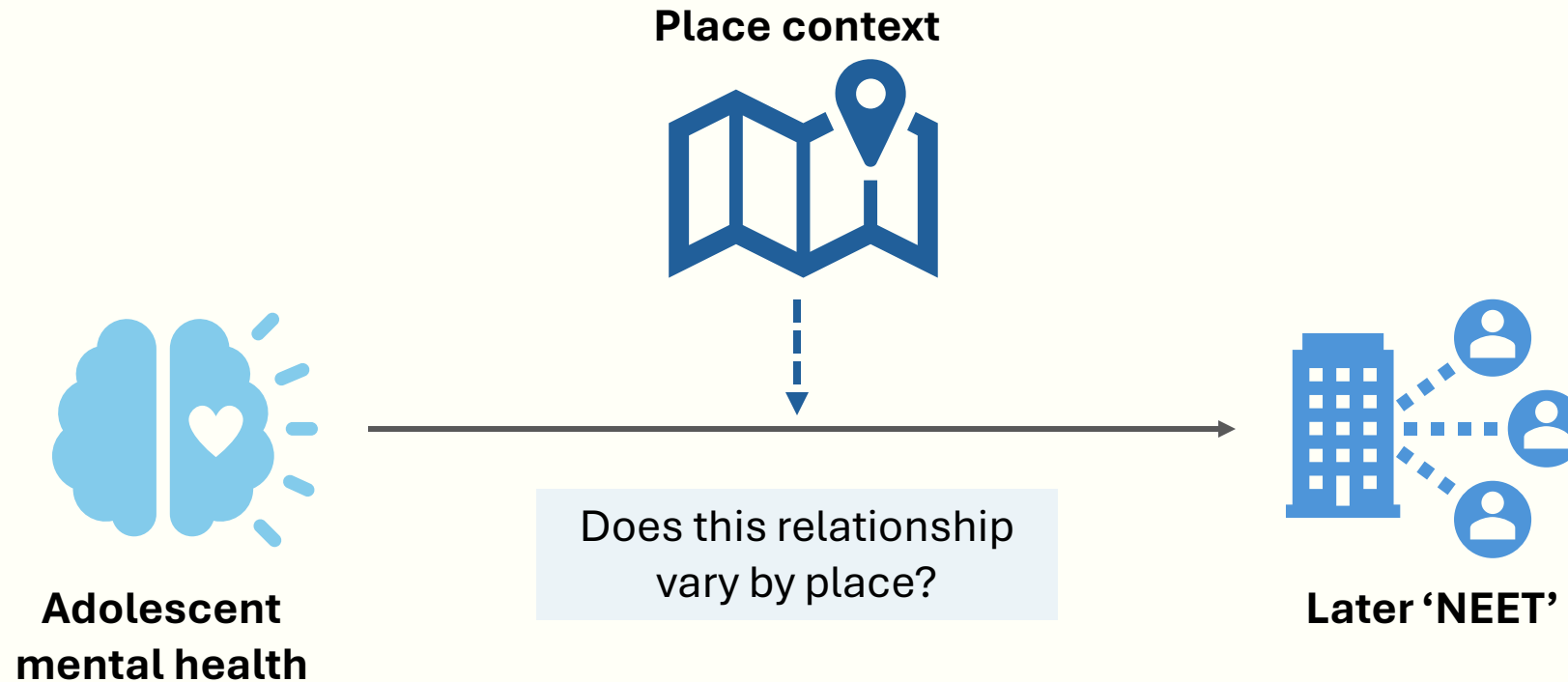


Physical health as
primary condition
74% → 32%¹





Does everyone experience this the same?





Research questions



RQ1: Does adolescent mental health shape NEET risk?



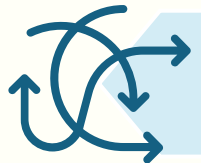
RQ4: Do associations differ by gender?



RQ2: Does area deprivation shape NEET risk?



RQ5: Which aspects of place matter most?



RQ3: Does area deprivation modify mental health → NEET risk?



RQ6: Do associations change across birth cohorts?





