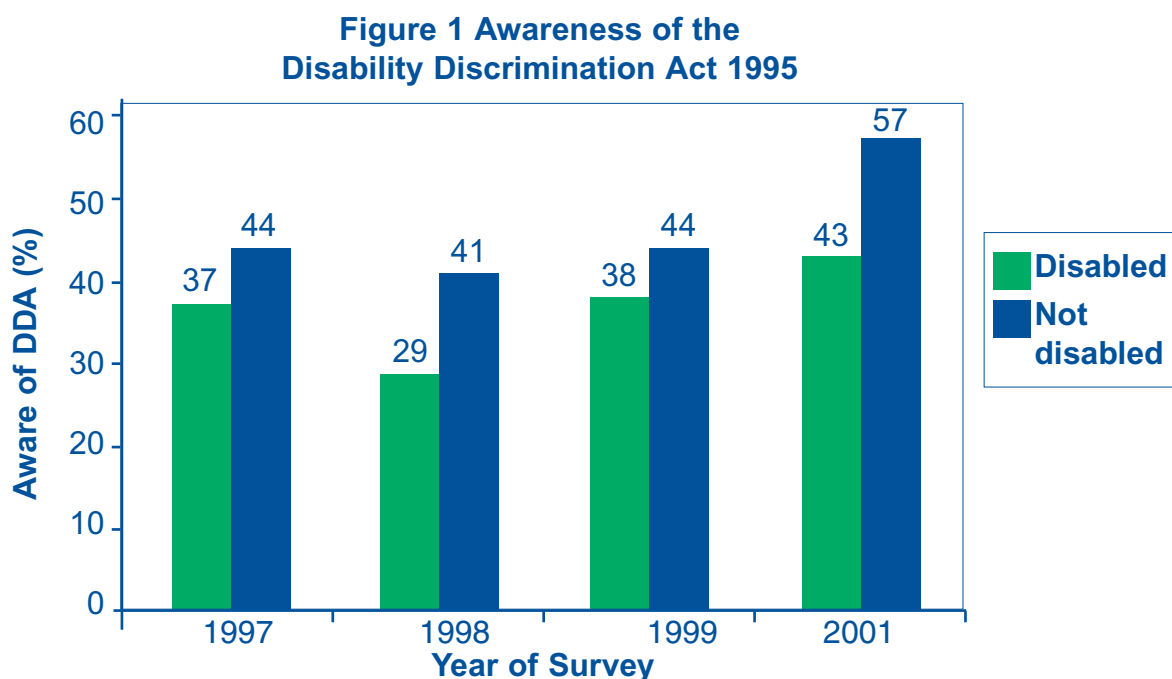


Public Attitudes to Disability in Northern Ireland

This factsheet presents an analysis of the disability part of the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey, which was conducted by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency in 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2001. The most recent survey was commissioned by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland while the earlier surveys were conducted on behalf of the Northern Ireland Disability Council. The factsheet presents the findings of the 2001 survey and comparisons are drawn with the earlier surveys where statistically significant change has occurred.

Awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)

Non-disabled people are more likely to know about the DDA than disabled people. Although levels of awareness have improved slightly among disabled people only 43% were aware of the DDA in 2001. Almost three fifths of respondents in 2001 who were not disabled knew about the DDA (57%), up from 44% in 1997.



Prevalence of Disability

Most respondents underestimated the proportion of disabled people in Northern Ireland. Only 8% of respondents in 2001 believed that 1 in 6 (which is the estimate of the PPRU¹ Surveys of Disability) of the population is disabled.

