



# Is the rate of school absence changing as society changes? A study based on Finnish national data over 20 years

KATARINA ALANKO, PH.D, PSYCHOLOGIST

ÅBO AKADEMI UNIVERSITY

KATARINA.ALANKO@ABO.FI

# BACKGROUND

- Anecdotal increase in absence rates. Is it true?
- Large study on truancy between 2002-2014 in the US did not indicate change in truancy rates. Rates stable around 11 %. (Maynard et al. 2017)
- Increase in psychiatric and neuropsychiatric diagnoses among youth during the 20th century (Gyllenberg et al. , 2018, Helsingin Sanomat, 13022017, Yle, 26062019).
- Societal changes of interest? Increase in eg. screen time and internet addiction. In Finland, smart phone use increased since 2010 and Finland leads statistics on mobile data and -phone use. Can we see this phenomenon reflected in an increased absence rate after 2010?

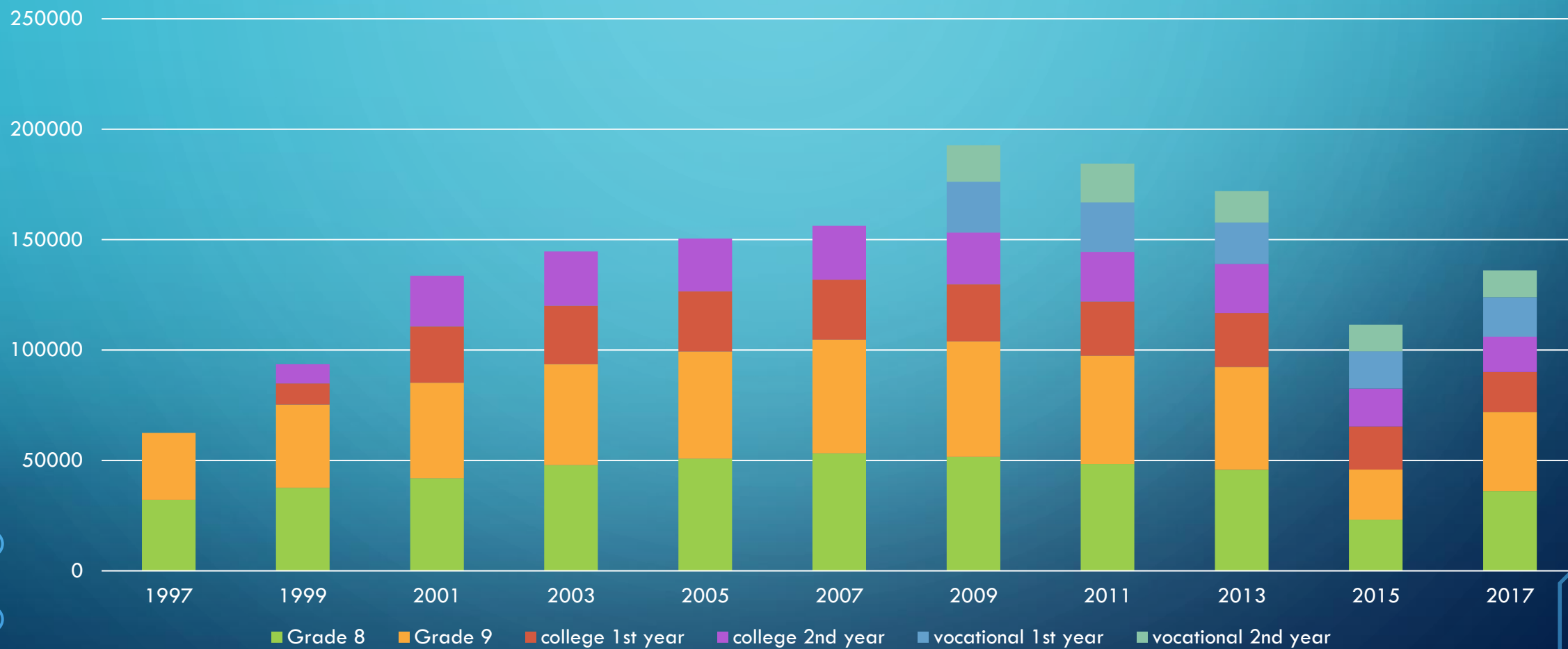
# METHOD

- " The School Health Promotion (SHP) " is a biannual national survey among grades 4, 5, 8 and 9 in primary school, and during the first and second year of secondary school (college, vocation school)
- Data is collected by the National Institute for Health and Welfare in Finland (thl.fi)
- All pupils in Finland are invited to participate during the spring of the data collection year. Each school replies on one specific date. Those not attending that day are not separately invited.
- Data is widely used for research and policy making

