

Compendium

An Executive Summary

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1 . Life Opportunities Survey

The Life Opportunities Survey (LOS) is a large scale longitudinal survey of disability in Great Britain. It is the first major social survey in Great Britain to explore disability in terms of the social barriers to participation that people experience. The LOS examines the experiences of people with and without impairments across a range of 'life areas', including education and training, employment, transport, leisure, social and cultural activities, and social contact.

The survey is wholly funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and is carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The LOS is a longitudinal survey in that it follows respondents over time and collects information on changes in the respondents' situations and experiences. Respondents were interviewed for the first time at Wave One (June 2009 – March 2011), and for the second time at Wave Two (June 2010 – March 2012). Each wave of the survey spans two years and respondents are followed up approximately one year after their initial interview.

The LOS follows the [social model of disability](#) and does not equate having an impairment with being disabled. People may have impairment(s) without being limited in their activities, and therefore they may not consider themselves as disabled.

In this report, an adult is defined as having an impairment if they indicated that:

- they experience moderate, severe or complete difficulty within at least one area of physical or mental functioning
- certain activities are limited in any way as a result. 'Activities' refer to different areas of physical or mental functioning, such as walking, climbing stairs or reading a newspaper

For further background information on the survey, its development and definitions, please see [Chapter 1: Introduction](#).

2 . What does the report examine?

This report examines how adults were restricted in participating in different life areas and the barriers they experienced in the two waves of the LOS. In particular, the focus is on whether the experience of restriction changed between Wave One and Wave Two, and whether some barriers were reported consistently across the two waves, or reported at only one of the waves. The analyses on barriers will concentrate on three life areas – work, education and training, and transport.

The report will look at these topics for four groups of adults:

1. Adults with impairment at both waves: adults who had at least one impairment at Wave One and at Wave Two
2. Offset adults: adults who had at least one impairment at Wave One but no impairments at Wave Two
3. Onset-acquired adults: adults who did not have any impairment at Wave One but had at least one impairment at Wave Two
4. Adults without impairment at both waves: adults who did not have any impairment at Wave One or at Wave Two

3 . Restrictions to Participating in Areas of Life

An adult is considered to be restricted in participating in a life area if he/she experiences at least one barrier in that area. Chapter 2 looks at participation restriction for the four groups of adults aged 16 and over, for all eight life areas considered on the LOS.

Key findings

- Having an impairment appeared to be associated with experiencing [participation restriction](#) in various [life areas](#)
- Adults with impairment at both waves were most likely to have a participation restriction in the areas of work, economic life¹, transport, and accessibility outside the home
- Offset adults (who had impairment at Wave One but no longer at Wave Two) were generally less likely to have participation restrictions at Wave Two than at Wave One
- In contrast, onset-acquired adults (who had acquired an impairment at Wave Two) were generally more likely to have participation restrictions at Wave Two than at Wave One
- Most adults, regardless of their impairment status, had a participation restriction in at least one life area at both waves, with transport and leisure being the two areas where a participation restriction was most widely experienced

Notes for restrictions to participating in areas of life

1. Economic life refers to the household's ability to pay bills

4 . Barriers to accessing work

These analyses focused on the barriers to work, as reported by working age (16 to 64) adults who were employed at both waves, or who were economically inactive (not working and not seeking work) at both waves ¹. For adults in employment, these barriers limit the type or amount of work they do, whereas for economically inactive adults, the barriers are reasons why they do not do paid work or choose not to look for work.

Key findings

- ‘Family responsibilities’, ‘lack of job opportunities’ and ‘lack of qualifications/experience/skills’ were common barriers at work reported by adults employed at both waves
- Employed adults with impairment at both waves were more likely to have a participation restriction to work than employed adults without impairment at both waves
- Having an impairment may be associated with experiencing impairment-based barriers at work. ‘A health condition, illness or impairment’ was the top barrier for adults with impairment at both waves, and was a barrier reported by offset adults at Wave One, and by onset-acquired adults at Wave Two
- For adults who were economically inactive at both waves, ‘family responsibilities’ was a reason commonly reported for not working. Impairment and disability-related reasons were also reported by adults with impairment at both waves, offset and onset-acquired adults
- Most adults who were employed at both waves did not report any enablers which helped them at work. Similarly, most adults who were economically inactive at both waves did not report any enablers which they needed to be able to work
- When reported, the most common enablers were ‘modified hours or days or reduced work hours’ and ‘tax credits’². These enablers might have been reported for various reasons – as ways to cope with family or caring responsibilities, or to manage a health condition, illness or impairment, or to supplement low income

