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The wellbeing of secondary school children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

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Research funded by



Background

- Despite much research on the **personal wellbeing** of children, we know little about children with **SEN**
- Children with SEN can have a **range** of needs (learning difficulties; social & emotional; communication etc.)
- ...and hence may **experience** school and other aspects of life differently from children without SEN
 - Greater risk of **bullying** (Chatzitheochari et al, 2014)
 - More likely to be **excluded** or **absent** from school (DfE, 2016)
 - Needs that may make it **harder to learn** than most children
- These factors may contribute to **lower levels** of wellbeing

Ipsos MORI in partnership with Dr. Agnes Haines
Research on child wellbeing.



Good Childhood Report 2017



Lack of data

- We have lots of data on child wellbeing
 - e.g. from surveys - BHPS, USoc, MCS, GCS, OECD, ONS
- We have data on SEN status
 - e.g. from School Census (and some 'subjective' measures from surveys)
- But lack of data on child wellbeing AND SEN status
 - Rarely collected in the same dataset
 - FACS, MCS5

Research Questions

- What is the personal wellbeing of children with SEN?
- Do levels of personal wellbeing of children with SEN differ from levels of personal wellbeing of children without SEN?
- Is having SEN independently associated with levels of personal wellbeing (and which other factors are)?

[We also explored children's psychological wellbeing]

- Where is the data that lets us explore these issues?



Data source: Linked USoc-NPD dataset

National Pupil Database



- Contains detailed information on every child at school in England
- Information collected via School Census (three times a year)
- Exam results
- Attendance
- Socio and economic background, including **SEN**
- Does not collect wellbeing information

