

Changing expectations in uncertain times

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Introduction

- Uses two-cohort nature of the Growing Up in Ireland study to compare two groups of 13-year-olds (2011/12 and 2021/22)
- Impact of external shocks – recession and pandemic – on the educational expectations of young people and their parents
- Hypothesis: stronger effect of the recession because of more prolonged nature

Conceptual framework

Complementary perspectives:

- Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) – ‘horizons for action’ frame the career choices that are seen as feasible
- Gottfredson (2002) – developmental focus; young people come to focus on more ‘realistic’ options as they grow older
- An external shock which affects the resources available to a family (or the stability of such resources) might result in young people and their parents reassessing what is feasible and adjusting their expectations for the future

Stability and change in educational expectations

- Parental expectations often assumed to be static but do respond to own educational upgrading (Augustine, 2012) and signals of child's academic progress (Smyth, 2020)
- More instability in intentions among youth from disadvantaged backgrounds (Anders, 2017); greater fall in expectations 14-17 years among working-class youth (Anders and Micklewright, 2015)
- Focus of existing research on impact of recession (and other shocks) on educational performance; less focus on expectations
- But we know young people's expectations are responsive to macro-level and regional economic downturns (Salazar et al., 2020; Hartnung et al., 2022)
- More varied findings on parents (Renzulli and Barr, 2017 – only middle-class parents impacted in the US)
- Research on pandemic shock has mainly focused on learning loss (and wellbeing) but Schoon and Henseke (2021) point to greater uncertainty re career planning