# THE PRESENT STUDY

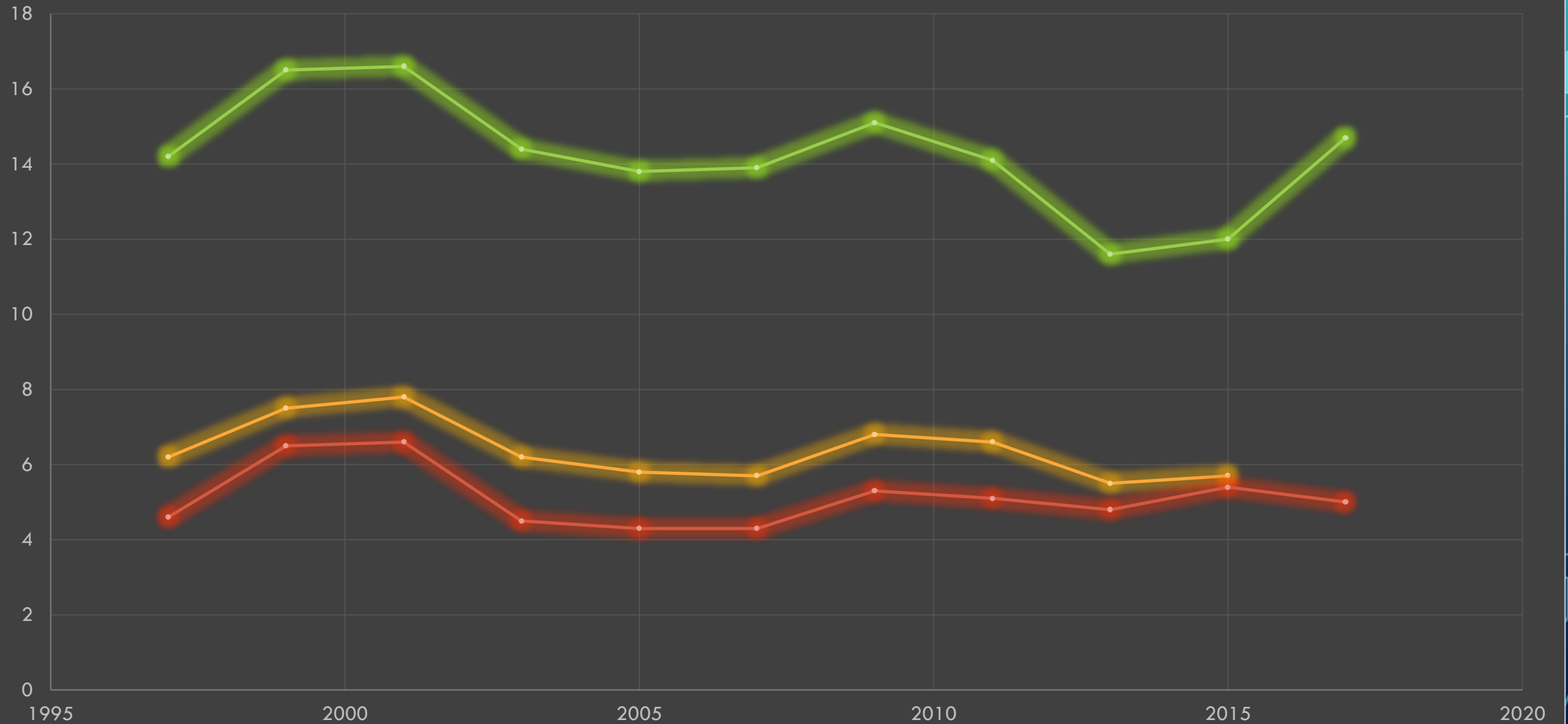
- Data from 1997 to 2017
- In this study, data on 14-15 year olds was used (8th and 9th grade), 16-18 year olds in secondary education (college and vocational school, years 1 and 2)
- Among high school students, response rate was 74–84 % and in college 60–77%. Vocational school response rate not calculated.
- Items vary per year, concerning absence a big change in 2017
- Absence based on truancy, sickness, and other reasons