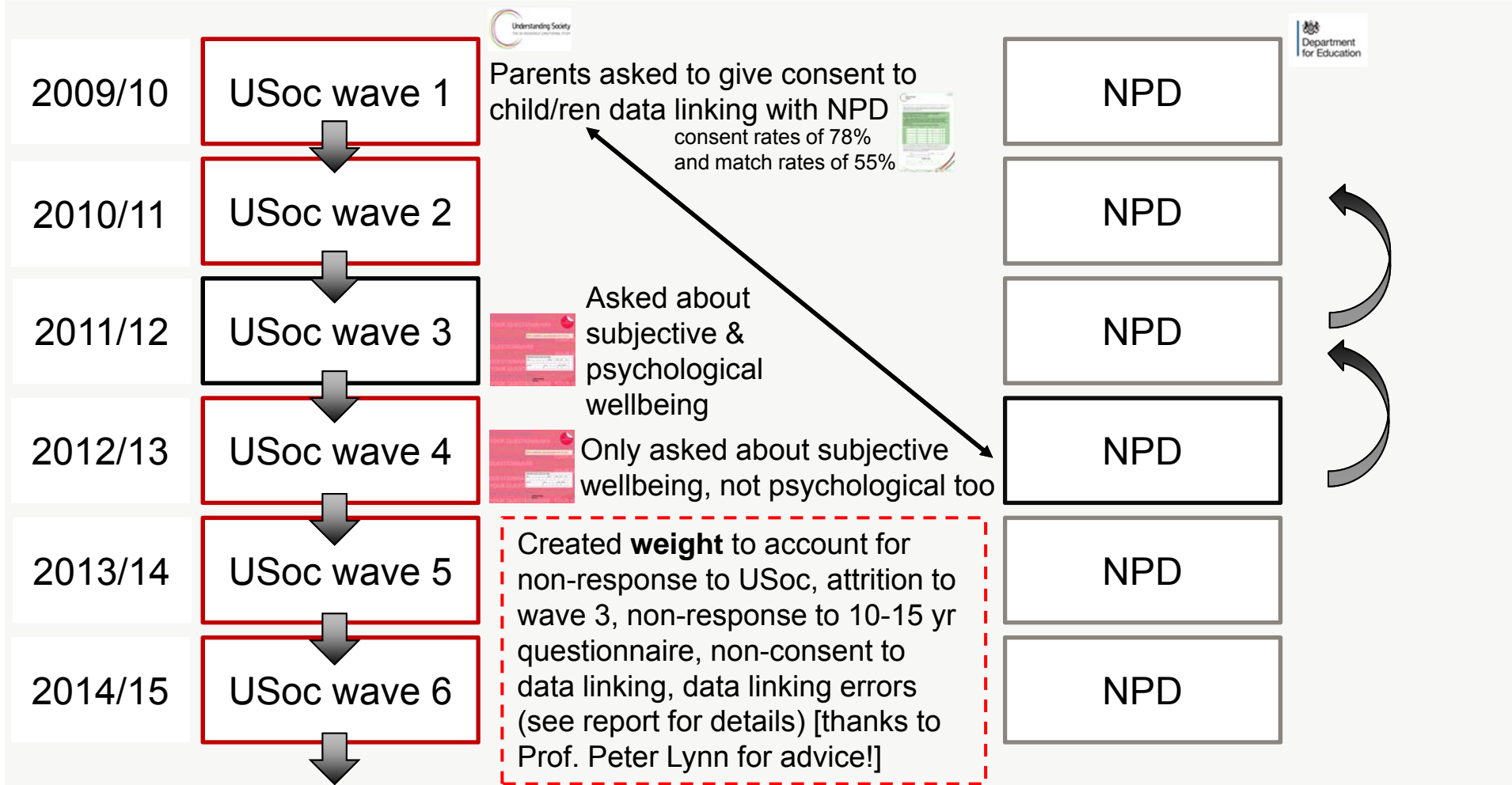


Understanding Society



- Annual panel survey from 2009/10
- 40,000 households
- Adults and children 10-15 years
- Socio-demographic & economic background
- Family relationships
- Health & wellbeing of parents
- Child behaviours & attitudes
- Family relationships
- **Subjective & psychological wellbeing of children (10-15 years)**
- Does not collect SEN information

The linked USoc-NPD dataset



Measuring Special Educational Needs

- 1,600 children aged 10-15 used in analysis

Table 2.1 Number of children (aged 10-15) in the linked data according to SEN support category

| Special Educational Needs support category | | Number of children in linked dataset |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| No Special Educational Needs | | 1,301 |
| Children with Special Educational Needs | School Action or Early Years Action | 176 |
| | School Action Plus or Early Years Action Plus | 77 |
| | Statement | 46 |
| | All with Special Educational Needs | 299 |
| All children | | 1,600 |

Source: Understanding Society – National Pupil Database (linked dataset)

- Data predates recent SEN(D) reforms
- Analysis does not differentiate support type
 - School Action / School Action Plus / Statement
- ...nor area of need
 - Learning difficulty; social emotional & mental health; speech, language & communication; hearing, visual, autism etc.

- USoc-NPD data broadly mirrors NPD
- One in five children aged 10-15 have SEN
- Boys and FSM children at higher risk of having SEN (know this from NPD data)

