1. The Early Adulthood of Youth With Disabilities

At various times in history, changes in economic and social conditions have generated a reconsideration of how best to characterize the life stages through which most individuals in a society progress. The introduction of the notion of "adolescence" by Hall (1904) was such a change. The spread of public schooling and the industrialization of the economy increasingly pointed to the inappropriateness of dividing human experience into a stage associated with childhood and one associated with adulthood; adolescence, the years between 11 and 18, became accepted as a period of life distinct from both the years before and those after.

Increasingly, researchers contend that changes in the latter part of the 20th century and the early 21st century have brought us to another such time of reconsideration (e.g., Fussell and Furstenberg 2005). They suggest that, among other social shifts, an increasing emphasis on postsecondary education and the growing struggles postadolescents face in becoming economically self-sufficient elongate or postpone the transitions usually associated with adulthood—"completion of schooling, movement from the parental household, entrance into the labor force, formation of partnerships, and the onset of childbearing and parenting" (Furstenberg, Rumbaut, and Settersten 2005, p. 7). Recognizing this reality, a growing body of research focuses on the period of "early adulthood" as distinct from adolescence and full adulthood (e.g., Arnett 2002; 2001). The John T. and Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood and Public Policy recently assembled an extensive collection of analyses of the social forces shaping the early adult period and the experiences that characterize it (Settersten, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005). However, after reviewing available data, the authors conclude that there remains a need to "pioneer research efforts aimed at understanding the new frontiers of early adult life" (Settersten, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005, p. 7).

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) provides a unique source of information to help in developing an understanding of the experiences of secondary school students with disabilities nationally as they go through their early adult years. NLTS2 addresses questions about youth with disabilities in transition by providing information over a 10-year period about a nationally representative sample of secondary school students with disabilities who were receiving special education services under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the 2000–01 school year. This report focuses on the subset of youth with disabilities who were out of secondary school and 17 to 21 years old[1] when telephone interviews were conducted with their parents and, whenever possible, with youth themselves in 2005. NLTS2 findings reported in this document use information about these youth to describe the experiences of youth with disabilities in the postsecondary education, employment, independence, and social domains in their first 4 years out of high school.

Study Overview

NLTS2 is a 10-year-long study of the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of a nationally representative sample of youth with disabilities who were 13 to 16 years old and receiving special education services in grade 7 or above on December 1, 2000. NLTS2 findings

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[1] Age was based on birthdates provided by parents during interviews and date of Wave 3 interview was used to determine youth age in 2005.

generalize to youth with disabilities nationally and to youth in each of the 12 federal special education disability categories in use for students in the NLTS2 age range.[2] (Details of the NLTS2 design, sample, and analysis procedures are presented in appendix A.)[3] The study is designed to collect data on sample members from multiple sources in five waves, beginning in 2001 and ending in 2009.[4]

The NLTS2 sample was constructed in two stages. The NLTS2 district sample was stratified to increase the precision of estimates, to ensure that low-frequency types of districts (e.g., large urban districts) were adequately represented in the sample, to improve comparisons with the findings of other research, and to make NLTS2 responsive to concerns voiced in policy debate (e.g., differential effects of federal policies in particular regions, districts of different sizes). Three stratifying variables were used: region, size (student enrollment), and community wealth. A stratified random sample of school districts was selected from the universe of approximately 12,000 that served students receiving special education in at least one grade from 7th through 12th grades. These districts and 77 state-supported special schools that served primarily students with hearing and vision impairments and multiple disabilities were invited to participate in the study, with the intention of recruiting approximately 500 districts and as many special schools as possible from which to select a target sample of about 12,000 students. Recruitment efforts resulted in 501 school districts and 38 special schools agreeing to participate and providing rosters of students receiving special education services in the designated age range, from which the student sample was selected.

The roster of all students in the NLTS2 age range who were receiving special education services from each district and special school was stratified by primary disability category, as reported by the districts. Students then were selected randomly from each disability category. Sampling fractions were calculated that would produce enough students in each category so that, in the final study year, findings will generalize to most categories individually with an acceptable level of precision, accounting for attrition and for response rates to the parent/youth interview. A total of 11,276 students were selected and eligible to participate in NLTS2.

