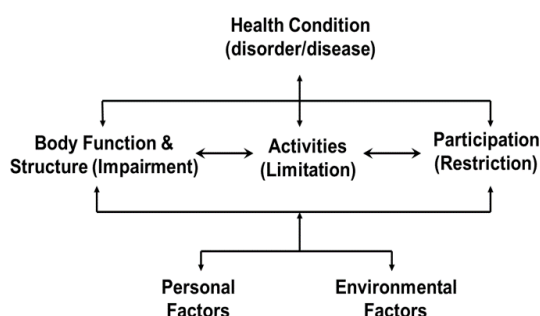# Disability in Malawi

The Importance of Disability

Disability is both a multidimensional concept and experience. Disability can affect anyone at any time – from birth through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Worldwide, many people with disabilities do not have equal access to education, employment, and health care. In addition, those with disability may experience barriers to participating in civic and social life activities.

Defining Disability

No single definition of disability exists. Definitions vary depending on the purpose for measurement. Moreover, the nature and severity of disabilities can vary greatly depending on cultural contexts[1]. Yet, data on the size and characteristics of the population with disability, which also allow for cross-cultural comparisons, require standardization in both the conceptualization and the measurement of disability.

The ICF Model of Disability

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), developed by the World Health Organization[2], provides the necessary and consistent definition of disability. According to the ICF model, disability arises from the interaction between an individual and that individual's contextual (personal and environmental) circumstances. Thus, the degree to which participation in life activities is restricted depends on the interaction between the individual's functioning (ability to perform basic functional activities) and the environment.

The Washington Group

The Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG), a city group established under the United Nations Statistical Commission, was formed to address the need for population-based measures of disability by promoting and coordinating international co-operation in the area of health statistics, focusing on disability data collection tools suitable for censuses and national surveys.

The WG has developed, tested and adopted the Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS) to collect such data. The questions use the ICF as a conceptual framework. The WG-SS is comprised of 6 questions measuring difficulty functioning in basic actions, with response categories that capture the full spectrum of difficulty functioning, from mild to severe. Disability is defined as having "a lot of difficulty" or "cannot do at all" to at least one WG-SS question.

The WG Short Set on Functioning

1. Do you have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?
2. Do you have difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid?
3. Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps?
4. Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?
5. Do you have difficulty with self-care, such as washing all over or dressing?
6. Using your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating, for example understanding or being understood?

Response categories: No difficulty / Some difficulty / A lot of difficulty / Cannot do at all

For more information on the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, visit: http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/.
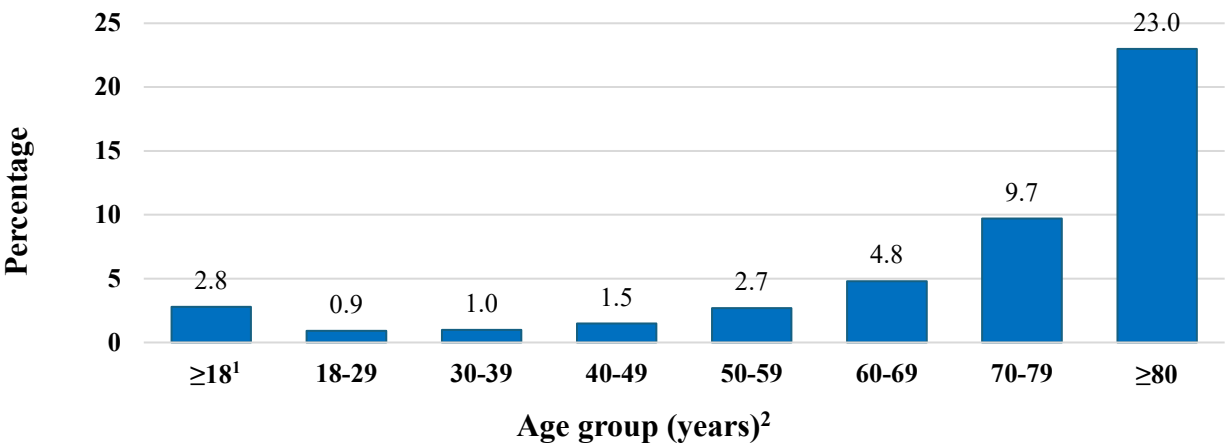
Malawi Data on Disability and Methods

The Malawi Population and Housing Census (PHC) was the sixth in the series of conducting censuses in Malawi and it fell under the 2020 round of World population censuses advocated by the United Nations. The PHC is a nationally-representative, enumerating all houses and individuals in the country and gathering a broad range of household and individual characteristics including disability statuses. This report uses 2018 Malawi PHC data. The final population for 2018 was 17,506,022 and 15,011,343 aged 5 years and over. The WG-SS questions have been included in the 2018 Malawi PHC. For more information about the 2018 Malawi PHC, visit: https://www.nsomalawi.mw/census/2018.

