

# **Equality of condition? Exploring minority ethnic group experiences of education in Northern Ireland.**

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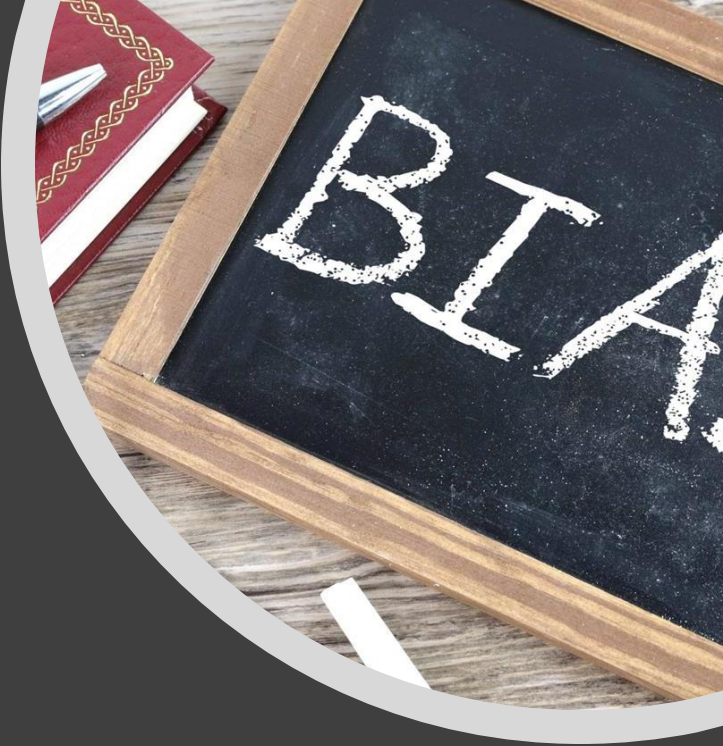
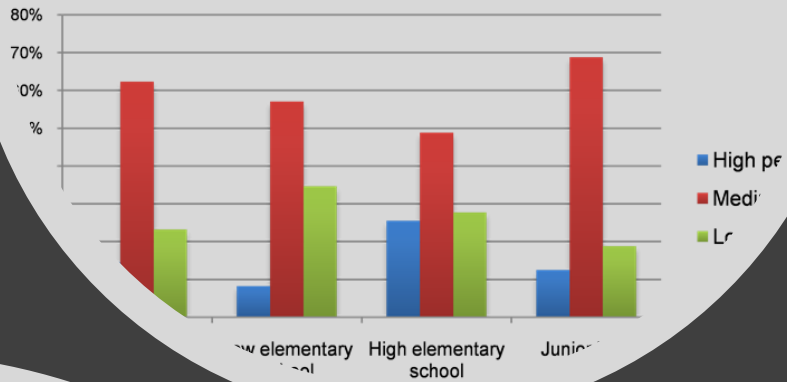


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# Inward migration v's NI Education System

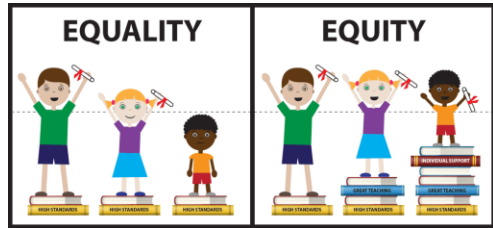


**ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE ACCORDING TO CHILDREN'S SCHOLAR GRADE**



Contributing variables to minority ethnic group disadvantage in education.





# ‘Equality of Condition’: Lynch and Baker (2015)

Four equality of condition problems:

1. *Equality in educational and related resources*
2. *Equality of respect and recognition in education*
3. *Equality of Power*
4. *Equality of love, care and solidarity*

- We draw on Lynch and Baker's 'Equality of Condition' framework to examine the experiences of minority ethnic families and how the distinctive characteristics of the NI education system may impact settlement, integration and equality.