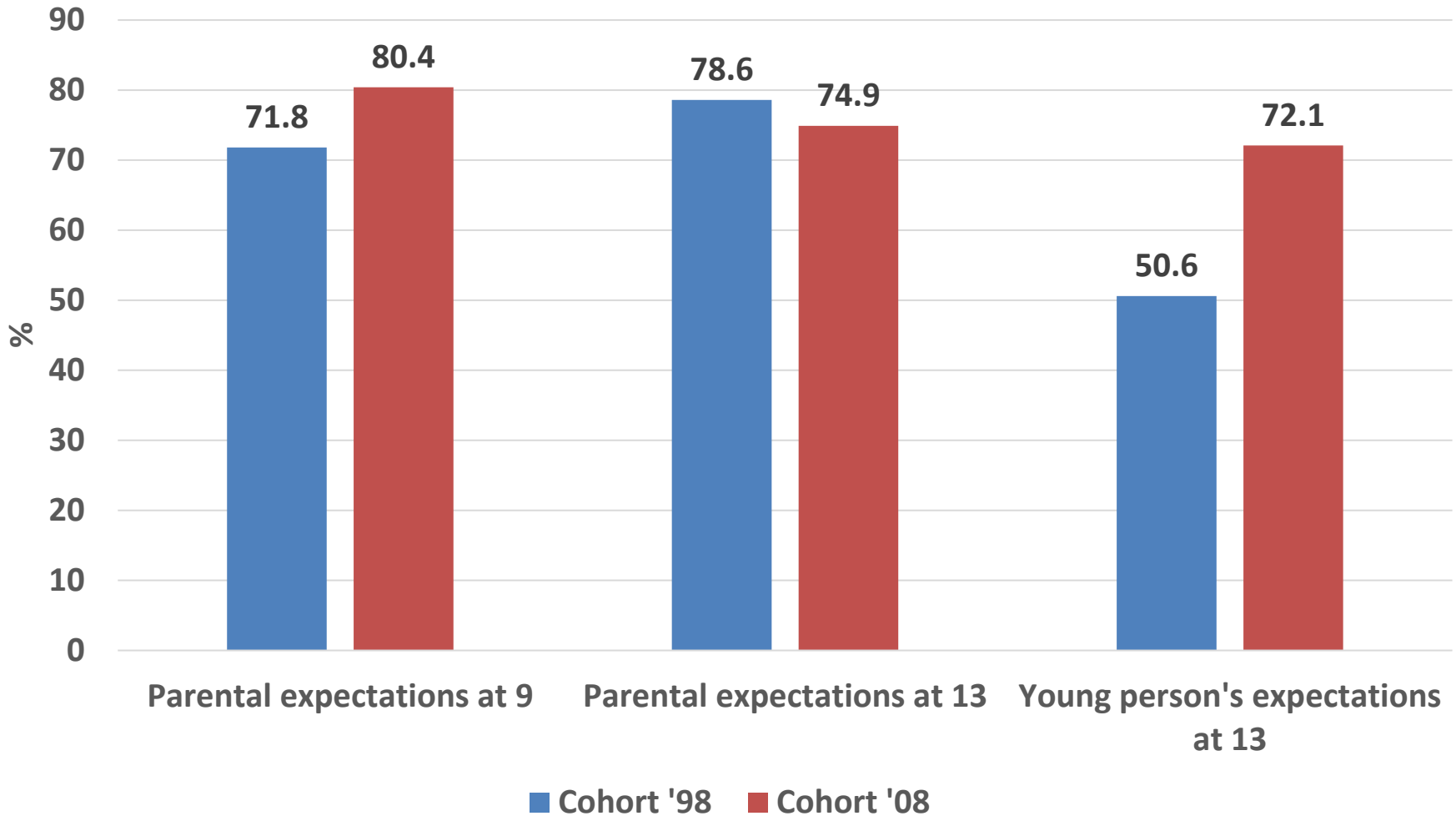
Data and methodology

- Two cohorts:
 - Cohort '98, 9 years in 2007/8, followed up at 13 (in 2011/12)
 - Cohort '08, 9 months in 2008/9 and followed up at 3, 5, 9, 11 and 13 years (in 2021/22); short online survey in December 2020 to capture pandemic experiences
- Outcome:
 - How far is the young person expected to go in their education: mother and young person at 13
 - Because of high rates of tertiary participation in Ireland, distinguish between higher education expectations and all others
 - Control for parental expectations at age 9 (young person not asked at that age)

