



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

**OxWell**  
Student Survey  
Young People's Health and Wellbeing

# The prevalence of eating difficulties and eating disorders in secondary school students in England

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Conference, 2025

# Background

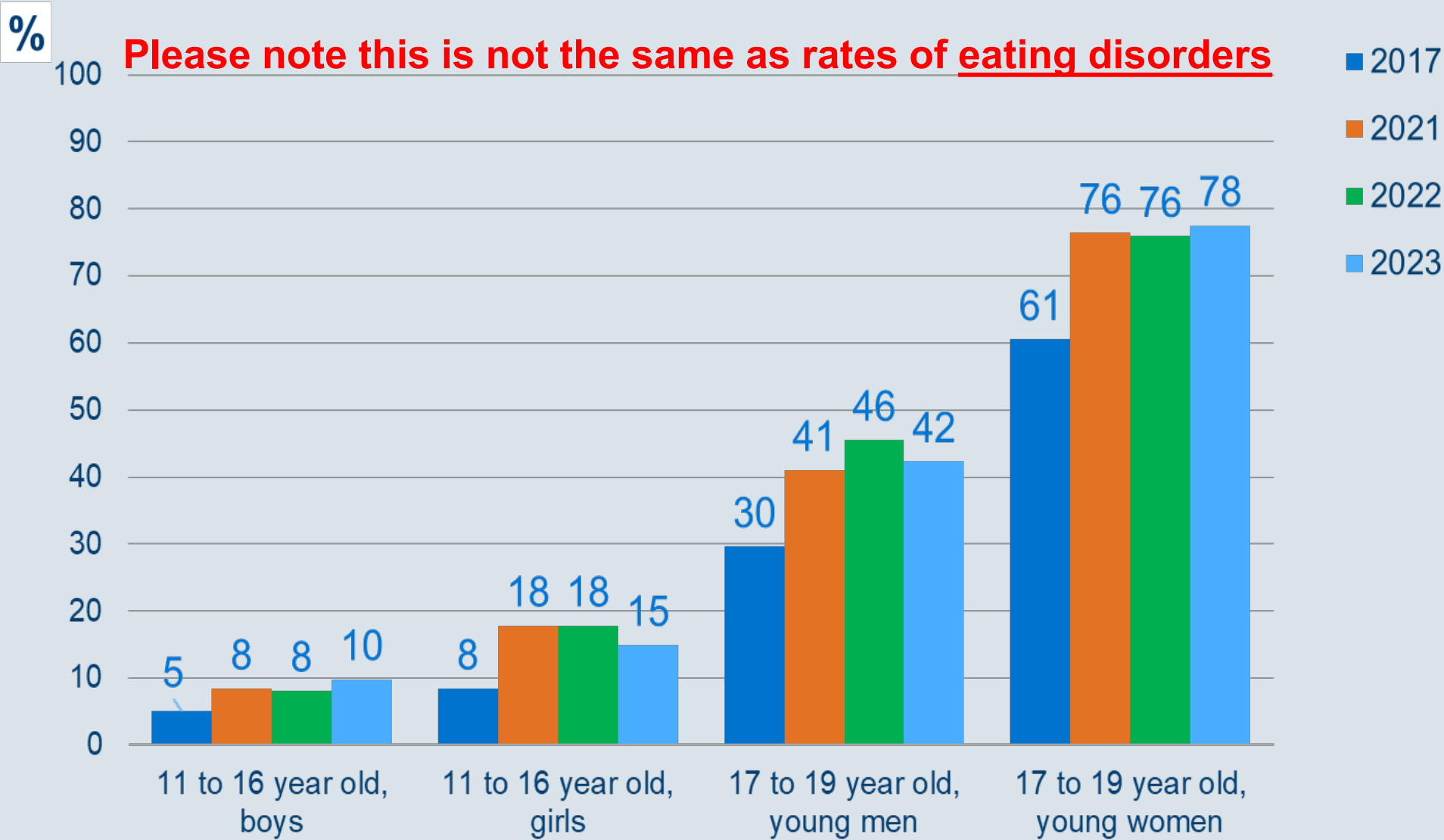


Eating difficulties /  
Disordered eating



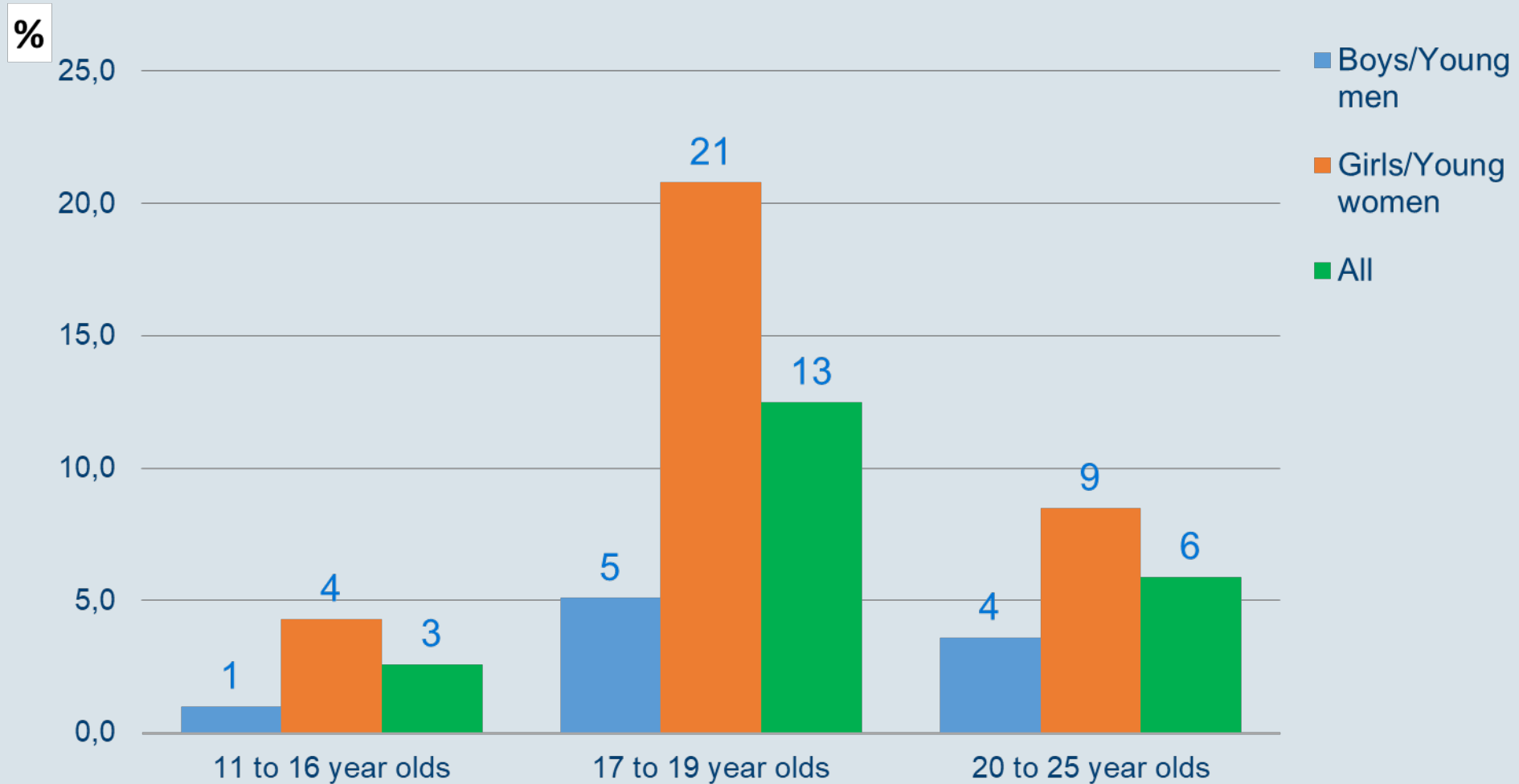
Eating disorder

# Eating difficulties according to DAWBA screen



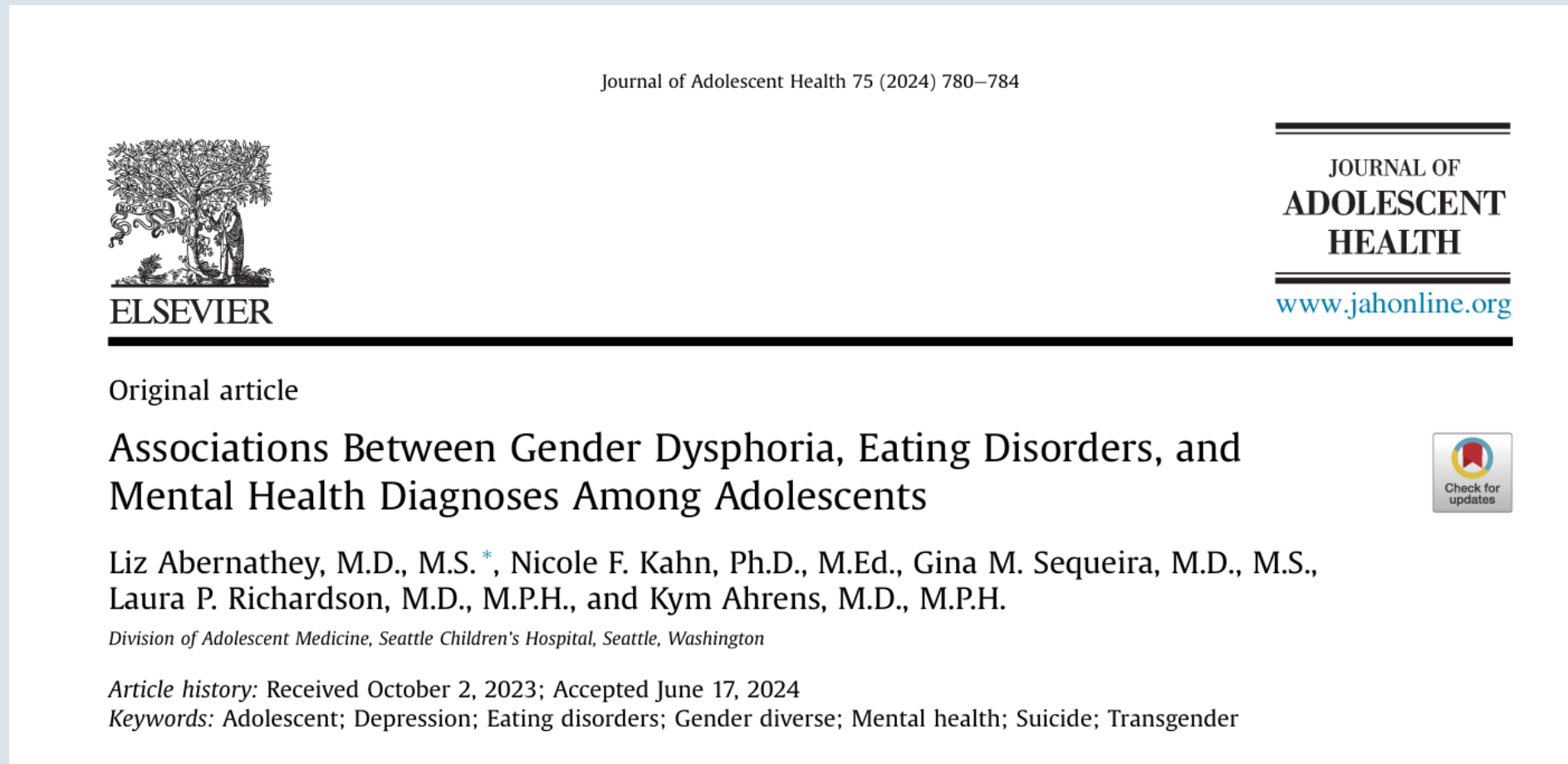
Source: NHS England. 11 to 19 year olds, England, 2023. Figure 5.1 in the report.

