



What Does It Mean to Have Learning Disabilities in British Columbia?

ADULTS 16 TO 21

This profile focuses on young adults aged 16 to 21. People in this group are making decisions about their futures — college, university, the workplace — that will have an impact on the rest of their lives. They are also making the sometimes difficult social transitions from being teenagers to becoming adults.

The data in this section were taken from the 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS). PALS was a cross-sectional survey that was focused on disability. The PALS sample was selected from those people who answered “yes” to one or more of the disability questions on the 2001 Census of Population long questionnaire.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE LEARNING DISABILITIES?

Of those people aged 16 to 21, slightly more than one person in 100 (1.5%) said that they had a learning disability on the 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS). Among males aged 16 to 21, the rate was 1.8%; it was slightly lower for females at 1.3%.

Among those young adults who said that they had a learning disability, more than half of them were males (58.2%). Males make up 50% of the total population of British Columbia.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT AT SCHOOL?

Thoughts from the Focus Groups

Luck got me through the school system; the school system didn't get me through the school system. I was in the right place at the right time for things to happen.

I got good grades, but inside I knew that I had a problem with reading. At the time, they didn't understand what a learning disability was. Today, people are more able to recognize what a learning disability is.

What the Data Tell Us

Almost six in 10 males and females aged 16 to 21 who said that they had a learning disability (59.4%) reported less than a secondary school certificate as their highest level of schooling. The story was somewhat different among the total population of Alberta aged 16 to 21. For this population, 45.8% reported less than a secondary school certificate as their highest level of schooling. Among the total population aged 16 to 21 years, 34.4% reported some post-secondary schooling — either trade or university. Among this same age group that reported learning disabilities, 22.1% reported some post-secondary education.

Among young adults aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities, 39.1% said that it took them longer to reach their present level of education because of their disabilities.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT AT WORK?

Thoughts from the Focus Groups

I have a tough time filling out applications and my resumé isn't up to par. I can understand why an employer would dismiss my application if there are misspelled words. They are looking for who they think will be the best person for the job.

There's not enough information about learning disabilities in the work force. Employers don't have the information they need. They often see people with learning disabilities as too much of a risk to their businesses.

What the Data Tell Us

People with learning disabilities aged 16 to 21 were less likely than the total population of the province to have said that they were employed in the week prior to the 2001 Census. The figures were 30.1% and 50.4%, respectively.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON INCOME?

Almost two-thirds (65.9%) of young adults aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — were not members of low-income families (as calculated using data from the 2001 Census). This figure was 76.5% for the total population aged 16 to 21.

According to the *2001 Census Dictionary*, the **low-income cut-off** is defined as the income level at which families or unattached individuals spend 20% more than the average on necessities (i.e., food, shelter and clothing).

The data in this section were taken from the 2000 and 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), Cycle 1.2 – Mental Health and Well-being. The CCHS was a cross-sectional survey (it was only done once) that focused, in this cycle, on mental health and well-being. The sample for this survey was selected from the Canadian Labour Force Survey.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON HEALTH?

Just over one-third (36.8%) of the survey respondents aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — reported that they thought their health in general was excellent or very good. This figure was higher (69.5%) among the total survey population aged 16 to 21.

When asked about their physical health, 34.5 of the population aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — rated their physical health as excellent or very good. The figure was 58.8% for the total population.

Survey respondents were also asked about their mental health. Amongst the population aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — 21.2% said their mental health was either excellent or very good. This figure was much higher at 63.4% for the total population aged 16 to 21. Also, 34.3% of young adults aged 16 to 21 years with learning disabilities rated their mental health as fair or poor compared to 8.8% among the total population in this age group.

When asked about their ability to handle unexpected demands, 23.6% of people with learning disabilities aged 16 to 21 — both sexes — said their ability was either excellent or very good. This figure was 63.2% among the total population aged 16 to 21.

More than three times as many young adults aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities reported having asthma as a chronic condition (a condition that some think can be related to learning disabilities) than in the total population of British Columbia aged 16 to 21 years — 38.9% and 11.6% respectively.