



A Socio-Demographic Profile of Canadians Experiencing Health or Activity Limitations

Introduction

during the past decade or so, both in Canada and abroad, much concern has been expressed about persons who have health and activity limitations. Many initiatives were undertaken to improve their social and economic living situations.

In 1980, a special Parliamentary Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped in Canada was established. This committee published its first report, *Obstacles*, in 1981 – the International Year of Disabled Persons. In 1983, the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons began. In Canada, the Prime Minister, on behalf of the federal government, announced the participation of this country in the Decade of Disabled Persons in December 1985. The Canadian Declaration of the Decade of Disabled Persons, signed by the Prime Minister, established the principles which direct and guide the Canadian government in improving the living conditions of disabled Canadians.

CMHC completed a study of the socio-demographic profile of Canadians experiencing health or activity limitations (i.e., disabled persons). This study provides information on the nature and degree of individuals' disabilities and relates this information to various household characteristics, including the housing situation of disabled persons.

The different types of disabilities discussed involve mobility, agility, seeing, hearing, speaking, and other areas of limitation (i.e., learning, emotional, and developmental handicaps). All persons of all ages experiencing any of these limitations, living in households or institutions, are included in the analysis.

The study uses data from the 1986-87 Health and Activity Limitations Survey, (HALS) and the 1986 Census of Canada. The analysis of the data from HALS and the Census involved the preparation of various charts and frequency tabulations and cross-tabulations of socio-demographic variables on individuals and households.

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Although the distribution of disability in Canada closely mirrors the population distribution across the country, the province of Nova Scotia has the highest disability rate -17%.

Findings

Disabled Individuals

- The total number of individuals experiencing health or activity limitations in Canada is 3.3 million persons. This represents about 13 per cent of the total population of Canada.
- There are 1.7 million female disabled persons in Canada and 1.6 million male disabled. This difference is probably mainly attributable to the higher life expectancy of females.
- As may be expected, disability rates increase with age. Five per cent of all children (less than 15 years old) are reported to have some disability. On the other hand, 46 per cent of all seniors (65 years or older) have some health or activity limitation. The overall Canadian disability rate is 13 per cent.

Geographic Distribution

- Reflecting largely the geographic distribution of the Canadian population, the greatest concentration of disabled persons (adults and children) is in the province of Ontario, with 1.263 million disabled persons. This represents approximately 38 per cent of all disabled persons in Canada. Quebec has about 22 per cent (or 728 thousand persons) and British Columbia 12 per cent (395 thousand persons) of all disabled Canadians.
- The disability rate is highest in Nova Scotia, at 17 per cent of the provincial population. All the other provinces have disability rates which are within 2 percentage points of the national average (which is 13 per cent).
- About 23 per cent of the adult disabled live in rural areas and 77 per cent live in urban areas. This is consistent with the urban-rural distribution of the overall Canadian population.

Type and Severity of Disability

- There are more persons with multiple disabilities than there are with single disabilities – 1.867 million (or 61 per cent) compared to 1.172 million (39 per cent). This high proportion of “multiples” is largely due to the overlap between “mobility” and “agility” types of disabilities.
- Disabled persons with “mobility” and “agility” limitations are the largest groups of disabled persons. Sixty-five per cent of the disabled adults living in households and institutions are mobility-disabled, and 58 per cent are agility-disabled. In contrast, only 8 per cent are speaking-disabled, 18 per cent are seeing-disabled, and 32 per cent are hearing-disabled.
- Only 19 per cent of the disabled are severely limited in health or activity, whereas 35 per cent are moderately limited and 46 per cent are mildly limited.

Institutions

- There are significantly more disabled persons living in households (some 92 per cent of all disabled) than in institutions (8 per cent).
- Of the population living in institutions, the large majority (79 per cent) are senior citizens. Only 1 per cent of those living in institutions are children and 20 per cent are adults aged 15 to 64 years.
- Females account for 65 per cent of disabled persons residing in institutions. Eighty-seven per cent of disabled females in institutions are 65 years or older. In comparison, 65 per cent of disabled males in institutions are 65 years or older.