Data and measures





Data and measures



Understanding
Society

MILLENNIUM
COHORT STUDY



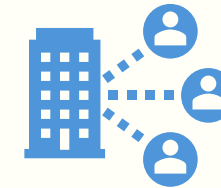
Moderator

Area deprivation, IMD (age 16)



Exposure

Psychological
distress, GHQ
(age 16)



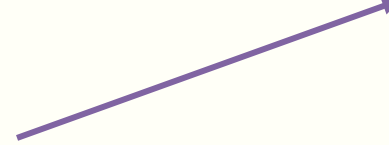
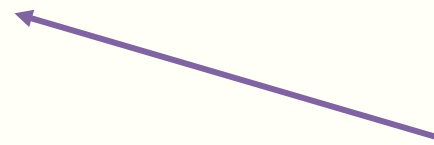
Outcome

Young people in
the NEET category
(age 18-24)



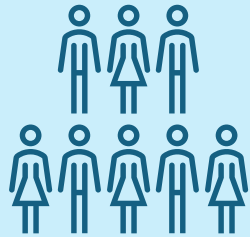
Confounders

Gender, ethnicity, household income, parental education/
employment/ social class/ mental health (age 16)





Analyses



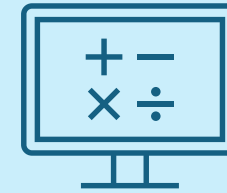
Sample

GHQ at baseline, at least
one NEET observation 18-
24, England



Missing data

Multiple imputation
by chained equations



Analysis

Mixed effect logistic
regression models





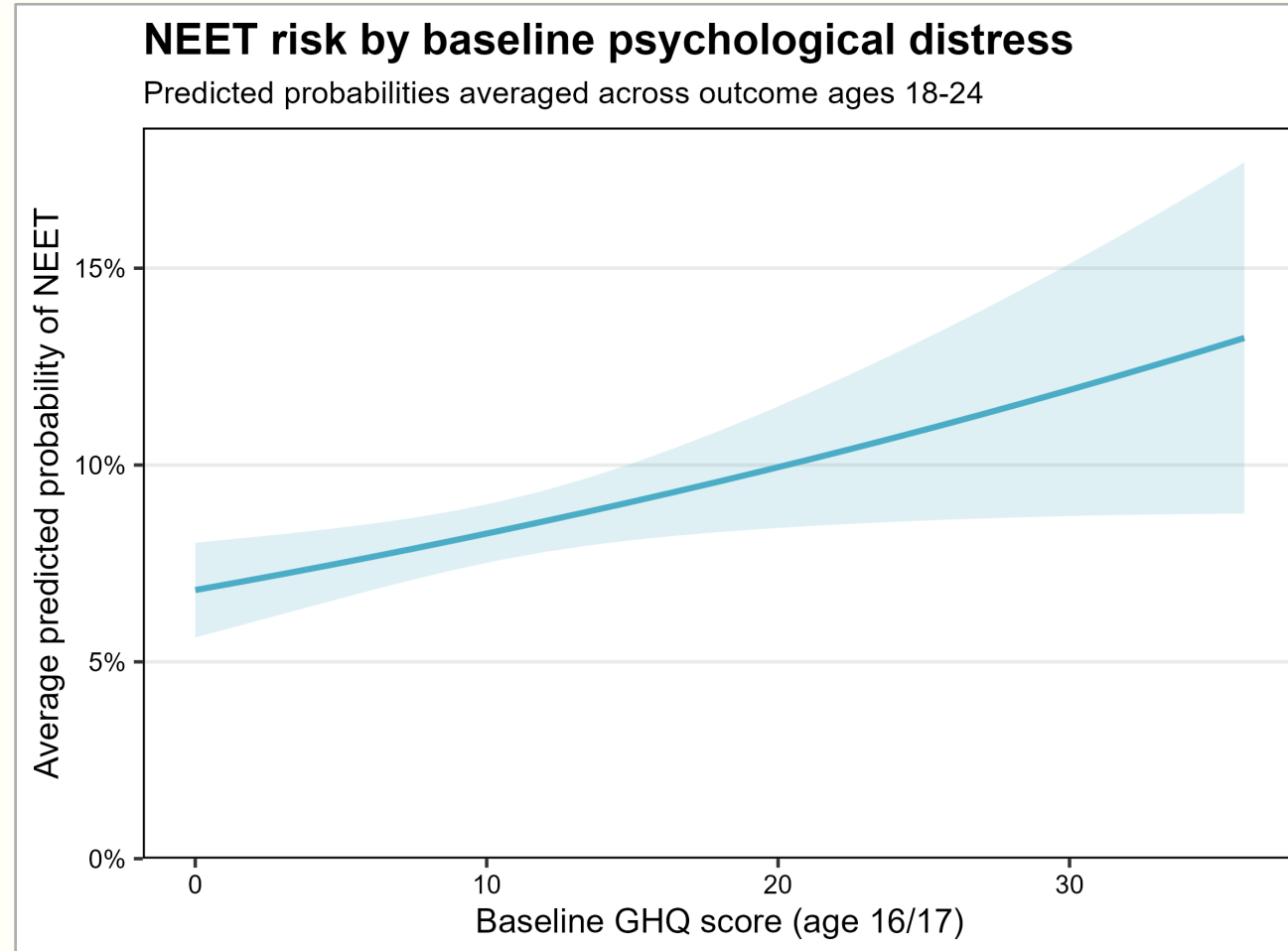
Results

Models used 39,054 person-age outcome observations from 5,974 young people; 6,795 observations were NEET (17.4%).