# Eating disorder DAWBA module 2023



Source: NHS England. 11 to 25 year olds, England, 2023. Figure 5.4 in the report.

# Background



Youth identifying as gender diverse had 3.7 times the odds of having an ED [CI]: 2.98–4.64 (n = 57,353) (Abernathey et al., 2024)

# Eating difficulties (DAWBA)

Have you ever thought you were fat even when other people told you were very thin?

Would you be ashamed if other people knew how much you eat?

Have you deliberately made yourself vomit (throw up)?

Do your worries about eating really interfere with your life?

If you eat too much, do you blame yourself a lot?

# Aims

- (I) To estimate the prevalence of eating difficulties and Eating Disorders in secondary school students in England adopting a gender inclusive approach
- (II) Analyse factors associated with increased odds of eating difficulties

# Methods

**n = 21, 676\***

**\*secondary  
school pupils  
with eating difficulties data**

Sandwell &  
Surrey  
818 students  
in 5 schools

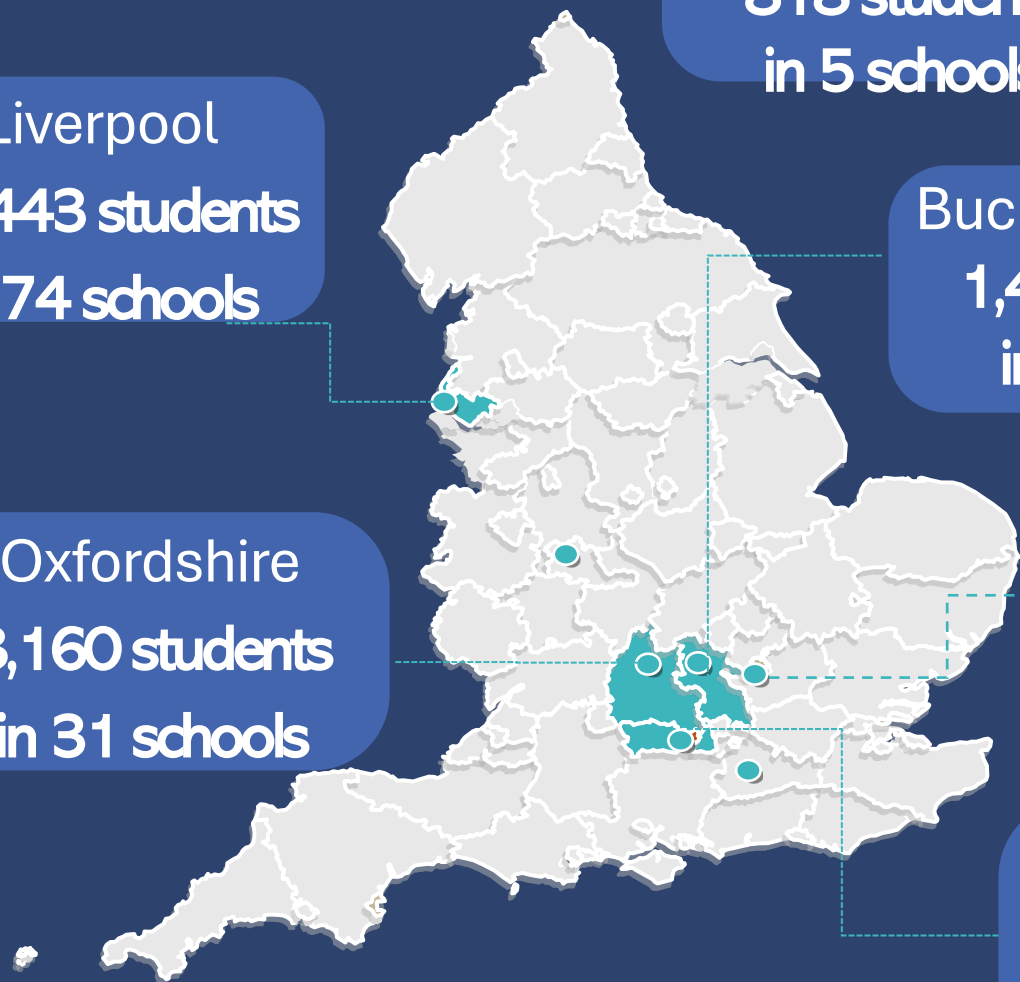
Liverpool  
17,443 students  
in 74 schools

