

6. Disability

Disability can affect an individual's participation in society and therefore is an important aspect of health and wellbeing. Children and young people with a severe disability may be in good health, but may have long-term limitations on normal activities and be unable to participate in many activities. Young people may have a 'core activity restriction' if they are limited in their ability, to some degree, to perform tasks in relation to self-care, mobility, communication, schooling and/or employment. Disability can create serious financial hardship for the person with the disability, their parents and carers. Young people with a disability can have difficulty taking up employment and can often be excluded from normal social activities outside the home. A disability affects the overall wellbeing of the affected young people, their parents and their siblings.

This chapter presents information on the prevalence of disability among Australian young people. The information is derived from the 1998 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers. A disability is defined by the ABS as the presence of one or more of 17 restrictions, limitations or impairments that had lasted, or that were likely to last, for a period of 6 months or more. Four levels of core activity restriction are distinguished: profound, severe, moderate and mild. People with a profound core activity restriction are not able to do, or always need help with, a core activity. Those with a severe restriction may sometimes need help with a core activity, may have difficulty understanding or being understood by others, or may use sign language more easily than spoken communication. People with a moderate restriction need no help but have difficulty with a core activity. Those with a mild restriction need no help and have no difficulty with core activities, but use aids and equipment, or may have other difficulties, for example with walking long distances, using public transport, walking up and down stairs or bending to pick up an object from the floor (ABS 1999).

Prevalence of disability and core activity restriction

In 1998, based on the ABS definition of disability, it was estimated that approximately 230,200 young people aged 15–24 years had a disability (Table 6.1). The proportion of young people aged 15–24 years with a disability was estimated to be about 9%.

Table 6.1: Estimated number of young people aged 15–24 years with a disability, 1998

	Age (years)	Total with specific restriction ^(a)		Total without specific restriction		Total with disability	
		Number ('000)	Per cent ^(b)	Number ('000)	Per cent ^(b)	Number ('000)	Per cent ^(b)
Males	15–19	52.0	7.7	10.2	1.5	62.3	9.2
	20–24	56.2	8.0	13.6	1.9	69.8	9.9
	15–24	10.8	7.9	23.8	1.7	132.1	9.6
Females	15–19	35.1	5.5	10.2	1.6	45.4	7.1
	20–24	41.0	6.2	13.8	2.1	54.8	8.2
	15–24	76.2	5.8	24.0	1.8	100.2	7.7
Persons	15–19	87.2	6.6	20.5	1.6	107.6	8.2
	20–24	97.2	7.1	27.3	2.0	124.6	9.1
	15–24	184.4	6.9	47.8	1.8	232.2	8.7

(a) 'Specific restriction' includes restrictions in self-care, mobility, communications and schooling or employment.

(b) Per cent is the rate per 100 population of the relevant age group.

Source: AIHW analysis of 1998 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers unit record file.

- The overall disability rate among young people aged 15–24 years was about 9%, with more males than females reporting having a disability (10%, compared with 8%). In both age groups, males had higher rates of disability and core activity restriction than females.
- Most young people with a disability had a specific restriction (79%). Specific restriction was lower among young people aged 15–19 years than those aged 20–24 years.

Although the prevalence of disability appears to have increased during the 5 years from 1993 to 1998, the two ABS disability surveys are not strictly comparable. A change in wording of a survey question from 'slow at learning or understanding' in the 1993 survey to 'difficulty in learning or understanding' in the 1998 survey is thought to have encouraged more reporting of intellectual and developmental disabilities, especially among boys.

The rate of those with activity restrictions by disability status is shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Young people aged 15–24 with a disability, 1998

	Age (years)	Profound/severe core activity restriction		Moderate/mild core activity restriction		Schooling or employment restriction only		Total with specific activity restriction	
		Number ('000)	Per cent ^(b)	Number ('000)	Per cent ^(b)	Number ('000)	Per cent ^(b)	Number ('000)	Per cent ^(b)
Males	15–19	17.6	2.6	21.9	3.2	12.5	1.9	52.0	7.7
	20–24	11.6	1.7	27.7	3.9	16.9	2.4	56.2	8.0
	15–24	29.2	2.1	49.6	3.6	29.5	2.1	108.2	7.9
Females	15–19	13.5	2.1	15.9	2.5	5.7	0.9	35.1	5.5
	20–24	9.6	1.4	21.0	3.2	10.4	1.6	41.0	6.2
	15–24	23.1	1.8	36.9	2.8	16.1	1.2	76.2	5.8
Persons	15–19	31.1	2.4	37.8	2.9	18.2	1.4	87.2	6.6
	20–24	21.2	1.6	48.7	3.6	27.3	2.0	97.2	7.1
	15–24	52.4	2.0	86.5	3.2	45.6	1.7	184.4	6.9

(a) The estimates of young people with schooling restriction include young people with schooling restriction only and with no restriction in core activities. Some children with mild, moderate, severe or profound core activity restriction may also have schooling restriction.