Data Sources for Youth With Disabilities

Multiple data sources were used in this report to describe the post-high school experiences of youth with disabilities at the time of the Wave 3 interview. Primary sources were the Wave 3 youth telephone interview and mail survey or the Wave 3 parent telephone interview, conducted in 2005.[5] In addition, those variables that describe youth's experiences since leaving high school were constructed based on data from the Wave 2 youth telephone interview and mail survey or the Wave 2 parent telephone interview (conducted in 2003) for youth who were out of high

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[2] The definitions of the 12 primary disability categories used here are specified by law and presented in table A-4, appendix A.

[3] Additional information about NLTS2 is available at www.nlts2.org.

[4] Wave 1 included parent interviews (2001), surveys of school staff (2002), and assessments of the academic abilities of students who were 16 to 18 years old in 2002. Wave 2 involved interviews with both parents and youth (2003), a mail survey of youth whose parents reported they were able to respond to questions but not by phone (2003), school staff surveys for youth still in high school (2004), and assessments of the academic abilities of youth who were 16 to 18 years old in 2004. Wave 3 (2005) repeated the telephone interviews and mail survey of youth, as in Waves 4 and 5 (2007 and 2009). High school transcripts were collected annually for youth leaving high school each year.

[5] NLTS2 instruments are available at www.nlts2.org.

Table 1.	NLTS2 data sources for post-high school experiences of youth with disabilities included in this report		
Source		Number	Percent of eligible youth
Sample members with responses to Wave 3 survey, known to be out of secondary school at the time of the Wave 3 data collection		2,670	100.0
Wave 3 survey			
Youth telephone interview		1,620	60.7
Youth mail questionnaire		180	6.8
Parent telephone interview		470	17.6
Wave 2 survey			
Youth telephone interview		800	30.0
Youth mail questionnaire		70	2.6
Parent telephone interview		270	10.1
Wave 1 survey			
Parent interview		2,670	100.0
Student's school program survey		1,820	68.1
School and school district student rosters		2,670	100.0

school at that time. School district rosters and the Wave 1 parent interview or mail survey also provided a small amount of data used in this report. Each data source for youth with disabilities is described briefly below and discussed in greater detail in appendix A.

The data for this report were obtained on approximately 2,670 NLTS2 sample members with responses to the Wave 3 survey, who were known to be out of high school at the time of the Wave 3 data collection (table 1).

Parent/Youth Data

Wave 3 Data

Much of the information reported in this document comes from youth with disabilities themselves in the form of responses to either a telephone interview or a self-administered mail survey with a subset of key items from the telephone interview.[6] Data for youth who were reported by parents to be unable to respond to an interview or complete a questionnaire or who did not respond to interview or survey attempts were provided by parents. Data from the three sources were combined for the analyses reported here and subsetted to include only data for out-of-high school youth.

Youth telephone interview. NLTS2 sample members who were eligible for a Wave 3 youth telephone interview were those (1) for whom working telephone numbers or addresses were available so that they could be reached by phone (a total of approximately 7,990 youth) and (2) whose parents or guardians (referred to here as parents) had reported in the Wave 2 parent telephone interview (if interviewed at that time) or the Wave 3 parent interview (if interviewed in Wave 3 for the first time) that the youth could answer questions about his or her experience by phone (a total of approximately 3,070 youth).[7] At those times, after making the initial telephone contact with the parents of sample members and completing items intended only for parent respondents, parents were asked whether their adolescent children with disabilities were able to respond to questions about their experiences by telephone for themselves. Parents who responded affirmatively and whose sample children were younger than age 18 then were asked to grant permission for their children to be interviewed and told the kinds of questions that would

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6   Only a subset of items was included in the mail survey because the full set of items was considered too lengthy to be feasible for a mail questionnaire format.

7   See appendix A for more information on sample eligibility.

be asked.[8] Parents of youth 18 or older were informed of the kinds of questions that would be asked of the youth, but permission was not requested because the youth were no longer minors. Interviewers obtained contact information for these youth and attempted to complete telephone interviews with them. Telephone interviews were completed with approximately 2,810 youth, 92 percent of the approximately 3,070 youth who were eligible.[9] Approximately 1,620 telephone interview respondents to the Wave 3 youth telephone interview were out-of-high school youth, the focus of this report.