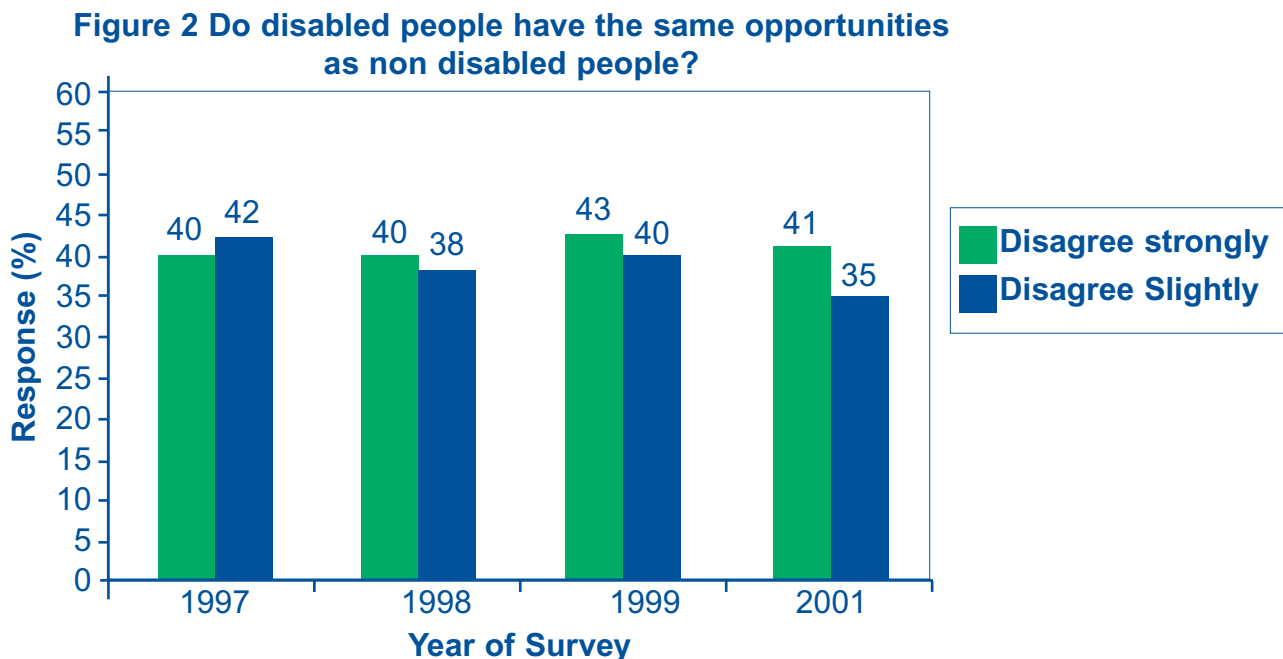
Contact With Disabled People

In 2001 just over half of respondents said that less than a quarter of their friends were disabled while only 1% felt that most of their friends were disabled. These proportions are more or less the same across the four surveys.

Perception of Opportunities for Disabled People

The majority of respondents to all four surveys (97% in 2001) agreed either slightly or strongly that disabled people should have the same opportunities in life as people who are not disabled.

At least three-quarters of respondents (76% in 2001) believe, either slightly or strongly, that disabled people do not have the same opportunities in life as non-disabled people. The proportion with this attitude has fallen slightly from earlier surveys; 82% in 1997.



¹ PPRU Surveys of Disability Report 1: The Prevalence of Disability Among Adults in Northern Ireland, 1992

Perception of Disabled Peoples' Hopes and Ambitions

At least half of respondents to all four surveys disagreed with the statement that disabled people have different hopes and ambitions from people who are not disabled. However 31% of respondents in 2001 agreed with this statement.

