

Project Details	
Project Code	MRCPHS26Br Tinner
Title	Mental health of young people with a disability or chronic illness: a focus on intersectional inequalities
Research Theme	PHS
Project Type	Dry lab
Summary	Mental health outcomes are socially patterned, differing by gender, race and ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status (SES). A gap remains regarding intersectional inequalities in young people's mental health – the way social positions – such as race, gender, and class – are not held in isolation, but overlap and interact. One under-researched group of young people is those with a disability or chronic illness, despite mental health problems being more prevalent. This PhD will examine intersectional mental health inequalities in this group using a range of methods tailored by the student to their interests, to inform policy and improve support.
Description	<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>Mental health is a public health priority. The proportion of 11-16-year-olds with a probable mental disorder rose from 13% in 2017 to 23% in 2023 (NHS Digital 2023). Mental health outcomes are socially patterned, differing by sex, gender, race and ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status (SES) (11). However, inequalities in mental health are complex. Intersectionality – a framework grounded in Black Feminist Thought (Crenshaw 1989) – is increasingly being applied in public health to understand this complexity. Intersectionality posits first that aspects of our identity are not isolated from one another, but overlap and interact. Secondly, these intersections are embedded within a societal matrix of power, privilege, oppression and discrimination (e.g., racism, sexism, and classism), further intersecting to create complex social inequalities (Collins 2015).</p> <p>There is a wealth of evidence showing the patterning of mental health outcomes by sociodemographic factors in isolation (Pattinson et al. 2021 , Terhaag et al. 2021 , Devonport et al. 2023), but a critical gap remains regarding understanding of intersectional inequalities in young people's mental health. There is some limited UK exploration of key intersections, mostly focused across ethnicity, LGBTQ+ identity and socioeconomic position (Moreno-Agostino et al. 2023 , White et al. 2023). One group of young people whose mental health needs are not well understood or addressed is those with a chronic illness or disability. This is despite higher prevalence of mental health disorders among this group. For example, young people with special educational needs having a fourfold chance of a probable mental disorder, and those with a long-term physical health condition being twice as likely to have one (NHS digital, 2021). It is well established that mental health conditions, and multiple co-occurring conditions are associated with particularly poor future social, relational and occupational outcomes.</p> <p><b>Research Aim:</b> To use intersectionality as a theoretical and applied framework to explore inequalities impacting on the mental health of young people with a disability or chronic illness, to inform policy and intervention.</p> <p><b>Objectives</b></p>

	<p>To review evidence on inequalities in young people's mental health related to factors that intersect with disability/chronic illness.</p> <p>To examine sociodemographic intersections in relation to mental health outcomes, for young people who have a disability/chronic illness.</p> <p>To identify ways in which intersectional mental health inequalities experienced by young people with a disability/chronic illness can be reduced.</p> <p><b>Methods</b></p> <p>The balance of training and methods is flexible and will be steered by the interests of the student. The supervisory team have expertise in both quantitative and qualitative methods and this project will benefit from a mixed methods approach. Methods may include:</p> <p>A systematic or scoping review of studies on intersectional inequalities in young people's mental health, with a focus on factors intersecting with disability/chronic illness.</p> <p>Quantitative analyses using longitudinal cohort data (e.g. Stockholm Youth Cohort/Millennium Cohort Study/Born in Bradford/the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children/Twins Early Development Study) using basic and advanced epidemiological methods to investigate inequalities in young people's mental health outcomes for those with a disability/chronic illness, and identify predictors of better-than-expected mental health outcomes for this group.</p> <p>Qualitative study with young people with a disability/chronic illness, to understand the mechanisms and pathways that shape their mental health at various intersections of disadvantage and privilege.</p> <p>Participatory qualitative workshops with young people, parents/carers, service providers, practitioners and policymakers to identify opportunities for intervention</p> <p><b>Added value features</b></p> <p>This PhD project is connected to Dr Laura Tinner's fellowship, meaning there is an existing network of collaborators, engagement opportunities and skills enhancement that can directly feed into the student's development. Links will also be possible with Dr Kidger's NIHR Population Health Career Scientist award exploring better mental health support for young people at risk of poor outcomes in early adulthood; this will enable collaboration with practice partners in local authorities, schools and colleges and third sector organisations for young people across two Integrated Care Systems, and opportunities to learn about systems thinking. Dr Russell's work focuses on the mental health of children and young people and she has established relationships with young people and schools across the South West as well as practitioners such as Educational and Clinical Psychologists. The supervisory team will facilitate meetings with external partners. This might involve presenting initial findings to policy colleagues, organisations such as the Mental Health Foundation or local authorities – all activities we do ourselves and have facilitated for students. These established external networks also provide exciting options for the Horizon placement, with this topic lending itself to many different environments across policy, practice and the charity sector. In encouraging this outward-looking approach, the PhD project presents a unique opportunity to engage with key</p>
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	stakeholders from the start, which is essential for generating impact. The student will be an active participant in this process, being encouraged to forge new networks of direct relevance to their PhD.
Supervisory Team	
Lead Supervisor	
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