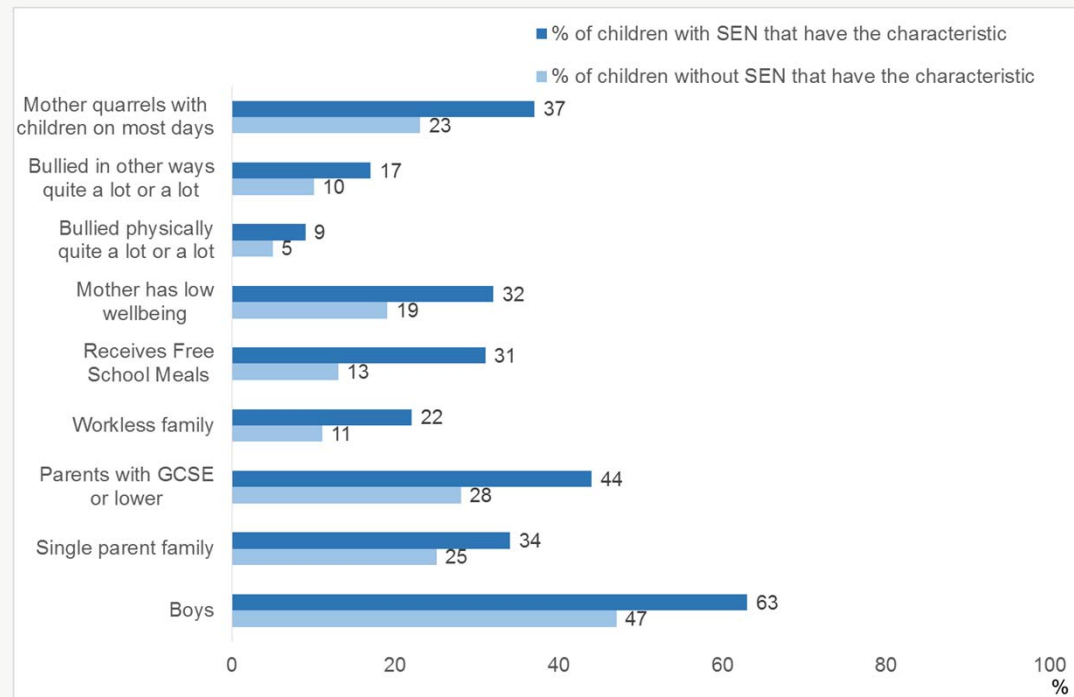
Table 2. Percentage of children (aged 10-15) that have SEN by child characteristics

| Child characteristic | | % of children with SEN | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|---------------|-----|
| | | USoc-NPD linked data | Full NPD | |
| | | Weighted % | Base of % (n) | % |
| All children | | 19% | 1600 | 19% |
| Gender | Boys | 24% | 803 | 27% |
| | Girls | 14% | 797 | 16% |
| Ethnic group | White | 18% | 1188 | 19% |
| | Ethnic minority | 20% | 406 | 19% |
| Language | English | 18% | 1367 | 19% |
| | Not English | 20% | 229 | 19% |
| Eligible for Free School Meals | No | 15% | 1322 | 16% |
| | Yes | 35% | 278 | 34% |

Source: Understanding Society – National Pupil Database (linked dataset)
Full NPD % taken from Department for Education's published SEN statistics (DfE, 2013)

Which children have Special Educational Needs?

- Most of the characteristics data comes from USoc
- Children with SEN may have other characteristics that impact on their levels of wellbeing
- Characteristics are likely to vary according to area of need

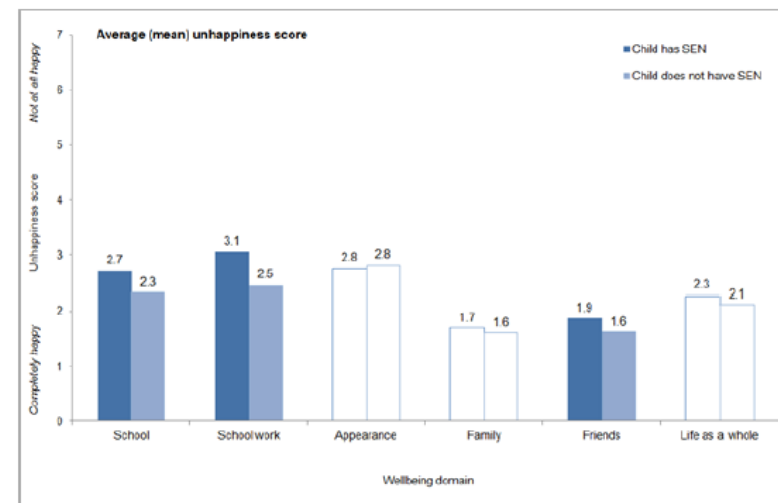


Subjective wellbeing - average levels of ‘unhappiness’



- Higher score = more unhappy
- Overall, children happiest with family & friends, unhappiest with school work & appearance
- Children with SEN have higher levels of unhappiness, than children without SEN, with:
 - school work** (mean score 3.1 compared to 2.5)
 - school** (mean score 2.7 compared to 2.3)
 - friends** (mean score 1.9 compared to 1.6)
- No difference for appearance, family, life as a whole