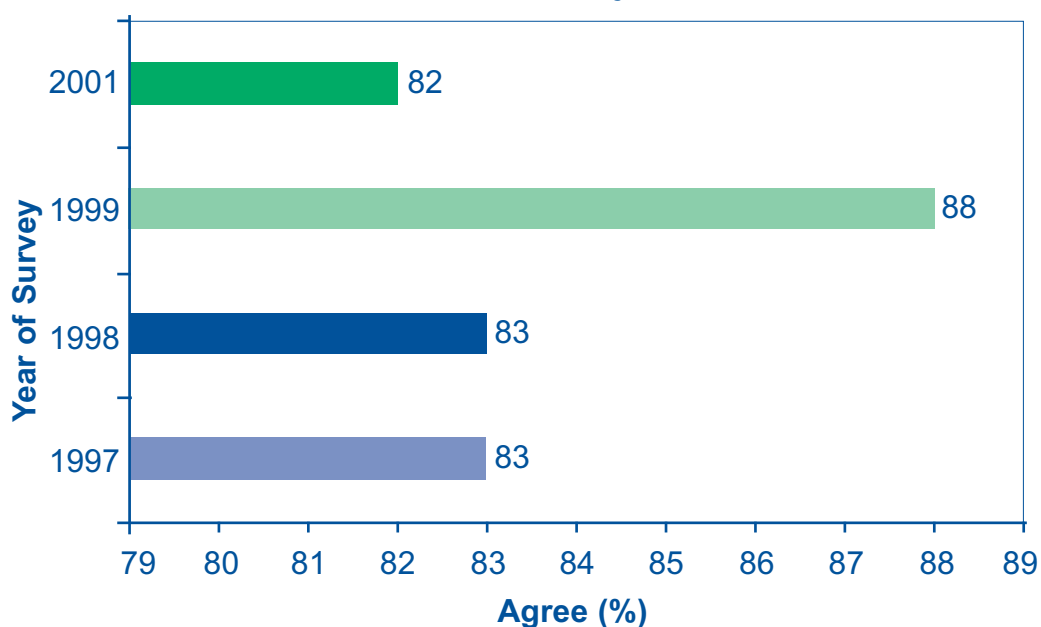
Disabled People and Work

There was strong support for the opinion that a disabled person can be as productive as a non-disabled person in a wide range of tasks, with 78% agreeing with this statement in 2001.

Roughly two thirds of respondents did not believe that employers do enough to meet the needs of disabled people (68% in 2001). Most respondents disagreed either slightly or strongly that there is fair representation of disabled people in more senior jobs, such as supervisors, managers and heads of companies; 74% in 2001.

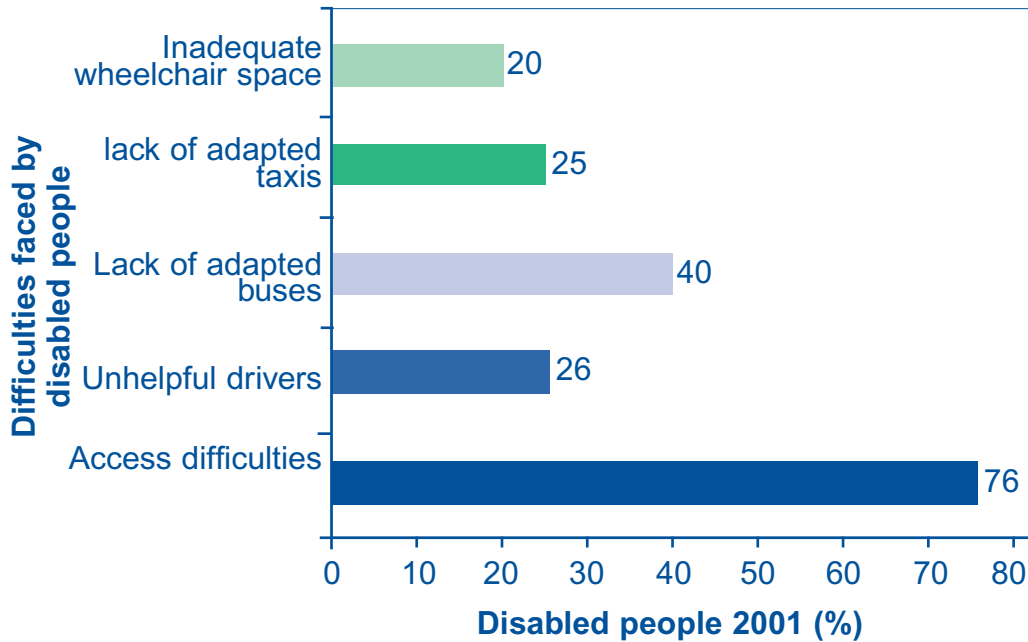
In complement to this opinion, the majority of respondents agreed either slightly or strongly that there should be more disabled people in these sorts of jobs.

