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Disability in Northern Ireland

Findings from the 2003 Life & Times Survey

Themes

- Social and economic circumstances of disabled people;
- public perceptions of who is disabled;
- attitudes towards the general circumstances of disabled people;
- prejudice and fear
- some conclusions

Some key facts about disability in NI

- About 20% of adults have a ‘limiting’ disability (over 70% of the population know someone who is disabled);
- most disabled people are elderly, although over a quarter are aged between 44 and 65;
- just 33% of disabled adults are in work, compared to 66% of all adults;
- Just over 27% of disabled adults have incomes of £135 a week or less compared to 10.5% of non disabled adults;
- 74% of disabled adults have no educational qualifications, compared to 38.6% of the non-disabled population

Four common beliefs about disability

- Relates to physical impairment;
- is visible to others;
- leads to incapacity and dependence *and*
- is a permanent unchanging state.

Public Perceptions of who is disabled

Disability is (Defining Circumstance)	Non-disabled respondents %	Disabled respondents %
difficulty getting around or moving from place to place	63.4	84.0
difficulty lifting or carrying everyday objects	58.4	75.0
a severe disfigurement such as a malformed limb, a facial scar	35.3	51.4
a hearing difficulty	47.9	54.7
difficulty seeing, so that they find it hard to read, even with glasses	65.9	72.6
a mental illness, such as depression or schizophrenia	57.2	75.2
a learning difficulty	40.2	50.1
a speech impairment which affects their ability to participate	37.7	49.5
a long-standing condition such as diabetes, epilepsy or a heart condition	45.9	74.0
a progressive illness, such as cancer, or multiple sclerosis	73.5	88.1

“People with disabilities are the victims of unfortunate circumstances and should be cared for”

	No disability	Disability	All
Strongly agree	32.4%	41.5%	34.2%
Agree	47.1%	45.3%	46.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	12.4%	5.7%	11.1%
Disagree	3.0%	3.2%	3.0%
Strongly disagree	.7%	.6%	.7%
Can't choose	2.3%	.9%	2.1%
Missing	2.0%	2.8%	2.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

“It is society that disables people by not doing enough to allow them to lead normal lives”

	No disability	Disability	
Strongly agree	18.4%	26.5%	20.0%
Agree	40.5%	45.4%	41.4%
Neither agree nor disagree	22.5%	12.6%	20.5%
Disagree	10.4%	8.2%	10.0%
Strongly disagree	1.1%	1.3%	1.1%
Can't choose	4.7%	2.8%	4.4%
Missing	2.3%	3.2%	2.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Percentages of people judging different groups as being treated unfairly

	% saying yes	
	Not disabled	disabled
Catholics treated unfairly?	3.6	5.1
Protestants treated unfairly?	5.1	6.2
Gays/lesbians/bisexuals treated unfairly?	22.1	18.7
Disabled treated unfairly?	26.8	29.9
Elderly treated unfairly?	30.5	25.3
Travellers treated unfairly?	23.7	22.4
Other ethnic minorities treated unfairly?	23.2	17.7
Women treated unfairly?	3.7	3.0
Men treated unfairly?	.5	.4

Is it against the law for an employer to refuse to take on a person only because they have a disability?

	No disability	Disability	All
Against the law	59.9%	46.3%	57.2%
Not against the law	8.9%	8.3%	8.8%
Depends	10.7%	12.7%	11.1%
Don't know	18.5%	28.9%	20.5%
Missing	2.0%	3.8%	2.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Is it against the law for someone to provide a lower level of service to someone only because they have a disability

	No disability	Disability	All
Against the law	57.5%	50.0%	56.0%
Not against the law	13.8%	10.1%	13.1%
Depends	6.1%	8.2%	6.6%
Don't know	20.4%	28.2%	21.9%
Missing	2.2%	3.5%	2.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Vignette One - post office

- *You are queuing up at a small post-office. It is near closing time or last post collection. A person with a speech impairment is taking a long time to be served as they are speaking very slowly. How would you feel and what would you do?*

Vignette two – bus stop, mental health

- You are waiting for a bus. A scruffily dressed person who looks as though they have not washed for some time is in front of you. They look nervous, and are talking and laughing to themselves. As the bus arrives they turn round. While looking at the floor, they ask for some one to take the money from their wallet. They say they can't touch the money because it is dangerous. How would you feel and what, if anything would you do?*

Vignette three – high street, deafness

- *You are walking down the high street and a deaf woman approaches you for some help or information. She makes it clear she cannot communicate other than through sign language. How would you feel and what, if anything, would you do?*

Vignette four – supermarket, physical disability

- *You are out doing your shopping at a busy time of day and are just paying for your goods at the checkout counter. You notice some one at the checkout next to yours who is clearly physically disabled and is having some difficulties carrying their goods to the car. How would you feel and what, if anything, would you do?*

Vignette five – supermarket 2, MS

- *You are in a supermarket buying one or two items. A friend is waiting for you in the car outside and you are running late. The person before you in the queue has Multiple Sclerosis and wishes to pay for their shopping by credit card. The signature they provide is very different from that on their card. They explain they have MS. The checkout assistant obviously does not know what to do. How would you feel and what, if anything, would you do?*

Vignette six: dentist - facial disfigurement

- *You are going to a new dentist. When you go in for treatment you notice that the dentist has a severe facial disfigurement. How would you feel and what, if anything, would you do?*

Two sets of attitudes

- **Exclusive**
 - limited definition of disability, employ negative images of disabled people's lives, and embody fearful, patronising, uncertain, sympathetic and sorrowful attitudes
- **Inclusive:**
 - reject 'difference', accept a broad definition of disability, employ positive views of disabled people's lives, and embody egalitarian and accepting attitudes.

Level of concern expressed about four scenarios among non-disabled people in Northern Ireland

	Mental illness hostel	Autistic child in child's class	Teacher with speech impairment	Relative marries a deaf person
Very concerned	26.7%	2.2%	5.1%	1.0%
A bit concerned	45.5%	21.2%	32.6%	14.3%
Unconcerned	24.7%	70.8%	55.9%	82.0%
Other	.8%	.8%	1.9%	.5%
Don't know	2.2%	5.1%	4.4%	2.2%
total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%