

Compendium

Chapter 5 - Social contact

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1 . Main findings

- Having an impairment appears to be associated with lower levels of social contact
- Around a fifth of adults, regardless of impairment status, felt they had less contact in the last week with those they felt close to than they would like
- Adults aged 16 to 64 were more likely than those aged 65 and over to say they had seen people they felt close to less than they would like in the last week. This was true regardless of impairment status
- There appears to be an association between having an impairment and adults reporting seeing people they felt close to less than they would like in the last week. This association appears to be stronger for adults aged 65 and over than for adults aged 16 to 64
- Lack of time is a common barrier to social contact for all adults, but for adults with impairment at both waves "other people too busy" was a more common barrier than not having enough time themselves
- Around 1 in 10 adults with impairments at both waves reported difficulty getting in or out of the home

2 . Aims of the chapter

Social contact and social relationships are recognised as important for individual well-being¹. We saw in Chapter 4 that an adult has a participation restriction in a life area if he or she experiences at least 1 barrier in that area. This chapter explores how adults experience participation restriction to social contact and how this varies by impairment status and age. It then describes the barriers experienced by those who had a participation restriction to social contact. The analysis focuses on responses made at Wave Three, which took place between October 2012 and September 2014.

Comparisons are made between the 4 analysis groups described in [Chapter 2](#):

1. adults with impairment at both waves
2. offset adults
3. onset-acquired adults
4. adults without impairment at both waves

These groups reflect the diversity of impairment status, in that impairment status may be stable, or may change over time. A person may have impairments at both waves (group 1) or no impairment at both waves (group 4), or they may no longer have impairments (group 2) or they acquire impairments at Wave Three (group 3).

It should be noted that the questions on LOS focused on the number of people adults felt close to, how many of these people they had seen in the last week and whether they would have liked to have seen more of them. Those adults who reported seeing people they felt close to less than they would have liked were then asked about the barriers they faced. Adults were not asked about the quality of their relationships or whether they felt lonely. The questions asked on the LOS about levels of social contact can be found in [Annex 4 \(17.8 Kb Pdf\)](#).

Notes for 5.2 Aims of the chapter

1. [Measuring National Wellbeing: Life in the UK, 2015](#)

3 . Social contact

This section looks at levels of social contact by impairment status and age, and whether adults felt this level of social contact was enough. Adults were asked a series of questions about people they felt close to. This was defined as someone who they could count on if they had a problem and could include relatives and friends.

The majority of adults felt close to at least 3 people, with around half of adults reporting they felt close to 6 or more people. This was regardless of age and impairment status. In general, adults said they had as much social contact as they would like, although there was slight variation by age. A lower percentage of adults aged 16 to 64 reported having as much social contact as they would like than those aged 65 and over, regardless of impairment group.

Only a small percentage of adults reported having nobody they felt close to, or having no social contact with people they are close to in the past week. This was regardless of impairment group and age. A number of adults felt close to only 1 or 2 people and several had only seen or spoken to one or two people they felt close to in the last week. Around a fifth of all adults said they had less social contact than they would have liked, regardless of impairment type.

There appears to be an association between impairment and the level of social contact, but other factors will also have an effect. Adults with impairment at both waves were more likely to report feeling close to only 1 or 2 adults and more likely to have seen only one or two adults in the last week than adults without impairment at both waves.

There also appears to be an association between impairment and desired level of social contact – adults with impairment at both waves were more likely than those without impairment at both waves to report seeing people they felt close to in the last week less than they would have liked. This association appears to be stronger for adults aged 65 and over. This was despite adults aged 65 and over being less likely than those aged 16 to 64 to report less social contact than they would have liked, for all groups. Other factors may therefore be having an effect. For example, adults may have had contact with a number of people they felt close to but still answer that this was less than they would have liked. As can be seen in Table 5.2, within each group the number of people adults had seen in the last week did not vary much by age. It may be that those aged 16 to 64 expect more contact with people they feel close to compared with those aged 65 and over.