Sample size per cohort



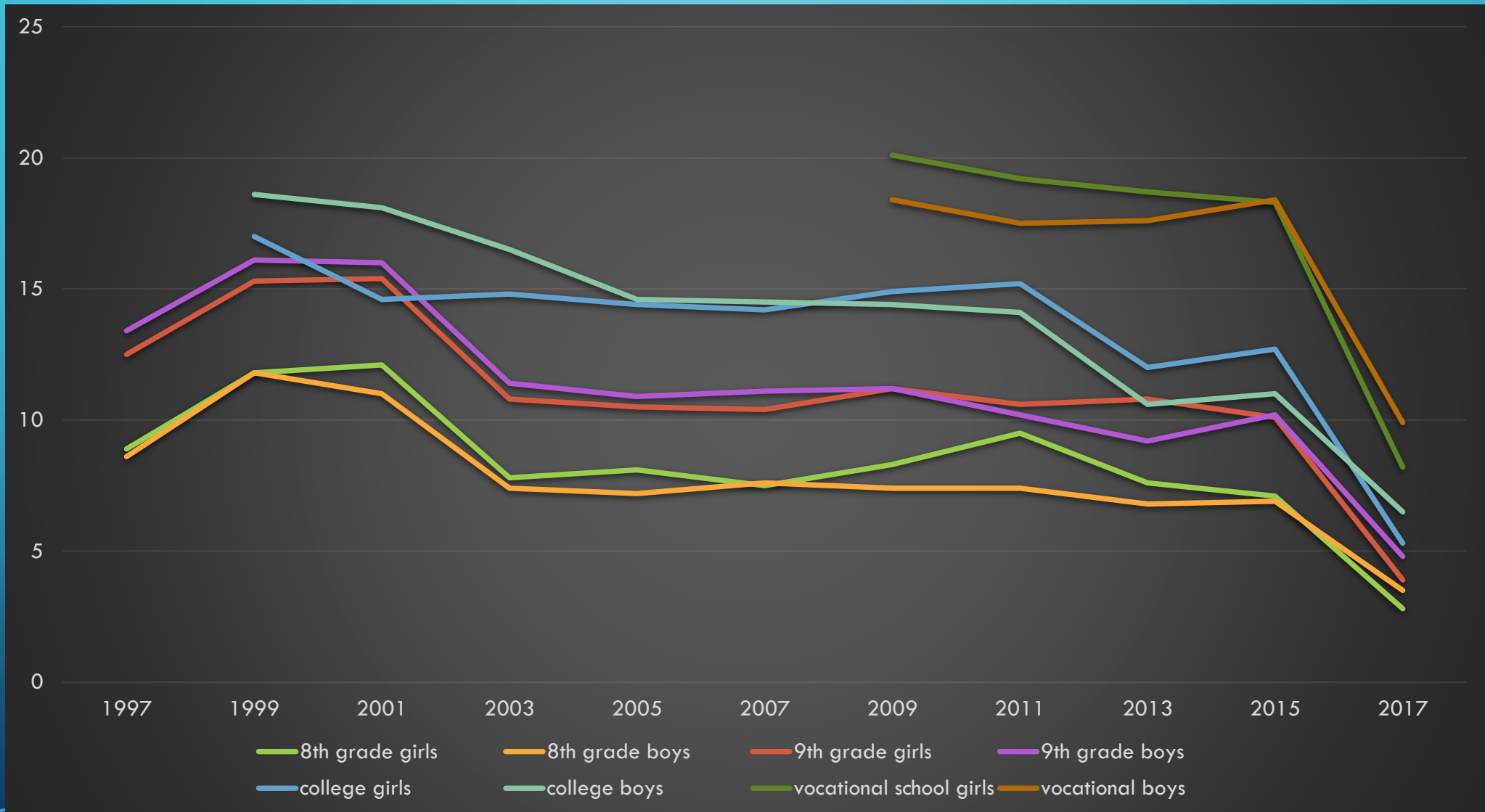
## Absence due to truancy during prior 30 days %

— One day — 2-3 days — more than 3 days



Note. For 2017 the item was changed to "illegitimate days of absence: monthly/weekly"