Buckinghamshire  
1,458 students  
in 3 schools

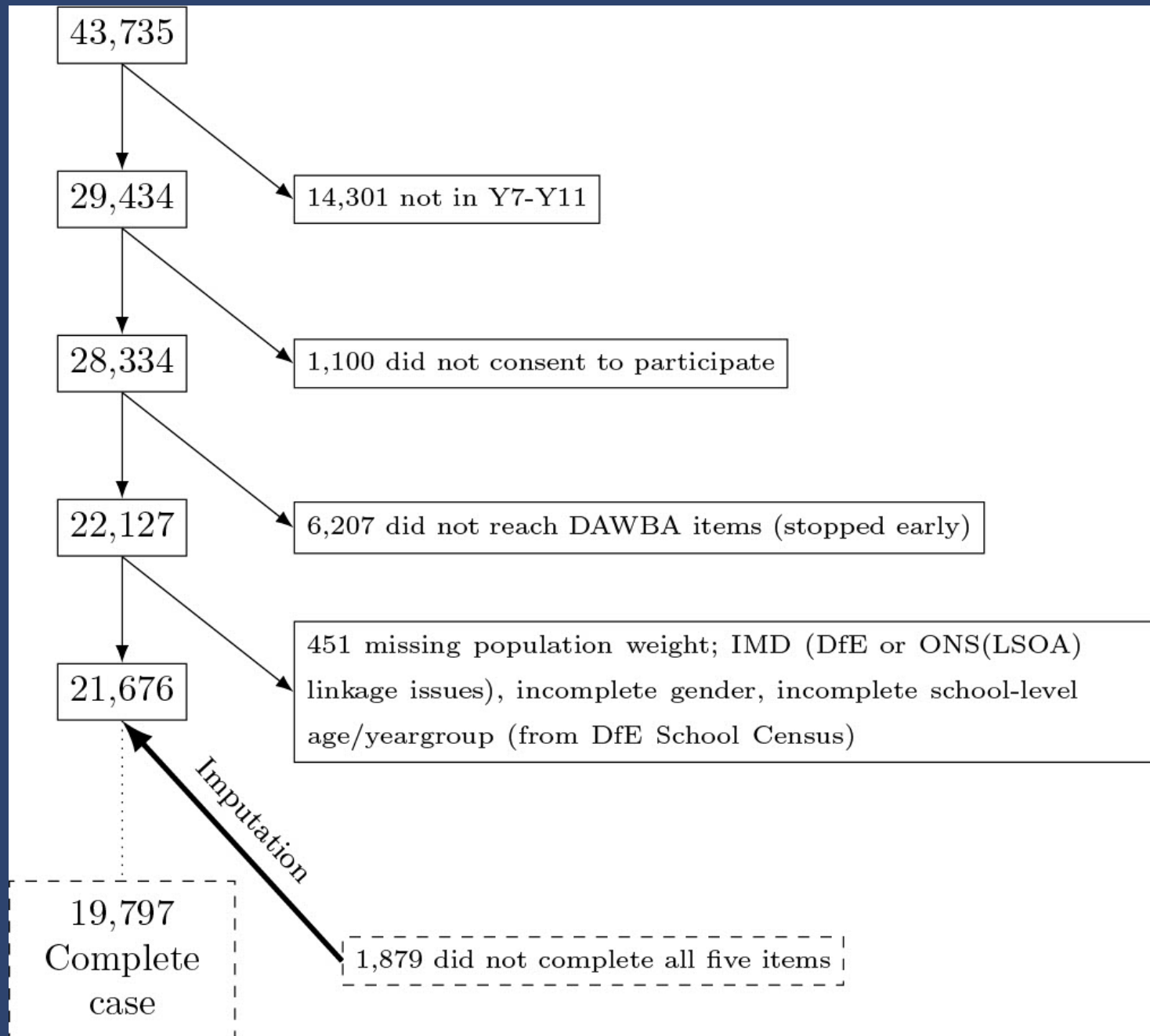
Milton Keynes  
2,879 students  
in 10 schools