Table 5.1: How many people adult felt close to at Wave Three, by impairment status and age

Great Britain					
	Percentage at Wave 3				Sample size (number)
	None	1 or 2	3-5	6 or more	
Adults aged 16-64					
Adults with impairment at both waves	1	15	38	45	1,480
Offset	0	9	36	55	900
Onset-acquired	1	10	41	48	700
Adults with no impairment at both waves	1	6	36	56	2,740
Adults aged 65 and over					
Adults with impairment at both waves	1	13	34	52	1,300
Offset	1	11	34	54	390
Onset-acquired	1	12	32	54	580
Adults with no impairment at both waves	1	8	32	60	1,190
All adults aged 16 and over					
Adults with impairment at both waves	1	14	37	48	2,780
Offset	1	10	35	54	1,290
Onset-acquired	1	11	38	50	1,280
Adults with no impairment at both waves	1	7	36	57	3,930

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number
2. Sample sizes have been rounded independently to the nearest 10

Table 5.2: How many people adults had seen in the last week that they felt close to at Wave Three, by impairment status and age

					Great Britain
Percentage at Wave					
3					
	None	1 or 2	3- 5	6 or more	Sample size (number)
Adults aged 16-64					
Adults with impairment at both waves	1	28	42	29	1,470
Offset	1	20	44	34	900
Onset-acquired	1	22	47	30	690
Adults with no impairment at both waves	1	16	47	35	2,720
Adults aged 65 and over					
Adults with impairment at both waves	1	24	44	31	1,290
Offset	2	21	45	32	390
Onset-acquired	1	27	40	32	570
Adults with no impairment at both waves	1	18	43	38	1,190
All adults aged 16 and over					
Adults with impairment at both waves	1	26	43	29	2,750
Offset	1	21	44	34	1,290
Onset-acquired	1	23	45	31	1,260
Adults with no impairment at both waves	1	17	47	36	3,910

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number
2. Sample sizes have been rounded independently to the nearest 10

Table 5.3: Percentage of adults who see people they feel close to as much as they would like, less than they would like or more than they would like at Wave Three, by impairment status and age

Great Britain				
Level of contact at Wave 3 (percentage)				
	As much as you would like	Less than you would like	More than you would like*	Sample size (number)
Adults aged 16-64				
Adults with impairment at both waves	74	26	1	1,440
Offset	77	23	1	890
Onset-acquired	74	25	1	680
Adults with no impairment at both waves	79	21	1	2,690
Adults aged 65 and over				
Adults with impairment at both waves	85	14	1	1,270
Offset	92	7	1	380
Onset-acquired	86	13	0	570
Adults with no impairment at both waves	92	8	0	1,170
All adults aged 16 and over				
Adults with impairment at both waves	78	21	1	2,710
Offset	80	19	1	1,270
Onset-acquired	78	22	1	1,250
Adults with no impairment at both waves	81	19	1	3,860

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number
2. Sample sizes have been rounded independently to the nearest 10
3. 0 - Less than 0.5 per cent, including none
4. *Spontaneous only

4 . Barriers to social contact: participation restriction

For adults with impairment, social contact may be more difficult compared to those without impairment. We saw in Section 5.3 that around a fifth of adults had less contact than they would like, although this varied by analysis group and age. This section considers the barriers those adults faced to social contact. Figures 5.1 to 5.4 show the 6 most commonly reported barriers to social contact for each of the 4 analysis groups.

Time is an important barrier to social contact. Not having enough time and other people being too busy were the top barriers to social contact regardless of impairment status. Adults with impairment at both waves were more likely to report other people being too busy as a barrier than them not having enough time, perhaps indicating that they are more likely to be reliant on others. This is consistent with the findings in [Chapter 4](#), where adults with impairment at both waves were more likely to report having little choice over how they spend their free time.

As may be expected, there appears to be an association between having an impairment and reporting an impairment-related barrier. Over a fifth of adults with impairment at both waves reported having a health condition, illness or impairment as a barrier to social contact. A health condition, illness or impairment was also in the top 6 barriers to social contact reported by onset adults, those with impairment at Wave Three but not at Wave One.

Caring responsibilities was a top 6 barrier for adults without impairment at both waves and offset adults, (those with impairment at Wave One but not at Wave Three). More information on caring and work are discussed in [Chapter 3](#).

"Too far to travel" appears in the top six barriers for all four impairment groups. This may reflect adults settling away from their childhood home and having more dispersed social networks¹.

