

# LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

## Learning Disabilities Statistics

### Some recent Canadian sources for statistics on learning disabilities

#### Preamble

In the field of Learning Disabilities (LDs), statistics on incidence rates can be particularly vulnerable to distortion or bias for a number of reasons. For example, there is no precise operational definition of learning disabilities that is widely accepted, with the result that studies are inconsistent in how they define what they are measuring. Similarly, studies vary in how they treat the disorder known as ADD/ADHD. Some include this as a specific type of LD involving attention, memory and concentration, others partial it out a separate but related and often co-existing disorder, while still others don't mention it at all. Many incidence surveys are based on self-reporting, so their results depend on what the respondents understand about LDs, and also whether they are comfortable with disclosing. All these factors may help explain why estimates of the incidence rate of LDs range from as low as 2% of the population to as high as 10% or more.

There are other examples of potential biases and distortions in the way data can be interpreted. Therefore any statistical analysis should be interpreted with caution and only with a full understanding of the definitions and criteria used by the researchers.

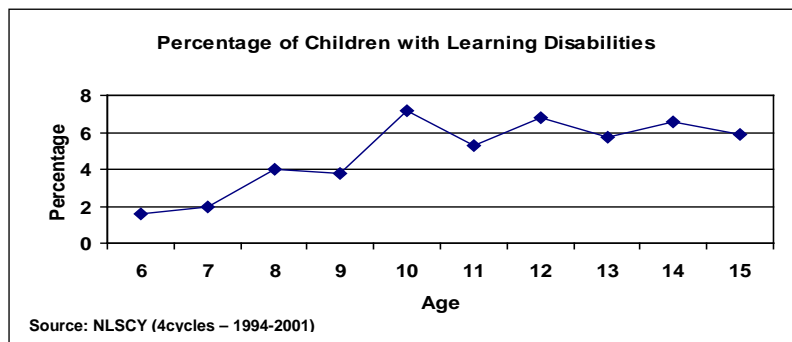
#### Putting a Face on Learning Disabilities (PACFOLD), LDA of Canada 2007 Report ([www.pacfold.ca](http://www.pacfold.ca))

The **National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY)** began following a representative sample of Canadian children from birth to 11 years in 1994, with follow-up surveys conducted every two years.

**PACFOLD** summarized data for Ontario from the **NLSCY**, from 1994 to 2001:

- 6.2% of children aged 6 to 15 were reported by parents/guardians to have a learning disability
- 24.5% of parents of children with learning disabilities (LDs) said their child was doing well or very well at school, compared to 76.1% of parents of children without disabilities.
- 16% of children with LDs received help or tutoring outside of school, compared to 5% of children without disabilities
- 14.7% of parents of children with LDs said that their child had been diagnosed with emotional, psychological or nervous difficulties, while parents of children without disabilities reported only 1% of such diagnoses

**PACFOLD** reported that 4.9% of Canadian children aged 6 to 15 had a learning disability according to the **NLSCY**. However, this figure varied across the age spectrum, from a low of 1.6% for children aged 6, to a high of 7.2% for 10-year-olds.



#### Other PACFOLD results:

- A significant number of youth and adults with LD had dropped out of the education system altogether, with over one-quarter of Canadians aged 22 to 29 with LD reporting less than a high school certificate as their highest academic achievement
- Persons with LDs were 2 to 3 times more likely to report fair to poor physical, general, and mental health, and 2 to 3 times less likely to report very good to excellent physical, general and mental health than the general population
- Persons with LDs were more than twice as likely to report high levels of distress, depression, anxiety disorders, suicidal thoughts, visits to a mental health professional and poorer overall mental health compared to persons without disabilities

#### Ministry of Education (EDU) statistics (as reported in School October Reports)

- In the 2009-2010 academic year; 43.7 % of students identified as “exceptional” by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) in Ontario were identified under the Learning Disability category and definition.
- The total percentage of students identified as exceptional was 9.34 % of the school population. That would mean that 4.66 % of the school population was identified for special education under Learning Disability in 2009-2010.
- This figure does not take into account the large number of students who receive special education programs and services without being formally identified. In total, 14.89 % of students in Ontario received some special education programs and/or services in 2009-10. If approximately the same percentage of these students had learning disabilities (43.7%), then about 6.56 % of students receiving special education in Ontario in 2009-2010 would have learning disabilities.

## Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU)

Statistics compiled for 2006 – 2007 by the College Committee on Disability Issues:

- Students with learning disabilities made up 40.8% of students served by the offices for students with disabilities at Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology in Ontario
- Students with learning disabilities represented 4.8 % of the total number of college students

2007-2008 statistics from MTCU (from Colleges and Universities Year End Reports)

- College students with learning disabilities 7,785 (10.1% increase over 5 yrs.)
- University students with learning disabilities 5,546 (17.9% increase over 5 yrs.)
- Total postsecondary students with LDs 13,331 (13.2% increase over 5 yrs.)
- Total postsecondary students with LDs or ADHD 16,551
- Students with LDs made up 2.24% of the total student population
- Students with LDs or ADHD made up 2.78% of the total student population

## Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), 2006

PALS is a Canadian national survey designed to collect information on adults and children who have a disability, whose everyday activities are limited because of a condition or health problem. It is based on self-reporting.

[www.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?catno=89-628-XWE&lang=eng](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?catno=89-628-XWE&lang=eng)

**Learning limitations** were defined as: Difficulty learning due to the presence of a condition, such as attention problems, hyperactivity or dyslexia, whether or not the condition was diagnosed by a teacher, doctor or other health professional.

There was a large increase between 2001 and 2006 in the number of PALS respondents who identified themselves or their child as having learning limitations, and the PALS authors hypothesized that Canadian society has continued to progress towards increased social acceptance of reporting a disability.

### Children (5 to 14)

- Among children aged 5 to 14, learning limitations (LLs) was the largest disability reported (about 69.3% of the children with disabilities).
- LLs affected 121,080 of the children aged 5 to 14, which is 3.2% of all children in this age group.
- Of children 5 to 14 in the survey who required special education, 89.6% did so because of LLs.
- 51.4% of parents who had children with LLs reported difficulty obtaining special education.
- Only 40.6 % of children with LLs had all their needs for assistive technologies met, while 31.2 % had no needs met. Computers were the most common assistive device, and cost was the biggest factor in unmet needs.

## **Adults (15 and over)**

Between the 2001 and 2006 surveys, the number of Canadians aged 15 and over who reported having learning disabilities rose by almost 40%. However the survey indicated that learning disabilities are not more common in people as they age, so this is probably a reporting difference. The PALS authors hypothesized that Canadian society has continued to progress towards increased social acceptance of reporting a disability.

- 83.2% of adults with learning disabilities (LDs) used home computers and adults with LDs used more types of assistive technology than adults with any other type of disability. However, only 56.4% of adults with LDs indicated that all their needs for specialized equipment were met, while 27.7 said that no needs were met. 85.9% paid for their assistive technology themselves.
- In 2006, 34.5% of people with LLs aged 15 to 64 reported that they were employed. The 2006 survey showed a decrease in the unemployment rate for adults with LLs, from 20.1 % in 2001 to 11.7 % in 2006. This unemployment rate is still slightly higher than the rate for adults with all disability types (10.4%) and higher than the unemployment rate for the whole population.
- Average employment income for adults with LLs was \$20,215 in 2006, compared to \$26,640 for all disability types.
- Approximately one in four (25.7%) employed people with LLs reported that their employer did not know about their condition.
- Almost one in five (18.0 %) people with LLs reported that they had been refused a job in the previous five years because of their condition. Moreover, 13.4% of people stated that they had been refused a job interview.

## **Transitions Longitudinal Study 2009**

This study, begun in 2005, surveyed a cohort of students (initially about 200) who had participated in pilot transitions support programs from 1998 -2002 in one of the 13 colleges and universities in Ontario under the Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF). The longitudinal study shows that students with learning disabilities who got supports in postsecondary studies and answered the surveys had more favourable outcomes than those shown in the PALS research. For example:

- For each of the five years of the study, 10% or less of the participants left their programs without graduating, compared to 15% in the general population. For those who did not graduate, the most common reason was inability to pass required courses.
- The number of participants who returned to school after graduation each year ranged from 17% to 35%.
- The number of participants who were employed increased from 58% in 2005 to 82% in 2009.
- By 2009, 93% of participants who responded to the survey earned at least \$20, 000 and 53% earned at least \$35,000.
- About half of the employed participants had disclosed their LDs at work and of these 96% found the reaction positive. 43% of employed participants did not feel that disclosure was necessary.

## **SUMMARY**

- Estimates of the incidence rate of LDs range as high as 10% or more of the population, but there is most statistical evidence from demographic sources for a range of 4 to 6 %.
- Figures from the Ministry of Education suggest that about 6% of students in the publically funded school system are receiving special education programs or services because of learning disabilities.
- Postsecondary students with learning disabilities make up between 2 to 5% of the total student body, with higher percentages in colleges than in universities. The numbers in both colleges and universities is increasing.
- Outcomes are promising for students with LDs who get the supports they need to reach postsecondary education and who receive supports in postsecondary.

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