Figure 1. Subjective wellbeing of children aged 10-15 by SEN status: Average unhappiness score



Source: Understanding Society – National Pupil Database (linked dataset)
The left (dark) bars in each pair of bars represent children with SEN
The right (light) bars in each pair of bars represent children without SEN
White bars indicate no statistically significant difference between children with and without SEN

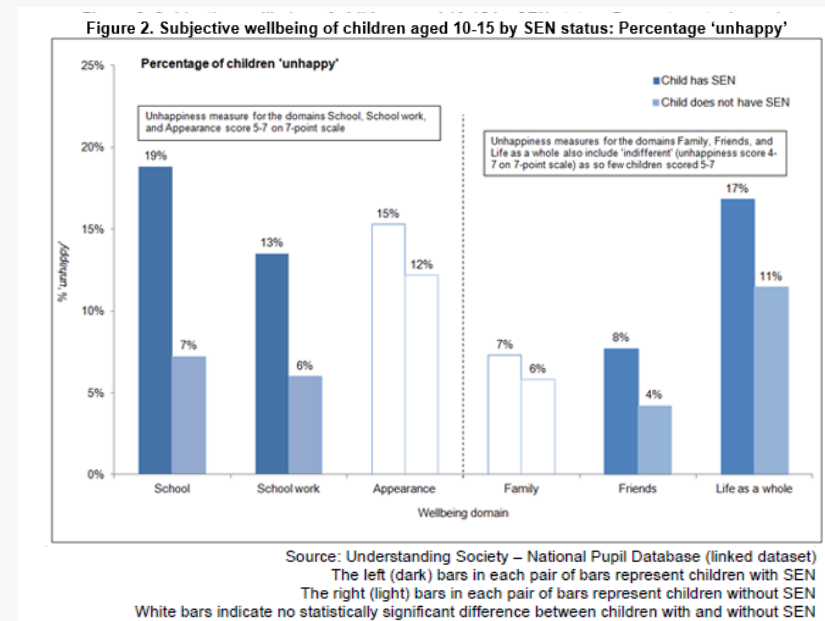
Subjective wellbeing – percentage ‘unhappy’



- ‘Unhappiness threshold’
 - 5+ for school, school work & appearance
 - 4+ for family, friends, and life as a whole (indifferent/unhappy)

- Children with SEN are more likely than children without SEN to be ‘unhappy’ with:
 - **school** (19 per cent compared to 7 per cent)
 - **school work** (13 per cent compared to 6 per cent),
 - **friends** (8 per cent compared to 4 per cent)
 - **life as a whole** (17 per cent compared to 11 per cent)

- No difference for appearance and family



Is having SEN independently associated with child wellbeing?



1. Linear regression model
 - Dependent variable: **Unhappiness score (1-7)**
2. Logistic regression model
 - Dependent variable: **'Unhappy' / not 'unhappy'**
 - Model for each wellbeing domain
 - School you go to
 - School work
 - Appearance
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Life as a whole

Independent variables:

▪ Special Educational Needs

Personal characteristics of child

- Gender
- Ethnic group
- Language

Family characteristics

- Family type
- Age of mother
- Number of dependent children
- Age of youngest child

Family economic background

- Highest parental qualification
- Work status
- Household income
- Free School Meal eligibility

Child behaviours

- Risky behaviours (alcohol etc.)
- Amount of screen time
- Being bullied at school

Child relationship with parents

- Family meals together
- Talk about important matters

Mental health

- Strengths & difficulties

Health and wellbeing of mother

- Long-standing illness / disability
- Subjective wellbeing
- Life satisfaction

Is having SEN independently associated with child wellbeing?

