



# The Relation Between Physical Limitations and Capacity to Maintain Quality Friendships in Adolescents.

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## Introduction

- Children with disabilities often face greater challenges in making and keeping friends compared to their peers, which impacts their mental health (Young, 2021; Heslon, 2024).
- Friendships are essential for emotional well-being, but children with disabilities tend to have fewer and less diverse friendships than non-disabled peers.
- Most existing research focuses on areas like academic performance (Heller, 1996), social integration (Russel, 2009), and quality of life in adults, leaving a gap in understanding the role of physical disabilities in adolescent friendships.
- Physical limitations, such as mobility issues, can affect the ability to form and maintain friendships, but this area is under-researched.

## Research Questions

What is the Relation Between Physical Limitations and Capacity to Maintain Quality Friendships in Adolescents?

Heslon, K., J. H. Hanson, and T. Ogourtsova. "Mental Health in Children with Disabilities and Their Families: Red Flags, Services' Impact, Facilitators, Barriers, and Proposed Solutions." *Frontiers in Rehabilitation Sciences*, vol. 5, 2024, Article 1347412, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fresc.2024.1347412>.

Heller, Kathryn Wolff, Paul A. Alberto, and Teddi Mallory Meagher. "The Impact of Physical Impairments on Academic Performance." *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, vol. 8, 1996, pp. 233–45.

Russell, David. "Living Arrangements, Social Integration, and Loneliness in Later Life: The Case of Physical Disability." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2009, pp. 460–75.

Viemerö, Vappu, and Christina Krause. "Quality of Life in Individuals with Physical Disabilities." *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, vol. 67, no. 6, 1998, pp. 317–22.

## Methods

### Sample:

- The study used data from the U.S. National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health), which surveyed over 20,000 adolescents in grades 7–12 nationwide through in-home interviews.
- The dataset includes 6,504 observations across 2,829 variables

### Measures:

- To determine participants' physical limitations, questions about whether they had trouble using their hands, arms, legs, or feet because of a physical condition were asked. The question was, "Do you have difficulty using your hands, arms, legs, or feet because of a permanent physical condition?" A "yes" response was coded as 1, and "no" was coded as 0.
- The following questions were asked about the participant's male friend and then again for the participant's female friend questions were:
  1. "Did you go to [NAME]'s house during the past seven days?"
  2. "Did you meet [NAME] after school to hang out or go somewhere during the past seven days?"
  3. "Did you spend time with [NAME] during the past weekend?"
  4. "Did you talk to [NAME] about a problem during the past seven days?"
  5. "Did you talk to [NAME] on the telephone during the past seven days?"

## Results

### Univariate:

143 adolescents responded that they had a physical limitations impairing the use of a limb or extremity.

### Bivariate:

#### ANOVA

Analysis indicated a significant difference in the quality of female friendships ( $p = 0.0008583$ ) and no significant difference in male friendships ( $p = 0.228$ ) between children with and without physical limitation. The data revealed that children with physical limitations experienced a greater ability to maintain quality friendships with their first female friend compared to their able-bodied peers. However, no significant difference was observed in the quality of male friendships between the two groups.

