

Who is Missing Out on School? Exploring Socioeconomic Inequalities in School Absenteeism

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- The literature consistently found that low-SES students have a higher risk of school absenteeism than high-SES students (for a meta-analysis on risk factors see Gubbels et al., 2019)
- **But:** Studies rarely look at different dimensions of SES in a single study; most studies from US

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- Are there differences in the association between social background characteristics and types of school absenteeism (truancy, sickness absence, temporary exclusion)?
- Are these relationships moderated by gender and place of residence?

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- Neighbourhood mechanisms (e.g. air pollution, neighbourhood and school conditions, exposure to crime)

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- Period poverty (Phillips-Howard et al., 2016) may lead to greater sickness-related absenteeism among girls from lower social backgrounds.

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- Urban schools tend to suspend more students than rural schools (Achilles et al., 2007).
- Pupils in urban areas are also more likely to be truant than students from rural areas (Darmody et al., 2008; Sheldon and Epstein, 2004)
→ Social inequalities in school absenteeism may be less pronounced in rural areas than in urban areas

Data: Scottish Longitudinal Study

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- Controls: sex, place of residence (urban vs. rural), ethnicity (white vs. non-white), child's age, mother's age at birth, year of schooling

- Dependent variable as proportion of half-days absent (overall, truancy, sickness-related): Fractional logistic regression

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- Results are based on complete cases (n=4620)

Descriptives

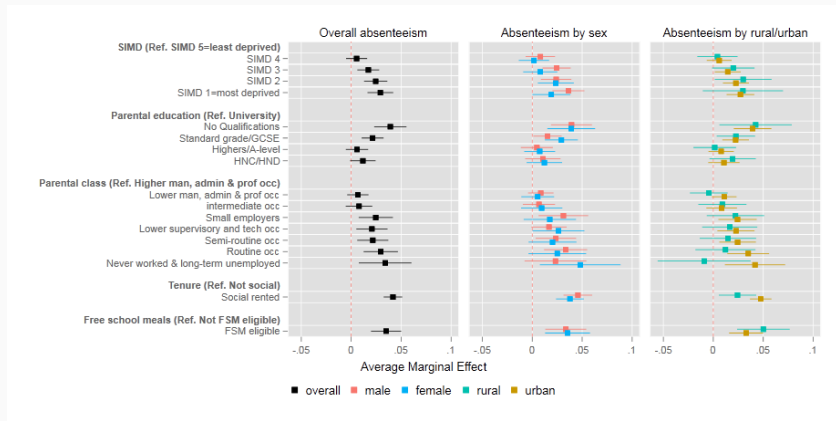
| | Proportion/Mean | SD |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-------|
| Overall absenteeism | 14.13 | 12.99 |
| Truancy | 1.78 | 5.37 |
| Sickness-related | 4.68 | 6.70 |
| Temporary exclusion | 0.05 | |
| Parental class | | |
| Service class | 0.42 | |
| Intermediate occ | 0.31 | |
| Working class | 0.23 | |
| Never worked and long-term unemployed | 0.04 | |
| Parental education | | |
| University | 0.27 | |
| HNC/HND | 0.11 | |
| Highers/A-level | 0.18 | |
| Standard Grade/GCSE | 0.31 | |
| No qualification | 0.14 | |

Descriptives (continued)

| | Proportion/Mean | SD |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----|
| Free school meal eligibility: yes | 0.09 | |
| Housing tenure: Socially rented | 0.28 | |
| SIMD | | |
| SIMD 5= least deprived | 0.21 | |
| SIMD 4 | 0.21 | |
| SIMD 3 | 0.20 | |
| SIMD 2 | 0.19 | |
| SIMD 1= most deprived | 0.18 | |
| Sex: Girls | 0.47 | |
| Place of residence: Rural | 0.22 | |

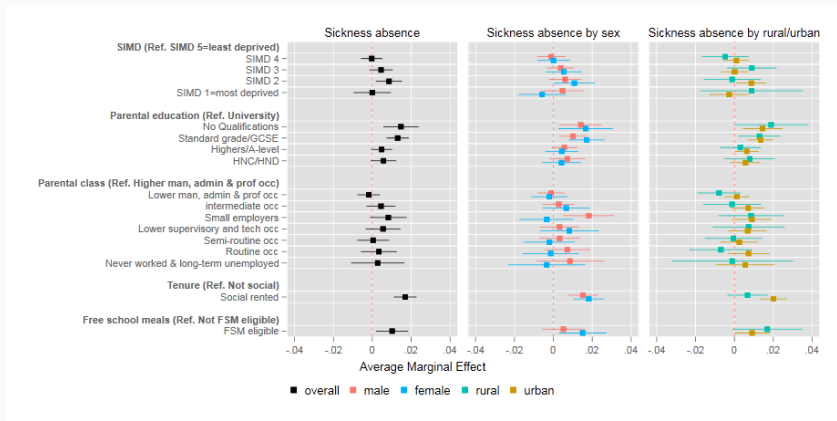
Source: Scottish Longitudinal Study, n=4620, own calculations

