What Does It Mean to Have Learning Disabilities in Ontario?

ADULTS 30 TO 44

This profile focuses on adults aged 30 to 44. People in this group have typically finished their schooling and are in the work force. They are also usually busy with their family lives.

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 30 to 44, slightly more than one person in 100 (1.7%) said that they had a learning disability on the 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS). Among males aged 30 to 44, the rate was 1.8%; it was slightly lower for females at 1.6%.

Among those young adults who said that they had a learning disability, just over half of them were males (51%).

WHAT TYPES OF FAMILIES DO THEY LIVE IN?

In the total population, 8.3% of young adults aged 30 to 44 reported that they lived alone compared to 23.9% young adults with learning disabilities.. Almost two-thirds (62.7%) of people with learning disabilities reported that they were the head of their household or spouse of the head of household compared to 85.8% in the total population.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT AT SCHOOL?

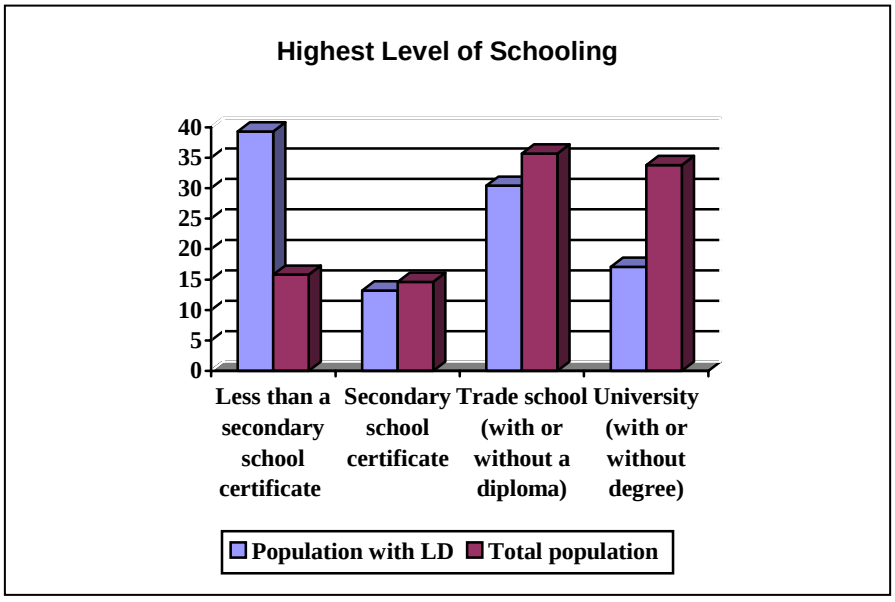
Thoughts from the Focus Groups

It was harder for me in high school. The classes were bigger and there was less one-on-one time with the teacher.

I had a tough time in high school. I always felt like my back was against the wall.

What the Data Tell Us

Just over one-third of males and females aged 30 to 44 who said that they had a learning disability (39.3%) reported less than a secondary school certificate as their highest level of schooling while 17.1% reported that they had some university (with or without a degree.



The story was different among the total population of Ontario aged 30 to 44. For this population, 15.8% reported less than a secondary school certificate as their highest level of school while 33.8% said they had some university (with or without a degree).

WHAT IS THE IMPACT AT WORK?

Thoughts from the Focus Groups

In my work, I constantly have to manage my disabilities. It's exhausting. I don't disclose at work but I choose the type of job I do and type of working environment I'm in. I'm very selective.

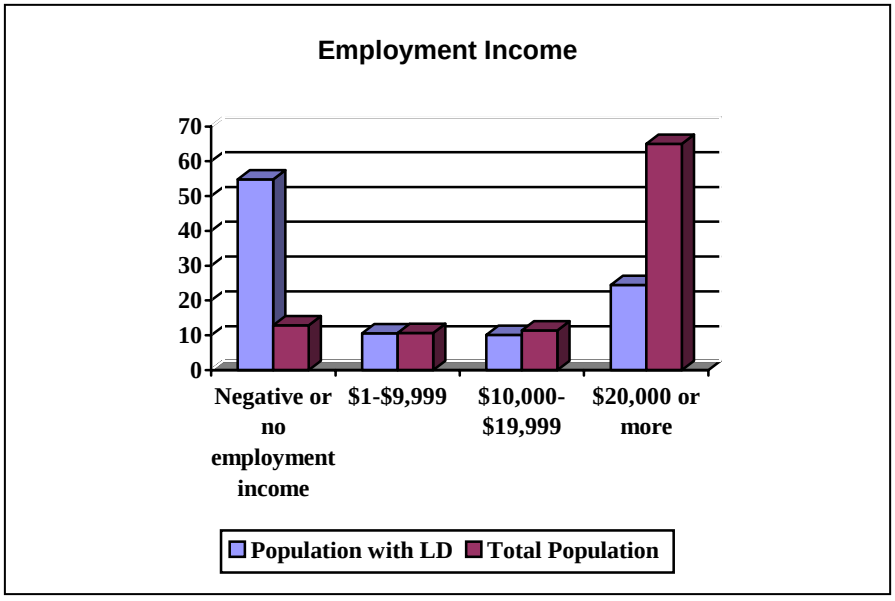
I have learned what my strengths are so I know what careers are definitely not for me.

