Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on those with disabilities: Findings from Growing Up in Ireland

Adam Nolan
ESRI/GUI
Presentation Overview

• Brief overview of disabilities and related social and health implications

• Overview of the COVID pandemic for those with a disability

• The present study:
  – Sample Description
  – Health related differences
  – Emotional Well-Being related differences
Background – Persons with Disabilities Pre-COVID

• WHO: Disability refers to the interaction between individuals with a health condition and personal and environmental factors

• Those with disabilities are more likely to face:
  – Poverty, economic and educational inequality, and unemployment
  – Poor health and increased interaction with healthcare services
  – Poor mental health
  – Discrimination and social exclusion

• WHO (2020) – Disability Fact Sheet; Doyle (2021)
Background – Disabilities in Ireland

• 13.5% of the population (almost 650,000) have a disability (CSO, 2016)

• Less likely to be in employment

• More likely to finish education earlier

• 50% more likely to experience discrimination and exclusion

CSO (2016) – National Census; Disability Federation of Ireland (2019) – Disability Profile: Ireland; Banks et al., 2018
Background – Disability During COVID

• Global concern that the pandemic is disproportionately affecting those with disabilities.

• Increased risk of:
  – Developing severe C19 disease
  – Increased mortality rate from C19
  – Difficulty practicing routine preventative measures
  – Reduced access to healthcare
  – Anxiety, stress, and depression
  – Discrimination and undermining of rights

• Boyle et al., (2020); Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2020); Pettinicchio et al., (2021)
The Current Study

- Uses data from the special GUI COVID-19 survey
- Focus on young adults from Cohort ‘98 who were aged ~22 years during data collection
- Data were collected during early December 2020
Measures

• Outcome measures: Experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic
  – Vulnerability to COVID-19
  – Contracted COVID-19
  – Access to health services
  – Informal health support
  – Life satisfaction
  – Optimism
  – CES-D 8 Scores
  – Informal emotional support

• Longitudinal Data from Wave 4 (age 20)
  – Disability & disability type
  – Family composition and social class
  – Family financial strain
  – PCG employment status
Sample

- N = 1, 979
  - Removed those who did not answer key variables in both the COVID survey and Wave 4

- 16.2% (n=320) reported a disability at Wave 4

- No significant difference between YAs with and without a disability in:
  - Family reported difficulty making ends meet at age 20
  - Income quintile at age 20
  - PCG Education level at 20
  - One vs two-parent family at age 20
  - Living arrangement at time of COVID survey
• Explorative, descriptive study

• The majority of YAs with disabilities reported living in the family home at the time of the COVID survey (70%)
  – Many of the issues reported for those with disabilities during the pandemic were related to those living in congregated settings (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2020).
Sample Background – Disability Type

- Disability Type (Age 20) (n=320)

  - Diseases of the nervous system: 6%
  - Diseases of the endocrine system: 6%
  - Diseases of the digestive system: 6%
  - Diseases of the musculoskeletal system: 10%
  - Diseases of the respiratory system: 14%
  - Other illnesses: 15%
  - Mental illness and Behavioural Disorders: 50%
Sample Background – Self Rated Health

• Health at age 20

Self Rated Health at Age 20

- Excellent*: 12% (4% Disability, 34% Mental Illness/Behavioural Disorder, 66% No Disability)
- Very Good*: 38% (38% Disability, 35% Mental Illness/Behavioural Disorder, 67% No Disability)
- Good*: 49% (28% Disability, 43% Mental Illness/Behavioural Disorder, 54% No Disability)
- Fair*: 16% (16% Disability, 15% Mental Illness/Behavioural Disorder, 70% No Disability)
- Poor*: 0% (6% Disability, 3% Mental Illness/Behavioural Disorder, 91% No Disability)
Health
Significantly more YAs with a disability at increased risk of developing severe COVID-19
Health - Contracted COVID-19