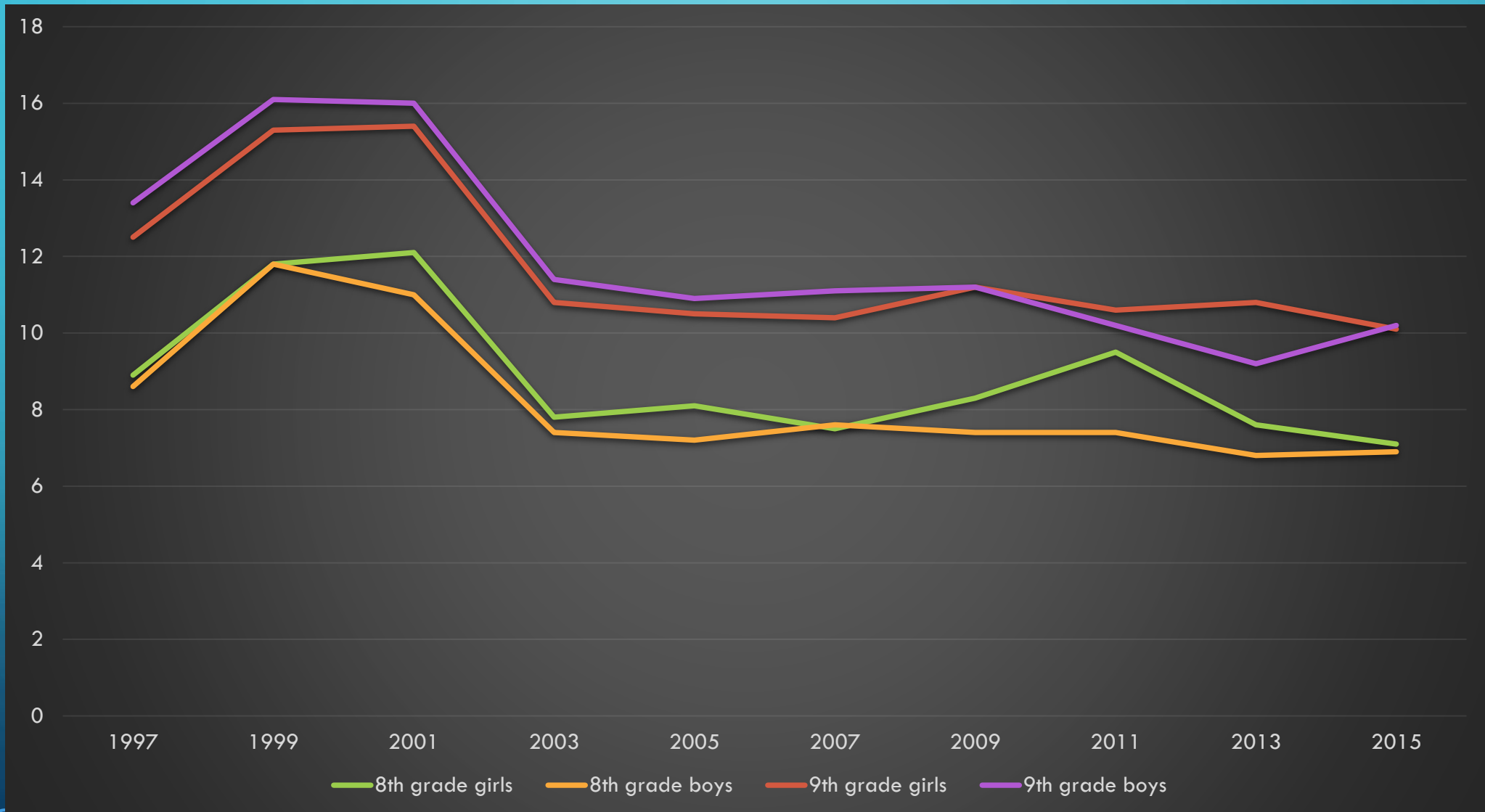
# TRUANCY PER GRADE, MORE THAN 2 DAYS PRIOR MONTH



Note. Secondary education second year. 2017 new item wording.



