

Inadequate support in schools for diabetic children

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The project entitled 'Young people with diabetes and their peers' led by Dr Brooks – who is a psychologist with the University of Huddersfield's Centre for Applied Psychological and Health Research – set out to examine the lives of young diabetics from the age when they are starting to be more independent, they have now published their research.

DIABETIC pupils who receive inadequate support from schools and insensitive treatment from teachers may not be managing their condition adequately, with worrying long-term consequences for their health. This means there is an urgent need for greater awareness of the disease, so that young people with [diabetes](#) are not singled out for unwanted attention and have the facilities they need, according to a research project led by the University of Huddersfield's Dr Jo Brooks.

She assembled a team of experts and received funding from Diabetes UK for the project entitled Young people with diabetes and their peers. The goal was to explore attitudes towards diabetes from the point of view of teenage diabetics themselves and their friends. A series of interviews took place and there were also focus groups in which secondary school pupils discussed the illness.

Type 1 diabetes

The research concentrated on Type 1 diabetes, the most common form of chronic illness among young people. Unlike the more widely-

publicised Type 2, it is not diet-related, but the numbers of Type 1 diabetics are increasing in the UK. It is currently estimated that of the three million people in the country who have been diagnosed as diabetic, 15 per cent have the Type 1 variety, which means that the body cannot produce insulin. Constant medication and checks in blood sugar levels are required, although a normal life can be led otherwise.

The project led by Dr Brooks – who is a psychologist with the University of Huddersfield's Centre for Applied Psychological and Health Research – set out to examine the lives of young diabetics from the age when they are starting to be more independent.

"Previous research that has been done with young people has been mainly about their families and the home setting. There has very little done on [diabetes management](#) in a peer context," said Dr Brooks. Among her concerns is the danger that teenage diabetics might become self-conscious about their condition and neglect their medication, and that ignorance among other pupils might lead to bullying.

Dr Brooks said that she had been shocked to discover the absence of an overall policy towards diabetes management within the secondary education sector. Some schools – such as Huddersfield's Almondbury High, which participated in the research project – were exemplary in their provision, but policy varied massively from school to school.

"Some pupils were getting tremendously good support from their teachers, and their friends were also providing better support because they knew about the condition. But there were other places where there clearly weren't any policies in place that were being adhered to."

Dr Brooks learned of several cases of diabetic pupils receiving unsympathetic treatment from teachers, not being allowed to leave the classroom if they felt unwell because of their condition.

"Or they might need to eat something in class, to keep up their [blood sugar levels](#), and they would be told off!"

There is a need for greater awareness and education about diabetes, concludes Dr Brooks, who has completed her report on the research project.

Raised awareness of diabetes would help normalise the condition so that young diabetics would therefore be less likely to become the focus of unwanted attention, states the report, adding that educational material piloted with focus groups in secondary schools was well-received and easily grasped by participants.

"Findings from this study suggest that more education about diabetes amongst young people is needed, but also, encouragingly, that this would be welcomed by [young people](#) themselves. We hope to use this work to develop a larger scale project to increase awareness of diabetes in school settings amongst both pupils and teaching staff."

Provided by University of Huddersfield

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