

## MEDIA RELEASE

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# Young people call for attitudes towards disability to change

Young people want disability to stop being seen as something that needs to be “fixed”, new Australian Catholic University (ACU) research shows.

Focusing on what people with a disability can rather than can't do, challenging stereotypes, and changing negative attitudes that cause harm are also key areas requiring action according to the study findings.

Led by ACU's Institute of Child Protection Studies and funded by the Australian Government through Australia's Disability Strategy, the qualitative study involved 39 people aged 16 to 24 with and without a disability including carers and those with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and genders.

Lead researcher Associate Professor Tim Moore said the study, run in conjunction with Children and Young People with Disability Australia and the Australian National University, explored how young people perceived societal attitudes towards disability.

“We wanted to understand how these attitudes shape the experiences of young people with disability, particularly in education, employment, and social activities,” he said.

Among the findings, the participants, who took part in focus group discussions, said disability was often seen negatively, with people treated unfairly including facing employment barriers, while school experiences varied.

Responding to questions about community attitudes, their impact and the factors that may have led to them, as well as personal experiences involving family, friends, school, the media, and the influence of their own cultural identity and geographical location on attitudes towards their disability, comments included:

*“There is a lot of judgement that stems from stereotypes and can lead to people dehumanising disabled people or simply treating them badly.”*

*“I will be very infantilised and treated like I can't do anything, or like I can't want the same things my peers want.”*

*“Whenever me and my boyfriend are like, out and about, people will assume that he's my carer.”*

*“...it seems like every villain in a children's show has some sort of disability.”*

*“I often find myself being compared to autistic characters in the media, or if not, expected to be supernaturally smart, like Sheldon Cooper.”*

*“Some schools and universities do a good job, like having ramps, extra time in exams, or teachers who understand disabilities. But others don't.”*

*“... these negative stereotypes in particular, can lead to bullying, discrimination and isolation in particular.”*

*“Sometimes others try to protect me too much, and it stops me from doing what I want to.”*

*"I'm not a problem that needs to be fixed."*

Associate Professor Moore said the [study](#) – "*A Lot of Judgement Stems from Stereotypes*": *Young People's Views on Australian Attitudes towards Disability* – highlighted the view among youth that societal attitudes needed to change along with educational reforms, media campaigns, and improved support services.

"Significant barriers to full inclusion in education, employment and social participation remain for young people with disabilities," he said.

"Participants called for an inclusive society in which disability is seen as a natural part of human diversity, an awareness campaign to challenge stereotypes, improved peer support networks, and appropriate adjustments in schools, universities and workplaces.

"Young people with a disability deserve to be seen, heard, valued, and respected."

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