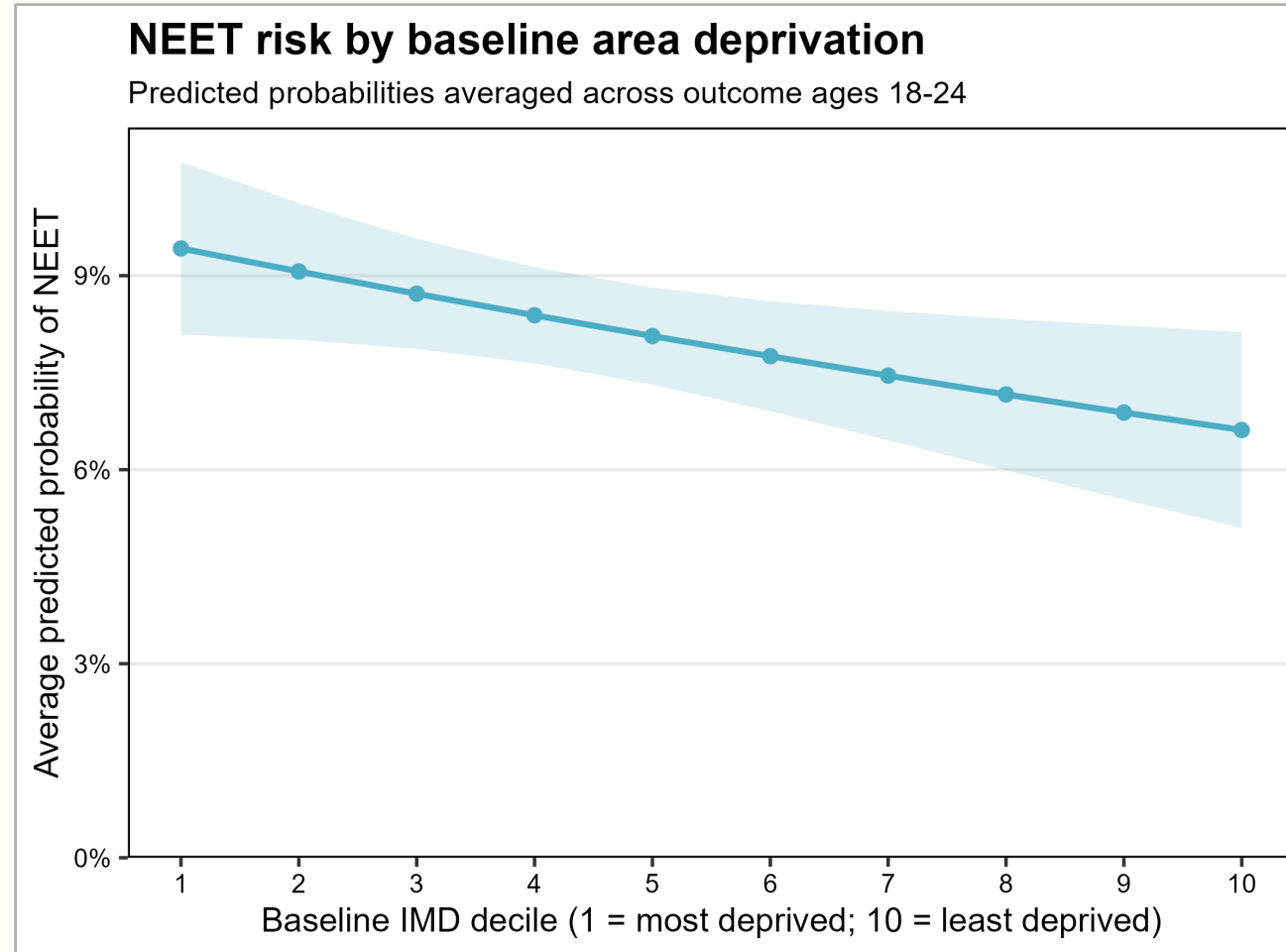


RQ1: Does adolescent psychological distress shape NEET risk?



