

Severity of impairment

Key facts from the Life Opportunities Survey - Wave one results, 2009/11(1)

The Life Opportunities Survey (LOS) is a large-scale longitudinal survey of disability in Great Britain. Results from the full first wave of the survey were published on the 8th December 2011 and the information below presents some of the key findings from this report. The report and the key findings below update the interim findings that were published in December 2010 based on the first half of wave one interviews.

The information below explores the severity of impairment(2) for adults, aged 16 and over.

Severity of impairment is defined from responses to the 'Impairments and health conditions' section of the LOS questionnaire. The questions provide a measure of the following for each respondent:

- if they experience either moderate, severe or complete difficulty within each area of physical or mental functioning
- if 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 at arms length

A summary of how the severity category has been defined is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Severity category

Difficulty	Frequency			
	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Mild	1	1	1	2
Moderate	1	2	2	3
Severe	2	3	3	4
Cannot do	3	4	4	4

29 per cent of adults in Great Britain had at least one impairment. Adults with impairment were placed into a severity category of 1 to 4 (with 1 being least severe and 4 being most severe)(3).

1 http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/los/index.php?page=los_wor

2 Please refer to the Introduction of the Life Opportunities Survey Wave One Report, 2009/11, for the definition of impairment status.

3 For more information regarding the methodology for categorising severity see Chapter 19 in the Life Opportunities Survey Wave one report, 2009/11.

Of all adults with impairment:

- 10 per cent were within severity category 1
- 44 per cent were within severity category 2
- 26 per cent were within severity category 3
- 21 per cent were within severity category 4

Severity of impairment by age group

The severity of adult impairment was found to increase with age. For example, 14 per cent of adults with impairment aged 16 to 39 years were within severity category 4. This compared with 20 per cent of those aged 45 to 64 years and 26 per cent of those aged 65 years and over.

Severity of impairment by economic status

Adults with more severe impairment were less likely to be in work. 61 per cent of adults with impairment who were within severity category 1 were in work, compared with 12 per cent of adults with impairment who were within severity category 4.

Severity of impairment by life area

Adults with more severe impairment were more likely to experience participation restrictions to key life areas. For example, 67 per cent of adults with impairment who were within severity category 1 experienced a participation restriction in using transport, which increased to 86 per cent of adults with impairment who were within severity category 4.

Severity of impairment by participation restriction

The participation restriction count⁽⁴⁾ is a score of between zero and eight that is calculated for each respondent as the sum of the number of life areas⁽⁵⁾ in which a participation restriction has been reported. For example, if an individual was restricted in the work that they could do and in the learning opportunities they could take part in then their participation restriction count would be two.

Among adults with impairment who were within severity category 1:

- 14 per cent experienced no participation restrictions
- 8 per cent experienced participation restrictions in five or more life areas.

⁴ For more information see Chapter 3 in the Life Opportunities Survey Wave one report, 2009/11.

⁵ The eight life areas are: education and training; employment; economic life and living standards; transport; leisure activities; social contact; accessibility of housing and accessibility outside the home.

Among adults with impairment who were within severity category 2:

- 8 per cent experienced no participation restriction
- 13 per cent experienced participation restrictions in five or more life areas.

Among adults with impairment who were within severity category 3:

- 6 per cent experienced no participation restriction
- 20 per cent experienced participation restrictions in five or more life areas.

Among adults with impairment who were within severity category 4:

- 5 per cent experienced no participation restriction
- 34 per cent experienced participation restrictions in five or more life areas.