- Evidence of a link between SEN and unhappiness with **schooling**

‘Unhappiness’ score

- After taking the other factors into account having SEN is only associated with **school work** (it is no longer associated with school or friends)

Being ‘unhappy’

- After taking the other factors into account, children with SEN were more likely than children without SEN to say they were unhappy with their **school** (it is no longer associated with school work, friends, or life as a whole)

Table 3. Subjective wellbeing: Regression analysis to isolate impact of having SEN
Increase in unhappiness score for children with SEN compared to children without SEN

| Wellbeing domain (and model: Linear regression analysis) | Coef. ¹ | Std. Err. | Sig. |
|--|-------------------------|-----------|------|
| School | | | |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (No control variables) | 0.39 | 0.13 | 0.00 |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (All control variables ²) | 0.05 | 0.11 | 0.65 |
| School work | | | |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (No control variables) | 0.60 | 0.10 | 0.00 |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (All control variables ²) | 0.28 | 0.09 | 0.00 |
| Appearance | | | |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (No control variables) | -0.06 | 0.12 | 0.64 |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (All control variables ²) | -0.21 | 0.10 | 0.04 |
| Family | | | |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (No control variables) | 0.09 | 0.08 | 0.26 |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (All control variables ²) | -0.03 | 0.07 | 0.72 |
| Friends | | | |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (No control variables) | 0.25 | 0.09 | 0.00 |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (All control variables ²) | 0.04 | 0.07 | 0.56 |
| Life as a whole | | | |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (No control variables) | 0.17 | 0.09 | 0.06 |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (All control variables ²) | -0.11 | 0.07 | 0.12 |
| Odds of being unhappy for children with SEN compared to children without SEN | | | |
| Wellbeing domain (and model: Logistic regression analysis) | Odds Ratio ² | Std. Err. | Sig. |
| Not happy with school | | | |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (No control variables) | 2.96 | 0.69 | 0.00 |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (All control variables ²) | 1.84 | 0.53 | 0.04 |
| Not happy with school work | | | |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (No control variables) | 2.46 | 0.56 | 0.00 |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (All control variables ²) | 1.24 | 0.37 | 0.47 |
| Not happy with appearance | | | |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (No control variables) | 1.30 | 0.27 | 0.20 |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (All control variables ²) | 1.09 | 0.28 | 0.74 |
| Indifferent / Not happy with family | | | |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (No control variables) | 1.14 | 0.30 | 0.63 |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (All control variables ²) | 0.95 | 0.33 | 0.88 |
| Indifferent / Not happy with friends | | | |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (No control variables) | 1.79 | 0.51 | 0.04 |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (All control variables ²) | 0.95 | 0.41 | 0.90 |
| Indifferent / Not happy with life as a whole | | | |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (No control variables) | 1.51 | 0.29 | 0.03 |
| Children with SEN compared to children without SEN (All control variables ²) | 0.75 | 0.22 | 0.32 |

Source: Understanding Society – National Pupil Database (linked dataset)

¹ The increase in unhappiness score for children with SEN compared to children without SEN
² An odds ratio greater (less) than one means higher (lower) odds of children with SEN being unhappy
³ See Figure 9 for full list of control variables and Annex D for more detailed regression results

What other factors were associated with child wellbeing?

- Factors **other** than having SEN are also independently associated with low subjective wellbeing
- These can vary according to the **domain** of subjective wellbeing
- Some factors are **prominent** across a number of wellbeing domains:
 - being a **girl**
 - being **bullied** (whether physical or non-physical)
 - having higher levels of **psychological difficulties**