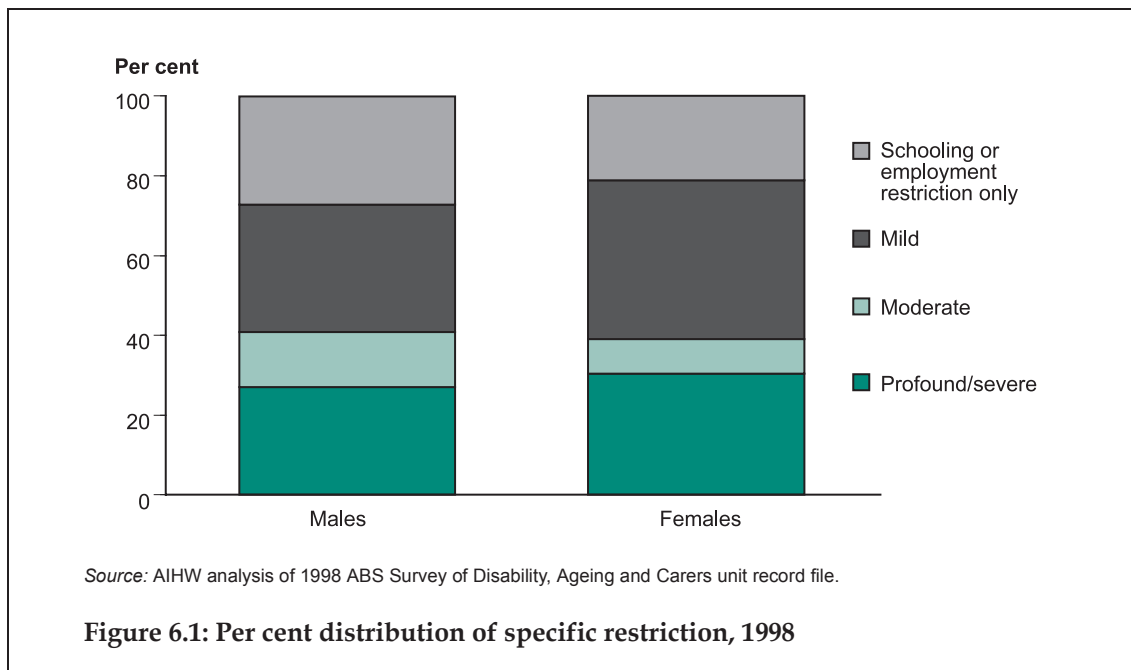
(b) Per cent is the rate per 100 population of the relevant age group.

Note: Estimates of 9,300 or less have an associated standard error of 25% or more and should be interpreted with caution.

Source: AIHW analysis of 1998 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers unit record file.

- Among young people aged 15–24 years, 2% had a profound or severe core activity restriction and just under 2% had a schooling or employment activity restriction only.
- Disability status varied by age and sex. Young people aged 15–19 years had a higher rate of profound/severe core activity restriction than those aged 20–24 years, whereas those aged 20–24 years had a higher rate of schooling or employment restriction only. In all age groups, females had a slightly lower rate of profound or severe core activity restriction than males.

Among those with specific restriction, the distribution by disability status is shown in Figure 6.1.



- Of young people aged 15–24 years with a specific restriction, 47% had a moderate or mild core activity restriction, 28% had a profound/severe core activity restriction and 1 in 4 (25%) had a schooling/employment restriction only.
- Among males with a specific restriction, the highest proportion had a mild core activity restriction (32%), followed by schooling/employment restriction only and severe/profound core activity restriction (27% each).
- Among females with a specific restriction, the highest proportion (40%) had a mild core activity restriction, followed by a severe/profound core activity restriction (30%) and then schooling/employment restriction (21%).