Figure 3 There should be more disabled people in senior jobs



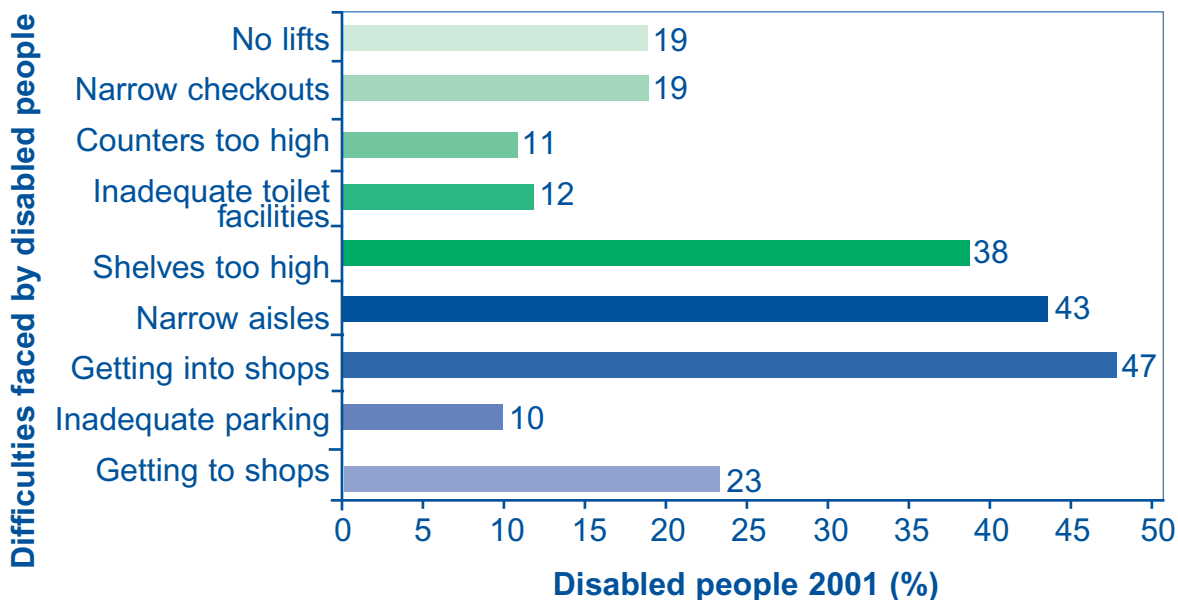
Disabled People and Services/Facilities

Figure 4 Difficulties faced by disabled people when using public transport and taxis



The majority of respondents (59%) in 2001 did not believe that providers of public transport and taxis do enough to meet the needs of disabled people. This proportion has fallen considerably compared to 1997 when 73% disagreed with this opinion. Similarly 47% of respondents in 2001 compared to 61% in 1997 felt that shops do not cater adequately for the needs of disabled people.

Figure 5 Difficulties disabled people face when shopping



There has also been a notable change in the proportion disagreeing with the statement that establishments such as pubs, restaurants and places of entertainment cater adequately for the needs of disabled people. Fifty-seven percent disagreed with this statement in 2001 compared to 66% in 1997, ie, more people believe that disabled people are well catered for. There were no significant differences in opinion about these issues between disabled and non-disabled respondents.

