What Does It Mean to Have Learning Disabilities in Ontario?

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 (1.2%) 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 1.3%; it was slightly lower for females at 1.2%.

Among those young adults who said that they had a learning disability, just over half of them were males (53.8%). Males make up 51.1% of the total population of Ontario.

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 two-thirds of males and females aged 16 to 21 who said that they had a learning disability (63.8%) reported less than a secondary school certificate as their highest level of schooling. The story was a bit different among the total population of Ontario aged 16 to 21. For this population, 50.9% reported less than a secondary school certificate as their highest level of schooling.

In addition, 43.4% of people aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities 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 40.0% and 55.4%, respectively.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON INCOME?

Having a learning disability did have an impact on the amount of income earned by young adults with learning disabilities. Young adults aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — earned less than young adults in the same age group in the total population. 43.3% of those with learning disabilities reported that they had earned either a negative or no income in 2000; this figure was 27.3% among the total population aged 16 to 21.

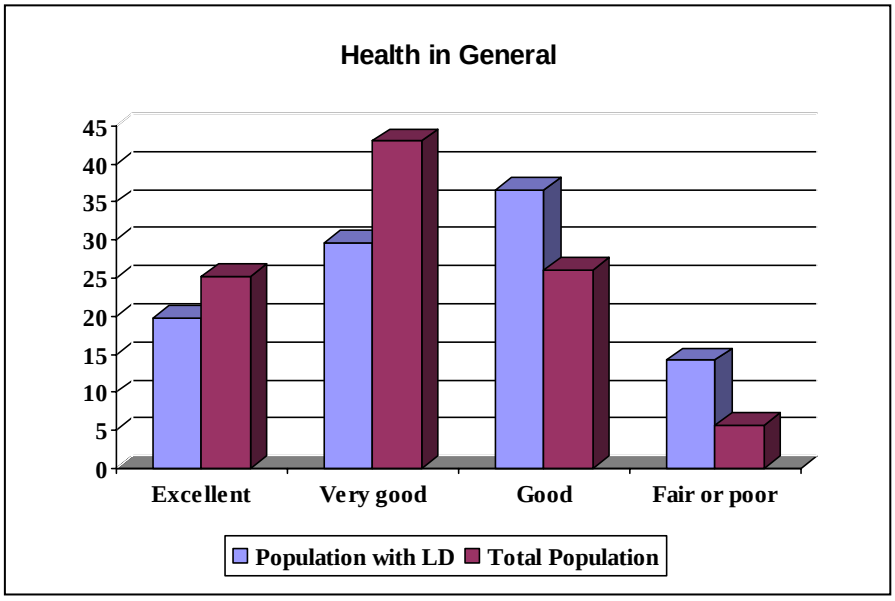
Over two-thirds (71.6%) of young adults aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — were not members of low-income families (as calculated using data from the 2001 Census). This figure was 82.4% for the total population aged 16 to 21.

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).

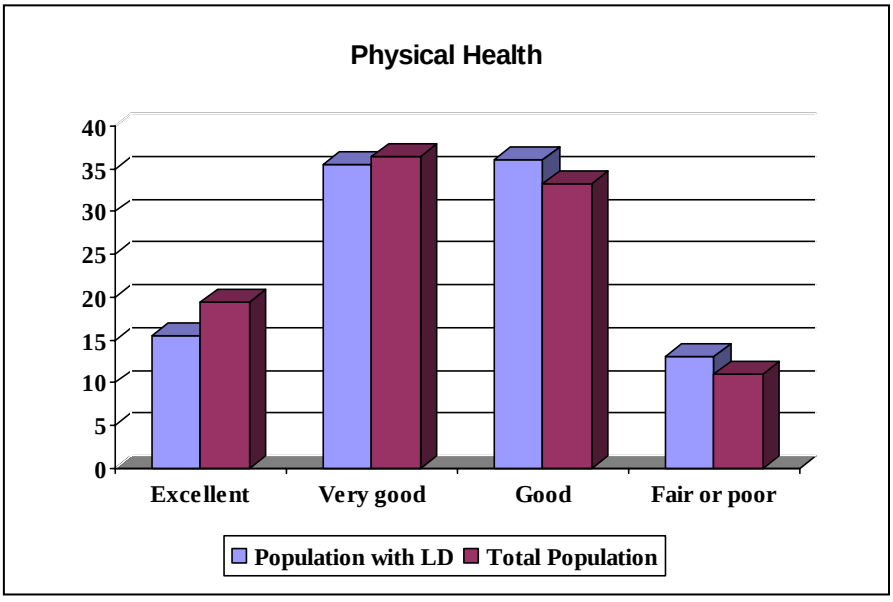
The data in this section were taken from the 2000 and 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), Cycle 1.2 – Mental Health and Well-being. The CCHS was a cross-sectional survey (it was only done once) that focused, in this cycle, on mental health and well-being. The sample for this survey was selected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

WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON HEALTH?

Almost half (49.4%) 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 (68.3%) among the total survey population aged 16 to 21. Conversely, 14.2% of young adults aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities said that their health in general was fair or poor; this figure was 5.7% among the total population aged 16 to 21.



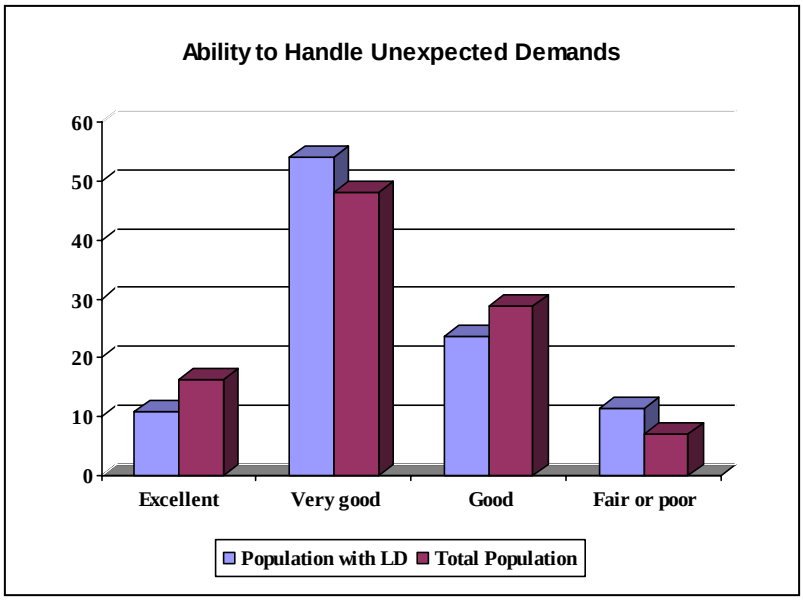
When asked about their physical health, just over half (51.0%) of the population aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — rated their physical health as excellent or very good.



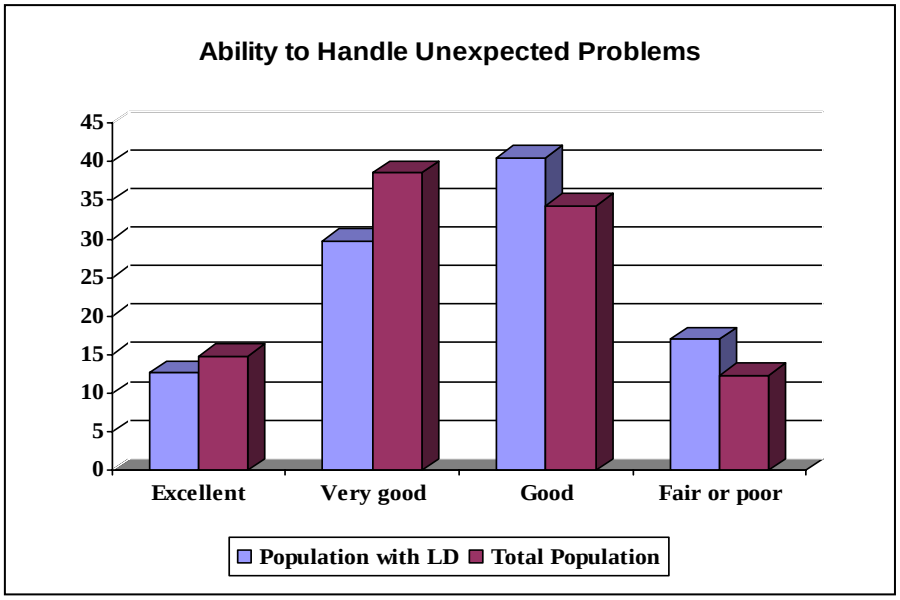
The figure was 55.8% for the total population. Conversely, 13.1% of the population aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities said that their physical health was either fair or poor. This is only slightly higher than what was reported by the total population aged 16 to 21; the figure for this group was 11.0%.

