

# Intimate relationships of disabled men and women in France

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Disabled people are frequently supposed to experience difficulties in living intimate relationships. However, surveys don't seem to confirm this impression. Disabled men and women live as frequently in unions as non-disabled men and women and their appreciation of the union is about equally positive. Yet, there are factors that alter the way disabled men and women live and appreciate their partnership. The age of occurrence of disability, before or after the beginning of the union, is the most important factor. That is what this research is about.

The data comes from the survey "Histoire de Vie, Construction Identitaire" (Life History and Construction of Identities), conceived and produced by the French National Institute of Statistics INSEE (2002). The sample is representative of the general French population, but disabled men and women are overrepresented. The survey holds life history data on about 4000 disabled men and women. The methodology used to analyse these data is mostly based on Event History Analysis, though the research project includes a qualitative part of in-depth life history interviews.

The project examines two major questions on behalf of disability and intimate relationships. Does disability reduce chances for starting new intimate relationships? And on the other hand, how do intimate relationships go on when disability occurs? Both questions are analysed in the context of determinants of many kinds: socio-economic, cultural, generational and gender. The first results show major effects of disability on the chances to engage in new intimate relationships, but little effect on relationships that started before disability occurred. Gender seems to be another main determinant for starting and maintaining intimate relationships.

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