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WARWICK

Disability and Social Mobility

A NEGLECTED RELATIONSHIP

Dr Stella Chatzitheochari
University of Warwick

Dr Sanne Velthuis
University of Newcastle

Dr Roxanne Connelly
University of Edinburgh

About this briefing

Recent years have witnessed a dramatic increase in the prevalence of childhood and adolescent disability in England. However, evidence on the socio-economic attainment of disabled children and young people remains limited.

This briefing highlights overlooked inequalities between disabled and non-disabled young people's activity status and social mobility in early adulthood. It specifically focuses on the importance of parental social class for disabled young people's socio-economic outcomes.

The Research

Dr Stella Chatzitheochari (University of Warwick), Dr Sanne Velthuis (University of Newcastle), and Dr Roxanne Connelly (University of Edinburgh) analysed data from Next Steps, a nationally representative longitudinal study that follows the lives of approximately 16,000 adolescents born in 1989-1990 in England. The research focused on young people who were identified with Special Educational Needs and/or conditions/impairments that compromise

Highlights

- There are stark inequalities between disabled and non-disabled young people's social mobility in early adulthood.
- Disability has a disproportionate negative effect on the occupational outcomes of disabled young people from low social class backgrounds.
- Further research is needed to understand the mechanisms behind disability differentials in social mobility.
- Nationally representative longitudinal data that provide sufficient numbers of young people with different impairments and/or conditions, measures of educational attainment, stigmatisation, and labour market discrimination, are necessary for this research endeavour.

school attendance and the ability to complete homework.

The majority of study participants attended mainstream rather than special secondary schools.

The researchers examined the association of social class origins (measured at age 13/14) and social class destinations in early adulthood (measured at age 25). Social class is measured with the 3-class National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC), which captures employment relations and occupational conditions.

Key findings

Figure 1 provides a graphical illustration of social mobility patterns of Next Steps cohort members by disability status. Thickness of the lines represent people moving from social class origins to social class destinations at age 25.

Disabled young people are more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds (**43 %** as opposed to **32%** for non-disabled peers)

There are also stark disability gaps in occupational attainment. Approximately **35%** of disabled young people are **not in paid employment** at age 25, as opposed to **18%** of non-disabled young people. For disabled young people, this risk varies substantially by parental social class background: **21%** of those from a low social class background are **not in paid employment** at age 25 as opposed to only **8%** and **6%** among those from high and middle social class backgrounds.

Non-disabled young people are also twice as likely to experience **upward mobility** compared to disabled young people (**23%** and **13%** respectively).

Class reproduction is far less common among disabled young people. For example, **10 %** of disabled youth have parents from a high social class background and remain in a similar position at age 25, as opposed to **21%** of non-disabled young people. In contrast, disabled young people are more likely to experience downward mobility.