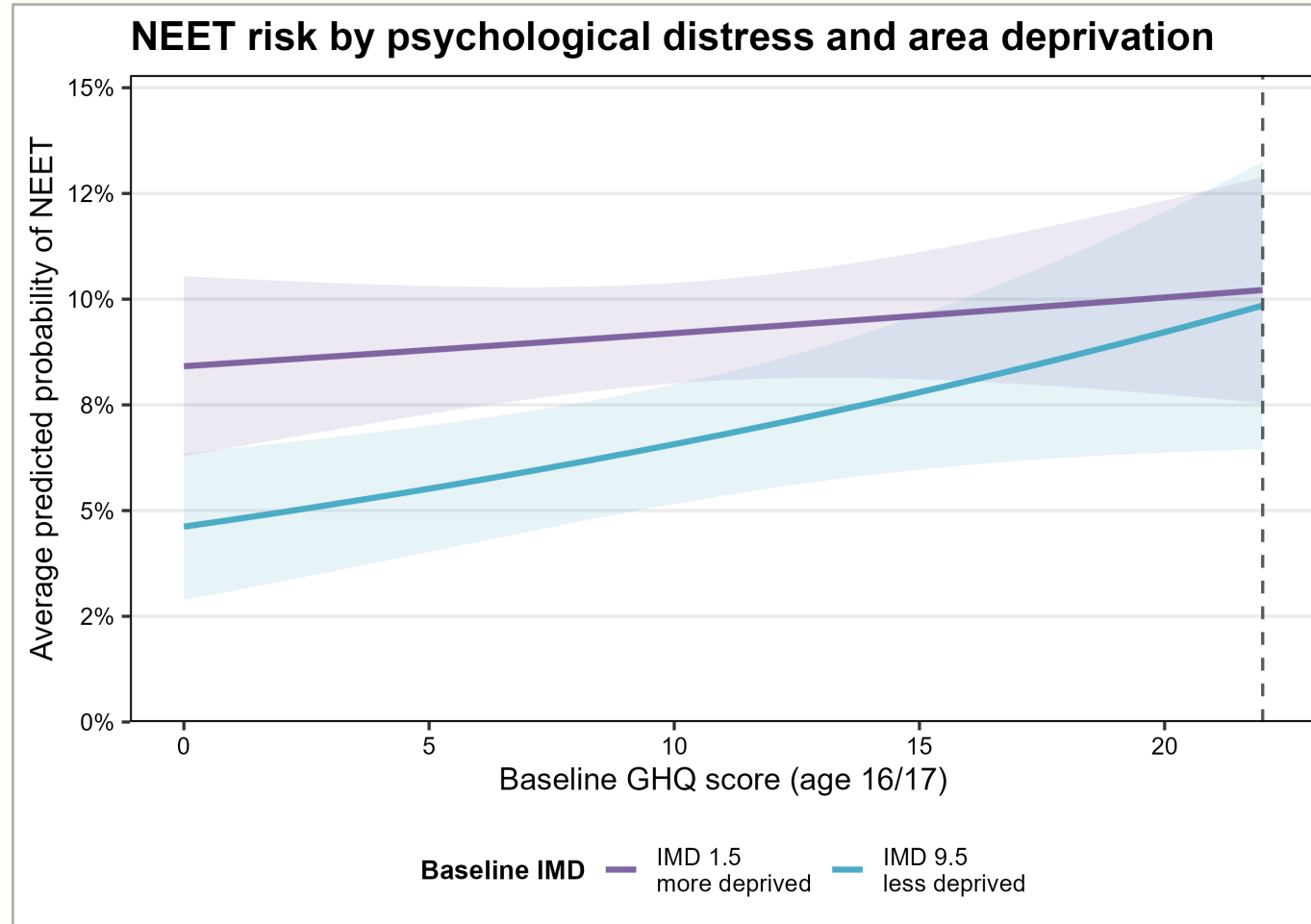


RQ2: Does area deprivation shape NEET risk?



