

Severity of impairment

Key facts from the Life Opportunities Survey interim results, 2009/10

The Life Opportunities Survey (LOS) is a new large scale longitudinal survey of disability in Great Britain. Interim results from the first year of the two year baseline survey were published on the 9th December 2010(1) and the information below presents some of the key facts from this report. In addition to these results, presented in boxes are some of the findings from the qualitative research that was commissioned to complement the statistics provided by the LOS(1).

The information below explores the severity of impairments for adults(2). The LOS does not equate having an impairment with being disabled. Following the social model, disability is understood as the disadvantage people with impairments experience due to barriers that restrict their participation in different areas of life. The survey requires someone to have experienced barriers to participation and have an impairment to be disabled. Please see Chapter 1 of the LOS interim report for discussion of how impairment status is defined and the reasons for its inclusion in the survey.

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, and
- 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.

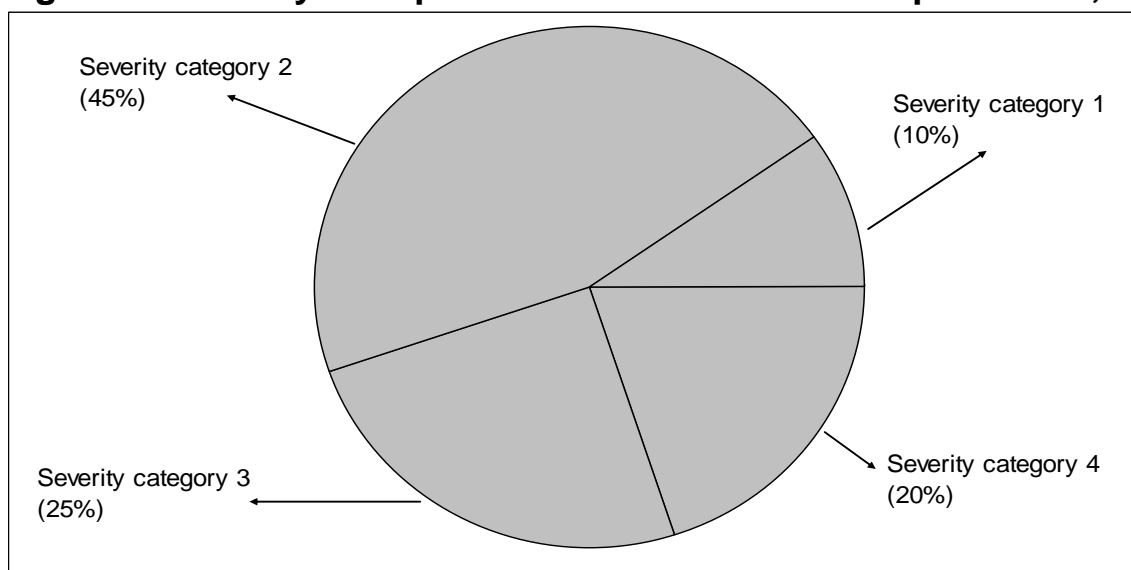
Respondents with impairments were ranked into a severity category of one to four (with one being least severe and four being most severe)(3). 29 per cent of adults in Great Britain had an impairment. As seen in Figure 1 below, nearly half (45 per cent) of these adults were within severity category two.

1 See <http://www.odi.gov.uk/disability-statistics-and-research/life-opportunities-survey.php> for more information.

2 Results presented are from adults (those aged 16 and over) who were interviewed as part of the LOS between June 2009 and March 2010.