Household Comparisons

- About 57 per cent of disabled persons living in households are aged between 15 and 64 years. Only 9 per cent are children, and 34 per cent are 65 years or older.
- Households with disabled persons account for 40 per cent of all senior-led households. In comparison, households with disabled persons account for 17 per cent of all non-senior-led households.
- Of all disabled adults, widowed females represent the largest group (by marital status) of those with severe disabilities. About 12 per cent of widowed females are severely disabled.
- Consistent with the previous points about widowed females, of all household-size groups, disabled adults who are single have the highest disability rate, 27 per cent. The next highest (20 per cent) is represented by households with only two members. This is primarily because the largest group of disabled, the elderly, account for the greatest proportion of the one- and two-person households.

Labour Force Status and Income

- The majority of disabled adults are either not in the labour force or are senior citizens. Together, these two groups account for 70 per cent of disabled adults.
- A larger proportion of households with disabled persons are in the lower income ranges, as compared to households with no disabled persons. Households in the under \$20,000 income categories (as of 1986) with disabled persons represent 46 per cent of all households with disabled persons. In contrast, 30 per cent of households with no disabled persons have incomes below \$20,000.
- Overall, 24 per cent of households earning at or below the low-income cut-off line have persons with disabilities. In comparison, 13 per cent of those earning above the line have persons with disabilities.

**The economic
impact of
disability is
clearly
illustrated by
the statistics:
almost half of
disabled
persons had
household
earnings of
less than
\$20,000.**

Housing Situation

- There does not appear to be much variation in the incidence of households with disabled persons across types of tenure. Households with disabled persons make up about 21 per cent of all the households who own their dwellings, and 20 per cent of all households who rent.
- Of all adults living in single-detached houses, 13 per cent are disabled. Of those living in apartment buildings of five stories or more, 22 per cent are disabled. This latter group also has a larger proportion of severely disabled — 5.3 per cent of all those living in apartment buildings of five stories or more are severely disabled.
- There is a slightly greater likelihood that a disabled person will live in an older housing unit, compared to non-disabled persons. Seventeen per cent of all dwellings aged 45 years or more are occupied by disabled persons. In contrast, 10.5 per cent of dwellings aged less than 10 years are occupied by disabled persons.
- Four per cent of the disabled indicate they use special features (such as ramps, widened doorways, elevators or lift devices) to leave or enter their place of residence, and another 2 per cent indicate that they need such features but do not have them. Seven per cent use special features inside their residence, and another 3 per cent report that they need such features but do not have them.

Affordability

- According to the 1986 Census, more than half of owner households with disabled persons earned less than \$30,000. In comparison, about a third of owner households with no disabled persons had incomes below \$30,000.
- Over 80 per cent of renter households with disabled persons earned less than \$30,000, compared to 68 per cent of renter households with no disabled persons.

- Non-senior-led households with disabled persons are over-represented in the 30 per cent or more shelter-to-income ratio groups. About 25 per cent of such households have shelter-to-income ratios in excess of 30 per cent. In contrast, slightly fewer than 20 per cent of non-senior-led households with no disabled persons spend more than 30 per cent of their income on shelter.

This research highlight summarizes some of the findings in *A Socio-Demographic Profile of Canadians Experiencing Health or Activity Limitations*, a study completed by **Teega Research Consultants Inc.** for the Research Division of CMHC. You can obtain a copy of this report by contacting the Canadian Housing Information Centre at (613) 748-2367. Any questions on the contents of this highlight may be directed to Mr. Denis Myette of the Research Division at (613) 748-2983.

The Research and International Affairs Directorate of CMHC carries out and finances a broad range of research on the social, economic and technical aspects of housing. This CMHC *Research and Development Highlight* issue is one of a series intended to briefly inform you of the nature and scope of these activities.

For more information on CMHC housing research, contact:

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