## Relationship Between Disability Status and Strength of Male and Female Friendship

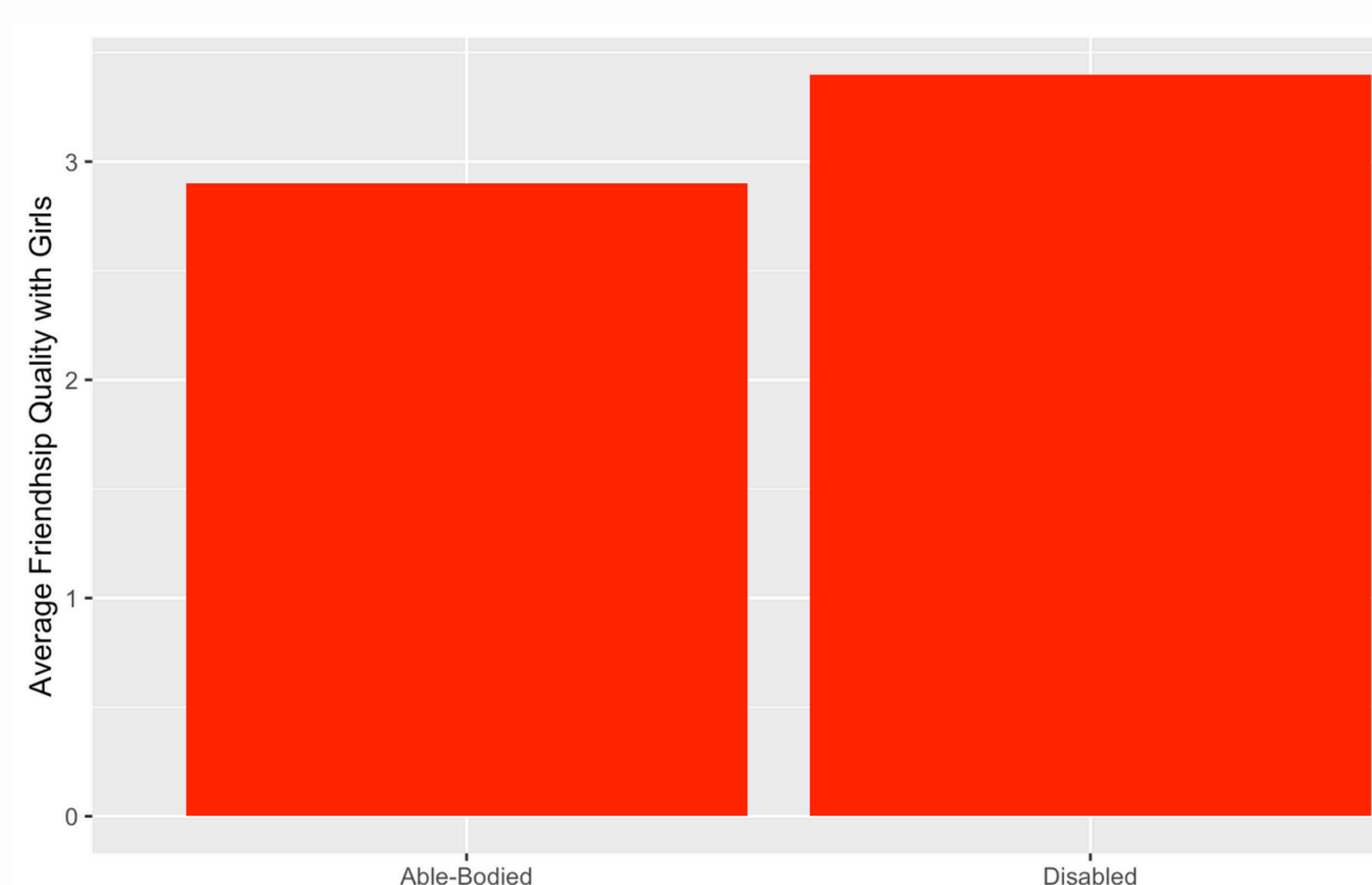


Figure 1

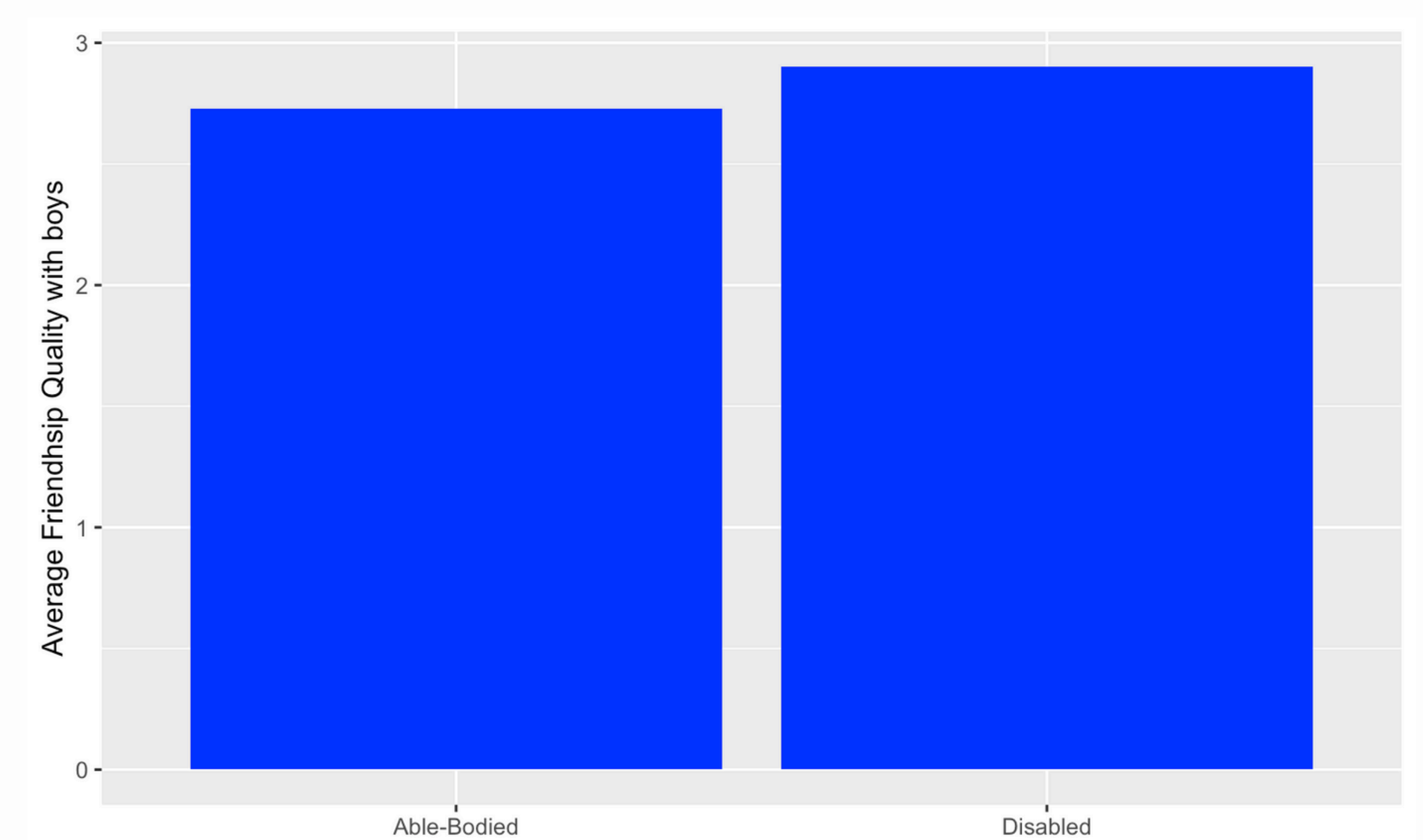


Figure 2

## Discussion

- **Next Steps:** Investigate the types of friendships children with physical limitations form (e.g., friendships with able-bodied or disabled peers) and explore how these friendships differ in terms of number and formation challenges.
- **Extrapolation:** Examine whether these children face more difficulty forming friendships overall, but experience better quality in the ones they do establish.
- **Summary:** The research indicates a positive outcome, showing that children with physical limitations can maintain high-quality friendships, though further study is needed to better understand these dynamics.