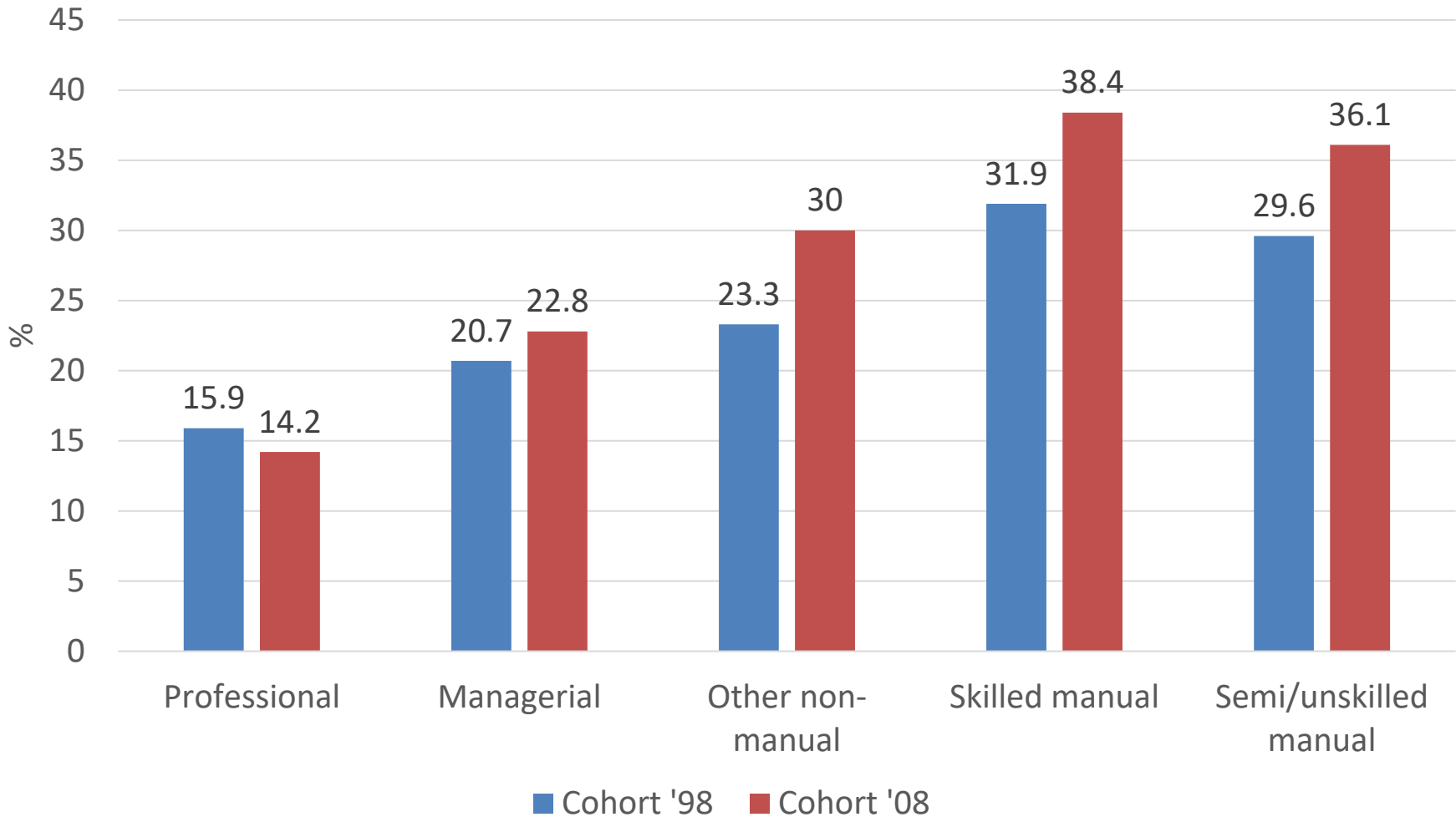
Methodology (2)

- Shock of recession
 - One or both parents lost job (23%)
 - Recession had very significant impact on family (23%)
- Shock of pandemic
 - One or both parents lost job (25%)
 - Income loss as a result of restrictions (36%)
- Controls: social class; household income (both measured at age 9); gender; illness/disability; reading test score at age 9
- Relationship between shock and expectations; whether this differs for different social groups

