

Executive summary

The lived experience of disabled people in the UK: A review of evidence

This report discusses the systematic review of lived experience evidence commissioned by the Cabinet Office's Disability Unit. The review was carried out by the Centre for Disability Studies at the University of Leeds and Disability Rights UK. Its aim was to establish evidence on the lived experience of disabled people in the UK published between 2010 and 2021. It addressed the following research question:

What evidence exists about the barriers and opportunities facing disabled people in the UK, arising specifically from their first-hand knowledge and experience (lived experience), in areas of current policy concern?

Methodology

The evidence review had 3 phases:

1. Around 15,000 potential sources were identified using systematic text searches of databases (mainly academic

research) and grey literature. The searches were focused on recent user-led research.

1. Around 1,500 sources were selected based on specific criteria. They were then sorted into 13 policy-relevant themes.
2. The evidence base was mapped thematically and the outputs were created.

For each theme, we explain the context and relevance of articles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). We then show the range of lived experience evidence, with relevant examples and as a basis for further analysis of the research findings.

Summary of findings by theme

1. Community and social participation

Disabled people often face barriers to social inclusion which affects their everyday lives. Evidence highlights the importance of community engagement and taking part in politics, economics and civil society.

2. Accessibility

There are persistent obstacles in physical and digital environments, including communication and transport. Disabled people say that many spaces are still not well designed or supported, despite some improvements.

3. Independent living and social care

Experiences of choosing and controlling personal support services are vital for independent living. Challenges include transitioning from institutional care and navigating complex social arrangements.

4. Healthcare

Some sources discuss barriers in accessing health services. These highlight systemic issues including:

- discrimination
- lack of information
- inadequate adjustments within healthcare settings

5. Justice

Evidence shows that disabled people often encounter violence, exploitation and discrimination. They also face barriers to accessing justice. These highlight the need for policy improvements to safeguard their rights.

6. Education

Challenges in mainstream education settings include inadequate support and resources for disabled students.

There is a need for tailored approaches to ensure educational practices are inclusive.

7. Employment

Barriers faced by disabled people in employment include stigma, discrimination and lack of reasonable adjustments. The findings emphasise the importance of inclusive workplace practices and support systems.

8. Income

Disabled people have a higher risk of poverty and financial instability – particularly through their interaction with the welfare system. Administrative barriers to accessing financial support also affect their economic independence.

9. Housing

Persistent barriers to accessible housing include:

- shortages of suitable properties
- a lack of support for adaptations

Experiences of homelessness among disabled people highlight critical gaps in policies and services.

10. Transport

Many disabled people report accessibility challenges with public transport. These affect their mobility and independence. Improved policies are needed to ensure equal access to transport.

11. Leisure

Physical barriers and social stigma make it harder for disabled people to take part in leisure activities. There need to be more inclusive recreational opportunities that accommodate all types of impairments.

12. Family and private sphere

Relationships and family dynamics are affected by a range of barriers. There are challenges related to parenthood, romantic relationships, and friendships. Many of these are due to societal attitudes and inadequate support.

13. Attitudes

Social attitudes towards disabled people often involve stigma and discrimination. The report highlights the need for awareness-raising initiatives to:

- encourage a more inclusive society
- oppose negative stereotypes

This evidence review illustrates the wide range of barriers faced by disabled people in the UK in different policy areas. It highlights the need for targeted interventions and policy improvements that enable inclusivity and improve their quality of life.