Main disabling condition

A person's main disabling condition was defined in the 1998 disability survey as 'a long-term condition identified by a person as the one causing the most problems' (ABS 1999: 69). The main disabling conditions for young people are shown in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Main disabling condition of young people aged 15–24 years with a disability, 1998

Main disabling condition	Number('000)			Per cent		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
Intellectual & other mental ^(a)	43.2	14.5	57.6	18.6	6.2	24.8
Respiratory diseases	15.6	18.7	34.3	6.7	8.1	14.8
Arthritis	2.8	2.0	4.7	1.2	0.8	2.0
Other musculoskeletal disorder	20.8	13.1	33.9	9.0	5.6	14.6
Nervous system diseases	4.5	15.0	19.6	2.0	6.5	8.4
Psychiatric ^(b)	7.4	9.7	17.1	3.2	4.2	7.4
Diseases of ear	5.1	2.8	7.9	2.2	1.2	3.4
Head injury/any other brain damage	2.7	2.3	5.0	1.2	1.0	2.2
Disease of eye	2.0	2.7	4.7	0.9	1.1	2.0
Stroke	0.4	0.3	0.7	0.2	0.1	0.3
Other circulatory diseases	1.0	1.4	2.5	0.4	0.6	1.1
All other diseases and conditions ^(c)	26.4	17.7	44.1	11.4	7.6	19.0
Total	132.1	100.2	232.2	56.9	43.1	100.0

(a) Includes the group entitled 'Intellectual and developmental disorders' and 'Other mental and behavioural disorders'. The definition has changed since the 1993 survey and now includes Down syndrome.

(b) Includes the group entitled 'Psychoses/mood affective disorders' and 'Neurotic/stress-related/somatoform disorders' in ABS publications. The definition has changed since the 1993 survey.

(c) Includes other physical diseases and conditions such as spina bifida, neoplasms and diseases of urinary system, genital organs and breast.

Note: Estimates of 9,300 or less have an associated relative standard error of 25% or more, and estimates of 2,700 or less have an associated relative standard error of 50% or more. These estimates should be interpreted with caution.

Source: AIHW analysis of 1998 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers unit record file.

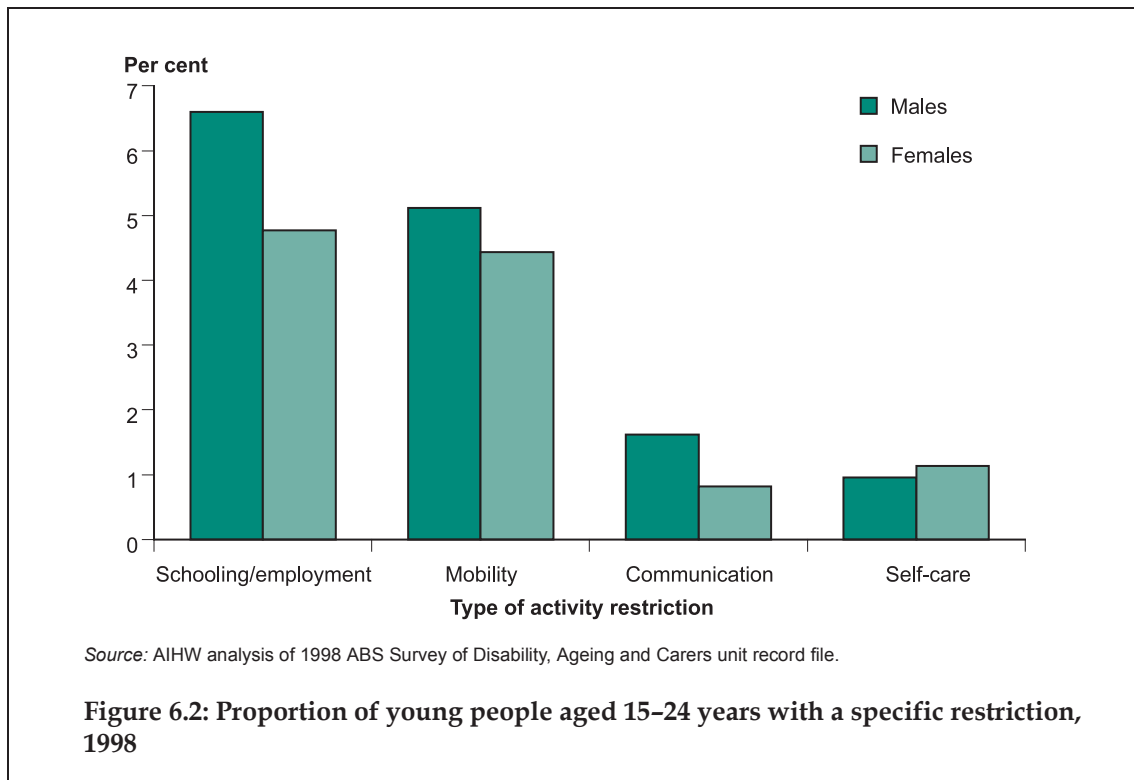
- In 1998, intellectual and other mental disorders were the most commonly reported main disabling condition of young people aged 15–24 years with a disability, accounting for 25% of all disabling conditions. The proportion of young people with a disability who had intellectual and other mental disorders in 1998 was almost twice that reported in 1993 (3%, compared with just under 2%). As noted, changes to a survey question in 1998 are thought to be responsible for the increased reporting of intellectual and developmental disabilities among young people, especially among boys.
- Musculoskeletal diseases, including arthritis, were the second most frequently reported disabling condition of young people with a disability aged 15–24 years (17%).
- Respiratory diseases accounted for 16% of all reported main disabling conditions among young people with a disability.
- There were differences in the main disabling conditions by sex. The three most commonly reported disabling conditions in males were intellectual and other mental conditions (19%), musculoskeletal (10%) and respiratory diseases (7%). The corresponding main disabling conditions for females were respiratory diseases (8%), diseases of the nervous system (7%) and intellectual and other mental conditions (6%).