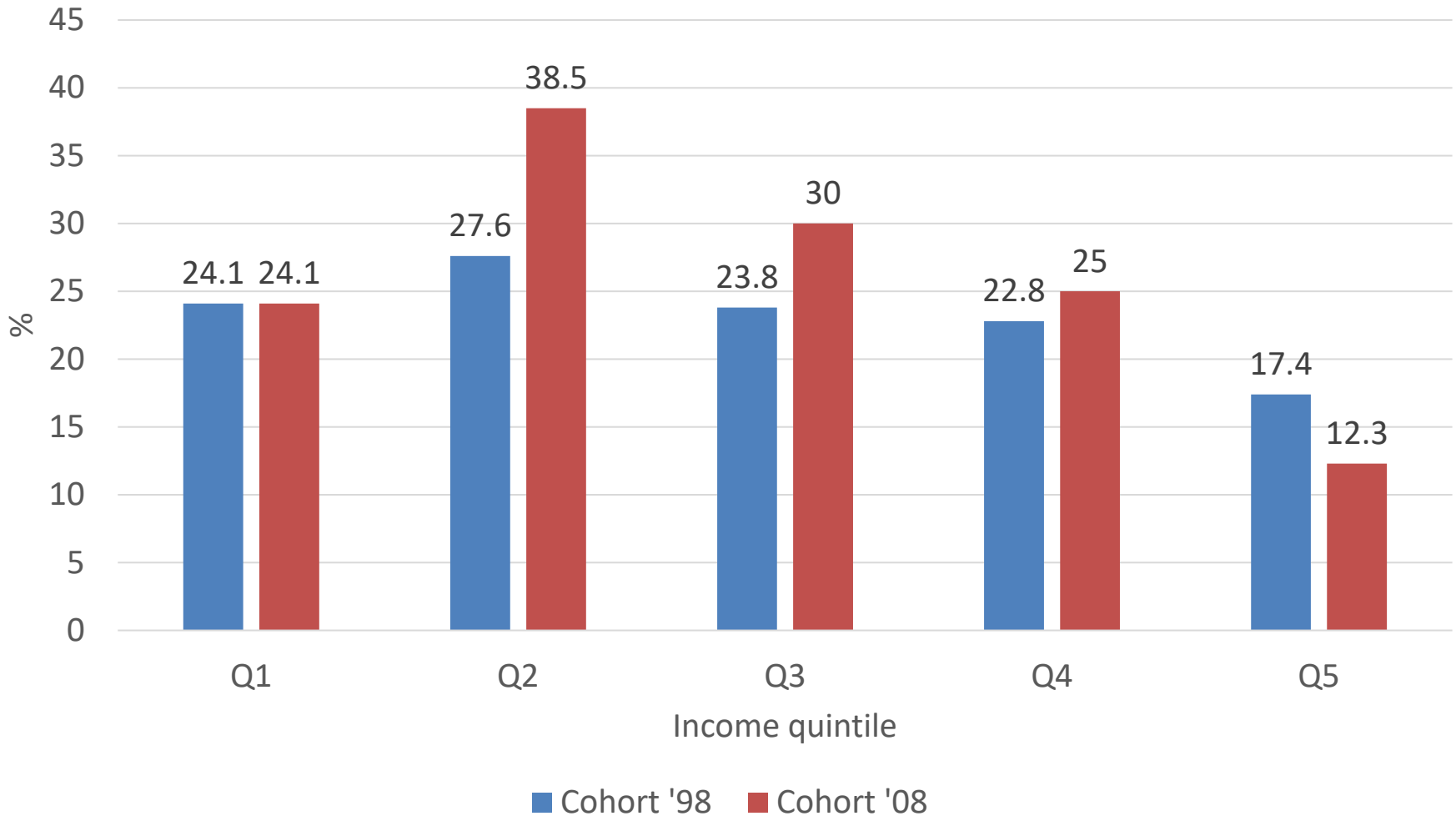
Educational expectations



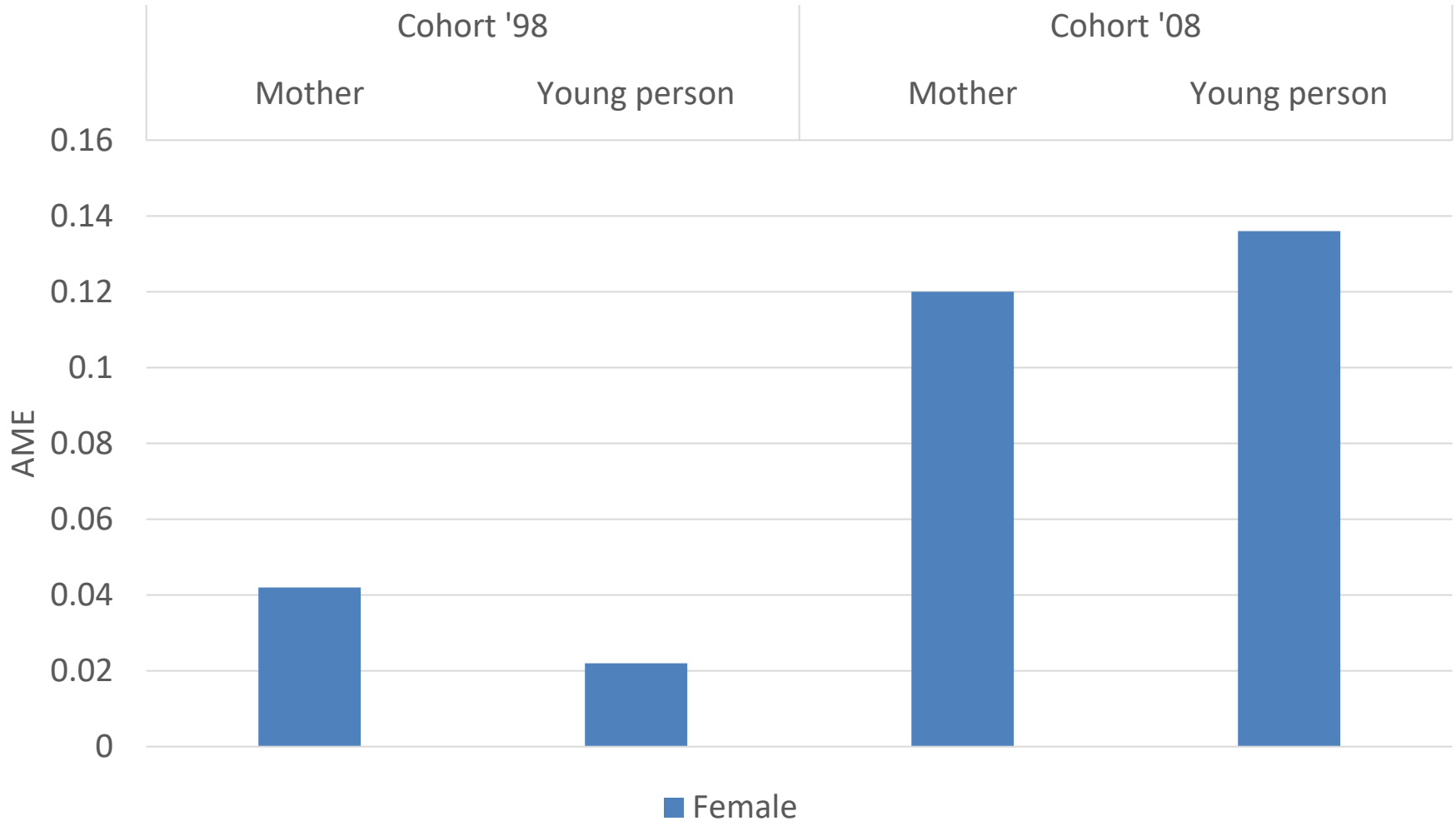
Job loss by social class



Job loss by prior household income



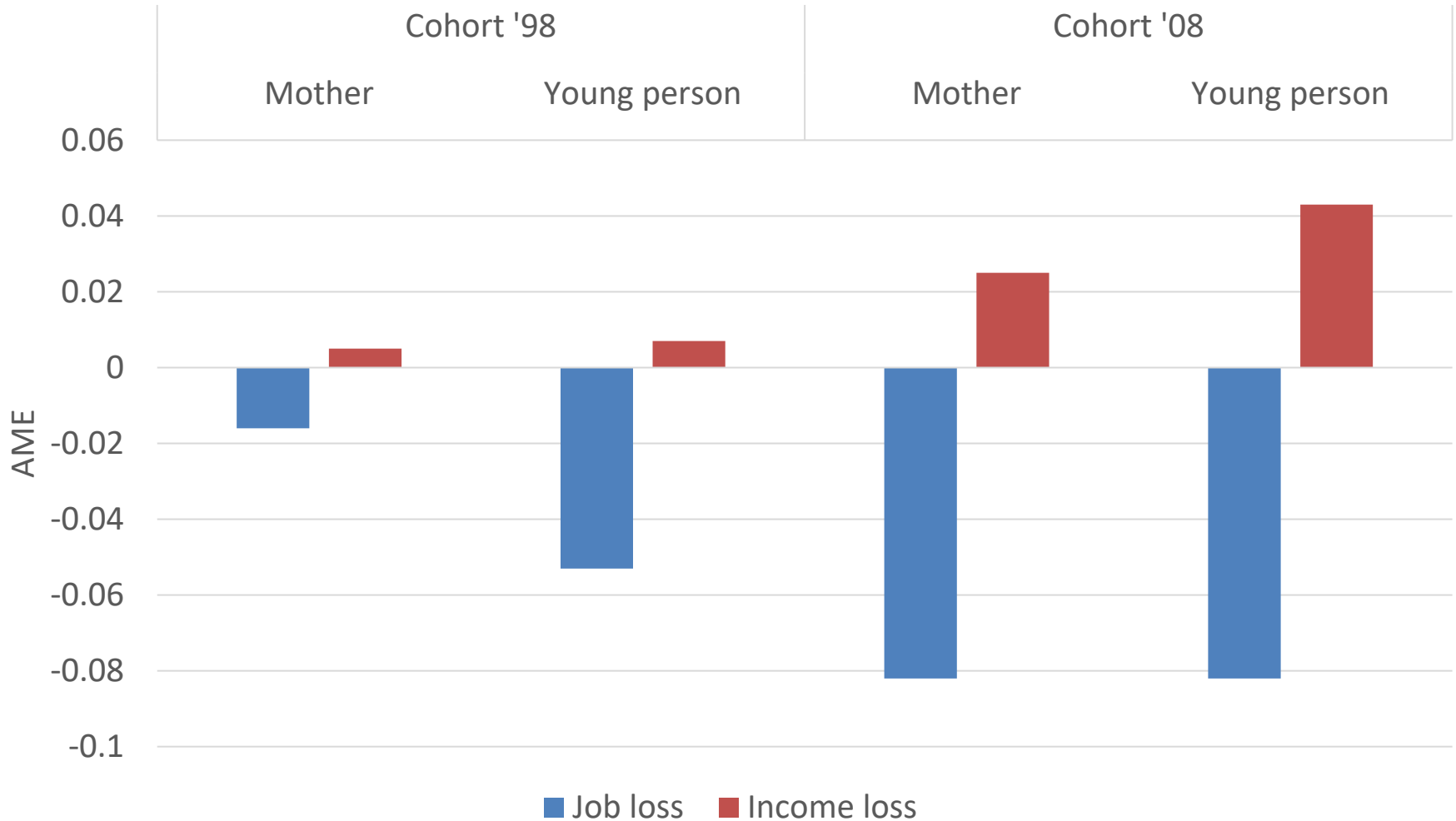
Gender and expectations



Social background and expectations



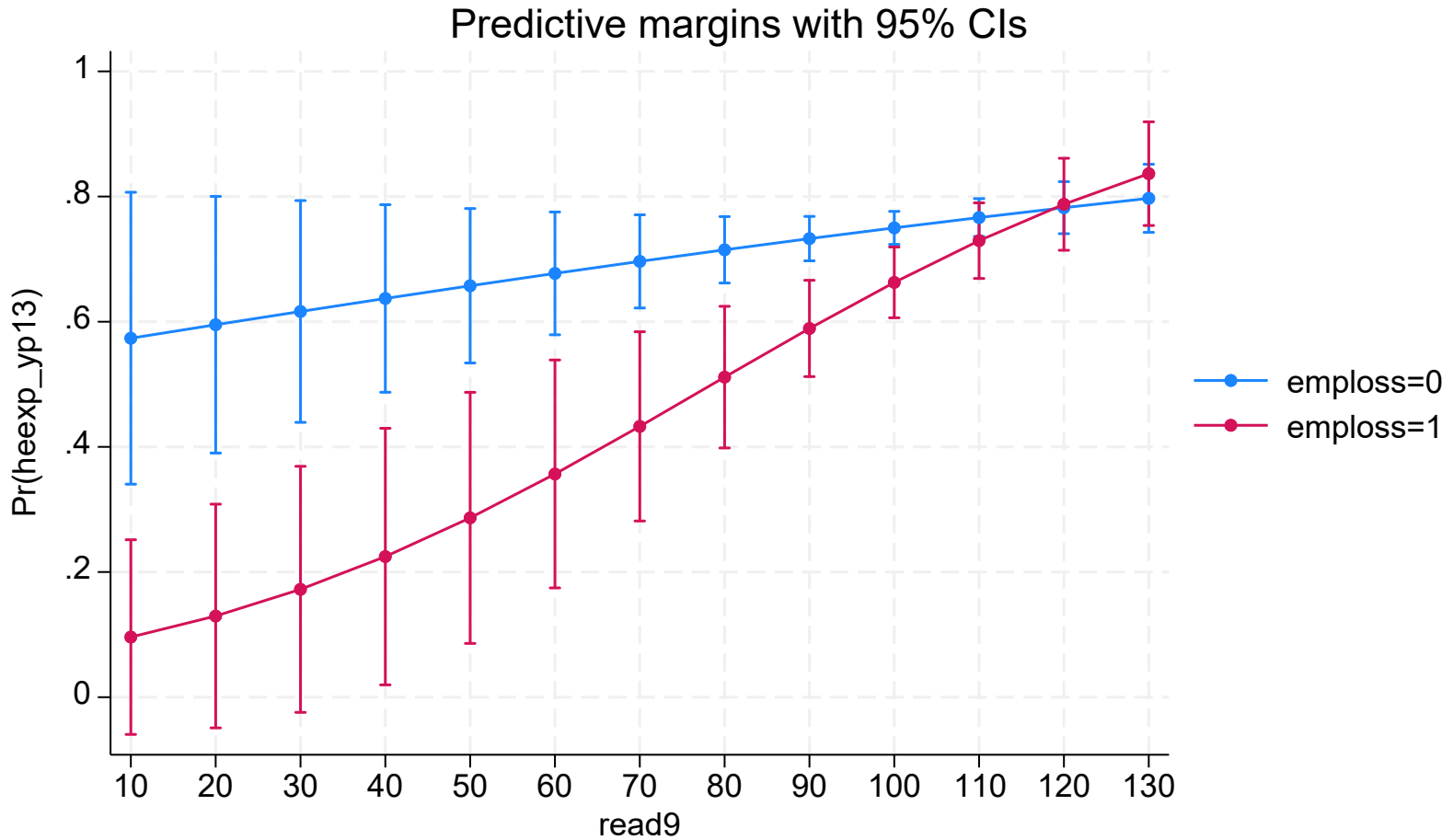
Effect of shocks on expectations



Does the effect of job loss differ across groups?

- Recession cohort
 - No significant variation in effect by social class, income, disability, reading score or prior expectations (for either mother or young person)
- Pandemic cohort