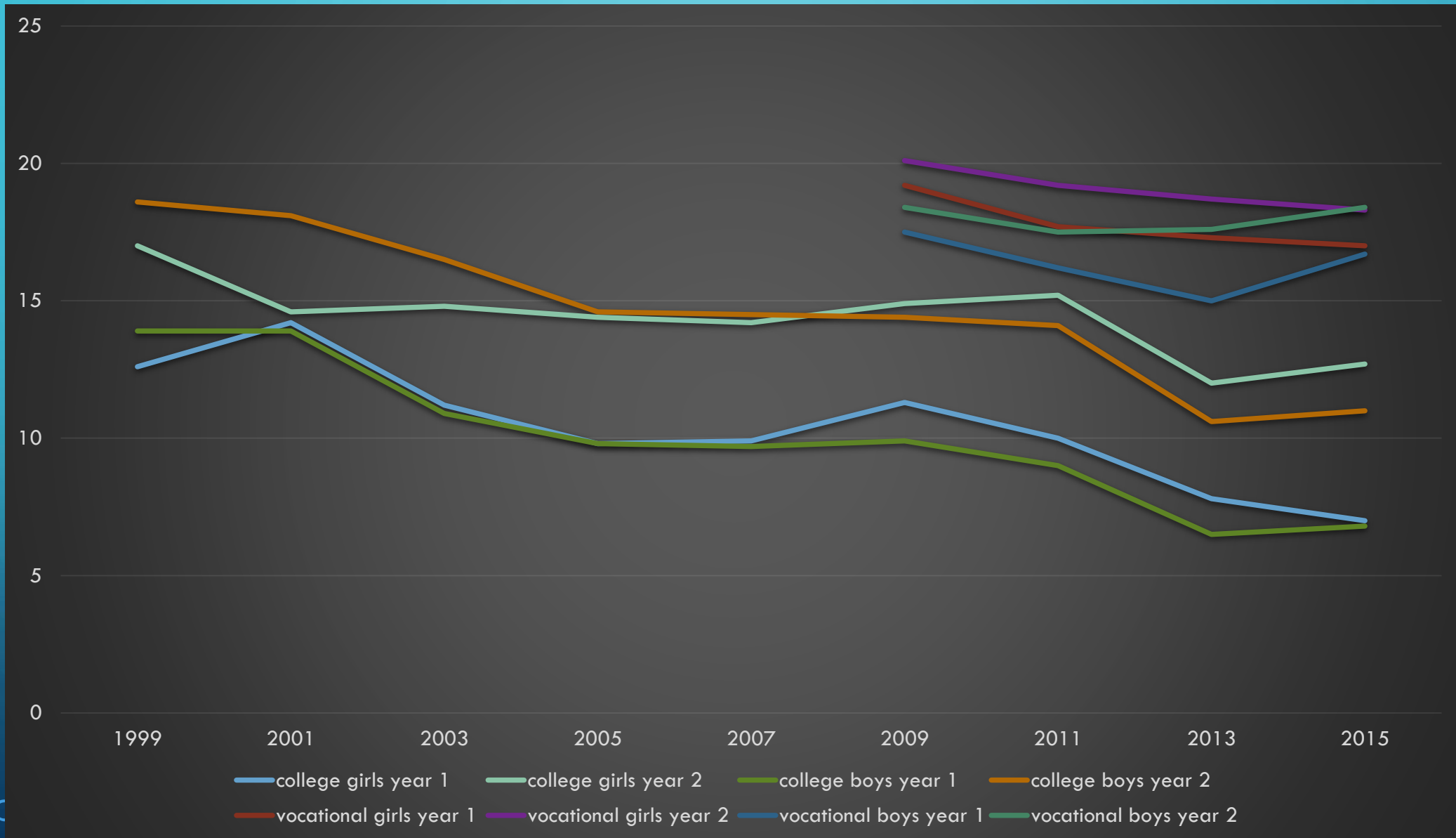
# TRUANCY IN HIGH SCHOOL



Note, question changed in 2017, left out here.