Figure 5.1: Impairment at both waves: Percentage of adults reporting barriers meeting or speaking to people close to at Wave Three, by group

Great Britain

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number
2. Sample sizes have been rounded independently to the nearest 10

Figure 5.2: Offset: Percentage of adults reporting barriers meeting or speaking to people close to at Wave Three, by group

Great Britain

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number
2. Sample sizes have been rounded independently to the nearest 10

Figure 5.3: Onset: Percentage of adults reporting barriers meeting or speaking to people close to at Wave Three, by group

Great Britain

Source: Office For National Statistics

Notes:

1. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number
2. Sample sizes have been rounded independently to the nearest 10

Figure 5.4: Adults without impairment at both waves: Percentage of adults reporting barriers meeting or speaking to people close to at Wave Three, by group

Great Britain

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number
2. Sample sizes have been rounded to independently to the nearest 10

Notes for 5.4 Barriers to social contact: participation restriction

1. Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB (2010) Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review. PLoS Medicine 7(7)

5 . Difficulty getting in/out of the home

Difficulty getting in or out of the home may prevent adults from having as much social contact as they would like. All adults were asked whether they have any difficulty getting in or out of their home, regardless of whether they had reported a participation restriction to social contact.

The majority of adults reported no difficulties getting in or out of the home, regardless of impairment status. As may be expected, those with impairment were more likely to report difficulty getting in or out of the home. A higher percentage of adults with impairment at both waves and onset-acquired adults reported difficulties getting in or out of the home than offset adults and adults without impairment at both waves.

Adults aged 65 and over were more likely to report difficulty getting in or out of the home than adults aged 16 to 64, reflecting the finding in [Chapter 2](#) and a [previous LOS report](#) where older adults were more likely to report mobility related impairments.

Table 5.4: Difficulty getting in/out of the home at Wave Three, by group

	Percentage at Wave 3		Great Britain
	Yes	No	Sample size (number)
Adults aged 16-64			
Adults with impairment at both waves	7	93	1,480
Offset	0	100	900
Onset-acquired	2	98	700
Adults with no impairment at both waves	..	100	2,750
Adults aged 65 and over			
Adults with impairment at both waves	14	86	1,300
Offset	4	96	390
Onset-acquired	5	95	580
Adults with no impairment at both waves	0	100	1,190
All adults aged 16 and over			
Adults with impairment at both waves	10	90	2,780
Offset	1	99	1,290
Onset-acquired	3	97	1,280
Adults with no impairment at both waves	0	100	3,940

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

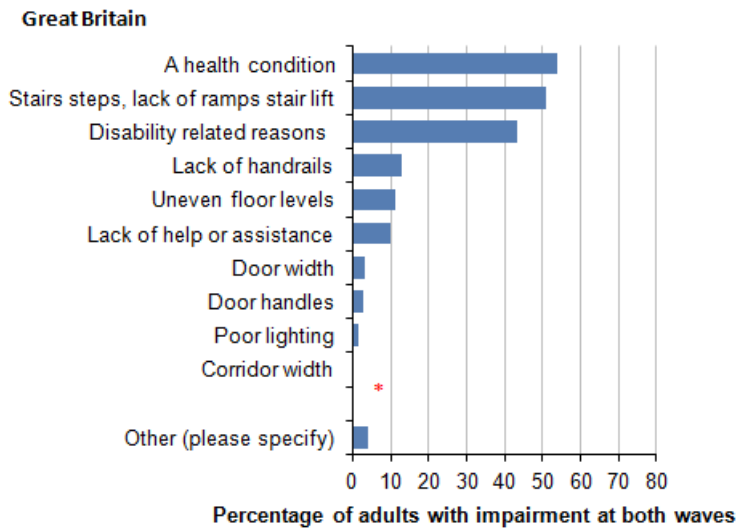
1. .. - Cells have been suppressed due to small cell counts
2. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number
3. Sample sizes have been rounded independently to the nearest 10
4. 0 - less than 0.5 per cent, including none

6 . Barriers to getting in or out of the home

Adults who said they had difficulty getting in or out of the home were asked about the barriers they faced. Figure 5.5 shows the barriers to getting in or out of the home for the 10% of adults with impairment at both waves who reported difficulties.

Impairment-related conditions were common barriers, with over half of those who had difficulty getting in or out of the home reporting an illness, health condition or impairment as the reason, and around 40% attributing it to a disability-related reason. Stairs were also a common barrier, with over 50% of this group of adults saying they were a barrier to getting in or out of the home.

Figure 5.5: Impairment at both waves: Barriers to getting in or out of the home at Wave Three



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number
2. Sample sizes have been rounded independently to the nearest 10
3. .. - Cells have been suppressed due to small cell counts

7. 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.gsi.gov.uk