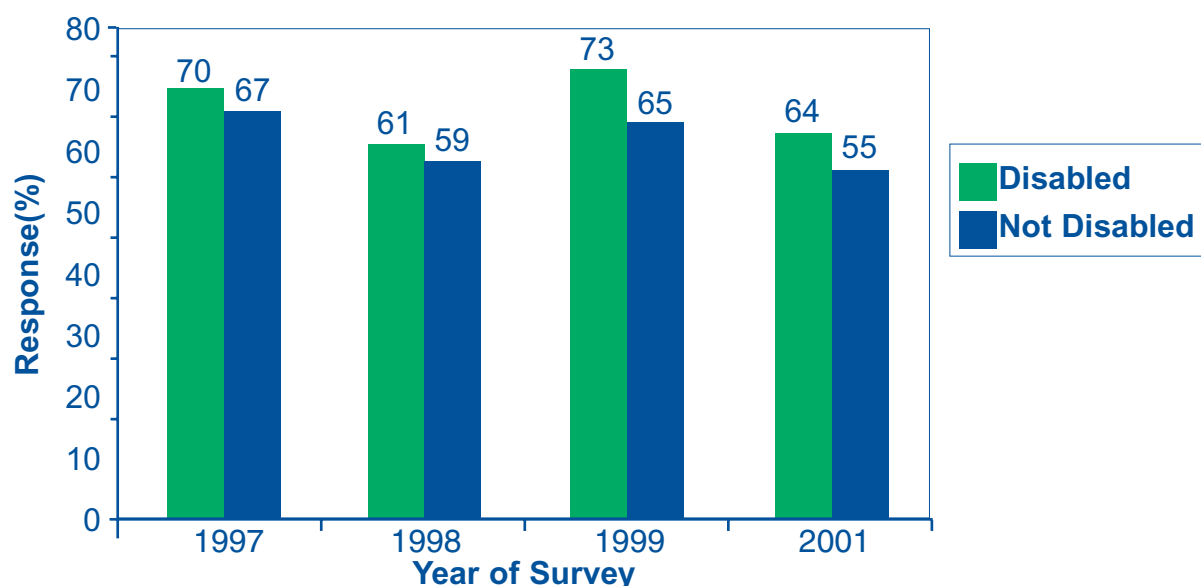
Disabled Children and Education

The majority of respondents (66%) in 2001 agreed that disabled children should attend the same schools as non-disabled children and this finding is consistent with the earlier surveys.

Government Assistance for Disabled People

Respondents were asked to indicate which one of a list of six 'social benefits' would receive their highest priority for extra government spending. In 2001 retirement pensions (45%) were more likely to be given priority than benefits for disabled people (25%).

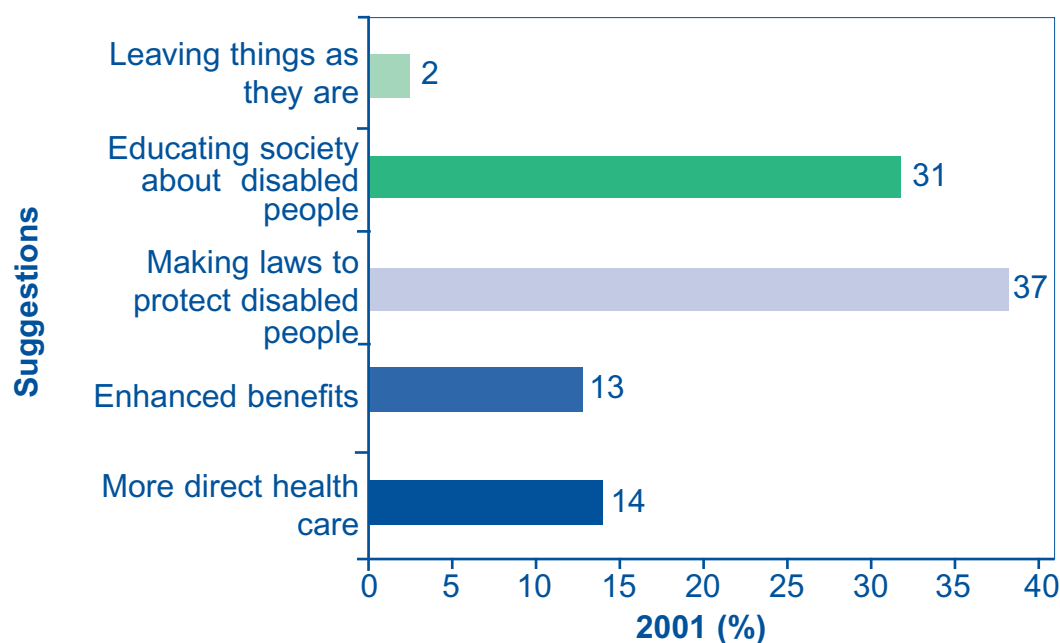
Figure 6 The state does not provide enough support for disabled people



In 2001, 34% of respondents felt that the state provides an adequate level of support for disabled people compared to 24% in 1997. In contrast 57% of respondents in 2001 indicated that the state does not provide enough support for disabled people. In 1997, 68% held this opinion.