SES and overall absenteeism



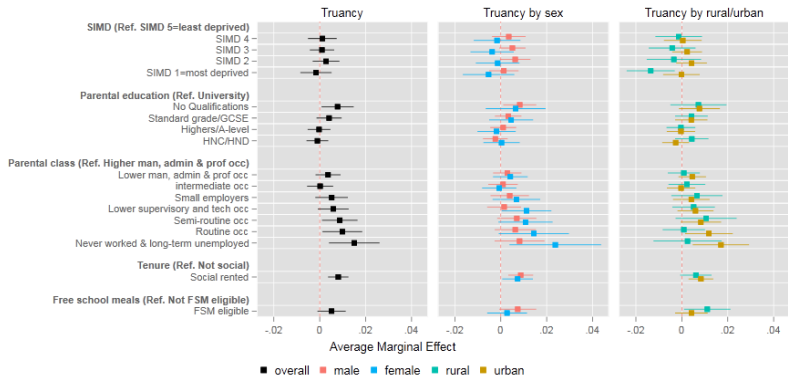
Source: Scottish Longitudinal Study, own calculations

SES and sickness absence



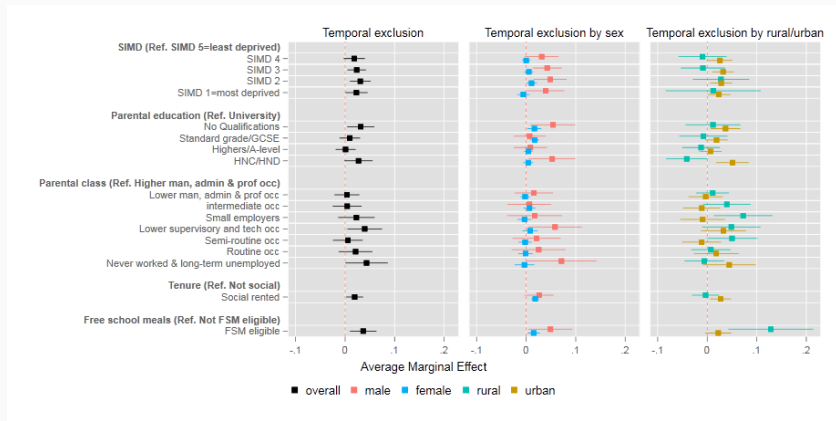
Source: Scottish Longitudinal Study, own calculations

SES and truancy



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SES and temporary exclusion



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Summary

- All social background characteristics including our neighbourhood indicator are uniquely associated with overall absenteeism
- Social rent and originating from households with no qualification are the most persistent social background measures associated with all types of absenteeism
- Main risk factors for sickness-related absenteeism: Parents with lower qualifications, social rent and free-school meal eligibility

- Main risk factors for truancy: Social class, housing tenure and parents with no qualifications

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- Main risk factors for exclusion: neighbourhood deprivation, social rent, free-school meal eligibility and parents with no qualifications → visible characteristics appear to influence exclusion although these are not necessarily related to truancy
- No moderation by gender and place of residence. However, trends suggest that social background has a stronger impact on the risk of exclusion among boys than among girls

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- **Limitations**

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 - **Poverty/Family income not directly measured**

Disclaimer

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The LSCS is supported by the ESRC/JISC, the Scottish Funding Council, the Chief Scientist's Office and the Scottish Government. The authors alone are responsible for the interpretation of the data. Census output is Crown copyright and is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO and the Queen's Printer for Scotland.

For more information on the SLS, please visit: <http://sls.lscs.ac.uk>

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Thank you!

Our SLS sample

Table 1. Structure of School Census Data by cohort

| STAGE COHORT | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 2007 School Census | | | | p1 | p2 | p3 | p4 | p5 | p6 | p7 | s1 | s2 | s3 | s4 | s5 | s6 |
| 2007 Exam results expected | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2008 School Census | | | p1 | p2 | p3 | p4 | p5 | p6 | p7 | s1 | s2 | s3 | s4 | s5 | s6 | |
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| 2010 School Census | | | p1 | p2 | p3 | p4 | p5 | p6 | p7 | s1 | s2 | s3 | s4 | s5 | s6 | |
| 2010 Exam results expected | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Number of pupils | cohort -2 | cohort -1 | cohort 0 | cohort 1 | cohort 2 | cohort 3 | cohort 4 | cohort 5 | cohort 6 | cohort 7 | cohort 8 | cohort 9 | cohort 10 | cohort 11 | cohort 12 | cohort 13 |
| All | 3005 | 2878 | 2903 | 3020 | 2994 | 3001 | 2919 | 3050 | 3226 | 3206 | 3412 | 3261 | 3376 | 3367 | 2582 | 1535 |

Source: Raab (2013)

- We focus on SLS members that passed through the school stages S3-S6 or S4-S6 in 2007-2010 (cohorts 10 and 11)
- and who were present during Census 2001 and for whom father and/or mother were identified

SES correlations

| | Parental class | Parental educ. | FSM | Housing | SIMD |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|------|---------|------|
| Parental class | 1 | 0.34 | 0.35 | 0.50 | 0.25 |
| Parental educ. | | 1 | 0.30 | 0.44 | 0.22 |
| FSM | | | 1 | 0.33 | 0.24 |
| Housing | | | | 1 | 0.45 |
| SIMD | | | | | 1 |

Note: Correlations based on Cramer's V; Source: Scottish Longitudinal Study, n=4620, own calculations