Youth mail survey. If parent respondents to the Wave 2 or Wave 3 telephone interview indicated that youth were not able to respond to questions about their experiences for themselves by telephone, interviewers asked whether youth would be able to complete a mail questionnaire. Parents of approximately 740 Wave 3-eligible youth responded affirmatively, making their children eligible for a mail survey.[10] Mailing addresses were obtained for those sample members, and questionnaires were sent to the youth. Questionnaires were tailored to the circumstances of individual youth. For example, if a parent indicated in the telephone interview that a youth was employed, the questionnaire for that youth contained a section on employment experiences, which was not included in questionnaires for youth reported not to be employed. Questionnaires were returned by approximately 480 youth, 65 percent of the approximately 740 youth who were eligible; approximately 180 mail questionnaire respondents were out-of-high school youth who are part of the sample that generated the findings reported in this document.

Parent/guardian interview. In addition to sample members who completed a telephone interview or mail survey, parents completed a telephone interview for approximately 1,560 sample members who did not respond for themselves, either because they were reported not to be able to do so or because youth who were reported to be able to respond could not be reached or refused to respond. In the latter case, parents were contacted to complete a subset of interview items that experience demonstrated could readily be answered by many parents (e.g., whether a youth was employed or enrolled in postsecondary education). A total of approximately 470 youth for whom parents were the sole respondents were out of secondary school and are included in the sample that forms the basis of this report. Out-of-high school youth whose parents responded for

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[8] Parents were told that interview questions would pertain to "school or work and social activities, as well as a few questions about things like…." For youth younger than 18, the sentence was completed with "[his/her] attitudes and experiences, like ever having been arrested." For youth age 18 or older, the sentence was completed with "[his/her] attitudes and experiences, including smoking, drinking, and ever having been arrested"; items related to these kinds of risk behaviors were asked only of youth age 18 or older. A total of 164 parents reported that their children could respond to the telephone interview but did not give permission for their children to be interviewed (4 percent of those reportedly able to respond); the interview then continued with the parents and obtained additional information on subjects such as employment and postsecondary education. The parent continuation interview did not include any items addressed in this report; hence, these children are not represented in the findings presented here. Analyses of the disability category distribution and demographic factors of youth who were able to respond and given permission to do so and those who were not permitted to be interviewed revealed no significant or sizable differences between the two groups.

[9] If a youth could not be reached by phone or did not return a mailed questionnaire, an attempt was made to recontact the parent and complete the second part of the telephone interview with the parent, which included only items readily answerable by many parents about their adolescent and young adult children with disabilities.

[10] Permission for youth to be sent a mail questionnaire was not asked of parents because that questionnaire did not contain items considered potentially sensitive and because parents' providing a mailing address for the questionnaire was considered to be permission to send it.

them did not differ significantly in their disability category, age identified as having a disability, or functional abilities (appendix B provides detailed information regarding comparisons between these groups).

Wave 2 Data

As mentioned previously, several variables (a total of nine)[11] that were created for this report indicate whether a youth had had a particular experience "since high school." Fifty-one percent of out-of-high school respondents (approximately 1,140 youth) had left high school since the Wave 2 data collection; thus, Wave 3 data are all that are required to generate values for these variables for them. However, the remainder of the out-of-high school respondents (approximately 1,100 youth) were already out of high school in Wave 2. Thus, data from both Waves 2 and 3 needed to be taken into account to generate values for variables measuring experiences "since high school." Wave 2 data also were used to determine whether youth had completed high school or left without completing and the year in which they left. Wave 2 data collection mirrored procedures followed for Wave 3. The Wave 2 youth telephone interview produced data for approximately 800 youth included in the sample that forms the basis of this report, the mail questionnaire generated data for approximately 70 youth, and parent interviews provided data for approximately 270 youth, for a total of approximately 1,140 sample members.

Because of the relatively small percentage of youth enrolled in postsecondary schools, Wave 2 data also were used to augment data for variables related to the postsecondary education experiences of students who had been enrolled in these types of schools. Variables included those related to timing and intensity of enrollment, course of study, receipt of accommodations and supports, and postsecondary school completion. Including Wave 2 data increased the sample size, enabling broader analyses of these variables, particularly analyses by disability category. For these variables, those youth who did not have Wave 3 data but who were out of high school in Wave 2 and had Wave 2 data, these data were combined with the responses of postsecondary attendees in Wave 3. Wave 3 data account for 86 percent to 97 percent of the variables related to postsecondary experiences, with a mean of 89 percent variables.