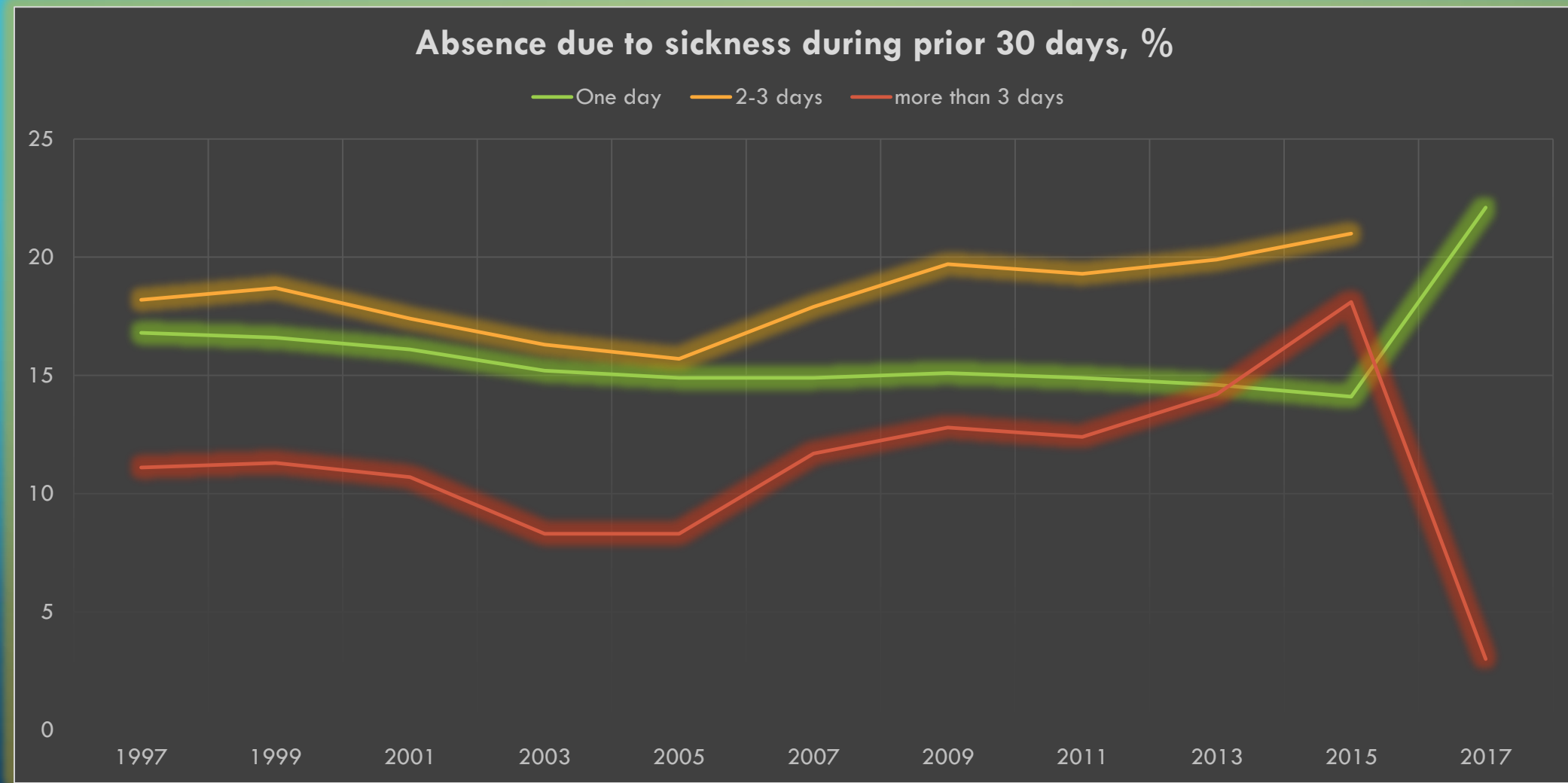
# TRUANCY SECONDARY SCHOOL



# CONCLUSION

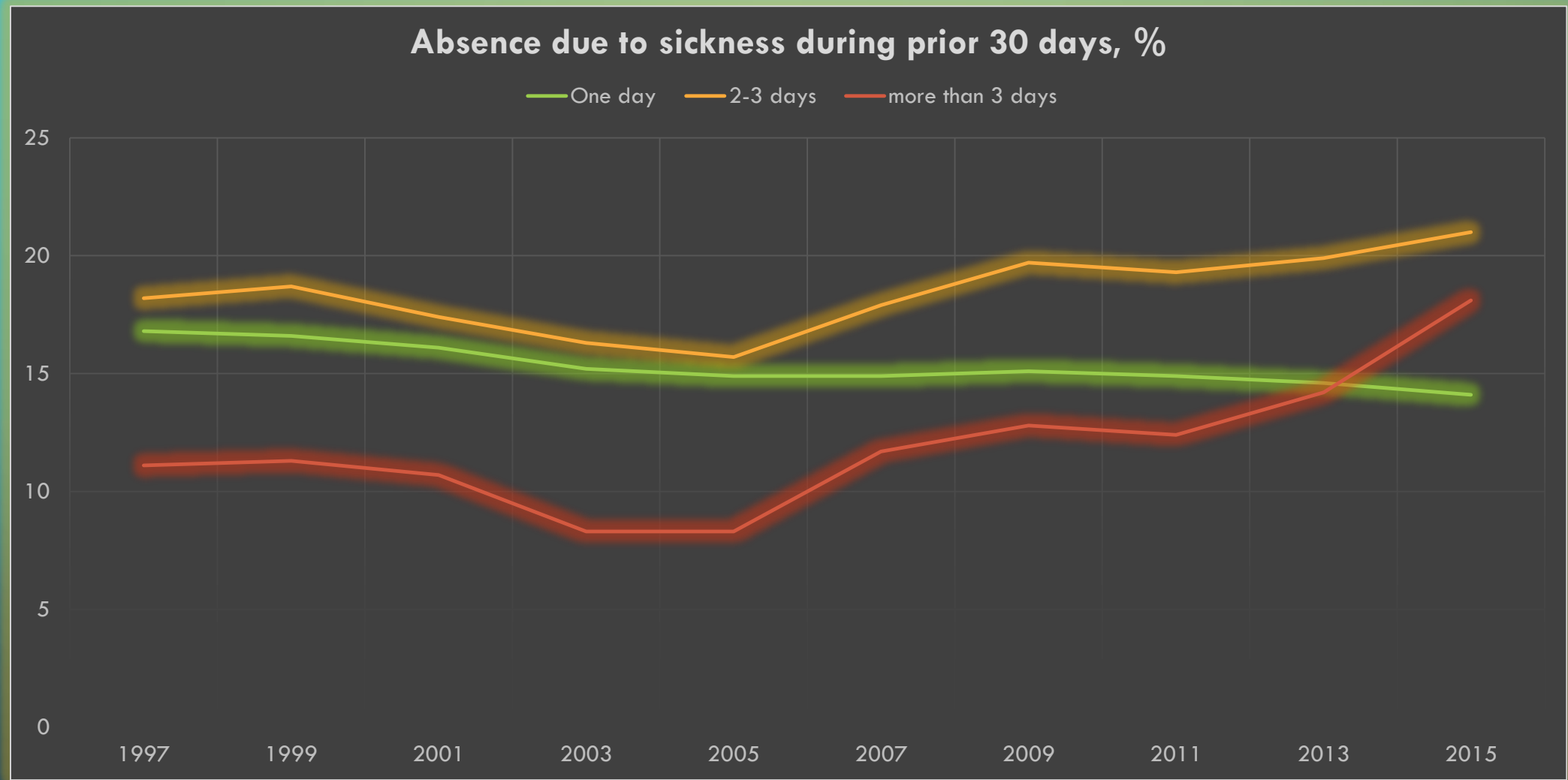
- Truancy rates relatively stable over the years in high school, with a peak around 2000
- However, college seems to have a declining trend, first year college lower rates than in the 9th grade
- Rates increase with age
- Girls seem to have slightly higher levels of truancy
- Here included were those truant more than 2 days out of prior 30 days. arbitrary cutoff- perhaps different with more than 3 days