What the Data Tell Us

People with learning disabilities aged 30 to 44 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 36.9% and 82.2%, respectively. Among the population with learning disabilities, just over half (51.5%) had given up seeking employment while 11.5% were actively seeking employment. Among the total population aged 30 to 44 years, these percentages were 13.3% and 4.5% respectively.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON INCOME?

Having a learning disability did have an impact on the amount of income earned by adults with learning disabilities. Adults aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — earned less than adults in the same age group in the total population. 54.8% of those with learning disabilities reported that they had earned either a negative or no income in 2000; this figure was 12.9% among the total population aged 30 to 44. 24.5% of adults with learning disabilities said that they had earned $20,000 or more. Among the total population aged 30-44, this figure was 65%.



Just under two-thirds (62.7%) of adults aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — were not members of low-income families (as calculated using data from the 2001 Census). This figure was 85.8% for the total population aged 30 to 44.

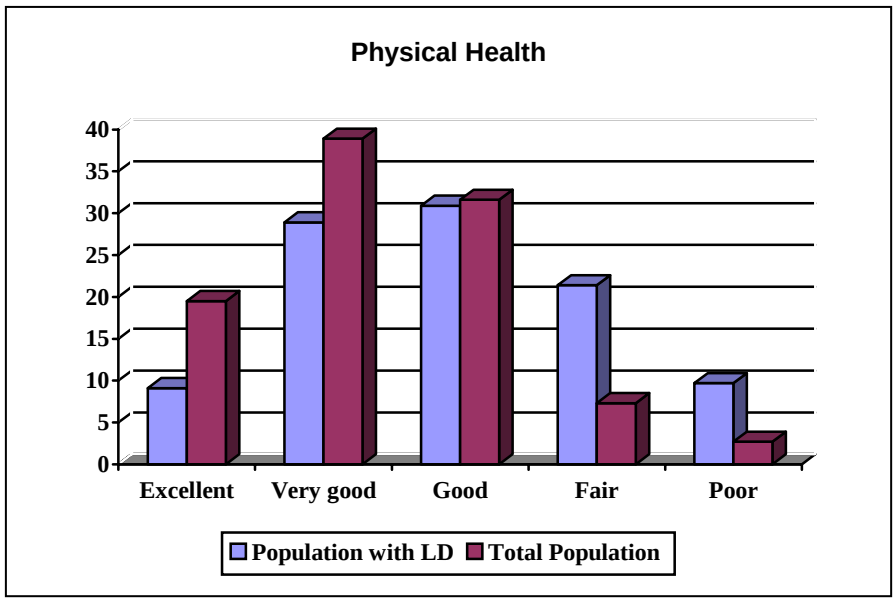
According to the *2001 Census Dictionary*, the **low-income cut-off** is defined as the income level at which families or unattached individuals spend 20% more than the average on necessities (i.e., food, shelter and clothing).

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?

While the majority of people with learning disabilities and those in the total population aged 30 to 44 years reported their general health as very good or good (67.6% and 65.8% respectively), there were noticeable differences between these two populations reporting excellent or fair and poor. Only 8.1% of the survey respondents aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — reported that they thought their health in general was excellent compared to 26.6% for the total population. In contrast, 24.2% of people with learning disabilities reported that their general health was fair or poor. This figure was lower (7.6%) among the total survey population aged 30 to 44.

When asked about their physical health, the pattern was somewhat similar. 28.9% of the population aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — rated their physical health as excellent. The figure was 39.9% for the total population. Conversely, 31.1% of the population aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities said that their physical health was either fair or poor. This is higher than what was reported by the total population aged 30 to 44; the figure for this group was 9.9%.



