



POLICY BRIEF

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE OF LIVING WITH DEVELOPMENTAL COORDINATION DISORDER (DCD)

O'Dea, Áine.^a, Stanley, Mandy^b., Coote, Susan^c., Robinson, Katie^d

School of Allied Health ^{a,c,d}., Ageing Research Centre^d, Health Research Institute^{c, d}, University of Limerick, School of Medical and Health Sciences^b, Edith Cowan University, 270 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup, Western Australia 6027





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this study we explored what daily life is like for children and young people living with DCD. We searched for research papers and found fifteen studies reporting the experiences of 109 children and young people with DCD and we found common themes across the 15 studies including:

- 1) 'It's harder than it should be': Navigating daily activities:** Children with DCD described a mismatch between their abilities and performance norms or expectations for daily activities like handwriting. This mismatch sometimes led to children being critical of themselves.
- 2) Fitting in:** Children and young people with DCD really enjoyed friendships and activities with other children. However, lots of children and young people described being left out or bullied.
- 3) 'So what? I drop things':** In the face of these difficulties children described creative and successful strategies they used and supports they accessed including; assistance from others (parents, friends and teachers), focusing on their strengths and talents, accepting and embracing their difference, adopting a "just do it" attitude, avoiding some activities, using humour or sarcasm, viewing performance expectations as a social construct, and enjoying friendships as a forum for fun, acceptance and protective against exclusion.

This study shows that issues important to children and young people with DCD are not well addressed by health and disability services, for example friendships and bullying.



Why is this issue important?

Developmental Coordination Disorder, also known as Dyspraxia is a motor skills disorder that affects a child's ability to learn and perform motor skills necessary for engagement in everyday activities such as dressing, learning to cycle, handwriting, feeding. It affects approximately 6% of school aged children

What do we know already?

We know that children and young people with DCD are at risk of lower educational attainment and secondary mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression.

What did we do?

In this study, we searched for all research studies describing the views and experiences of everyday life of children and young people with DCD. We looked for the common things that children and young people with DCD reported across these studies.

What did we find?

We found 15 studies, from seven different countries (United Kingdom, Canada, Austria, Italy, Brazil, Belgium and New Zealand). The views of 109 children and young people were included in our results. Nine studies described primary school aged children, and six studies described secondary school aged young people's views and experiences.

Findings

Children and young people do not see their performance difficulties as a problem; rather, it is social expectations and the attitude of others that are perceived as the problem.

Children with DCD describe a mismatch between their abilities and performance norms for daily activities that led to a cascade of negative consequences including; negative self-appraisal, bullying, and exclusion



Findings continued

Children and young people described a wide array of creative and successful strategies, which they used to deal with challenging experiences including;

- Assistance from others (parents, friends and teachers)
- Focusing on their strengths and talents
- Accepting and embracing their difference
- Adopting a “just do it” attitude
- Setting personal goals
- Self-exclusion from some social activities
- Using humour or sarcasm
- Viewing performance expectations as a social construct,
- Enjoying friendships as a forum for fun, acceptance and protective against exclusion.

Recommendations

1. Irish **health and education policy** is focused on inclusion of children in school as a priority outcome. Future service developments should target friendship as a valued outcome for the child and young person with DCD.
2. School-based interventions enhancing the **awareness and understanding of DCD** are essential to support inclusion and participation in school-based activity and reduce the impact of bullying.
3. Interventions that support **family awareness and understanding of DCD at home** and how to support independence and positive relationships are essential.

To read the paper in full click here

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245738>

Contact details: aine.odea@ul.ie aine@otforlife.ie