Wave 1 Data

The initial wave of NLTS2 data collection involved parent telephone interviews and a mail survey of parents who could not be reached by telephone. Data for two demographic items (youth's gender and race/ethnicity) were drawn from these Wave 1 sources for the subset of out-of-high school youth with disabilities that forms the basis of this report.

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[11] The nine variables that focused on youth's experiences "since high school" included employment status, wages, number of hours worked at current or most recent job, number of hours worked at all jobs, number of paid jobs, receipt of TANF, receipt of Food Stamps, classes taken to earn a high school diploma or certificate, and living arrangements.

Student's School Program Survey

One item reported in chapter 5 regarding whether youth had received reproductive-health/pregnancy-prevention education during high school came from the NLTS2 Student's School Program Survey. This mail survey was administered to school staff who were most knowledgeable about the overall school programs of NLTS2 sample members who attended their schools. Data were taken from the survey administered in Wave 1 for youth who were out of high school in Wave 2 and from Wave 2 for youth still in secondary school at that time. Survey data were available for approximately 1,820 youth who were out of high school in Wave 3 and had Wave 3 parent or youth data.

School and School District Student Rosters

Information about the primary disability category of NLTS2 sample members came from rosters of students in the NLTS2 age range receiving special education services in the 2000–01 school year under the auspices of participating school districts and state-supported special schools. Additionally, data on the racial/ethnic background of sample members were taken from this source when they were included on rosters. In the absence of roster data on youth's racial/ethnic background, data were taken from the Wave 1 parent interview or mail survey.

Data Sources for Comparisons With Youth in the General Population

When similar data items were available, comparisons were made between youth with disabilities and the same-age youth in the general population.[12] Comparison data were taken from:

- The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 (NLSY97). This study includes a nationally representative sample of approximately 9,000 youth who were 12 to 16 years old as of December 31, 1996. Round 1 of the survey took place in 1997. In that round, both the eligible youth and one of each youth's parents received hour-long personal interviews. Youth have continued to be interviewed annually. Comparison data for this report were taken from the 2001 data collection for youth who were 17 to 21 years old and out of high school at the time, to match the sample of NLTS2 youth included in this report. Calculations were made from public-use data available at http://www.nlsinfo.org/web-investigator/webgator.php. Many of the comparisons between data from NLTS2 and NLSY used identical data items and response categories. Any differences in the wording of items and/or response categories are pointed out in footnotes.

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[12] Young adults with disabilities are included in the general population comparison sample because excluding them would require using self-reported disability data, which frequently are not an accurate indicator of disability, resulting in both over- and underestimations of disability. For example, a large proportion of self-identified disabilities in postsecondary are visual impairments because of confusion by students who wear glasses. In addition, NLTS2 findings indicate that less than one-third (32 percent) of youth who were identified by their secondary school as having a disability consider themselves to have a disability by the time they are age 17 or older.

- The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Wave 3. Comparisons with the general population regarding sexual behavior, reported in chapter 5, are based on the public-use version of the National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Wave 3, a nationally representative study that explores health-related behaviors of adolescents in grades 7 through 12 and their outcomes in young adulthood. Wave 3 data were collected in 2001–02. Comparisons included a subset of approximately 2,000 respondents who were 18 to 21 years old.

Youth Included in the Report

The youth who are the focus of this report represent only a subset of youth with disabilities who received special education services in secondary school in 2000–01, not the entire population. The full population to which the NLTS2 sample generalizes is a cohort of youth who were 13 to 16 years old and received special education services in grade 7 or above in participating schools and school districts as of December 1, 2000. Weights for analyses reported in this document were calculated so that all youth who were out of secondary school and for whom a telephone interview or mail survey was completed or for whom parents responded to the second part of the parent interview generalize to all youth who were out of high school. To illustrate, consider the following groups:

A = The NLTS2 sample.

    A1 = The portion of A for whom parental contact was attempted because parents stated that youth were unable to respond to an interview or complete a questionnaire. This also includes youth known to be deceased.

