

Trajectories and transitions of disabled children and young people

Research summary two: Socio-economic disadvantage among families with disabled children

Do families with a disabled child face greater socio-economic disadvantage? And how does the risk of disadvantage vary with age?

Evidence from two cohort studies of children and young people

Introduction

Disability is typically associated with a greater risk of socio-economic disadvantage. However, we know relatively little about the extent to which disabled children are born into more disadvantaged families or whether disadvantage accumulates during childhood. Moreover, there has been little opportunity to explore whether the pattern is the same across different measures of disability and at different ages.

This summary outlines research that explores these issues, using data from two cohort studies that follow the lives of children and young people over time: the Millennium Cohort Study and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England.

KEY FINDINGS

- Child disability is associated with family socio-economic disadvantage. This is the case in both younger childhood and in adolescence, and with any measure of disability used. However, the association is greatest for those identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- The extent to which disadvantage increases over time varies with both the measure of disability and with age. The circumstances of teenagers are more stable than those of younger children.
- There is some evidence that having a disabled child raises family stress, increasing disadvantage; but also that children defined as disabled are more likely to come from disadvantaged families.

Measures of socio-economic disadvantage and child disability

We use two broad indicators of socio-economic disadvantage: living in a lone parent family and living in a workless household.¹ These are not intended as potential causes of disability but have been selected as indicators of family disadvantage because they are associated with:

- greater risks of poverty, material deprivation and family stress
- poorer child outcomes, such as educational attainment and behavioural difficulties.

We also use different measures of child disability, as outlined in summary one.

For the Millennium Cohort Study these are:

- Mild and severe developmental delay (DD), measured at nine months. This is a prospective measure, so we can see if families with a child with DD become more disadvantaged over time.
- Long-standing limiting illness (LSLI), measured at any of ages 3, 5 or 7. This measure is closest to the Equality Act definition of disability and enables us to see if young children defined according to the legislation experience relative

disadvantage compared to non-disabled children, in the same way that adults with LSLI do compared to non-disabled adults. LSLI includes long-term health conditions, such as type 1 diabetes or asthma; mental health problems; and impairments such as a missing limb or partial sight.

- Special Educational Needs (SEN) measured at age 7, including those with a Statement of SEN. This measure, which is commonly used in educational research, allows us to see if those who are defined as SEN at age 7 have come from families that are already disadvantaged in their infancy or whether they become more disadvantaged over time. SEN covers health conditions or impairments which may inhibit learning, such as hearing loss; behavioural difficulties such as ADHD; learning-related conditions such as dyslexia; and learning disabilities.

For the LSYPE we use two measures of disability:

- Special Educational Needs (SEN), including those with a Statement of SEN
- Long-standing limiting illness.

The studies

The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)

The MCS is a study of more than 19,000 children born in 2000-2001. The children have been surveyed five times so far: at 9 months, and ages 3, 5, 7 and 11 years. The age 11 survey was completed in 2013 and data will be available in early 2014. The study collects a rich array of information on different aspects of the children's lives, including socio-economic background, health and disability, and behavioural and cognitive outcomes.

In order to explore the experience of the children over time using consistent measures of disability, this research focuses only on children who were present at each of the first four surveys. For comparison with the LSYPE, we concentrate on those

living in England, providing a sample of 7,342 children.

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.

¹ In the full analysis we include a much wider range of indicators. These two have been selected for the summary as they are consistent across the two studies and they reflect the overall patterns shown with the wider range of indicators.

Socio-economic disadvantage and disability in the MCS

Figure 1 shows the proportion of children who have ever lived in a lone parent family between ages nine months and 7 years. For example, the rates at age 7 include all those who have lived in a lone parent family at earlier ages, even if they have subsequently lived in a two-parent family. At 9 months, there is little difference between children with mild or severe DD and those with no disability. However, over time those with DD become more likely to have lived in a lone parent family at some point.

By contrast, children with LSLI or SEN are at greater risk of living in a lone parent family at 9 months.

Figure 2 shows the proportion of children who have ever lived in a workless household by disability status. Worklessness covers those families where no parent is in work, whether through unemployment, health problems or disability, or family responsibilities.

The pattern in Figure 2 is similar to that in Figure 1 and shows that families of children who are disabled are at an increased risk of having ever been workless at each time point. The risk is particularly high for families of children with a Statement of SEN.

There is also an increase in the gaps between disabled children and non-disabled children over time. This is particularly notable for children with severe DD: the proportion of those with experience of living in a workless household starts off close to the proportion of non-disabled children but increases at a faster rate than for the other disability measures.

Socio-economic disadvantage and disability in the LSYPE

Figures 3 and 4 show the proportion of teenage children who have lived in lone parent and workless families between the ages of 13/14 and 16/17. For example, the rates at age 16/17 include all those who have lived in a workless family either at that or previous ages, even if their family circumstances have subsequently changed.

