

## Trajectories and transitions of disabled children and young people

### Research summary three: Growing up with a disability

# How does disability affect young people's experiences of growing up?

Evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England

## Introduction

Disabled children and young people can experience the transition to adulthood quite differently to their non-disabled peers.<sup>1</sup>

With potential restrictions on their lifestyles, those who are disabled in childhood may be more isolated from peer influences and less likely to engage in risky behaviours. Similarly, they may have fewer chances to take part in social activities, and to form friendships and relationships. Parents can also be more protective of disabled children.<sup>2</sup> Involvement in risky behaviours may be a cause for concern for all young people, but on the other hand experimentation is acknowledged as part of growing up.

This summary outlines research that uses data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England to explore these issues. We evaluate whether young people aged 19, who experienced disability in their teens, had similar or different experiences of growing up compared to non-disabled young people. We look at differences in key risky and positive social behaviours that are associated with growing up, as well as how the young people feel about their lives.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Overall the differences between the experiences of disabled young people and their non-disabled peers are small.
- Those who had a statement of special educational needs in their early teens differ most from non-disabled teenagers: they are less likely to have engaged in risky behaviours or to have been in a relationship by age 19.

1. See, for example: Morris, J. (2002) Young disabled people moving into adulthood. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation; and Sloper, P., Beecham, J., Clarke, S., Franklin, A., Moran, N. and Cusworth, L. (2011). Transition to adult services for disabled young people and those with complex health needs. York: University of York, Social Policy Research Unit.  
2. Martin, K., Hart, R., White, R. and Sharp, C. (2011). Young people with special educational needs/learning difficulties and disabilities: Research into planning for adult life and services. (LG Group Research Report). Slough: NFER.

## Measures of disability

In this research we use two different measures of disability, collected in the LSYPE when the young people were in their early teenage years:

- Special educational needs (SEN), including those with a statement of SEN. SEN covers young people with learning difficulties and disabilities for which special educational provision needs to be made. It can include learning, communication, behavioural, emotional, sensory and physical difficulties.
- Long-standing illness, covering long-term health conditions such as type 1 diabetes or asthma; mental health problems; and impairments such as a missing limb or partial sight.

Summary one provides further information on these disability measures.

## The Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE)

The LSYPE is a large scale, representative study of nearly 16,000 young people. They were first surveyed when they were in Year 9 (aged 13/14) and followed up annually for seven years. The study contains a wealth of data relating to the young people's

educational experiences, occupational and educational aspirations, and personal and family characteristics. This research concentrates on those who were present at each survey, providing a sample of 8,115 young people.

## Findings

### Risky behaviours

Figure 1 shows a number of 'risky' behaviours broken down by disability status. There are no statistically significant differences in the chances of having tried cannabis across the different disability groupings, but young people with SEN are significantly more likely to have had a child by age 19, though the numbers are small.

Those with a statement of SEN are less likely to have had sex than their non-disabled peers.

Figure 2 shows that young people who are disabled by any disability measure tend to get drunk less frequently than their non-disabled counterparts. In their teenage years they are much more likely to 'rarely' or 'never' get drunk on the occasions that they drink alcohol.