Among young people aged 15–24 years with a profound/severe core activity restriction, intellectual and other mental conditions (39%) and psychiatric conditions (12%) accounted for 51% of all disabling conditions, and diseases of the nervous (16%) and musculoskeletal systems (10%) accounted for an additional 26% of main disabling conditions.

Among young people with profound or severe core activity restriction, intellectual and other mental conditions, diseases of the nervous system, psychiatric illnesses, and head injury and brain damage accounted for the majority of disabling conditions (69%).

Activity limitation

Young people are regarded as having activity limitations if they have difficulty doing a particular activity, need help from another person or use an aid.



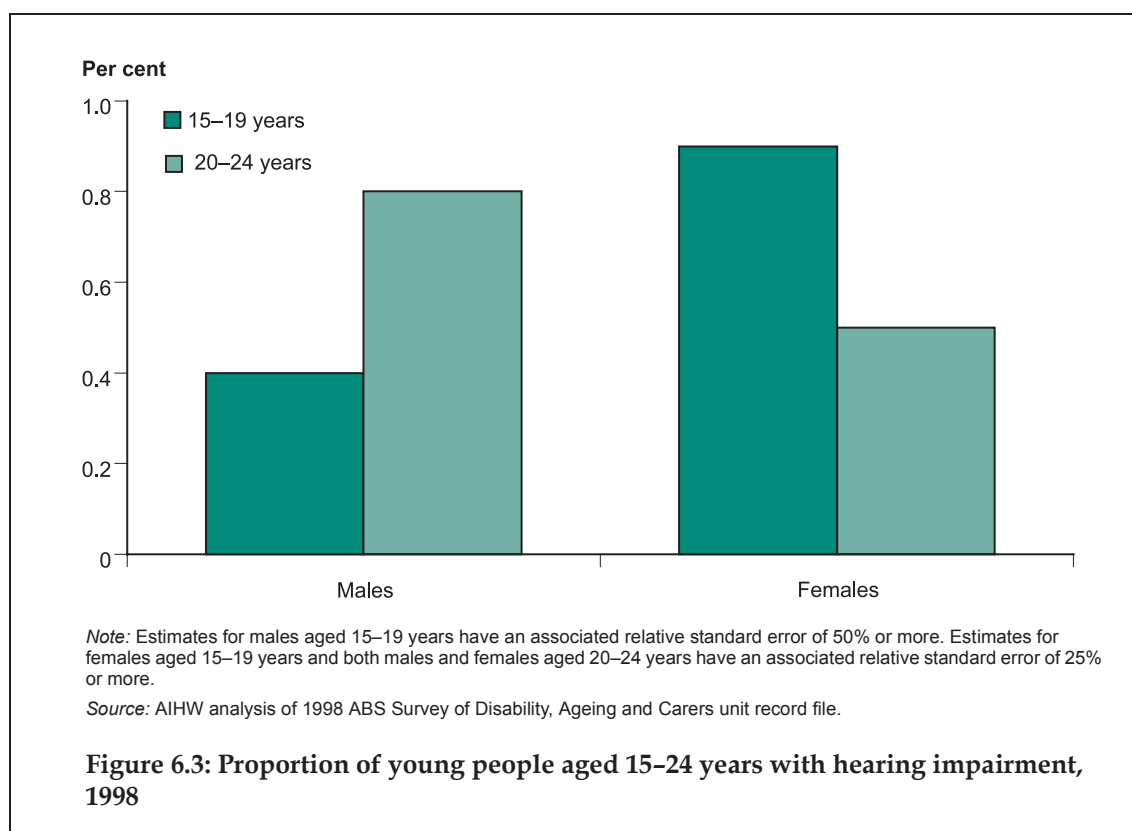
- The most commonly reported activity restrictions were limitations in the ability to undertake schooling or employment only, followed by limitations in mobility, communication, and self-care.
- The rates for all activity limitations, with the exception of self-care, were higher for males than females.