Oxfordshire  
8,160 students  
in 31 schools

Berkshire  
12,976 students  
in 62 schools







# Methods



**Gender**



**Ethnic  
Group**



**Logistic  
Regressions**



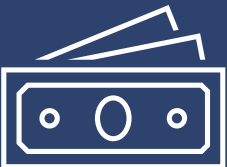
**Year  
Group**



**Eating  
Difficulties**

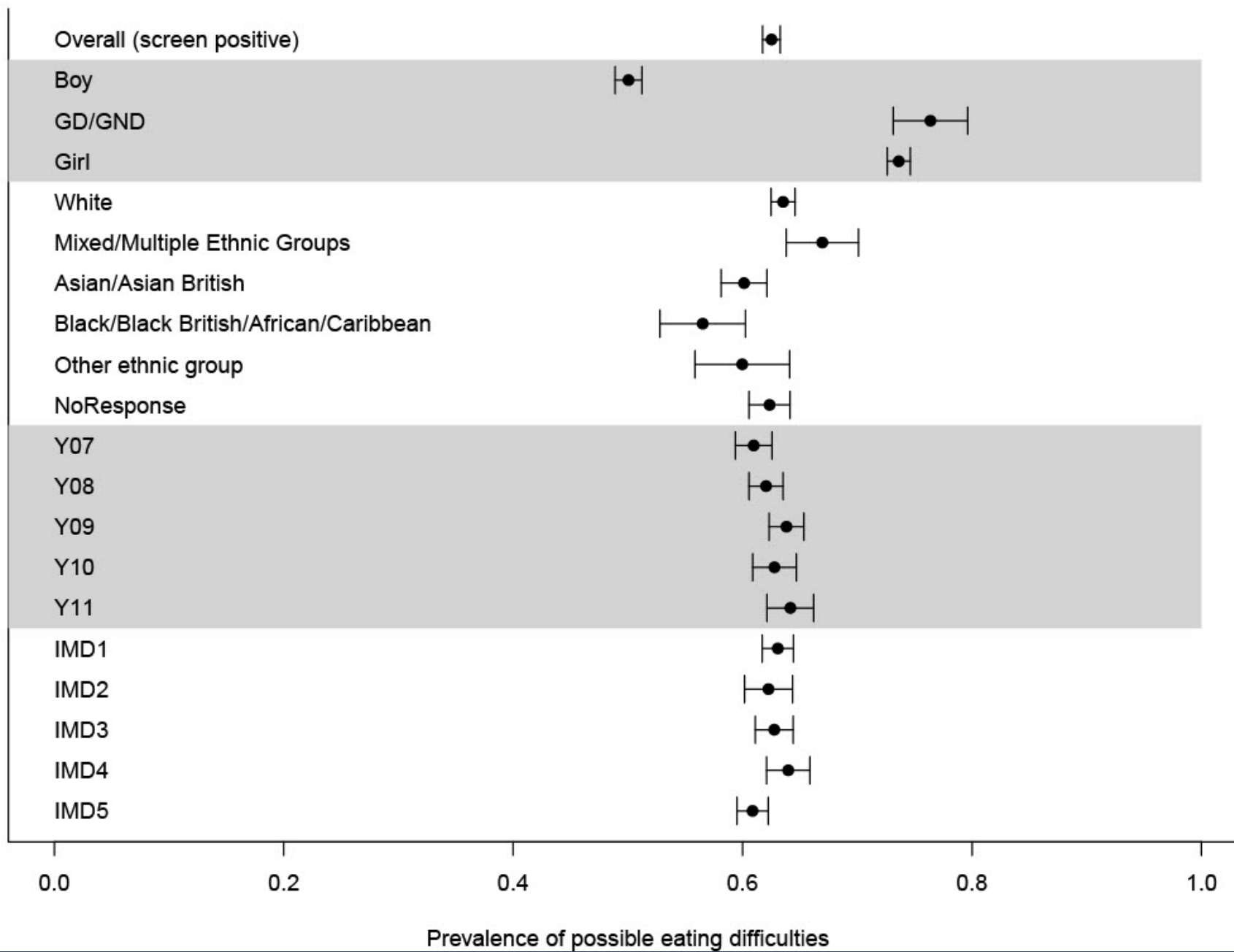


**Weights**

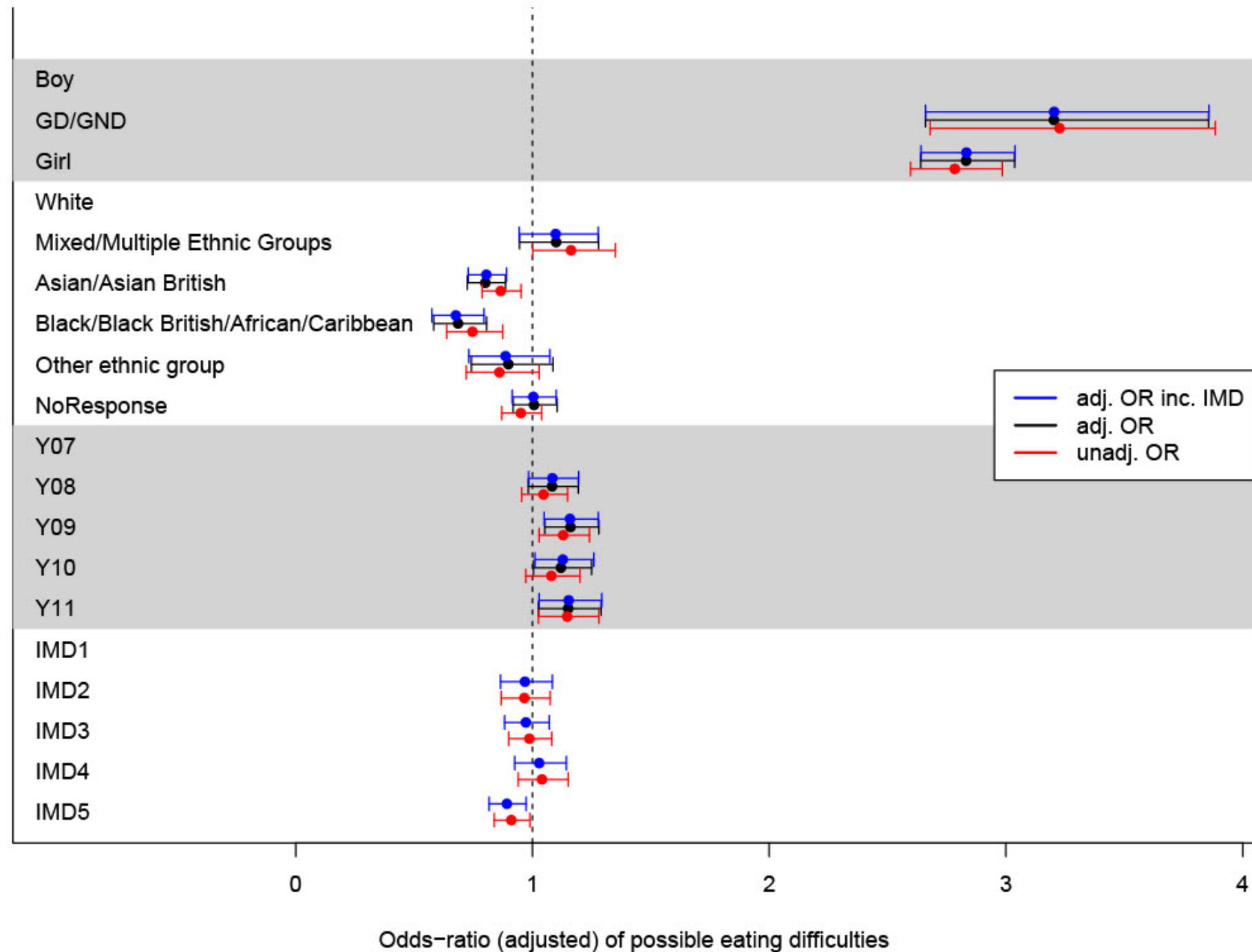


**Deprivation**

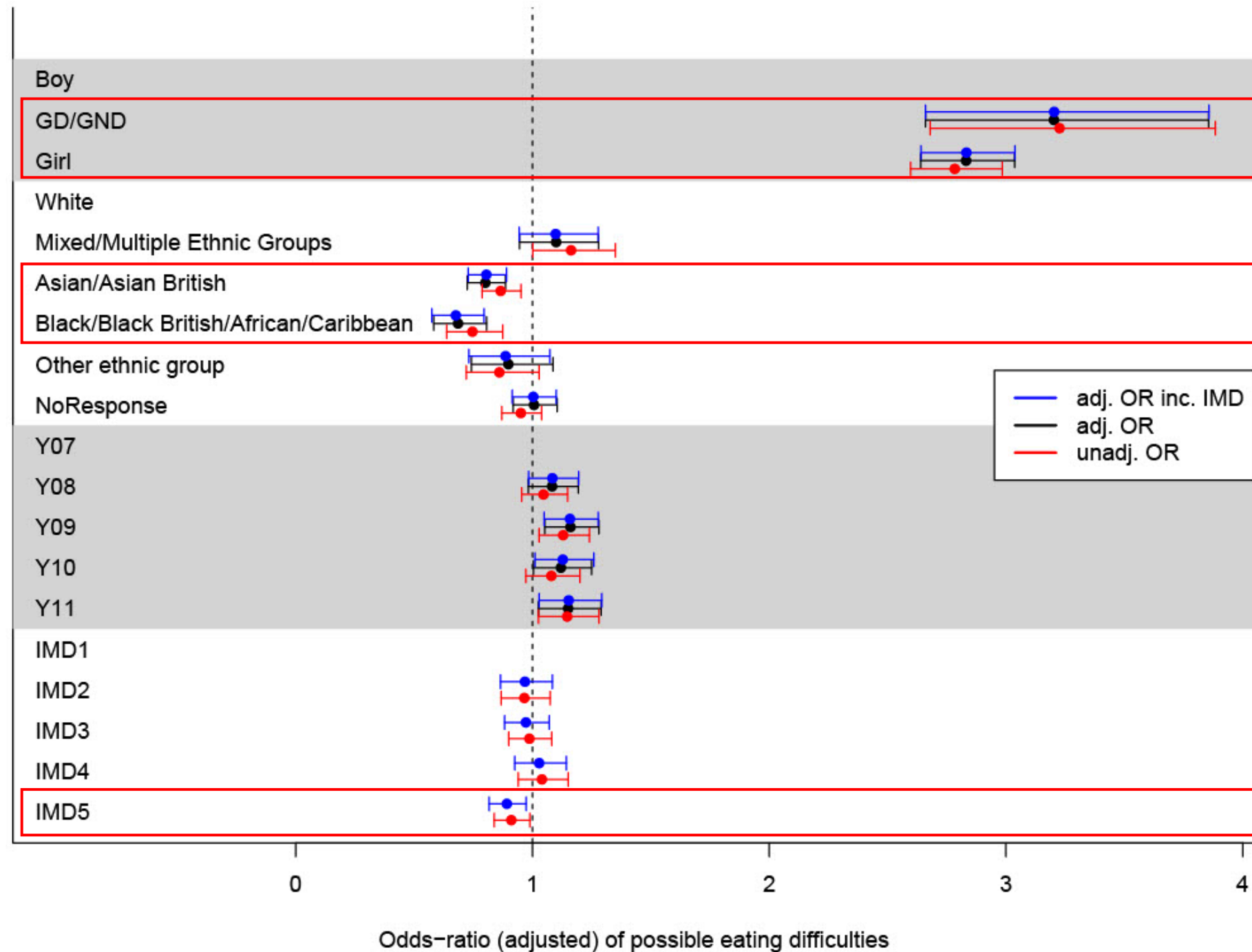
# Survey weighted prevalence of possible eating difficulties