FIGURE 1

### Risky behaviours by disability status

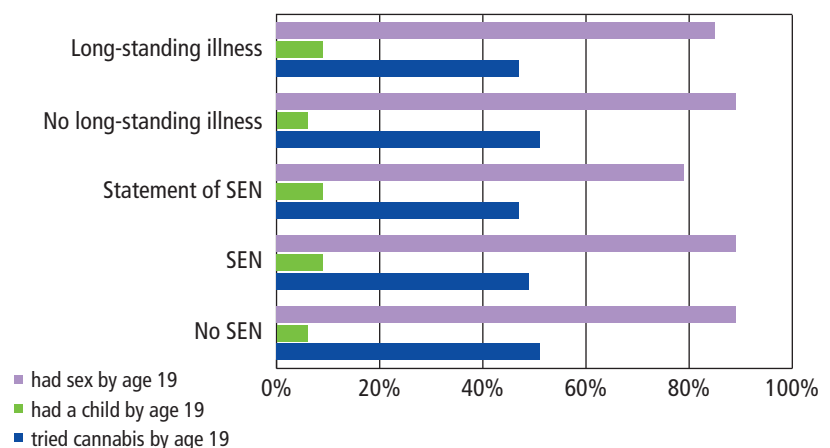
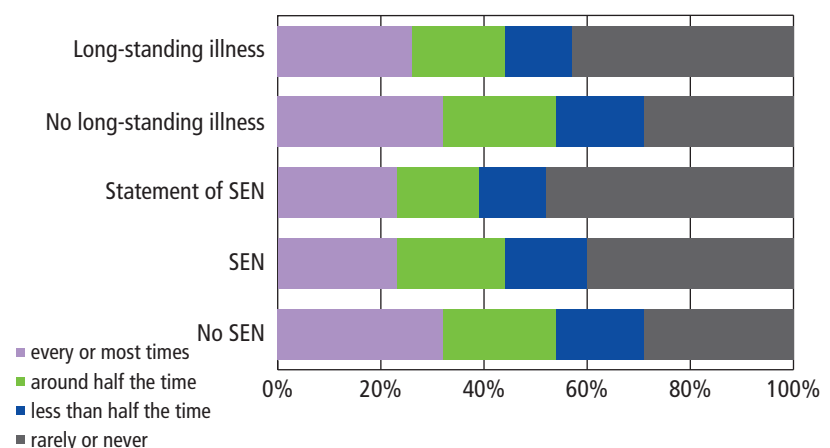


FIGURE 2

### Getting drunk when drinking alcohol, by disability status



**Positive social behaviours**

Figure 3 shows that there is no difference in the likelihood of volunteering between disabled and non-disabled young people, but those with a statement of SEN were less likely to have donated money to good causes.

**Friendships and relationships**

As peer influences are important for both risky behaviours and for wellbeing, we also look at the social networks of disabled young people. Figure 4 shows that disabled young people have slightly smaller friendship networks than those who are not disabled, but the differences are not great. Very few young people have no friends.

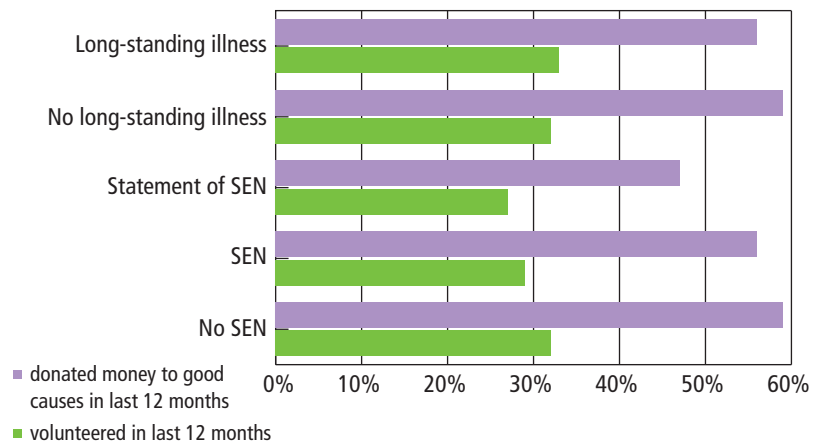
Around 63 per cent of non-disabled young people and those with SEN without a statement have had a romantic relationship by age 19. In contrast, only half (50 per cent) of those with a statement of SEN or a long-standing illness in their early teens have had a romantic relationship by age 19, which represents a substantial difference.

**Life satisfaction**

In Figure 5, we look at how happy disabled young people are compared to non-disabled young people. We see that those with a statement of SEN or with long-standing illness tend to be somewhat less happy on average than their non-disabled peers. The differences are not enormous, but they are statistically significant.