    A2 = The portion of A for whom youth contact was attempted by telephone or mail survey because their parents stated they were capable of responding and, in the case of telephone interviews for youth younger than 18, gave consent for an interview.

For each of these three sample groups (A, A1, and A2), there is a corresponding group in the universe, which we denote as B, B1, and B2. The sizes of these universe subgroups can be estimated by weighting all youth in A (as if they all were respondents) up to the entire universe, B. Then the sum of the weights of all youth in A, A1, and A2 are estimates of the number of youth in B, B1, and B2.

However, responses were not obtained for all youth in A1 or A2. Let those youth for whom responses were obtained be labeled Ar. Weights were computed (adjusting for various youth and school characteristics used as stratifying or poststratifying variables) that project Ar up to B. These weights also allow respondents in A1 to be projected to B1 and respondents in A2 to be projected to B2. Analyses in this report were restricted to youth in A1 and A2 who were out of high school in Wave 3.

Analysis Approaches

Analyses reported in this document involve simple descriptive statistics (e.g., percentages, means), bivariate relationships (i.e., cross-tabulations), and correlations. All statistics were weighted to be representative of a larger population of students (as discussed earlier). These analysis approaches excluded cases with missing values; no imputation of missing values was conducted.

Statistical tests examining differences between independent subgroups or between responses to different items given by the same group that involve categorical variables with more than two possible response categories were conducted by treating each of the possible response categories as separate dichotomous items. For example, each of the four possible response categories to a question regarding satisfaction with the amount of services youth received from their postsecondary school ("definitely getting enough," "probably getting enough," "probably not getting enough," and "definitely not getting enough") was treated as a separate dichotomous item. The percentages of youth who gave each response were then compared across disability or demographic groups or across different questionnaire/interview items. This approach, rather than using scale scores (e.g., the average response for a disability group on a 4-point scale created by assigning values of 1 through 4 to the response categories), was adopted for two reasons: the proper scaling for the response categories was not apparent, and it was felt that reporting differences in percentages responding in each of the response categories would be more meaningful and easier for readers to interpret than reporting differences in mean values.

Rather than test for differences between all independent subgroups (e.g., youth in different disability categories) simultaneously (e.g., using a k x 2 chi-square test of homogeneity of distribution, where k is the number of disability groups), the statistical significance of differences between selected pairs of independent subgroups was tested. This approach was followed because the intent was to identify significant differences between specific groups (e.g., youth with learning disabilities are significantly more likely than those with mental retardation to report that they are cared for "a lot" by parents), rather than to identify a more general "disability effect" (e.g., the observed distribution across disability categories differs significantly from what would be expected from the marginal distributions) for the variable of interest.

The test statistic used to compare Bernoullian-distributed responses (i.e., responses that can be allocated into one of two categories and coded as 0 or 1) for two independent subgroups is analogous to a chi-square test for equality of distribution (Conover 1971) and approximately follows a chi-square distribution with one degree of freedom. However, because the test statistic

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itself is more similar in form to the square of a two-sample *t* statistic with unequal variances[13] (Satterthwaite 1946) and because a chi-square distribution with one degree of freedom is the same as an *F* distribution with one degree of freedom in the numerator and infinite degrees of freedom in the denominator (Johnson and Kotz 1970), this statistic can be considered the same as an *F* value; it also can be considered "chi-squared."

Tests also were conducted to examine differences in the rates at which youth with disabilities as a whole provided specific kinds of self-representations (for example, the percentage of youth who reported relying on parents for support "a lot" compared with the percentage who relied on friends "a lot"), using an analogous one-sample statistic based on difference scores.[14] The test statistic follows a chi-square distribution with one degree of freedom for sample sizes 30 or larger and, for similar reasons to those cited above, is considered roughly equivalent to an $F(1, \text{infinity})$ distribution.

In contrast to the dichotomous approach used in statistical tests examining differences in specific responses given by subgroups or across items by the same group, correlations were calculated by comparing responses on a scale that reflects the number of response category options. For example, a 4-point scale was created for variables with response categories related to youth's perceptions of their strengths: "very good" (4 points), "pretty good," "not very good," or "not at all good" (1 point).