# Methodology



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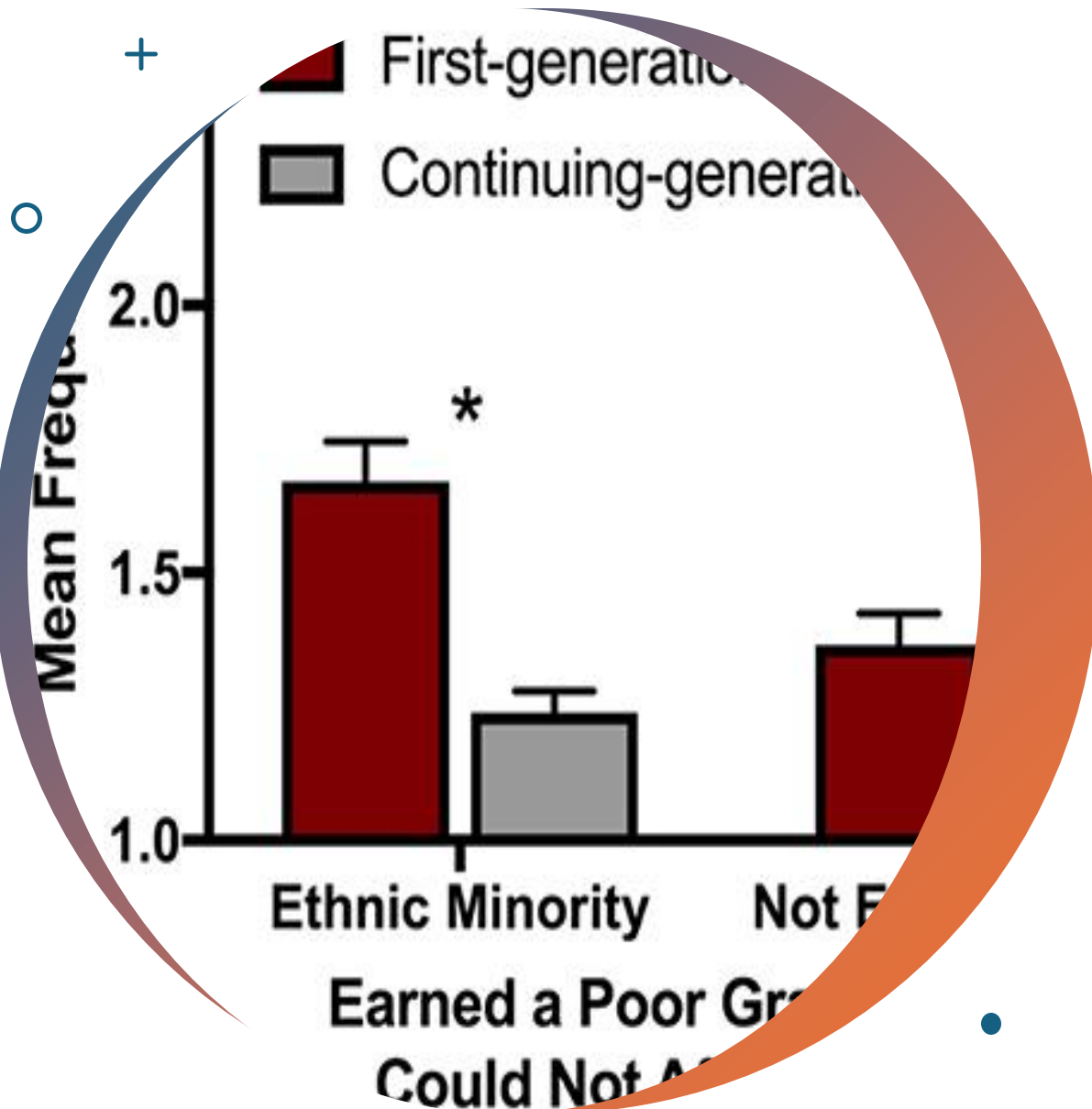
- Qualitative interviews with 62 children aged 9-15 (30 female and 32 male) and 53 parents (41 female and 12 male) from diverse minority ethnic backgrounds across Northern Ireland.
- Interviews and focus groups with 43 stakeholders, including educators, policymakers and representatives of statutory and voluntary agencies that work with minority ethnic communities.

# Findings

Several potentially disadvantaging factors emerged as particularly significant:

- Newcomer/refugee status v's more 'settled' status
- Schools' admission criteria
- The stratified and denominational structure of education in NI
- Racialized responses in education
- Educational and economic capital possessed by families and groups

# Minority status



- Complexities of the education system difficult to navigate, especially where English language competence was low:

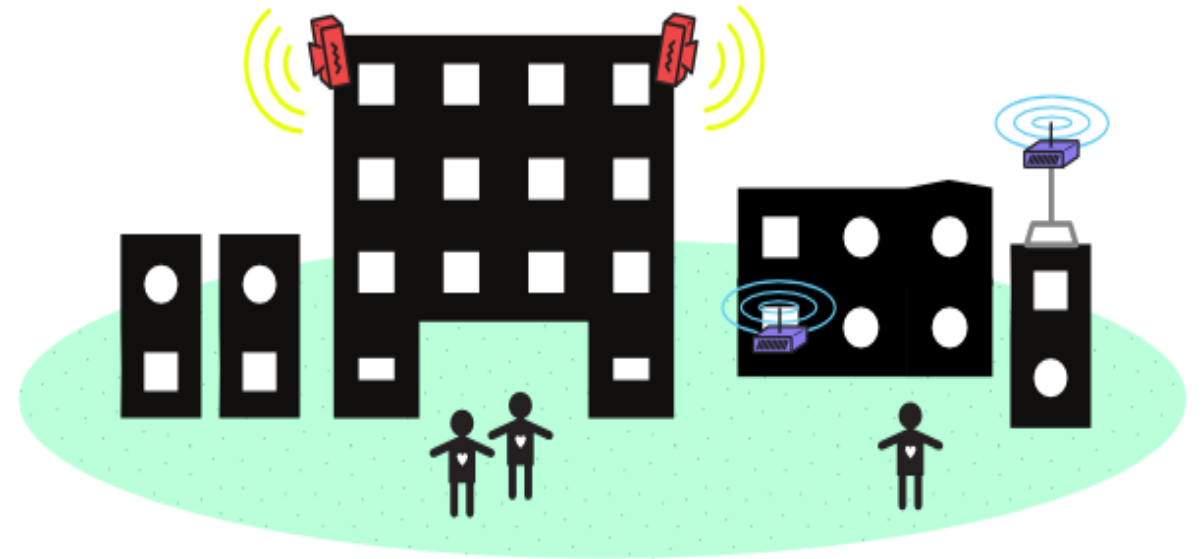
*I actually had no clue about schools at all, you know, in Northern Ireland... It was everything new. And just talking about religion and everything. Like in Lithuania, most people are Catholics, you know. But with choosing [primary school], and then I find out later on it's a different religion school. (Mother, white other ethnic group, area of high diversity)*



# Minority group status: 'settled' v's newcomer

- Migrant families often rely on limited networks to select schools
- This, alongside 'homing' policies and school placement policies led to concerns that some schools would become known as, 'foreigners' schools',

*I mean my concern is what you end up with is ....a number of schools that are very heavily populated with newcomers.... that results in a ghettoization. The ...children and young people are not mixing with others and they themselves become an 'other'. And because we're not investing in those schools, and we really aren't investing in those schools, actually they're probably being disadvantaged (Stakeholder)*



# *Academic selection*

- Newcomer post-primary aged pupils placed in non-selective schools
- Not all pupils given same opportunity to sit the transfer test
- Racialized assumptions about academic ability of minority pupils seen as a contributory factor
- Academic test also seen as causing significant stress for parents and pupils.



- *Nobody told me about it, and I only found out two weeks after, because I wanted my daughter to sit the test, but apparently she's been pulled out of the class for the ones who are doing the tests. And I had no idea, so there was not enough information for me as a parent. Because, at the end of the day, I'm taking the decision, and I only found out two weeks after it happened... They assume that no Roma will sit the test. (Mother, Roma ethnic group, area of high diversity)*

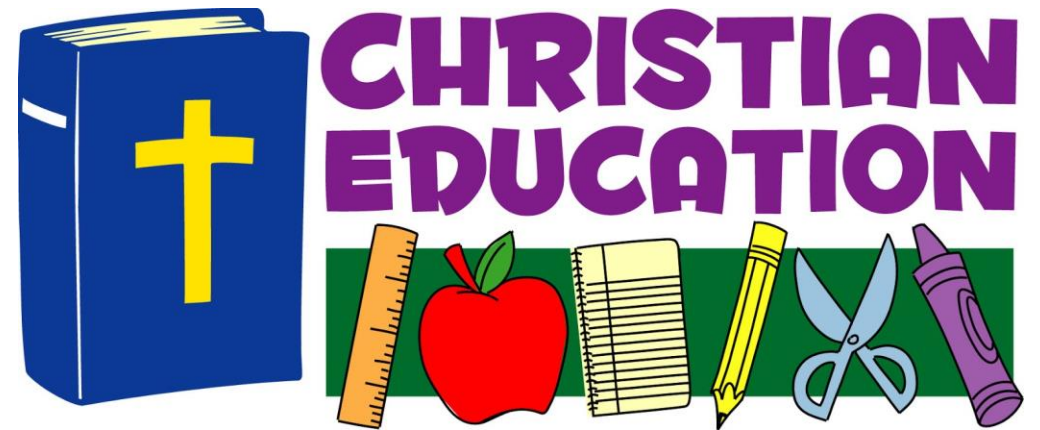
- *With the Syrian project, for instance, expectation is zero from these kids. Some of these kids are babysat in some of the schools and the kids would tell you, 'What's the point of me going to school when I'm not learning?... They're very basic, they're not challenged. (Stakeholder' community)*
- *You learn so much about different cultures but you don't learn about Traveller culture and that's so weird...Ukrainians came here and everything was talked about. They were talked about for ages. We never get talked about. No one talks about us. (Child, Irish Traveller ethnic group, area of high diversity)*

# *The denominational system*

Catholic or Protestant orientation was less a source of unease than the overwhelmingly Christian orientation of schools.

