

Disability discrimination affects one in seven Australian adults

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One in seven Australian adults with a disability reports experiencing discrimination due to their impairment and this discrimination can affect their health. Credit: University of Melbourne

One in seven Australian adults with a disability reports experiencing discrimination due to their impairment and this discrimination can affect their health, a new study has found. Rates were higher for those who were younger, unemployed or in low-status jobs.

The University of Melbourne-led research, published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, was Australia's first population-level study of self-reported interpersonal disability-based [discrimination](#) and its relationship with [health](#).

Released ahead of International Day of People with Disability on 3 December, the study found almost 14 per cent of Australians aged 15-64 with disability reported that they had experienced discrimination in the past year.

One of the authors, Centre of Research Excellence in Disability and Health Co-Director Professor Anne Kavanagh, said the rates were likely to be higher because people were reluctant to report discrimination and sometimes they did not recognise behaviour as discriminatory.

"This discrimination can take many forms, such as being overlooked for a promotion due to a disability that does not impair the person's ability to do the job, or not being provided with a service such as a taxi," Professor Kavanagh said.

Estimates were similar for men and women, but much higher among younger people (20.4 per cent at age 15-24) than older people (9.4 per cent at age 55-64). Respondents born in non-English speaking countries reported lower discrimination rates than those born here.

"The highest levels of discrimination were reported among those with a severe or profound restriction (21.6 per cent) and the lowest levels were among those with no specific restriction (4.2 per cent)," the study found.

"People with intellectual or psychological [disabilities](#) fared the worst; about one in four reported discrimination, whereas 14 per cent of people with physical impairments reported discrimination."

The study found higher-skilled workers, such as managers, reported lower discrimination levels (9 per cent) than those in lower-skilled occupations such as sales (13 per cent). Almost 30 per cent of unemployed respondents reported discrimination, compared to 9 per cent of those employed full-time. Rates were highest among those in the lowest 20 per cent of household income distribution.

Researchers also found discrimination was associated with increased odds of psychological distress and poor self-rated health.

"Discrimination has a moderate to strong association with poorer health," the study found. The authors concluded that reducing such discrimination was likely to bring social, economic and health benefits for Australians with disability and reduce welfare and health expenditure.

"Disability-based discrimination is an under-recognised [public health](#) problem," they said in the report. "Public health policy, research and practice needs to concentrate efforts on developing policy and programs that reduce discrimination experienced by Australians with disability."

The study analysed data from 6183 participants aged 15-64 from the 2015 the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), which collected the first Australian population-based data on interpersonal disability-based discrimination.

Participants were defined as having a disability if they had a limitation, impairment or restriction in everyday activities that had lasted, or was likely to last, for a period of six months or more.

More information: Lauren Krnjacki et al. Disability-based discrimination and health: findings from an Australian-based population study, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2017).

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