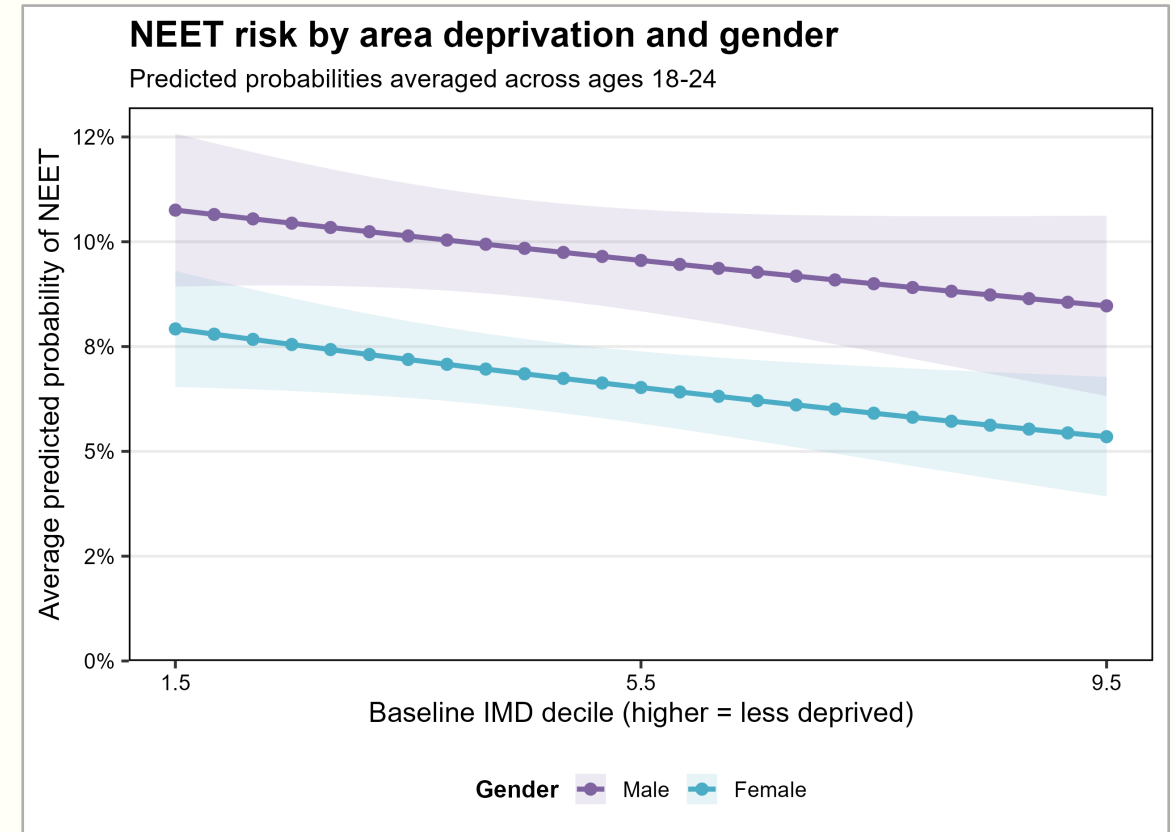
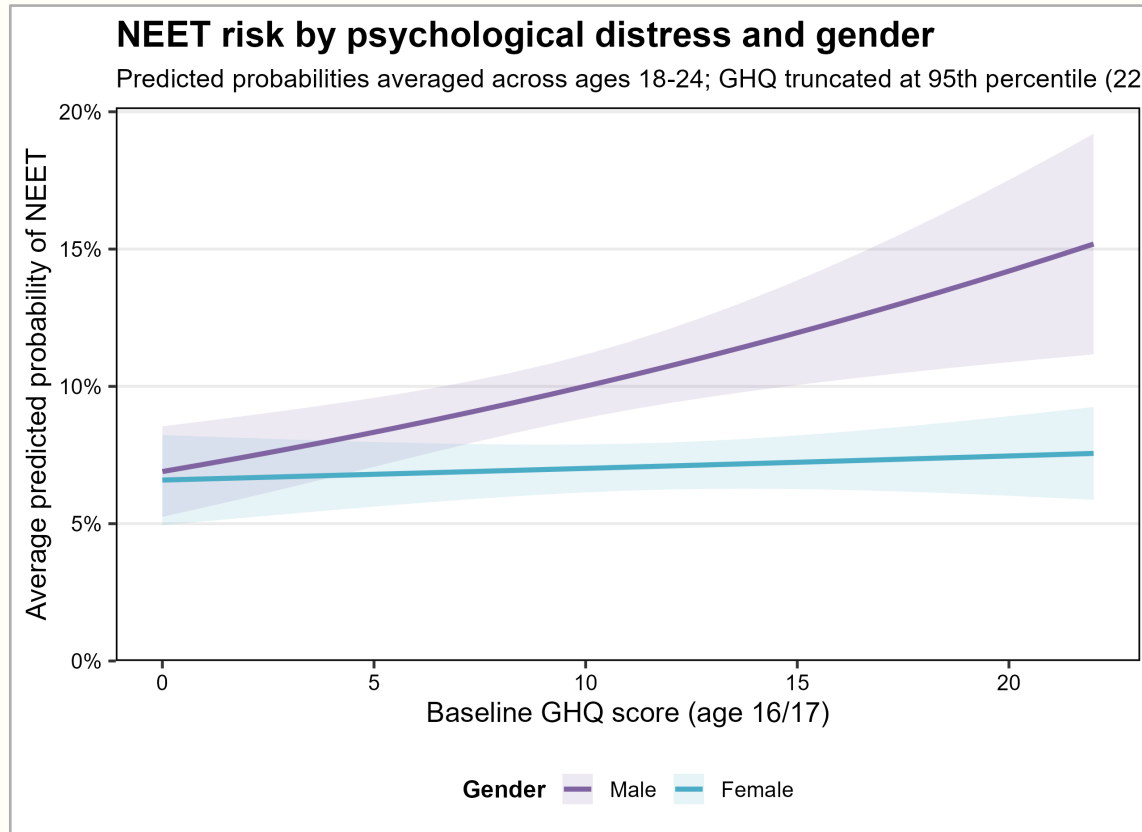


