



Research
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Trajectories and transitions of disabled children and young people

A new study from the Centre for Longitudinal Studies, the NCB Research Centre, and the Council for Disabled Children

The [Centre for Longitudinal Studies](#) (CLS) at the [Institute of Education](#) (IOE) and the [Research Centre](#) at the [National Children's Bureau](#) (NCB) are undertaking a new research project examining the influence of family and contextual factors on outcomes for disabled children and young people. The research will have a particular focus on key transition points in their lives.

This research is being carried out in collaboration with NCB's [Council for Disabled Children](#) (CDC). The 18-month project, which starts in January 2013, employs analysis of existing data and is informed by the perspectives of disabled young people. It is funded by the [Economic and Social Research Council](#) under their Secondary Data Analysis Initiative.

Aims and key research questions

The aim of the study is to enhance our understanding of disabled children's early development and their subsequent educational transitions, and the influence of family and other contextual factors on both. The study will analyse existing data from two major longitudinal studies of children and young people that cover almost the entire span of childhood and youth - the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), which follows around 19,000 children born in the UK in 2000-01, and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), a study of almost 16,000 young people who were first surveyed at age 13/14, and followed up annually for seven years.

The study comprises four major strands of work, addressing four key questions:

1. *What is the prevalence of disability among children?*

Focusing on MCS data, this strand of the research will use existing survey questions on, for example, developmental delay in infancy, long-term health conditions, and Special Educational Needs (SEN) to measure disability in different ways. We will look at the overlap between different measures of disability, the prevalence of disability (overall and at different ages) using these different measures and the heterogeneity of disabled children (in terms of impairments and severity). Informed by both theory and the possibilities for effective data analysis using alternative definitions, we will determine how to most accurately group children for the remaining research. As well as providing the basis for subsequent strands, this strand also enables us to explore the extent to which disabled children are adequately represented in longitudinal cohort studies and how these existing multi-purpose studies might be improved in the future to more accurately reflect the experiences of disabled children.

2. *What are the family circumstances of disabled children and young people and how do they change as they get older?*

Using MCS and LSYPE, this strand explores the family socio-economic circumstances (e.g. poverty, economic activity, family structure and so on) of disabled children, whether these circumstances change over time and how the family circumstances of disabled children differ from those of non-disabled children. This strand of work will help us to understand whether disabled children and young people are more likely to live in disadvantaged families relative to other children and whether early disadvantage increases (or decreases) as they grow older. These findings will help us to identify critical points for support or intervention for disabled children and young people and their families.

3. *What is the pattern of disabled children's outcomes over time, given different starting points and the influence of family and other contextual factors?*

Using MCS data, this strand of research will explore disabled children's outcomes over time and the influence of family and other contextual factors on these outcome trajectories. It investigates whether disabled children experience patterns of development that are comparable to those of non-disabled children (accounting for differences in their starting points) and the extent to which differential patterns of development over time are driven by or conditional on family experiences and other contextual factors. These findings will provide evidence on the extent to which considering children as 'disabled' is associated with adverse developmental trajectories, as well as whether additional support is needed for some disabled children to achieve their potential.

4. *What is the nature of disabled young people's future educational aspirations and transitions into post-compulsory education?*

Using LSYPE, this strand will explore disabled young people's aspirations to take up further and higher education, training and employment while they are still at school, and their actual participation in these post-compulsory routes. It will investigate how these differ from non-disabled young people, and the influence of family and other contextual factors on these aspirations and transitions. These findings will shed light on the factors that raise disabled young people's aspirations and support favourable post-compulsory school outcomes.

Dissemination and impact

The findings will be disseminated through policy briefings and an invited roundtable discussion, as well as through more academic routes. We will write three primary reports stemming from strands 2-4 and supplemental working papers and data notes, as well as briefings for policymakers, practitioners and young people.

The research findings have the potential to change our understanding of the experiences and environments that affect the lives of disabled children and young people, and will be instrumental in influencing both policy and practice. The findings may also build capacity among funders of research to consider new ways of including disabled children and young people in large multi-purpose surveys.