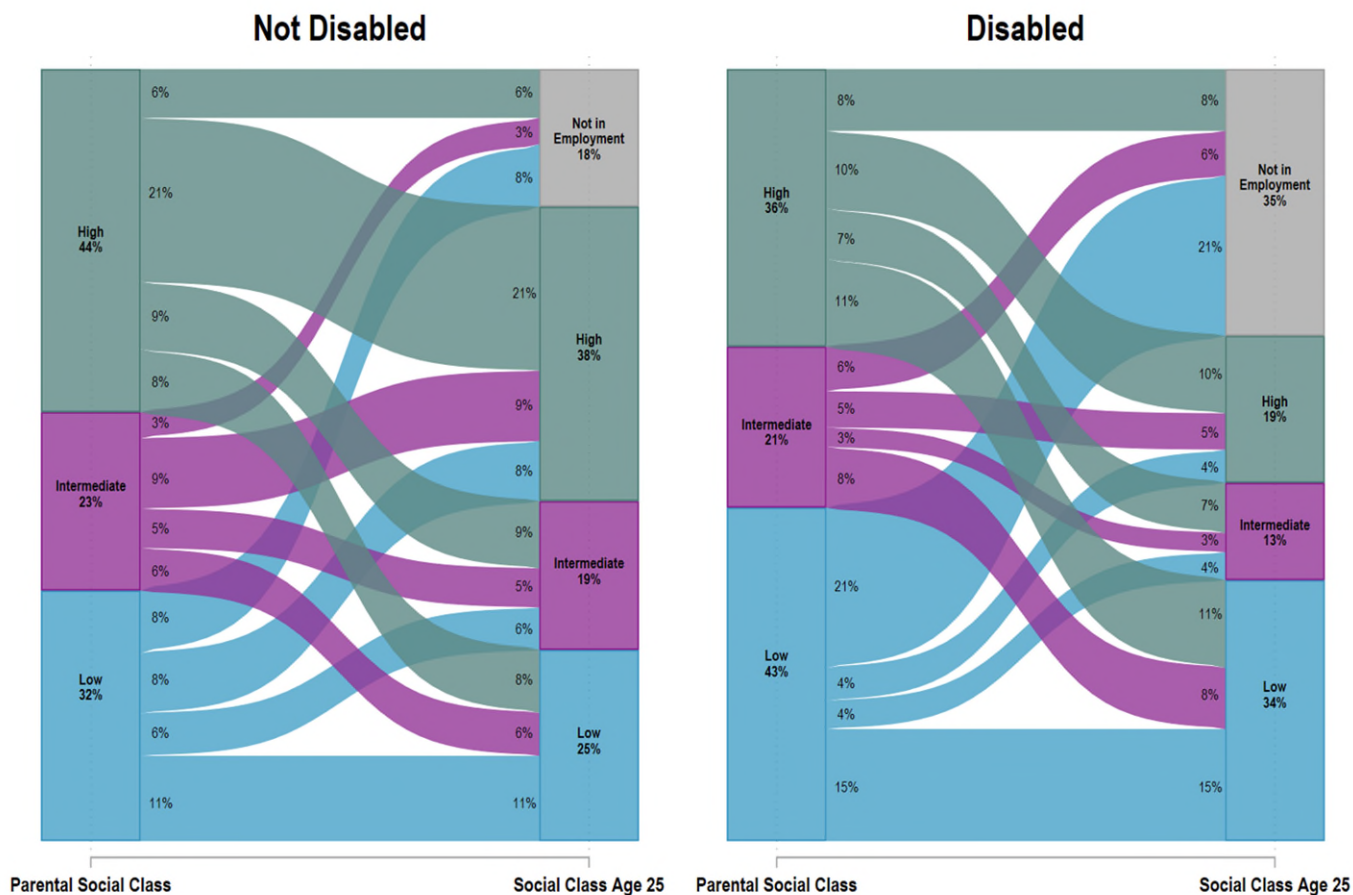


Figure 1. Social class origins and destinations at age 25 by disability status.

Conclusion

This research reveals stark overlooked inequalities in early occupational outcomes of disabled and non-disabled young people. Social class is particularly influential: disabled young people from low social class backgrounds have worse occupational outcomes than those from middle and high social class backgrounds.

What explains these patterns? There are several factors that may be relevant, such as differences in educational attainment by disability status, as well as structural discrimination and experiences of stigmatisation of young people with different impairments and conditions and social class backgrounds. At present, there is a lack of nationally representative longitudinal survey data resources that can help researchers disentangle causes behind these patterns. Inclusion of good quality measures on the abovementioned factors, as well as sufficient samples of young people with different impairments and conditions are necessary to advance our understanding surrounding disability-related disadvantage in early adulthood.

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Further information

This briefing is based on:

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The views contained in this briefing do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Warwick.

Contact the researchers

Dr Stella Chatzitheochari, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick
s.chatzitheochari@warwick.ac.uk

Dr Sanne Velthuis, School of Geography, Politics, and Sociology, University of Newcastle
Sanne.velthuis@newcastle.ac.uk

Dr Roxanne Connelly, School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh
Roxanne.connelly@ed.ac.uk

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