RQ3: Does area deprivation modify the distress-NEET relationship?





RQ4: Do associations differ by gender?





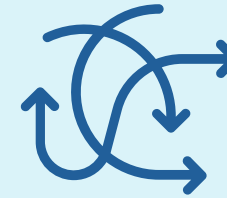
Results summary



Young people with
higher adolescent
distress had
higher predicted
NEET risk.



Young people in
more deprived
areas had higher
predicted NEET
risk.



Distress-NEET
gradient
appeared
steeper in less
deprived areas.



Distress-NEET
gradient appeared
stronger among
males than
females.





Implications



Early mental health support may have relevance for NEET prevention.



Place-based disadvantage remains important and should not be reduced to individual risk.



Policy responses need to recognise different pathways into NEET by gender and place.





Evaluation



1. Longitudinal design
2. Repeated NEET measurement
3. Multiple imputation

1. Residual confounding
2. Limited power
3. NEET is a diverse category





Conclusion

Higher adolescent psychological distress and area deprivation were associated with increased risk of being in the NEET category, with the distress-NEET association appearing stronger among men.





References

1. Milburn, A. (2026) *Young People and Work: Interim Report*. Department for Work and Pensions. Available at: GOV.UK. Accessed: 8 June 2026.
2. Judge, L., Clegg, A., Diniz, J., Cominetti, N. and Stone, I. (2026) *Lost in transition: An examination of why the UK NEET rate is high and rising*. Resolution Foundation.
<https://doi.org/10.63492/cxo2244>
3. Beshir, H., Kelly, D., Fitzsimons, E. and Macmillan, L. (2026) *Post-16 transitions and destinations: Initial findings from the Millennium Cohort Study at Age 23*. Centre for Longitudinal Studies, UCL.





Thank you!



We'd love to hear from you! Contact us via email at equalise@ucl.ac.uk

