

# 'Disablism' could shape the future for young people with a disability

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(Medical Xpress) -- A new study led by the University of Sydney hopes to shed light on how the experiences of young Australians with a disability are shaped by discrimination.

The study, titled *Disability and Ability: How young people with impairments make the transition to adulthood*, will follow the [life experiences](#) of 100 [participants](#) aged between 19 and 26 years of age over three years.

"We already know from recent research by our colleagues that, compared to their able-bodied [peers](#), 15 to 29-year-olds with a long-term [health condition](#) or impairment have an increased risk of negative social, physical and mental health outcomes," says chief investigator Dr Nikki Wedgwood, of the University's Faculty of Health Sciences.

"We also know from previous research that this is less likely due to their impairment per se and more likely due to the fact that people with impairments are commonly perceived differently to able-bodied people and so experience lower levels of inclusion in society generally."

[Discrimination](#) towards people with impairments — also known as 'disablism' — can have a profound impact on the lives of people with impairments.

"We tend to think of people with impairments as 'that' person with a disability rather than that student or that parent or that musician and so

on, and so we tend to treat them differently - we might avoid them, or they might just be socially invisible to us," says Dr Wedgwood.

"As such, disablism affects their sense of belonging and levels of inclusion in virtually every aspect of life, from peer acceptance at school, to employment, marriage and other relationships," she says.

"Employers will tend to assume people with impairments can't do a lot of things when they actually can, and they tend to receive a lot of pity instead of friendship, and discrimination instead of inclusion."

Researchers hope the findings from the study will inform policy to help ensure that more of the 250,000 young [Australians](#) with impairments are able to meet the developmental and structural challenges of early adulthood and become fully included members of society.

"We know that adolescence is a vital developmental phase in able-bodied people - a real make or break time in terms of what role a person will play in society or on its margins - so it is likely to be the optimal time for interventions in the lives of people with impairments."

Adolescence and 'emerging adulthood' are neglected in terms of disability research, with most studies focusing either on adulthood or childhood.

The University of Sydney is hoping to expand evidence-based knowledge in areas such as this through its new Centre for Disability Research and Policy, which aims to influence policy and practice to make a lasting difference in the lives of people with [disabilities](#). The study is funded by the Australian Research Council and is being carried out in collaboration with Deakin University.

Provided by University of Sydney

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