Survey respondents were also asked about their mental health. Amongst the population aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — 51.0% said their mental health was either excellent or very good. This figure was higher at 65.6% for the total population aged 16 to 21. 17.4% of the population aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — said their mental health was fair or poor. This figure was 7.2% among the total population aged 16 to 21.

The CCHS also asked respondents about their ability to handle the unexpected problems that can arise. Among both males and females aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities, 12.7% said that they thought their ability to handle unexpected problems was excellent and 29.8% said it was very good. The figures were 14.8% and 38.5%, respectively, among the general population aged 16 to 21.



There were also differences in the percentages of young adults in the two population groups who said that their ability to handle unexpected problems was fair or poor. The figures were 17.0% for the population aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities and 12.4% for the total population aged 16 to 21.



When asked about their ability to handle unexpected demands, 64.9% of people with learning disabilities aged 16 to 21 — both sexes — said their ability was either excellent or very good. This figure was 64.2% among the total population aged 16 to 21. As well, 11.5% of people with learning disabilities aged 16 to 21 said that their ability to handle unexpected demands was fair or poor, as compared to 7.1% of the total population aged 16 to 21.

There were slight differences in the percentages of young adults aged 16 to 21 — both those with learning disabilities and the total population — who reported that they had asthma (a condition that some think can be related to learning disabilities). In this case, the figures were 18.4% and 13.9% respectively.

The data in this section were taken from the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). IALS was a cross-sectional survey (a survey that was only done once) that was focused on literacy. Along with Canada, this survey was conducted in seven other industrialized countries. The IALS sample was selected using two methods: the 1991 Census file was used to select the sample of Francophones from the province of Ontario and the Labour Force Survey sample file was used to select all other respondents.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON READING, WRITING AND MATH SKILLS?

A Brief Introduction to the Scales Used in the IALS to Define and Measure Literacy Performance

The IALS reported on three scales: prose, document and quantitative. Each scale ranges from 0 to 500. These scale scores have also been grouped into five literacy levels. Each of these levels implies an ability to cope with a particular subset of reading tasks. Individuals were assigned a literacy level based on the estimation that they will perform tasks at that point on the scale with an 80% probability of a correct answer.

Prose Literacy: measured the ability of the respondent to understand and use information contained in various kinds of text. Each prose selection was accompanied by one or more questions asking the reader to find information in the text based on conditions or features specified in the question.

Document Literacy: measured the ability of the respondent to process the information contained in documents such as schedules, charts, graphs, tables, maps and forms at home, at work or when traveling in their communities.

Quantitative Literacy: measured the ability of the respondent to perform the arithmetic operations that are required in everyday life.

Information from the *IALS Microdata User's Guide*, Statistics Canada.

Prose Literacy

The following outlines the five levels used to rate the respondents' prose literacy. For the purposes of this profile, Levels 4 and 5 were combined (as Level 4).

- Level 1 – Most of the tasks at this level require the reader to locate one piece of information in the text that is identical to or synonymous with the information given in the directive.
- Level 2 – Tasks at this level generally require the reader to locate one or more pieces of information in the text, but several distractors may be present or low-level inferences may be required. Tasks at this level also begin to ask readers to integrate two or more pieces of information or to compare and contrast information.
- Level 3 – Tasks at this level generally direct readers to locate information that requires low-level inferences or that meets specified conditions. Sometimes the reader is required to identify several pieces of information that are located in different sentences or paragraphs rather than in a single sentence. Readers may also be asked to integrate or to compare and contrast information across paragraphs or sections of text.
- Level 4 – These tasks require readers to perform multiple-feature matching or to provide several responses where the requested information must be identified through text-based inferences. Tasks at this level may also require the reader to integrate or contrast pieces of information, sometimes presented in relatively lengthy texts. Typically, these texts contain more distracting information and the information requested is more abstract.
- Level 5 – Tasks at this level typically require the reader to search for information in dense text that contains a number of plausible distractors. Some require the readers to make high-level inferences or to use specialized knowledge.