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[13] In the case of unweighted data, two percentages are usually compared by using nonparametric statistics, such as the Fisher exact test. In the case of NLTS2, the data were weighted, and the usual nonparametric tests would yield significance levels that are too small, because the NLTS2 effective sample size is less than the nominal sample size. Instead, to test for the equality between the mean values of the responses to a single survey item in two disjoint subpopulations, we began by computing a ratio where the numerator was the difference of the sample means for those subpopulations. (In the case of Bernoulli variables, each mean was a weighted percentage.) The denominator for the ratio was the estimated standard error of the numerator, where the standard errors were adjusted to take into account clustering, stratification, and unequal weights. This test statistic is essentially equivalent to a two-sample *t* test for independent samples (Welch 1947) with design effect adjustments. The adjustment to the variances were determined in a design effect study that compared traditionally calculated variances with those calculated using 32 balanced repeated replicate weights. Sample sizes (and consequently degrees of freedom) for Student *t* types of ratios were typically reasonably large (i.e., never fewer than 30 in each group), so the ratio follows, by the Central Limit Theorem (Wilks 1962), an approximate normal distribution. For a two-tailed test, the test statistic is the square of the ratio, which then follows an approximate chi-square distribution with one degree of freedom. Because a chi-square distribution with one degree of freedom is the same as an *F* distribution with one degree of freedom in the numerator and an infinite number of degrees in the denominator, the test statistic approximately follows an $F(1, \text{infinity})$ distribution. Since the application of adjustments from the design effect study tended to slightly overestimate the standard errors from balanced repeated replicates, the use of infinite degrees of freedom, rather than 31 degrees of freedom, nevertheless resulted in actual *p* values that were slightly lower than nominal *p* values.

[14] Testing for the significance of differences in responses to two survey items for the same individuals involves identifying for each youth the pattern of response to the two items. The response to each item (e.g., the youth reported relying "a lot" on parents for support—yes or no—and reported relying on friends "a lot" for support—yes or no) is scored as 0 or 1, producing difference values for individual students of +1 (responded affirmatively to the first item but not the second), 0 (responded affirmatively to both or neither item), or -1 (responded affirmatively to the second item but not the first). The test statistic is the square of a ratio, where the numerator of the ratio is the weighted mean change score and the denominator is an estimate of the standard error of that mean. Since the ratio approaches a normal distribution by the Central Limit Theorem, this test statistic approximately follows a chi-square distribution with one degree of freedom, that is, an $F(1, \text{infinity})$ distribution.

Technical Notes

Readers should remember the following issues when interpreting the findings in this report:

- **Purpose of the report.** The purpose of this report is descriptive; as a nonexperimental study, NLTS2 does not provide data that can be used to address causal questions. The descriptions provided in this document concern the post-high school experiences of youth. No attempt is made to "validate" respondents' reports with information on their understanding of the survey items or with third-party information on their experiences (e.g., from employers or postsecondary education institutions). Further, the report does not attempt to explain why parents or youth responded as they did or why responses differ for youth in different subgroups (e.g., disability categories).

- **Subgroups reported.** In each chapter, the descriptive findings are reported for the full sample of youth; those findings are heavily influenced by information provided by youth with learning disabilities, who constitute 64 percent of the weighted sample (see appendix B). Youth with emotional disturbances, mental retardation, other health impairments, and speech/language impairments constitute 13 percent, 10 percent, 5 percent, and 3 percent of the weighted sample, respectively. The other seven categories together make up less than 5 percent of the weighted sample. Findings then are reported separately for youth in each federal special education disability category. Comparisons also were conducted between groups of youth who differed with respect to age, school-leaving status, gender, race/ethnicity, and household income. These bivariate analyses should not be interpreted as implying that a factor on which subgroups are differentiated (e.g., disability category) has a causal relationship with the differences reported. Further, readers should be aware that demographic factors (e.g., race/ethnicity and household income) are correlated among youth with disabilities, as well as being distributed differently across disability categories (e.g., youth in the category of mental retardation are disproportionately likely to be African American, and those in the other health impairment category are disproportionately likely to be White, relative to the general population; see appendix B table B-4, for percentage of youth within each disability category, by demographic characteristics).[15] The complex interactions and relationships among subgroups relative to the other variables included in this report (e.g., postsecondary enrollment status) have not been explored.