Table 4. Factors associated with unhappiness (grey cells¹), Regression analysis

| | School | | School work | | Appearance | | Family | | Friends | | Life as a whole | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Sc ² | Un ³ | Sc ² | Un ³ | Sc ² | Un ³ | Sc ² | Un ³ | Sc ² | Un ³ | Sc ² | Un ³ |
| Has Special Educational Needs | | | | | -ve | | | | | | | |
| Characteristics of child | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Older | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Girl | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| White | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Family background | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lower household income | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Eligible for Free School Meals | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Working family (not full time) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| High parental education | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Single parent | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Age of youngest child: 5-10 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Number of children: Higher | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Age of mother: Older | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Health of mother: Poor | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mother dissatisfied with life | | -ve | | | | | | -ve | | | | |
| Social relationships | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Child rarely talks to mother | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Child rarely talks to father | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mother rarely discusses children | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mother quarrels with children | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Child bullied physically | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Child bullied in other ways | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Child psychological wellbeing | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Emotional problems | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Conduct problems | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Hyperactivity problems | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Peer relationship problems | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prosocial problems | | | | | | | | -ve | | | | |
| Child behaviours | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Has drank alcohol | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Smokes or has smoked | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| High screen time | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Environmental factors | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lives in rural area | | | | | | | | | | | | |

¹ '-ve' means the factor has a negative relationship with unhappiness

² Increase in unhappiness score

³ Higher odds of being unhappy (school, school work, appearance) or indifferent/unhappy (Friends, Family, Life as a whole)

Aside: We also looked at the association between SEN and psychological wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing ('difficulties')

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire:

- Emotional symptoms
 - Conduct problems
 - Hyperactivity
 - Peer relationships
 - Prosocial behaviour
- Our research shows that children with SEN have higher average **psychological difficulties** score across all domains
 - Children with SEN are also more likely than children without SEN to have **high / very high** psychological difficulties across all domains

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Now for some questions about how you see yourself as a person.

For each item, please tick the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you aren't absolutely certain. Please give your answers on the basis of how things have been for you over the last six months.

| | Not true | Somewhat true | Certainly true |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I try to be nice to other people. YPSDQA I care about their feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am restless, I cannot YPSDQB stay still for long | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I get a lot of headaches, YPSDQC stomach-aches or sickness | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I usually share with others | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Conclusions

- New **quantitative evidence** on link between SEN and wellbeing
- Children with SEN tend to have **lower levels** of subjective wellbeing than children without SEN when talking about their **school** and their **school work** – and also with their friends (an important element of school life)
- The link between SEN and wellbeing in relation to school exists when **controlling** for other factors
 - Perhaps unsurprising given children with SEN often require additional support with **educational needs**
- Some of the other factors linked to wellbeing are **disproportionately** associated with children with SEN
- Obviously **complex** interaction between SEN and a number of other factors that can impact on children's wellbeing

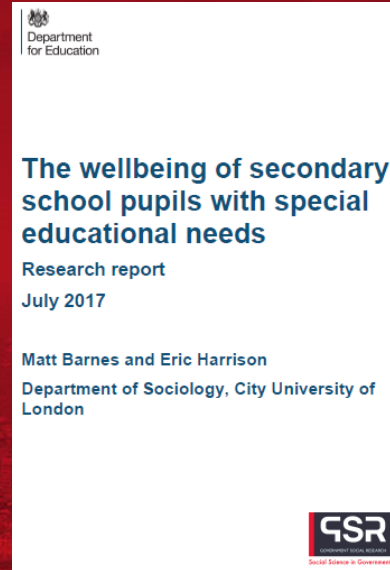
Limitations and further research

- Only secondary school children
- Likely to be differences by SEN support level and area of need
- How much less happy?
 - Difference for happiness with school work = 0.6 points (SEN 3.1 v Not SEN 2.5)
- Data linking (e.g. sample sizes, timing of information)
- New USoc-NPD data linking from USoc wave 4 consents?
- Longitudinal analysis – e.g. changes in SEN, wellbeing, other factors etc.



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The cover of the research report features the Department for Education logo at the top left. The title 'The wellbeing of secondary school pupils with special educational needs' is prominently displayed in a bold, dark blue font. Below the title, the text 'Research report' and 'July 2017' are listed. The authors' names, 'Matt Barnes and Eric Harrison', and their affiliation, 'Department of Sociology, City University of London', are provided. At the bottom right, the GSR (Government Social Research) logo is visible, with the tagline 'Social Science in Government' underneath.

Department
for Education

**The wellbeing of secondary
school pupils with special
educational needs**

Research report
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