# Variables associated with eating difficulties

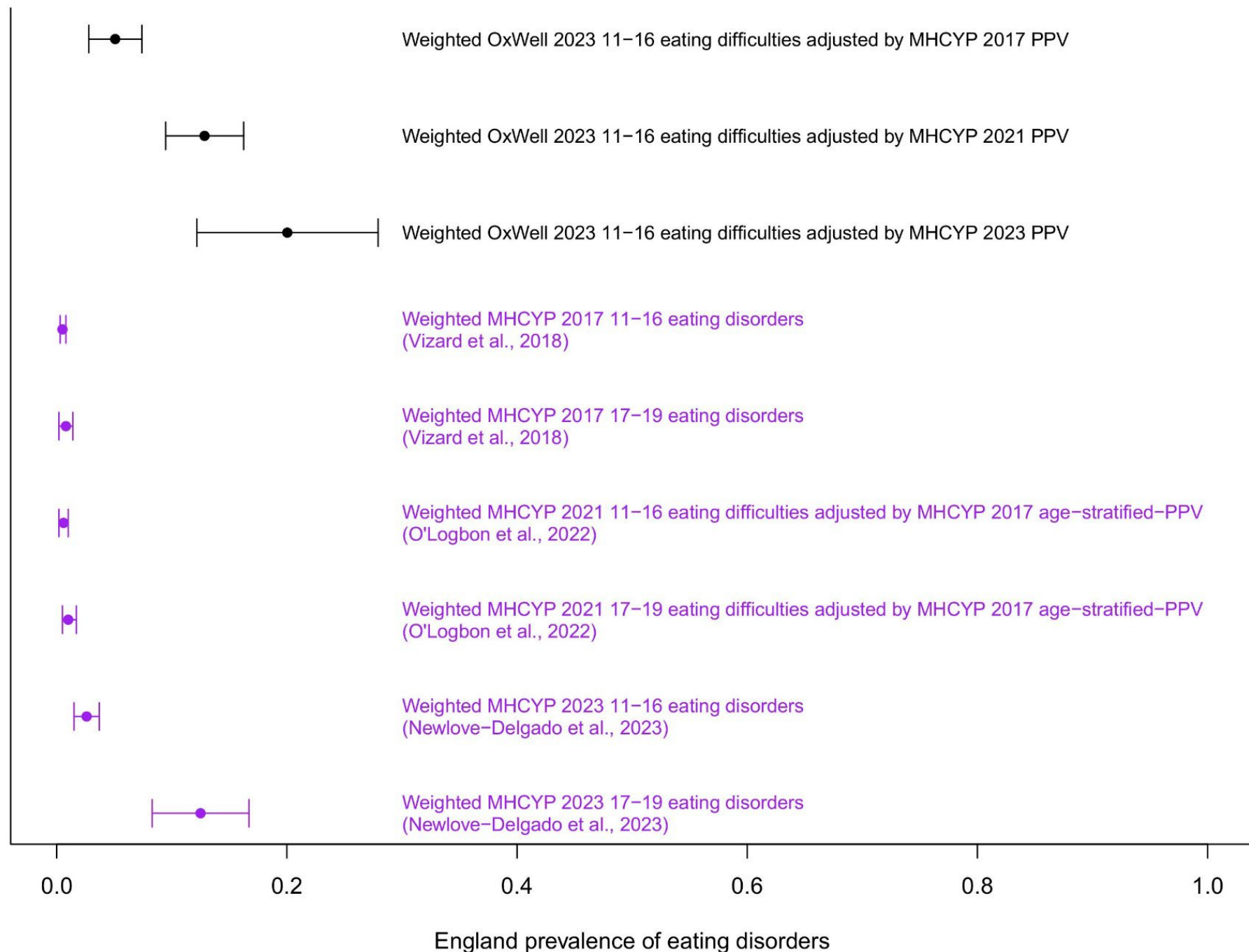


# Variables associated with eating difficulties



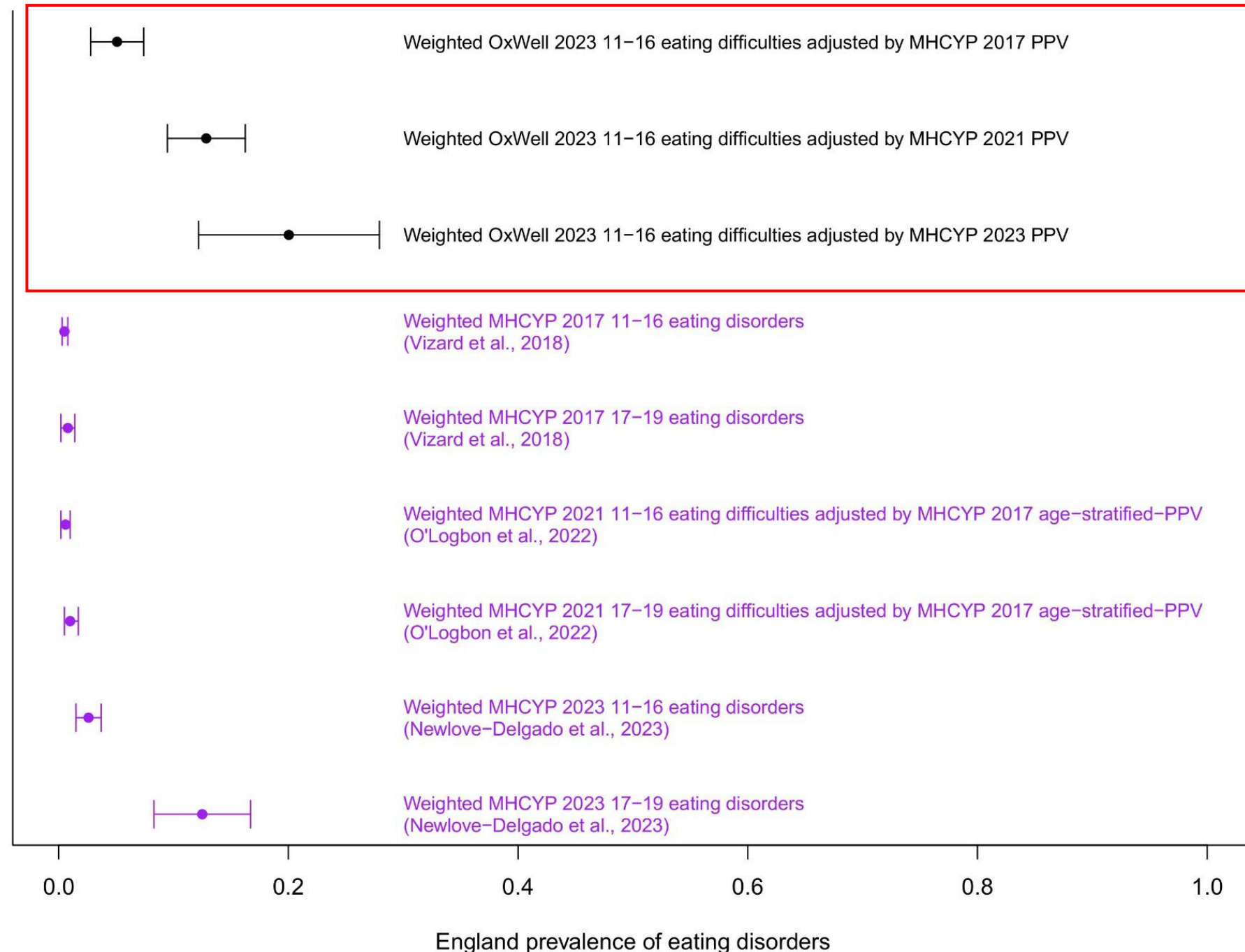
# Prevalence range of eating disorders

*Unpublished data, please  
do not share*



# Prevalence range of eating disorders in England

*Unpublished data, please  
do not share*



# Take home messages

- Gender diverse, girls and being in higher year groups are significant risk factors for presenting with disordered eating in secondary-school students
- Eating difficulties are common in children and young people
- Public health significance: potential for early interventions targeting disordered eating



# Acknowledgements

Professor Tamsin Ford

Professor Mina Fazel

The OxWell Study team

NHS Digital

The RESHAPE team

University of Oxford

University of Cambridge

ONS

Dr Simon White

Dr Emma Soneson

All the young people and families that took  
part in the survey



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# Thank you!



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