Differences between percentages were evaluated using two-sided significance tests at the 0.05 level. Some of the estimates reported here are age-adjusted using the 2020 world population[3] to facilitate cross-country comparisons.

Prevalence of Disability

- The age-adjusted percentage of persons aged 18 and over with disabilities is 2.8%.

- The prevalence of disability increases with age, from 0.9% among those 18-29 years to 23.0% among those aged 80 and over.

Figure 1. Prevalence of disability: age-adjusted and age-specific percentage of the population 18 years and over and by age group, Malawi, 2018
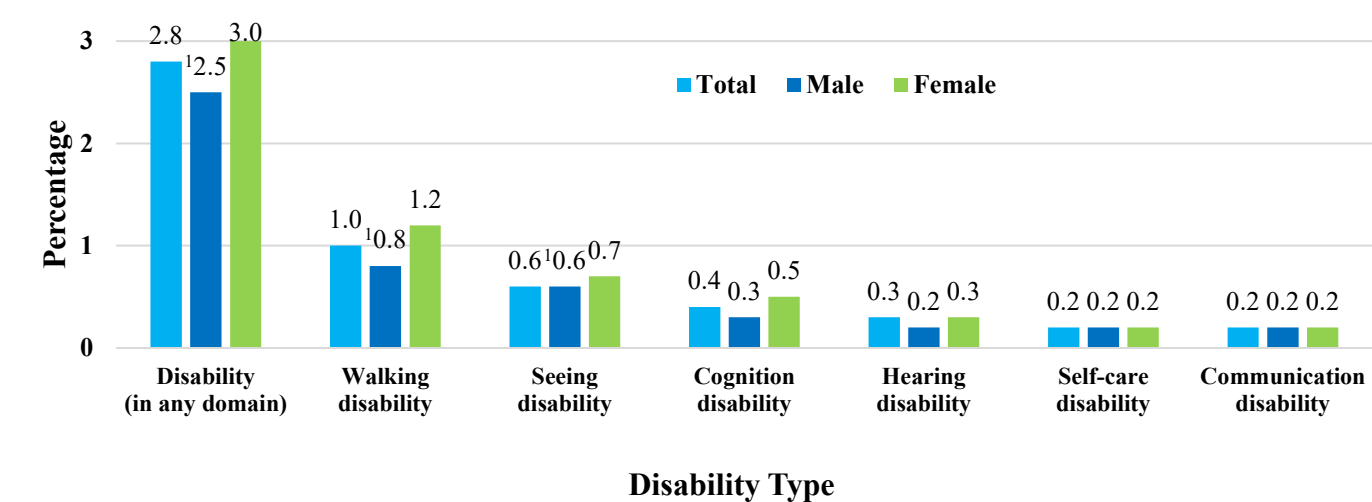

[1]Total for ≥18 is age-adjusted using the 2020 world population (available at: World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, and ≥80 years. [2]Significant quadratic trend by age (p<0.05).

Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated "a lot of difficulty" or "cannot do at all" to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as with disabilities.

Data source: Malawi Population and Housing Census, 2018.

- Females (3.0%) are more likely than males (2.5%) to have disability (in any domain).

- Females are more likely to have walking and cognition disabilities, while both females and males are equally likely to have hearing, seeing self-care and communication disabilities.

- The most common type of disability reported is walking.

Figure 2. Prevalence of disability in any domain and disability in each domain: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, by sex, Malawi, 2018

Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, and ≥80 years. [1]Significantly different from female ($p<0.05$).

Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated "a lot of difficulty" or "cannot do at all" to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as having disability (in any domain). Disability in each domain is defined by a response of "a lot of difficulty" or "cannot do at all" in that domain.