# ABSENCE DUE TO SICKNESS, ENTIRE SAMPLE



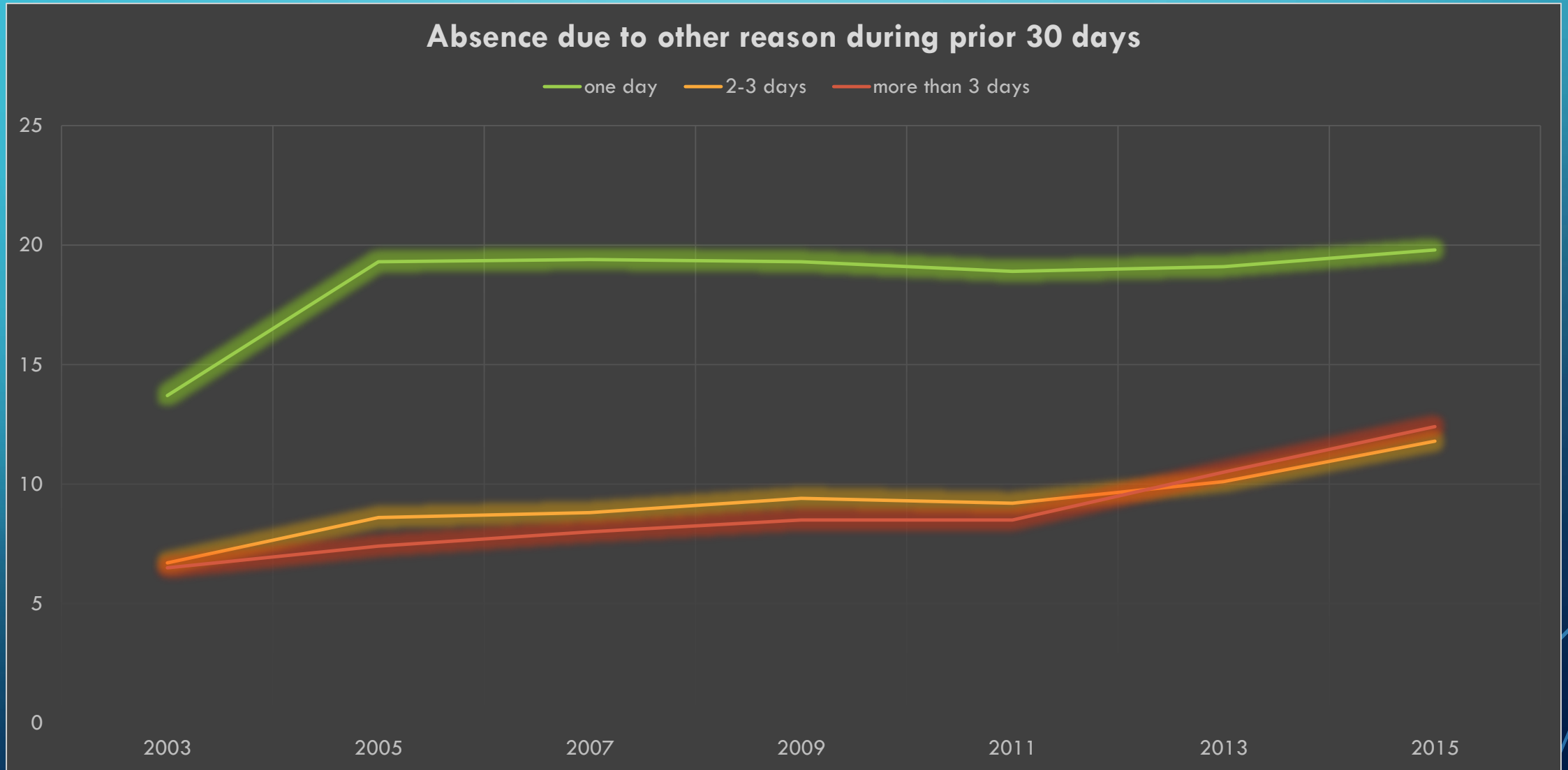
Note. For 2017 the item was changed to "days of absence due to sickness: monthly/weekly"

# ABSENCE DUE TO SICKNESS, ENTIRE SAMPLE



Note. For 2017 the item was changed to "days of absence due to sickness: monthly/weekly"

# ABSENCE, DUE TO OTHER REASONS, ENTIRE SAMPLE



# CONCLUSIONS

- Increasing trend for group with high absence level (more than 3 days in prior 30 days), both due to sickness and other reasons (no statistical testing done yet)
- Also, those with 2-3 days per month an increasing group
- A change in the direction at 2011- mobile phone effect? 2005- internet effect?
- School refusers likely reflected in the "absent due to sickness" group
- Those absent from school did not respond to the survey- ie. the numbers probably do not reflect reality

# TO BE CONTINUED....

- Publications under work on this cohort data, as well as other data from the survey
- Questions, comments? Please e-mail me at [katarina.alanko@abo.fi](mailto:katarina.alanko@abo.fi)