Survey respondents were also asked about their mental health. Amongst the population aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both

sexes — 13.4% said their mental health was excellent. This figure was almost double at 26.4% the total population aged 30 to 44. 29.3% of the population aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — said their mental health was fair or poor. This figure was 8.6% among the total population aged 30 to 44.

The CCHS also asked respondents about their ability to handle the unexpected problems that can arise. Among both males and females aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities, 13% said that they thought their ability to handle unexpected problems was excellent and 35.7% said it was very good. The figures were 21.3% and 48.6%, respectively, among the general population aged 30 to 44. Almost one-third (32.4%) of adults with learning disabilities aged 30 to 44 reported their ability to handle unexpected demands as good with 24.9% of the total population giving this assessment. Similar percentages of adults in the two population groups said that their ability to handle unexpected problems was good — 21.6% and 26% respectively. The biggest difference was given in the ratings of fair and poor. 20.5% of adults aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities reported the ability to handle unexpected problems as only fair or poor compared to 8.9% amongst the total population.

When asked about their ability to handle unexpected demands, 48.6% of people with learning disabilities aged 30 to 44 — both sexes — said their ability was either excellent or very good. This figure was 69.8% among the total population aged 30 to 44. The biggest difference was given in the ratings of fair and poor. 18.9% of adults aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities reported the ability to handle unexpected demands as only fair or poor compared to 5.3% amongst the total population.

Survey respondents were asked if they had selected chronic conditions that had been diagnosed by a health professional. Included in that list was asthma and that it was reported by 11.6% of people with learning disabilities and 9% of the total population aged 30 to 44 years.

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. Almost two-thirds (61.8%) of adults aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — scored in Level 1; this figure was 10.2% among the total population aged 30 to 44.

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.

Just over six in 10 (60.9%) respondents aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — scored Level 1 when it came to document literacy. This figure was 12.6% for the total population aged 30 to 44. 6.4% of adults with learning disabilities scored Level 2 compared to 15.9% among the total population. Just under one-third (32.7%) of the population with learning disabilities aged 30 to 44 scored Levels 3 or 4; this figure was significantly higher among the total population at 71.5%.

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 30 to 44 in the total population and those with learning disabilities were as pronounced when you look at the quantitative literacy scores. 61.6% of those aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — scored Level 1; this figure was 10.9% among males and females aged 30 to 44 in the total population. For those who scored Levels 2, 3 or 4, the figures were 38.4% for the population aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities and 88.1% for the total population aged 30 to 44.

Additional IALS Data

When asked to rate the writing skills that they need in their daily life, 28.5% of people aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — said their skills were excellent. This figure was 69.5% among the total population aged 30 to 44. Just over four in 10 (41.8%) of the population aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities rated their writing skills as poor, as compared to only 2.3% of the total population aged 30 to 44.

A similar question was asked about the respondent's rating of the mathematical skills that he/she need in their daily life. There were marked differences in the responses received from those aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities and those in the total population. 35.1% of those aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — rated the mathematical skills that they need in their daily life as either excellent or good. This figure was 88.2% among the total population aged 30 to 44. As well, 56.4% of those people aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities rated the mathematical skills that they need in their daily lives as poor. This figure was 5.1% for the total population aged 30 to 44.

When asked to rate their reading and writing skills, 19.2% of people aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — rated their skills as excellent. This can be compared to 59% of the total population aged 30 to 44. Conversely, 40.6% of people aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities rated their skills as poor. This figure was 2.8% among this age group in the total population.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT AT WORK?

Thoughts from the Focus Groups

Disclosure is difficult. It is hard to decide who to tell, when, where and why.

Family support is why I'm successful. I also attribute my success to self-awareness of my needs, of how I learn, the strategies I need to use, etc. This has taken me a long time to develop. Finding mentors I admire and learning how to accept both positive and negative feedback has also helped. .

What the Data Tell Us

When respondents who were working or looking for work were asked to rate their reading skills for their main job, 59.9% of those people aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities rated their skills as either excellent or good. This figure was 93.4% among the total population aged 30 to 44.

When respondents (only those individuals who were working or looking for work) were asked to rate their writing skills for their main job, 60% of the population aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — rated their skills as either excellent or good. This figure was 93.7% among the total population aged 30 to 44.

The respondents who were working or looking for work were also asked to rate their mathematical skills for their main job. Among the population aged 30 to 44 with learning disabilities — both sexes — 54.7% rated their skills as either excellent or good. This figure was 90.9% among the total population aged 30 to 44.