 - Effect on mothers is only significant if expected their child to go on to HE (at 9); greater effect where lower reading scores
 - For 13-year-old, somewhat greater effect if mothers had expected them to go on to HE; marked variation by prior reading score (stronger than for parents)

Young person's expectations by job loss and prior reading score



Conclusions

- Exploited two cohorts to contrast effects of economic shock on educational expectations
- All experienced recession and pandemic but variation within cohorts in job and income loss
- No impact of income loss per se
- Pandemic-related job loss is associated with lower expectations for parents and teenagers but recession-related job loss significantly affects teenagers only
- Evidence that young people adjust their expectations in light of negative context (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Gottfredson, 2007)
- No ready explanation for lack of recession effect on parents, especially given prolonged nature of recession

Conclusions (2)

- In both periods, job loss was more concentrated among working-class groups
- But effect of employment loss was similar across social groups (social class or income)
- Not due to a permanent lowering of income levels as it holds even when current income is taken into account
- Appears that lower expectations are not due to reduced resources but rather to increased uncertainty about the future

Conclusions (3)

- Contrary to hypothesis, the effects of the recession are not stronger than those of the pandemic, despite the shorter unemployment spells during the pandemic
- Job loss effects are greater for young people with lower reading scores - so reduced expectations may also reflect greater learning loss among more disadvantaged groups
- Next steps: explore the potential mechanisms underlying the role of employment loss in shaping educational expectations in both periods