

Trajectories and transitions of disabled children and young people

Research summary four: Disability and bullying

Are disabled children and young people at higher risk of being bullied?

Evidence from two cohort studies of children and young people

Introduction

Bullying is associated with adverse long-term health and social problems among school-aged children and teenagers.¹ Findings from small-scale studies suggest that child disability is associated with a greater risk of being bullied. However, there is a lack of longitudinal quantitative research that explores the relationship of disability with bullying, and there has also been little opportunity to examine this relationship at different ages.

This summary outlines research that builds upon previous findings, using nationally representative data from two studies of children and young people: the Millennium Cohort Study and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England.

1. Ken, R (2003) 'Consequences of bullying in schools', *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 48(9): 583-590

KEY FINDINGS

- Disability is associated with a higher risk of being bullied for both children and teenagers.
- The association between disability and bullying remains even when other characteristics known to influence bullying are taken into account.

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 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. This research focuses only on those who were involved in 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 representative study of nearly 16,000 young people born in the early 1990s. They were first surveyed when they were age 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. The research summarised here concentrates on a sample of 12,144 LSYPE members who took part in each of the first three surveys.

Measures of bullying

The MCS and LSYPE collected information on peer-group bullying in the surveys at age 7 and age 15/16 respectively.

For MCS we use two different bullying measures: a more severe measure when children report they were bullied 'all of the time' and a measure of any bullying, when the children report being bullied either 'all of the time' or 'some of the time'.

The LSYPE teenagers were asked about their experiences of different types of bullying and victimisation, which we have separated into relational and physical. Relational bullying refers to behaviours such as exclusion and rumour spreading, while physical bullying refers to direct violent acts such as hitting and kicking.²

2. Rivers, I, Smith, P. (1994) 'Types of Bullying Behaviour and Their Correlates', *Aggressive Behaviour*, 20: 359-368

BULLYING QUESTIONS IN MCS AND LSYPE

MCS (age 7)

How often do other children bully you?

- All of the time
- Some of the time
- Never

LSYPE (age 15/16)

Relational bullying (experienced in the 12 months prior to the survey)

- Have you ever been upset by being called hurtful names by other students, including getting text messages or emails?
- Have you been excluded from a group of friends or from joining in activities?

Physical bullying (experienced in the 12 months prior to the survey)

- Have other students at school ever made you give them money or personal possessions?
- Have other students ever threatened to hit you, kick you or use any other form of violence against you?
- Have other students ever actually hit you, kicked you or used any other form of violence against you?

Measures of disability

In this research we use several different measures of disability, outlined in further detail in summary one.

In the MCS these are:

- Mild and severe developmental delay (DD), measured at 9 months by assessing motor coordination and early communicative gestures.
- Long-standing limiting illness (LSLI), measured at 3, 5, or 7 years. LSLI covers 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 Need.³ 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.

In the LSYPE these are:

- SEN, measured at age 13/14, including those with a Statement of Need.
- LSLI, measured at age 13/14.

3. A Statement of Need is a formal document detailing the specialist educational support necessary to meet the child's learning needs.

Findings

Forty per cent of children in the MCS reported that they were bullied by other children 'some of the time' and a further 9 per cent said they were bullied 'all of the time'. In the LSYPE, 21 per cent of young people reported relational bullying in the 12 months prior to the age 15/16 survey, and 18 per cent reported physical bullying.

Table 1 shows that disabled children and young people were more likely to be bullied than their non-disabled peers. In the MCS the difference between non-disabled and disabled children is largest when looking at children who report being bullied 'all of the time'. In the LSYPE, young people who were disabled were particularly likely to experience relational bullying – being called names or being excluded from a group of friends.