Notes for barriers to accessing work

1. Due to insufficient sample size, it was not possible to analyse adults who were unemployed at both waves
2. A person may qualify for a [tax credit](#) if he/she works but earns low wages

5 . Barriers to Accessing Education and Training

These analyses focused on barriers to education and training, as reported by working age (16 to 64) adults.

Key findings

- The majority of adults did not experience participation restriction to education and training in either wave
- Adults with impairment at both waves were twice as likely to have a participation restriction to education and training in at least one wave compared with adults without impairment at both waves
- ‘Financial reasons’¹ was the most commonly reported barrier to education and training, regardless of an adult’s impairment status.
- ‘Too busy/not enough time’ was the second-most common barrier reported for offset adults, onset-acquired adults and adults without impairment at both waves
- For adults with impairment at both waves there is some evidence from the LOS data that they perceive their impairment to have affected their ability to participate in education and training more than other barriers
- There was no apparent relationship between the onset/offset of impairments and impairment-based barriers to education and training

Notes for Barriers to Accessing Education and Training

1. 'Financial reasons' could relate to a variety of things including: course fees; cost of learning resources; cost involved in time away from work; or cost of childcare to enable attendance on a course

6 . Barriers to Accessing Transport

These analyses focused on barriers to transport, as reported by working age (16 to 64) adults.

Key findings

- 'Cost' was the most common barrier to transport in all transport types¹ regardless of an adult's impairment status. The proportion reporting 'cost' as a barrier was highest for taxis/minicabs and lowest for local buses
- A higher percentage of adults reported 'cost' as a barrier to using motor vehicles in Wave Two only than in Wave One only. This finding was not seen for other transport types and coincided with a rise in the cost of fuel and car insurance²
- For adults with impairment at both waves there is evidence that some perceived their impairment to have affected their ability to access all four transport types. This was not the case for the other analysis groups
- Specific barrier types tended to be reported by adults at either Wave One only or Wave Two only, rather than at both waves. This suggests that barriers are transient in most cases, rather than fixed

Notes for Barriers to Accessing Transport

1. The four transport types included in this chapter are: motor vehicles, local buses, long-distance trains and taxis/minicabs
2. Data source: [Consumer Price Indices 2014](#) Office for National Statistics

7 . Conclusions

What can we say about these findings?

This report showed that being restricted to participating fully in various areas of life is a common experience shared by nearly all adults in Great Britain. Transport and leisure activities were the two areas where restriction was most commonly reported.

There were recurring themes underlying the types of barriers reported by adults – with cost-related reasons being more relevant in the area of education and training, and transport; and 'family responsibilities' the main barrier in the area of work. Other barriers reported also reflected the wider societal and economic climate of the period covered by the LOS. For example, 'lack of job opportunities' might have been reported as a barrier to work because of the extent of unemployment in the UK labour market at the time. 'Cost' might have been reported as a barrier to using motor vehicle as a result of rising fuel and insurance prices ¹.

This report showed evidence of an association between impairment and restriction to participation. Adults with impairment at both waves experienced restriction to participation to a greater extent than other groups, and were the only group who regularly reported an impairment-based barrier in work, education and training, and transport.

This report also highlighted the dynamic nature of barriers. Most barriers were reported at either Wave One only or Wave Two only, rather than consistently at both waves. This finding emphasises how barriers are likely to be influenced by changes in personal circumstances, as well as external factors that affect society as a whole.

The relationship between impairment and barriers is complex – this is because people's experiences of impairment and barriers are both diverse and liable to change over time for a variety of reasons.

Notes for conclusions

1. Data source: [Consumer Price Indices January 2014](#) Office for National Statistics

8. Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gov.uk.