There were significant differences in the scores that resulted from the prose literacy tests included in the IALS. More than one-third (40.5%) of young adults aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — scored Level 1; this figure was 14.2% among the total population aged 16 to 21.

Document Literacy

The following outlines the five levels used to rate the respondents' document literacy. For the purposes of this profile, Levels 4 and 5 were combined (as Level 4).

- Level 1 – Most of the tasks at this level require the reader to locate a single piece of information based on a literal match. Distracting information, if present, is typically located away from the correct answer. Some tasks may direct the reader to enter personal information onto a form.

- Level 2 – Document tasks at this level are a bit more varied. While some still require the reader to match a single feature, more distracting information may be present or the match may require a low-level inference. Some tasks at this level may require the reader to enter information onto a form or to cycle through information in a document.
- Level 3 – Tasks at this level are varied. Some require the reader to make literal or synonymous matches, but usually the reader must take conditional information into account or match on the basis of multiple features of information. Some require the reader to integrate information from one or more displays of information. Others ask the reader to cycle through a document to provide multiple responses.
- Level 4 – Tasks at this level, like those at the previous levels, ask the reader to match on the basis of multiple features of information, to cycle through documents, and to integrate information; frequently, however, these tasks require the reader to make higher-order inferences to arrive at the correct answer. Sometimes the document contains conditional information that must be taken into account by the reader.
- Level 5 – Tasks at this level require the reader to search through complex displays of information that contain multiple distractors, to make high-level inferences, process conditional information or uses specialized knowledge.

40.5% of respondents aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — scored Level 1. This figure was 5.9% among the total population aged 16 to 21.

Quantitative Literacy

The following outlines the five levels used to rate the respondents' quantitative literacy. For the purposes of this profile, Levels 4 and 5 were combined (as Level 4).

- Level 1 – Tasks at this level require the reader to perform a single, relatively simple operation (usually addition) for which either the numbers are clearly noted in the given document and the operation is stipulated, or the numbers are provided and the operation does not require the reader to find the numbers.
- Level 2 – Tasks at this level typically require readers to perform a single arithmetic operation (frequently addition or subtraction), using numbers that are easily located in the text or document. The operation to be performed may be easily inferred from the wording or the question or the format of the material (e.g., a bank deposit or order form).

- Level 3 – Tasks at this level typically require the reader to perform a single operation. However, the operations become more varied — some multiplication and division tasks are included. Sometimes the reader needs to identify two or more numbers from various places in the document, and the numbers are frequently embedded in complex displays. While semantic relation terms such as “how many” or “calculate the difference” are often used, some of the tasks require the reader to make higher-order inferences to determine the appropriate operation.
- Level 4 – With one exception, the tasks that this level require the reader to perform a single arithmetic operation where typically either the quantities or the operation are not easily determined. That is, for most of the tasks at this level, the question or directive does not provide a semantic relation term such as “how many” or “calculate the difference” to help the reader.
- Level 5 – These tasks require readers to perform multiple operations sequentially, and they must locate features of the problem embedded in the material or rely on background knowledge to determine the quantities or operations needed.

The differences between the males and females aged 16 to 21 in the total population and those with learning disabilities were equally pronounced when you look at the quantitative literacy scores. 40.5% of those aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — scored Level 1; this figure was 8.2% among males and females aged 16 to 21 in the total population.

Additional IALS Data

When asked to rate their reading and writing skills, 47.0% of people aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — rated their skills as excellent. This can be compared to 37.0% of the total population aged 16 to 21. In addition, 29.8% of people aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities rated their reading and writing skills as good; this figure was 43.6% for the total population aged 16 to 21.