Hearing and sight impairments

Sight and hearing problems can play a role in hindering development and ability to learn.

Hearing impairment

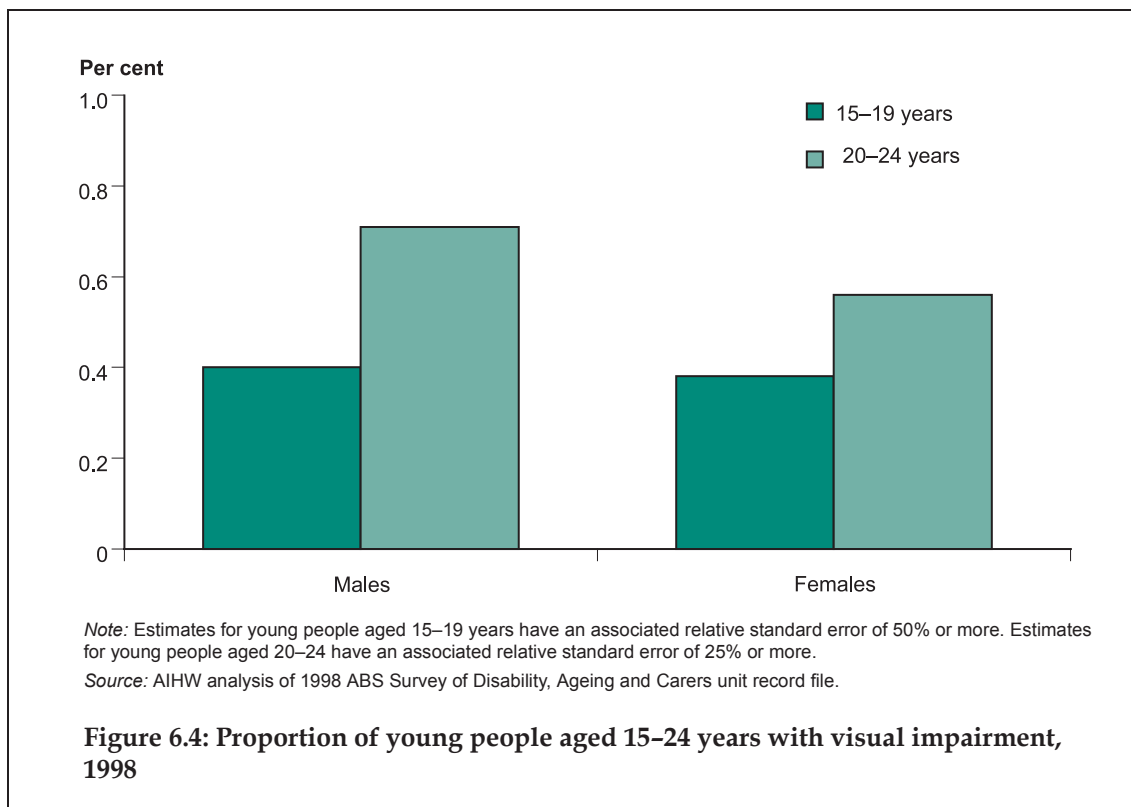
Hearing impairments are more common than visual impairments among young people aged 15–24 years. In 1998, approximately 17,000 young people were reported as having some form of hearing impairment.