TABLE 1

Percentage of children and young people bullied by their peers, by disability status

	MCS			LSYPE		
	Bullied 'some of the time' (%)	Bullied 'all of the time' (%)	Number	Relational Bullying (%)	Physical bullying (%)	Number
No SEN	40	7	5, 807	19	16	10, 826
SEN	40	17	871	27	25	745
Statement	37	20	212	34	27	572
No LSLI	40	8	6, 234	20	17	11, 448
LSLI	41	14	682	32	23	696
No DD	39	9	6, 063			
Mild DD	41	9	656			
Severe DD	46	13	155			

In the next stage of the analysis, we tested whether the differences in the experiences of disabled and non-disabled children and young people were affected by other characteristics that are known to influence risks of bullying and might also vary with disability status.⁴ These factors include: socio-economic circumstances; family structure; educational attainment; quality of relationship with mother; mother's mental health and disability status; and child's age, height, and weight.

Figures 1 to 4 show a) the likelihood of a child or young person being bullied when only considering their disability status; and b) the likelihood of being bullied once background and individual characteristics were also taken into account. These percentages enable us to see whether having a disability still increases the risk of being bullied for a child or young person who is similar in all other ways to their non-disabled counterpart.

The lower percentages for both disabled children and young people once background and individual characteristics are taken into account indicate that some of the relationship between disability and bullying is explained by these other risk factors. However, there remains a gap in the percentages for those with a disability and those without, showing that disabled children and young people still tend to face an increased risk of bullying.

Figure 1 shows that, in the MCS, 55 per cent of children with SEN experienced bullying 'some' or 'all' of the time once background and individual risk factors were taken into account. In contrast, 47 per cent of children without SEN reported being bullied at all, a difference of eight percentage points. Similarly, 53-57 per cent of children with a Statement of Needs, LSLI or DD experienced bullying 'some' or 'all' of the time, compared to 47-48 per cent of those without.

In figure 2, we can see that children with SEN, a Statement of Need, LSLI or DD are also more likely to be bullied 'all of the time'. Strikingly, the risk among children with SEN is double that of those with no SEN but otherwise similar characteristics (12 per cent compared to 6 per cent).