- Contracted COVID-19:
  - 7.5% of YA with a mental illness/behavioural disorder
  - 5.6% of YA with a disability
  - 3.7% of YA without a disability
  - No significant differences between groups
Reduced Access to both medical and mental health services due to the COVID 19 Pandemic for YP with disabilities

- However, more than 1 in 10 YAs without a disability did not have access to support for emotional/mental health problems
– Significantly higher number of YAs with MI/BD did not have access to support for emotional/mental health problems compared to those with other disabilities – still 1 in 5 with an other disability.
– Generally, YAs across all three groups reported being able to depend on the people around them if they were ill
Emotional Wellbeing

Photo by Robina Weermeijer on Unsplash
An independent t-test revealed that YAs with a disability were significantly less satisfied with life compared with those without a disability.

- $t(1974) = -4.969, p < .001$
Emotional Wellbeing – Life Satisfaction

- ANOVA and post-hoc tests show that this difference is driven by those with a mental illness or behavioural disorder
  - $F (2, 1973) = 21.421, p < .001$
Emotional Wellbeing – Longitudinal Life Satisfaction

Change in Life Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Illness/Behavioural Disorder</th>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>No Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life satisfaction at 20</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>6.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life satisfaction at 22</td>
<td>-1.30</td>
<td>-1.11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Longitudinal decrease in life satisfaction across all three groups
  - Reported in other studies of life satisfaction in emerging adults during COVID (Preetz et al., 2021)
Emotional Wellbeing – Optimism for the Future

- Significantly less YAs with a disability agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I am optimistic about my future”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Disabilities*</th>
<th>No Disability*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Optimism for</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the future</td>
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* Includes all disabilities.
Again, this difference was driven by those reporting a mental illness.
A one way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in scores on the CES-D 8; $F(2, 1963) = 41.132, p < .001$

Post-hoc analysis showed that there was a significant difference between all three groups.
Emotional Wellbeing – Informal Support

Could Depend on People at Home to talk to about problems

- Lower than support if sick in bed
  - Still >75% could depend somewhat or a great deal across all groups
Conclusions

• YAs with disabilities showed poorer pandemic experiences across a range of areas, including
  – Increased vulnerability to severe COVID-19
  – Reduced access to medical and mental health services

• Those with a mental illness or behavioural disorder fared worse, reporting:
  – Lower life satisfaction and optimism for the future
  – Higher levels of depression

• However, those with a disability generally were confident in the support they would receive at home
Limitations

• Representativeness
  – Online survey, self-complete
  – Missed those without access to internet or with lower computer literacy (who may have had worse pandemic experiences)
  – Likely missed those with more severe impairments who would be unable to complete the survey without additional supports

• Not disability specific questionnaire
  – May have missed key areas of concern relevant to only those with a disability

• High variation between disabilities reported
Next Steps

• Preliminary Analysis

• Future research:
  – Focus on other domains affected by the pandemic, such as education, employment, and income
  – Look at more meaningful ways to group disability type
  – Examine differences by living arrangement
  – Potential for qualitative research to explore further areas of concern specific to YAs with a disability
References

• WHO (2020) – Disability Fact Sheet;
• Doyle (2021) - ‘All in this together?’ A commentary on the impact of COVID-19 on disability day services in Ireland
• CSO (2016) – National Census;
• Disability Federation of Ireland (2019) – Disability Profile: Ireland
• Banks, Grotti, Fahey, & Dorothy Watson (2018) - Disability and Discrimination in Ireland: Evidence from the QNHS Equality Modules
• Pettinicchio, D., Maroto, M., Chai, L., & Lukk, M. (2021). Findings from an online survey on the mental health effects of COVID-19 on Canadians with disabilities and chronic health conditions
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Thank you!

Acknowledgements

GUI Team

All participants of *Growing Up in Ireland*

CSO

DCEDIY

Contact Details

Adam.Nolan@ESRI.ie

@AJ__Nolan

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2365-6195