- Of all young people aged 15–24 years, just over 0.6% were reported as having some form of hearing impairment, with 0.09% having a total loss of hearing, and 0.6% a partial loss of hearing. Overall, hearing impairment was slightly higher in the 20–24 age group (0.7%, compared with 0.6%).

Sight impairment

Overall in 1998, approximately 13,400 young people were estimated to have some form of visual impairment. Of these, 55% were males.



- In 1998, all visual impairment among surveyed young people aged 15-24 years was due to partial loss of vision—0.5% of all young people. Visual impairment was highest among those aged 20-24 years, irrespective of sex.
- The visual impairment rate was slightly higher among males than females.

Effect of disability on schooling

Many young people aged 15–19 years with a disability are still attending school. The schooling characteristics of young people with a disability are shown in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4: Schooling characteristics of young people aged 15–19 years with a disability, by sex, 1998

	Number ('000)			Per cent attending school		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
Mainstream school	27.6	17.6	45.1	91.2	85.0	88.7
No special class	22.6	13.9	36.6	74.9	67.4	71.8
Special class	4.9	3.6	8.6	16.3	17.6	16.8
Special school	2.7	3.1	5.8	8.8	15.0	11.3
Difficulties at school^(a)	18.8	9.6	28.4	62.2	46.5	55.8
Fitting in socially	8.6	4.0	12.7	28.6	19.5	24.9
Sight difficulties	0.5	0.3	0.8	3.8	10.6	6.6
Hearing difficulties	1.2	2.2	3.3	1.8	1.4	1.6
Other difficulties	1.9	5.4	7.3	6.3	25.9	14.3
						9.4
Need time off school	2.3	2.6	4.8	7.5	12.4	9.5
Attending school	30.2	20.7	50.9	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Young people may fall into none or more than one of these groups.

Note: Estimates of 9,300 or less have an associated relative standard error of 25% or more and estimates of 2,700 or less have an associated relative standard errors of 50% or more and should be interpreted with caution.

Source: AIHW analysis of ABS 1998 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers unit record file.

- Most young people aged 15–24 years with a disability who attended school were enrolled in mainstream schools (89%). Special schools were attended by 11%.
- Of young people attending mainstream schools, 72% attended normal classes and 17% attended special classes.
- Around 56% of young people with a disability who attended school were reported to have difficulties at school because of their disability.
- The most frequently reported difficulty at school was fitting in socially. Approximately 25% of young people with a disability attending school were reported as having this difficulty.
- About 10% of young people attending school needed time off school because of their disability.

Level of schooling and educational attainment by disability status

Disability, whether physical or intellectual, can have an impact on the ability to complete school or obtain a post-school qualification. This section explores the impact of disability on educational attainment.

A disability was, on average, associated with lower achievement at school. A higher proportion of young people aged 15–24 years without a disability completed Year 12 than did those with a disability – 53%, compared with 32%. A higher proportion of young people aged 20–24 years without a disability had post-school qualifications than had those with a disability – 69%, compared with 57%. The proportion of young people aged 15–24 years with and without post-school qualifications, by disability status, is shown in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5: Proportion of young people aged 20–24 years with and without post-school qualifications, by disability status, 1998

Disability status	With post-school qualification		Without post school qualifications ^(a)		Total
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	
Profound core activity restriction	2,098	34.6	3,963	65.4	6,061
Severe core activity restriction	3,694	25.8	10,625	74.2	14,319
Moderate core activity restriction	3,670	25.9	10,524	74.1	14,194
Mild core activity restriction	9,993	29.0	24,451	71.0	34,444
Schooling or employment restriction only	10,602	38.8	16,713	61.2	27,315
All with specific restrictions ^(b)	30,057	31.2	66,276	68.8	96,333
No restrictions	8,766	32.1	18,547	67.9	27,313
All with disability ^(c)	38,823	31.4	84,823	68.6	123,646
No disability	538,687	43.4	702,503	56.6	1,241,190

(a) Includes un-codable post-school qualifications.

(b) Total may be less than the sum of the components as persons may have both a core activity restriction and a schooling or employment restriction.

(c) Includes those who do not have a specific restriction.

Source: AIHW analysis of 1998 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers unit record file.

- Approximately 43% of young people aged 20–24 years without a disability have post-school qualifications, compared with 31% of those with a disability.
- The level of educational attainment is influenced by disability status. Just over one-third (35%) of those with profound core activity restriction have post-school qualifications.

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