FIGURE 1

Likelihood of MCS children being bullied 'some' or 'all' of the time

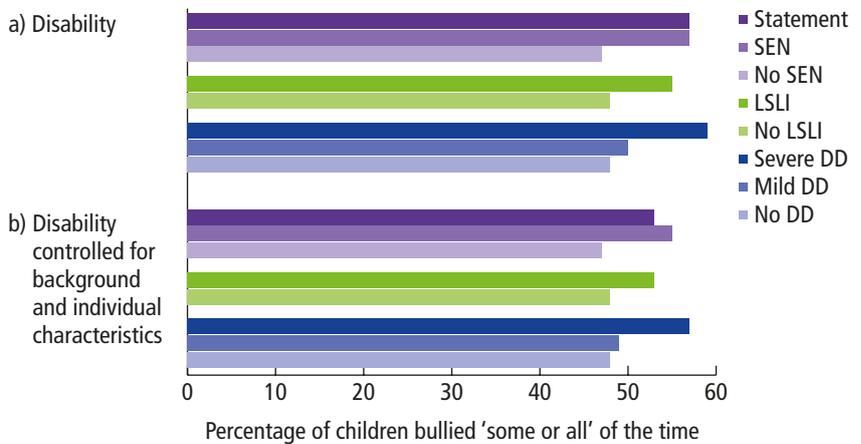


FIGURE 2

Likelihood of MCS children being bullied 'all' of the time

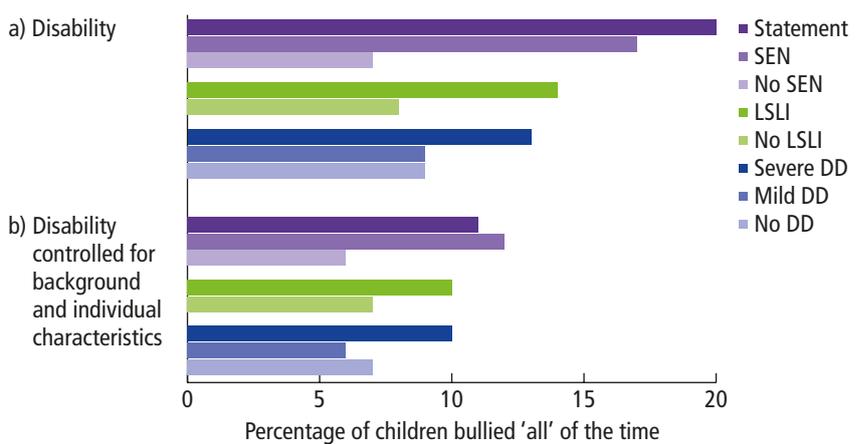
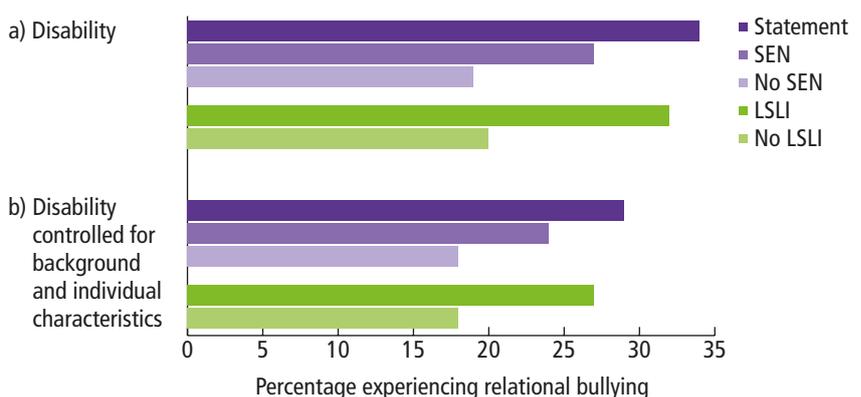


FIGURE 3

Likelihood of young people in the LSYPE experiencing relational bullying



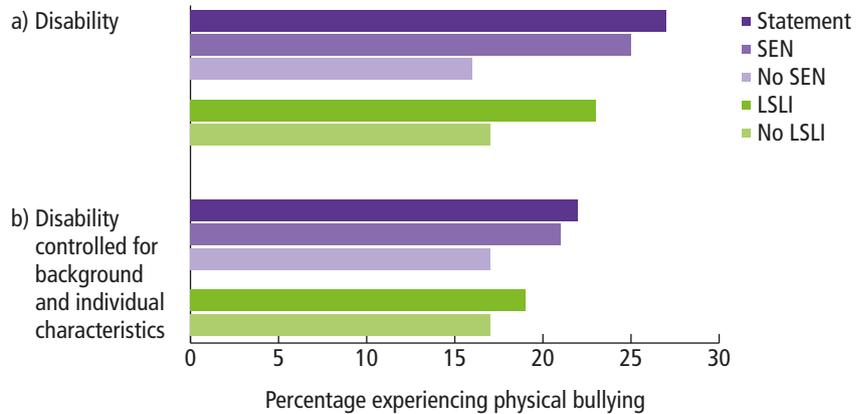
4. See, for example, Tipett, N., Wolke, D., Platt, L. (2013) 'Ethnicity and bullying involvement in a national UK youth sample', *Journal of Adolescence*, Vol. 36 (4): 639-649

Among young people in the LSYPE, those with SEN, a Statement of Need or LSLI all had increased risks of experiencing relational bullying, even when taking other differences in their characteristics into account. For example, as figure 3 shows, 18 per cent of young people with no SEN experienced relational bullying in contrast to 24-29 per cent of those with SEN or a Statement of Need who were similar in all other ways.

Similarly, figure 4 shows that disabled young people also face a higher risk of physical bullying compared to those without a disability but with otherwise similar characteristics. For example, 27 per cent of young people with a Statement of Need experience physical forms of bullying compared to only 16 per cent of those without SEN who are similar in all other ways.

FIGURE 4

Likelihood of young people in the LSYPE experiencing physical bullying



Conclusion

Our research demonstrates that there is an association between disability with bullying in both early childhood and adolescence, even after other factors that affect the risk of being bullied have been taken into account. This is the case for all measures of bullying that were used. The findings raise concerns for the well-being of more vulnerable children, and the potential long-term consequences for their future lives.

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).

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