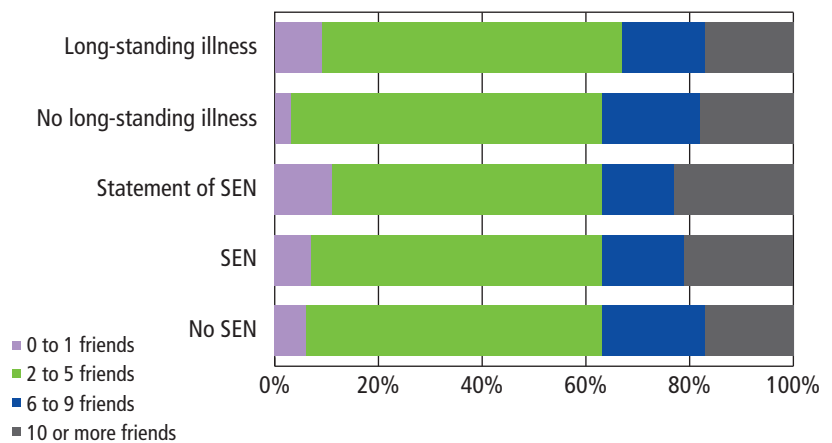
**FIGURE 3**

**Positive social behaviours among 19-year-olds by disability status**



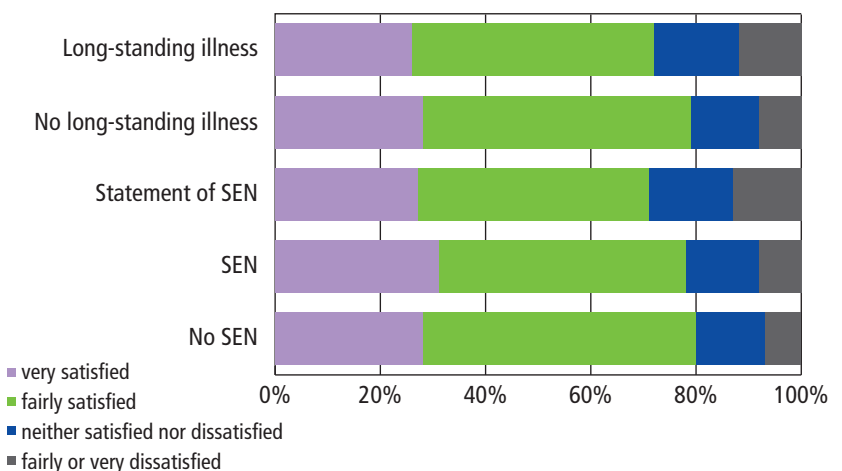
**FIGURE 4**

**Number of close friends at age 19**



**FIGURE 5**

**Life satisfaction at age 19 by disability status**



## Conclusion

Disabled young people differ less than might be expected in their risky and positive social behaviours and their relationships. However, they are somewhat less likely to engage in certain risky behaviours than their non-disabled peers. They also have slightly smaller social

networks, including substantially lower chances of having had a romantic relationship, and report slightly lower levels of life satisfaction at this age. There is therefore some evidence that they tend to be on the margins of typical behavioural practices for their age group.

## About this study

This summary is based on analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England. All analyses are adjusted to take account of sample design and non-response. It forms part of *Trajectories and Transitions of Disabled Children and Young People*, a joint research project by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS), the National Children's Bureau (NCB), and the NCB's Council for Disabled Children (CDC).

Research is being carried out by Lucinda Platt, Sam Parsons and Stella Chatzitheochari from CLS; Becky Fauth and Helena Jelcic

from NCB; and Philippa Stobbs and Lucia Winters from CDC.

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This summary is the third in a series. Summary one covered the definition and prevalence of disability according to different measures, and summary two looked at the socio-economic position of families with disabled children.