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DISABILITY INEQUALITIES IN POST-16 DESTINATIONS AND EARLY SOCIO- ECONOMIC ATTAINMENT

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About this briefing

Despite the dramatic increase in the prevalence of adolescent disability, we still know relatively little about the school-to-work transitions of disabled adolescents.

This briefing presents key findings from research that documents post-16 transitions and early socioeconomic attainment of disabled young people in England. It highlights pronounced disparities in the outcomes of disabled and non-disabled young people after the end of compulsory schooling and in early adulthood. It also explores whether post-16 destinations and early occupational outcomes vary by type of disability and by parental social class.

Policy Recommendations

- The government has a responsibility to provide support to facilitate successful post-16 transitions of disabled young people in England, particularly those with statements of need.
- More research is needed to better understand the barriers disabled young people face after Key Stage 4 and in early adulthood.
- Better data that provide sufficient numbers of students with different types of conditions and capture structural barriers that lead to the enduring socioeconomic disadvantage of disabled young people are needed.

Research context

Dr Stella Chatzitheochari (University of Warwick) and Dr Sanne Velthuis (University of Newcastle) analysed nationally representative data from Next Steps, which follows the lives of approximately 16,000 adolescents born in 1989-1990 in England. Study participants were interviewed annually from age 13/14 to age 19/20, and at age 25.

Next Steps provides unique longitudinal evidence on individuals who have experienced childhood and adolescent disability. This research focused on young people with special educational needs and disabilities which hinder school attendance and ability to complete homework. The study predominantly captures young people in mainstream rather than special schools.

Key findings

Post-16 education: 70% of disabled young people remain in education a few months after the end of Year 11, as opposed to 80% of non-disabled peers.

Type of education provider: Disabled young people are more likely to go to general Further Education colleges than their non-disabled peers (39% as opposed to 24%). They are much less likely to stay in school or go to sixth form colleges (39% as opposed to 63%).

Employment: At age 25, only 64% of disabled young people are in employment as opposed to 82% of non-disabled young people. A far higher percentage of disabled young people are unemployed or economically inactive at this stage.

Occupation: At age 25, disabled young people are much more likely to find themselves in semi-routine and routine jobs with low occupational status than non-disabled young people

Types of disability: Young people with SEN statements have particularly low rates of participation in employment and are also more likely to experience unemployment compared to disabled young people without statements of need.

Variation by social class: At age 25, parental class has a strong influence on the disability employment gap – disabled young people with parents in lower social class groups were 23% less likely to be in work compared to non-disabled peers from the same social class

Overall, the research highlights pronounced disability gaps in post-16 destinations. These disparities become even more pronounced at age 25.

Young people with a statement of Special Educational Needs emerged as a particularly vulnerable group, compared to those young people with other disabilities and chronic conditions. At the same time, findings suggested that disability has a disproportionate effect on young people from lower social class backgrounds in early adulthood.

Conclusions

More research is needed to understand the factors that are behind the abovementioned disability inequalities in post-16 destinations and early socioeconomic attainment. For example, it is

important to investigate the extent to which these disparities can be attributed to lower educational attainment of disabled young people, as well as disability discrimination in hiring practices or lack of reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

At the same time, findings from this research clearly direct our attention to the intersection of disability with social class. More research is needed to better understand the disproportionate disadvantage faced by disabled young people from a lower social class background.

Large-scale longitudinal data on childhood and adolescent disability remain scarce, severely limiting the analyses that can be undertaken by researchers. Future data collections that will account for different types of disabilities and capture factors that may negatively influence the lives of disabled adolescents are essential to better understand and tackle these inequalities.

Further information

Velthuis, Sanne & Chatzitheochari, S. (2021) Adolescent Disability, Post-16 Destinations and Early Socioeconomic Attainment: Initial Evidence from Next Steps. SocArxiv. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/vwcmt>

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