FIGURE 1

Proportion of children who have ever lived in a lone parent family by ages 9 months, 3 years, 5 years and 7 years

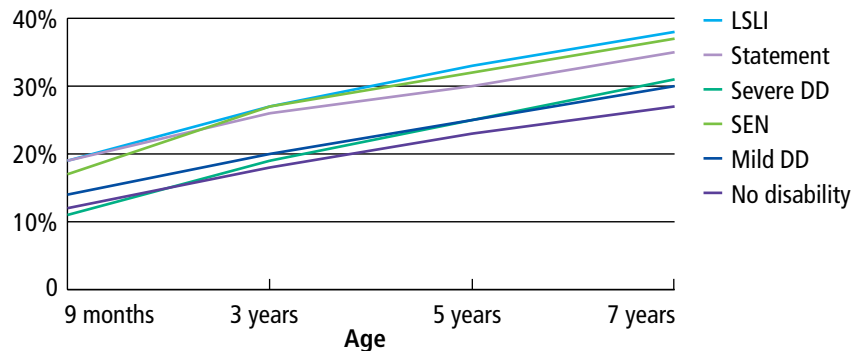


FIGURE 2

Proportion of children who have ever lived in a workless family by ages 9 months, 3 years, 5 years and 7 years

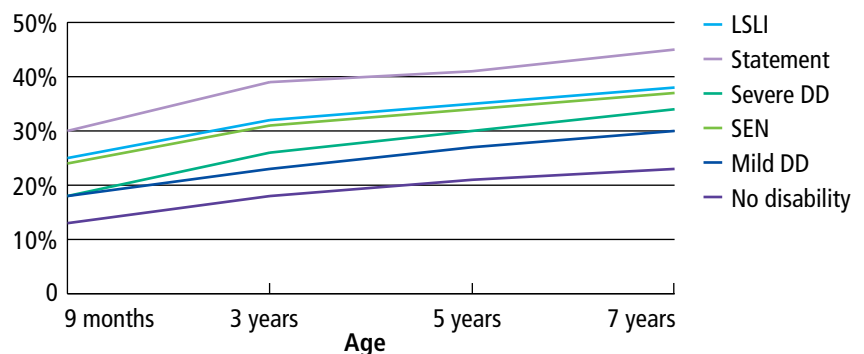
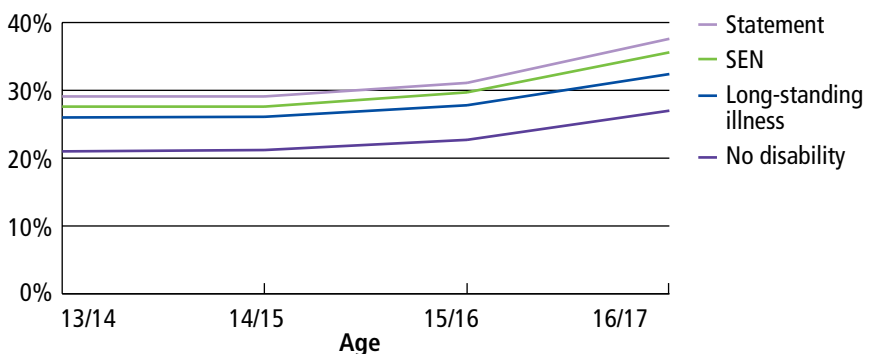


FIGURE 3

Proportion of children with experience of living in a lone parent family between ages 13/14 and 16/17 by each age

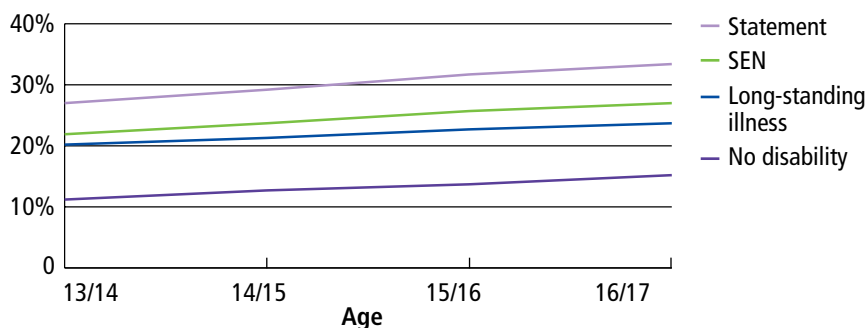


Figures 3 and 4 reveal an association between socio-economic disadvantage and all measures of disability. Those with a Statement of SEN are most likely to face disadvantaged family circumstances at any point in these teenage years.

However, the differences between non-disabled and disabled children living in lone parent or workless households remain similar over time. That is, there is no evidence that disabled children face an increased chance of their family becoming 'at risk' over the period.

FIGURE 4

Proportion of children with experience of living in a workless family between ages 13/14 and 16/17 by each age



Conclusion

The findings show that disabled children are more likely to experience disadvantaged family circumstances, whatever measure of disability is used, and in both early childhood and adolescence.

The risks of disadvantage appear to increase during early childhood but become more stable in adolescence. This is supported by additional analysis² which has followed individual children's changes in experience

over time. Children with a Statement of SEN are most likely to experience disadvantaged circumstances and these date back to infancy, even though SEN is measured after school entry.

The fact that there is an increasing likelihood of disadvantage among families with children who have mild or severe DD suggests that child disability may itself be a stress factor for families. However, the evidence for other measures of

disability indicates that disadvantage may cumulatively impact on children.

Future analysis will explore the relationship between individual children's patterns of disadvantage, disability status and behavioural and educational outcomes.

² Parsons, S. and Platt, L. (2013) Disability among young children: Prevalence, heterogeneity and socio-economic disadvantage. CLS Working Paper 2013/11. London: Centre for Longitudinal Studies.

About this study

Trajectories and Transitions of Disabled Children and Young People is a joint project between 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 second in a series that will be produced to reflect the different stages of the project. Summary 1 covered the definition and prevalence of disability according to different measures.