Attitudes in support of specific measures to benefit disabled people were fairly consistent over time. In 2001, 37% of respondents felt that making laws to protect disabled people would be most helpful. Educating society about disabled people was considered to be most helpful by a notable proportion of respondents (31% in 2001) and again this is broadly comparable with previous surveys.

Figure 7 Measures to benefit disabled people



CONCLUSION

Accurate and up-to-date information is essential if we are all – including the policy-makers – to play our part in developing a more equal society. The results of this research will inform debate and ensure that society pays greater attention to putting disability discrimination issues at the heart of equality work.

The disability module of the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey has provided a wealth of information regarding public attitudes towards disability in Northern Ireland. The 2001 survey not only replicates the positive opinions evident in the 1997, 1998 and 1999 surveys, but also reflects some interesting (albeit minor) change in attitudes. Overall this positive opinion demonstrates openness toward disability issues and

suggests strong support for the inclusion of disabled people in wider society; for example in education and in employment. The trends evident within all four surveys are encouraging.

Although public opinion continues to under estimate the proportion of disabled people in Northern Ireland it also continues to be positive about disability issues. These positive attitudes were also the same within various subgroups of respondents, notably between disabled people and those who are not disabled. However older people were more likely to be negative in their opinions, which is interesting given that older people were more likely to have disabled friends and also more likely to be disabled.

Although awareness levels of the Disability Discrimination Act have improved over time, they are not yet high enough. In particular the surveys have shown that disabled people are much less likely to be aware of this legislation.

The questions around disability and work drew strong support for the belief that disabled people could be as productive as non-disabled people and also that more disabled people should be in more senior jobs such as managers and supervisors. However analysis of the Labour Force Survey Autumn² 2000 reveals that the reality for the majority of disabled people of working age is very bleak. Disabled people (34%) were much less likely to be employed than non-disabled people (76%).

The main research findings demonstrate that the majority of respondents did not believe that service providers (public transport and taxis, shops and places of entertainment) cater adequately for the needs of disabled people. However there has been a notable rise in the proportion of people who agreed (although responses predominate in the slightly agree category) that service providers do cater adequately for disabled customers.

This change in opinion may in part be due to the fact that service providers have begun to embrace their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, particularly providing reasonable adjustments or changes to the physical environment. However disabled respondents said that they still face difficulties when accessing various services/facilities. Consequently much work still needs to be done in the area of service provision.

The questions around government assistance for disabled people raised some interesting issues. Specifically the support for extra spending on

² Disability Briefing, Equality Commission NI, June 2001.

retirement pensions may be attributable to the strong pensions lobby and the associated media campaign. Also worthy of note is that only 2% of respondents indicated that leaving things as they are would be of most help to disabled people, implying that the majority recognised that the current situation is inadequate.

The full report on public attitudes to disability is on the Equality Commission's website (www.equalityni.org).

If you would like a paper copy, or a copy of this summary in other formats, please contact:

The Information & Advice Department
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Equality House
7-9 Shaftesbury Square
BELFAST BT2 7DP

Tel: 028 90 500 600 Fax: 028 90 331 544 Textphone: 028 90 500 589
Email: information@equalityni.org Website: www.equalityni.org

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Research commissioned and published by
The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Equality House
7-9 Shaftesbury Square
BELFAST BT2 7DP
Tel: 028 90 500 600
E-mail: information@equalityni.org
Textphone: 028 90 500 589
Website: www.equalityni.org

The full research report is available on the Commission's website.

ISBN 1-903941-21-0

June 2002