- **Findings are weighted.** NLTS2 was designed to provide a national picture of the characteristics, experiences, and achievements of youth with disabilities in the NLTS2 age range as they transition to young adulthood. Therefore, all the statistics presented in this report are weighted estimates of the national population of students receiving special education in the NLTS2 age group and of each disability category individually who satisfied the study's eligibility requirement (i.e., who were out of high school).

- **Standard errors.** For each mean and percentage in this report, a standard error is presented that indicates the precision of the estimate. For example, a variable with a weighted estimated value of 50 percent and a standard error of 2.00 means that the value for the total population, if it had been measured, would, with 95 percent confidence, lie between 46 percent and 54 percent (i.e., within plus or minus 1.96 x 2, or

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[15] See Wagner et al. (2003) for relationships of demographic factors and disability categories for the full NLTS2 sample.

3.92 percentage points of 50 percent). Thus, smaller standard errors allow for greater confidence to be placed in the estimate, whereas larger ones require caution.

- **Combined youth self-report and parent-report data.** If a Wave 3 youth interview/survey was completed, youth's responses to these items were used in this report. If a youth interview/survey could not be completed for an eligible youth or if a youth was reported by parents not to be able to participate in an interview/survey, parent responses were used. For the subsample of out-of-high school youth included in this report, the youth interview/survey was the source of data for post-high school outcomes for 84 percent of youth, and the parent interview was the source for 16 percent of youth who did not have a youth interview. Combining data across respondents raises the question of whether parent and youth responses would concur—i.e., would the same findings result if parents' responses were reported instead of youth's responses. When both parents and youth were asked whether the youth belonged to an organized community group, currently works for pay, and worked for pay in the past 2 years, and wages currently employed youth earned per hour, their responses agreed from 69 percent to 80 percent of the time (analyses presented in appendix A).

- **Small samples.** Although NLTS2 data are weighted to represent the population, the size of standard errors is influenced heavily by the actual number of youth in a given group (e.g., a disability category). In fact, findings are not reported separately for groups that do not include at least 30 sample members because groups with very small samples have comparatively large standard errors. For example, because there are relatively few youth with deaf-blindness, estimates for that group have relatively large standard errors. Therefore, readers should be cautious in interpreting results for this group and others with small sample sizes and large standard errors.

- **Significant differences.** A large number of statistical analyses were conducted and are presented in this report. Because no explicit adjustments were made for multiple comparisons, the likelihood of finding at least one statistically significant difference when no difference exists in the population is substantially larger than the type I error for each individual analysis. To partially compensate for the number of analyses that were conducted, we have used a relatively conservative p value of $< .01$ in identifying significant differences. The text mentions only differences reaching that level of significance. If no level of significance is reported, the group differences described do not attain the $p < .01$ level. Readers also are cautioned that the meaningfulness of differences reported here cannot be inferred from their statistical significance.

Organization of the Report

This report is organized to provide information on out-of-high school youth with disabilities in several key domains. Chapter 2 describes the extent to which youth with disabilities enrolled in any postsecondary education and their participation in 2- and 4-year colleges and vocational or trade schools specifically; features of their educational experience, such as their major field of study and support services they accessed, also are presented. Chapter 3 considers the employment status of out-of-high school youth with disabilities, including current employment and employment since leaving high school. Characteristics of youth's current or most recent job also are described. Chapter 4 addresses the extent to which youth with disabilities were productively engaged in school, work, or preparation for work after they left high school.

The household circumstances of youth with disabilities are considered in chapter 5, including the extent to which youth were living away from home; the prevalence of marriage, parenting, and sexual behavior; and aspects of their financial independence. Chapter 6 focuses on the social and community involvement of youth with disabilities, including their friendship activities and community participation in both positive and negative ways, such as participation in extracurricular lessons or classes and organized group and volunteer activities, and involvement in violence-related activities and with the criminal justice system. The final chapter highlights key findings about the experiences of out-of-high school youth with disabilities across the domains that are the focus of individual chapters.

Appendix A provides details of the NLTS2 design, sample, measures, and analysis approaches. Appendix B presents data on the characteristics of youth with disabilities included in the out-of-high school sample.

The following chapters provide the most recent national picture of multiple dimensions of the experiences of youth with disabilities who had been out of secondary school up to 4 years. These findings will be augmented in the next few years of NLTS2 as more youth transition to early adulthood and have increasing exposure to opportunities for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living.