3 For more information regarding the severity score methodology see Chapter 19 in the LOS interim report, 2009/10.

Figure 1: Severity of impairments for adults with impairments, 2009/10



Source: Office for National Statistics

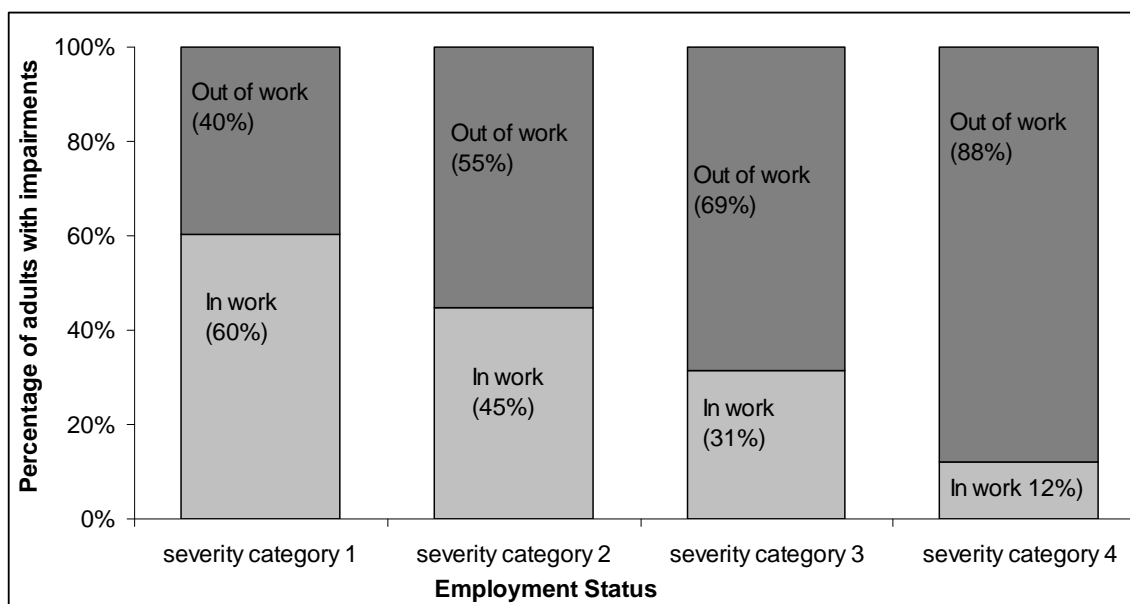
Severity of impairment by age group

- The severity of adult's impairments was found to increase with age. For example, under a tenth (8 per cent) of adults with impairments aged 65 and over were within severity category one, compared with a quarter (24 per cent) within severity category four.

Severity of impairment by employment status

- Adults with more severe impairments were less likely to be in work. As seen in Figure 2, three-fifths (60 per cent) of adults with impairments who were within severity category one were in work, compared with just over a tenth (12 per cent) of adults with impairments who were within severity category four.

Figure 2: Severity of impairments for adults by employment status, 2009/10



Source: Office for National Statistics

Severity of impairment by life area

- Adults with more severe impairments were more likely to experience participation restrictions various life areas. For example, 64 per cent of adults with impairments who were within severity category one experienced a participation restriction in using transport, which increased to 86 per cent of adults with impairments who were within severity category four.

Severity of impairment by participation restriction

- The participation restriction index (PRI) is a score of between zero and eight that is calculated for each respondent as the sum of their participation restrictions across various life areas(4). 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 PRI score would be two(5).
- Adults with impairments who were within severity category three and four were more likely to experience participation restrictions across a number of life areas.
- Among adults with impairments who were within severity category one:
 - a tenth (11 per cent) experienced no participation restrictions

4 Education and training, employment, economic life and living standards, transport, leisure, social and cultural activities, social contact, accessibility of housing and accessibility outside the home.

5 See Chapter 3 of the LOS interim report, 2009/10 for more information.

- under a tenth (8 per cent) experienced participation restrictions in five or more life areas.
- Among adults with impairments who were within severity category two:
 - under a tenth (8 per cent) experienced no participation restrictions
 - over a tenth (14 per cent) experienced participation restrictions in five or more life areas.
- Among adults with impairments who were within severity category three:
 - 6 per cent experienced no participation restrictions
 - a fifth (21 per cent) experienced participation restrictions in five or more life areas.
- Among adults with impairments who were within severity category four:
 - 4 per cent experienced no participation restrictions
 - over a third (36 per cent) experienced participation restrictions five or more life areas.