- *Right, because when I went to apply to one of the schools, they asked, “Are you Christian or Catholic?” “What? I’m wearing a Hijab, I’m a Muslim,” “Yes but you are a Muslim, which one do you tend to more?” it was really confusing.*

Accommodation for other faith traditions was described as piecemeal





# Cross-cutting issues of social class, agency, and NI parochialism

*I don't come from a very middle class, upper-middle class whatever, background, so it's the way-- And I don't know how to do the right speaking, I don't drive the right car and I don't speak-- ...and my family don't have a surname that relates to any kind of company, or organisation or anything that would be influential within the school. (REF)*

HOW  
CLASS  
WORKS



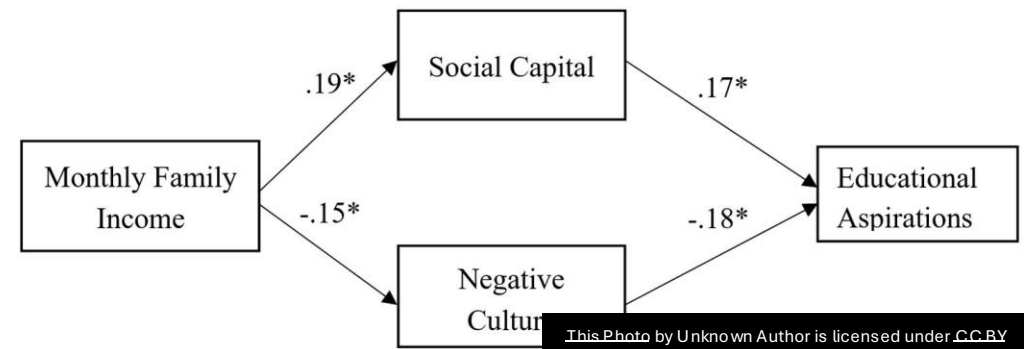
# NI Parochialism

*Our children are not studied from here and we're not from Irish background or a Northern Ireland background. Some of the time they know their parents, older parents they were with my daddy in the same church. So those are you know, I feel like they don't treat us the same way they treat the other children. Most of the parents like they would know the teacher and the teachers would only pay attention on their children. (REF)*



# Educational, cultural and economic capital

- The relationship between access to economic and educational resource amongst migrant families and their potential to secure educational advantage was a recurrent theme in the interviews
- Parents from more 'settled' minority backgrounds (mainly Chinese and Indian) spoke of using local knowledge, educational experience, and economic resource to maximize educational opportunity for their children.
- For those with more limited economic capital, choices were sometimes circumscribed by their financial situation
  - *Well, it was mostly for location and what we've heard in the beginning. But it was location as well. I was pregnant. I was due in November and they started in September, so I was like, 'I won't be able to walk that far.' We didn't have a car back then. (Mother, white other ethnic group, area of high diversity)*
- However, even where finances were limited, several parents spoke of sacrifices they had made to ensure the best educational opportunities for their children (cultural capital)



# Remedies to equality of condition harms (Lynch and Baker (2005))

- Abandon rigid academic grouping policies and the power of parents in these processes.
- Reform curricula and assessment processes to make them more reflective of a wider range of human intelligences.
- More inclusive processes for respecting differences, not only at institutional level in schools, but also in their curricula, pedagogy, and assessment systems.
- Greater democratisation of relationships in schools.
- Must recognise the intrinsic role that emotions play in the processes of teaching and learning.

# Adapting the recommendations based on our findings

- Review the processes of academic selection for primary to post-primary transfer and school placement policies.
- Examining the ways in which the legacy of conflict and 'home grown' intergroup tensions have become embedded in the education system, acting as barriers to inclusion, equality and diversity.
- Review the extent to which a state sponsored and wholly Christian education system that is fractured along (Christian) faith orientation and cross-cutting social class lines is fit for purpose in a society that has seen exponential demographic change in the post- Agreement period.