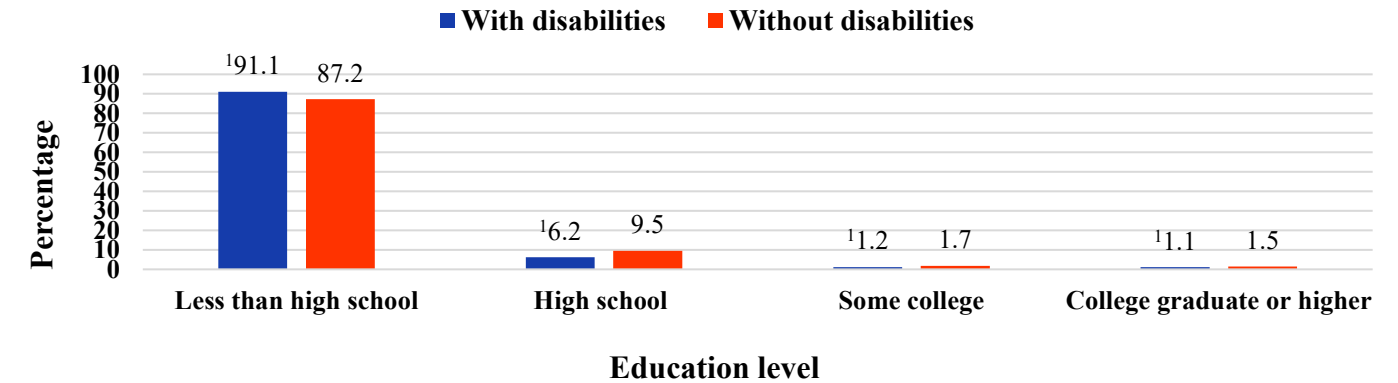Data source: Malawi Population and Housing Census, 2018.

Outcomes Disaggregated by Disability

Disaggregating data by disability status allows for the comparison of outcomes for people with and without disabilities and is a necessary first step towards addressing disparities. Outcome indicators, such as educational attainment and employment, any of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals[4], or specific programmatic objectives, can be monitored over time to determine if gaps exist between those with and without disabilities and whether those gaps are increasing or decreasing across time. In this section, data on educational attainment, family income, and employment status are disaggregated by disability status.

Educational Attainment

- Adults aged 18 and over with disabilities (91.1%) were more likely to have less than a high school education compared with those without disabilities (87.2%).

- Adults without disabilities (9.5%) were more likely to have a high school/Malawi school certificate of education compared with those with disabilities (6.2%).

- Adults without disabilities (1.7%) were more likely to have some college education compared with those with disabilities (1.2%).

- Adults with disabilities (1.1%) were less likely to have completed a college degree or higher compared with those without disabilities (1.5%).

Figure 3. Education level by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Malawi, 2018

Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, and ≥80 years. [1]Significantly different from adults without disabilities (p<0.05).
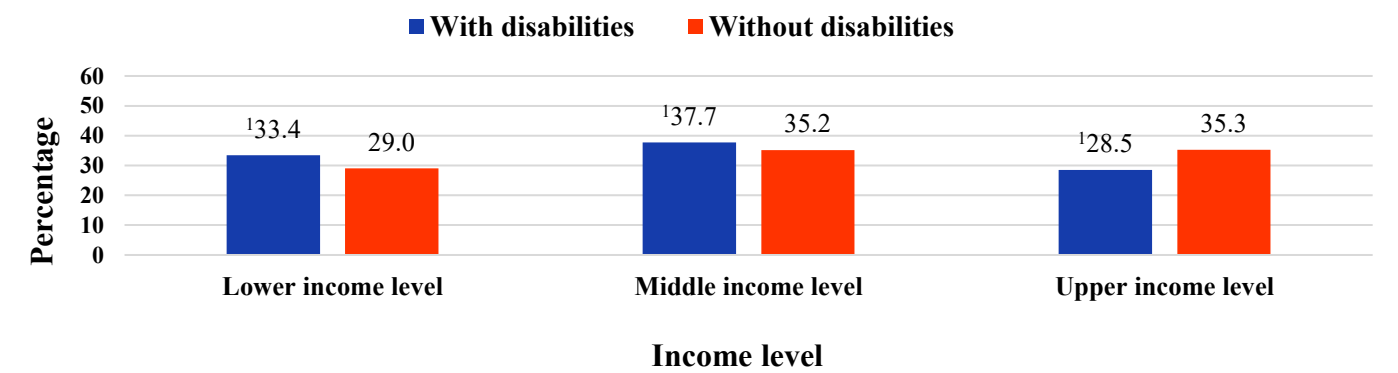
Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated "a lot of difficulty" or "cannot do at all" to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as with disabilities.

Data source: Malawi Population and Housing Census, 2018.

Family Income

- In 2018, 33.4% of adults aged 18 and over with disabilities were in lower income levels compared with 29.0% of those without disabilities.

- 37.7% of adults with disabilities were in middle income levels compared to 35.2% of those without disabilities.

- 28.5% of adults with disabilities were in the upper income level compared to 35.3% of those without disabilities.

Figure 4. Family income level by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Malawi, 2028

Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, and ≥80 years. [1]Significantly different from adults without disabilities (p<0.05).
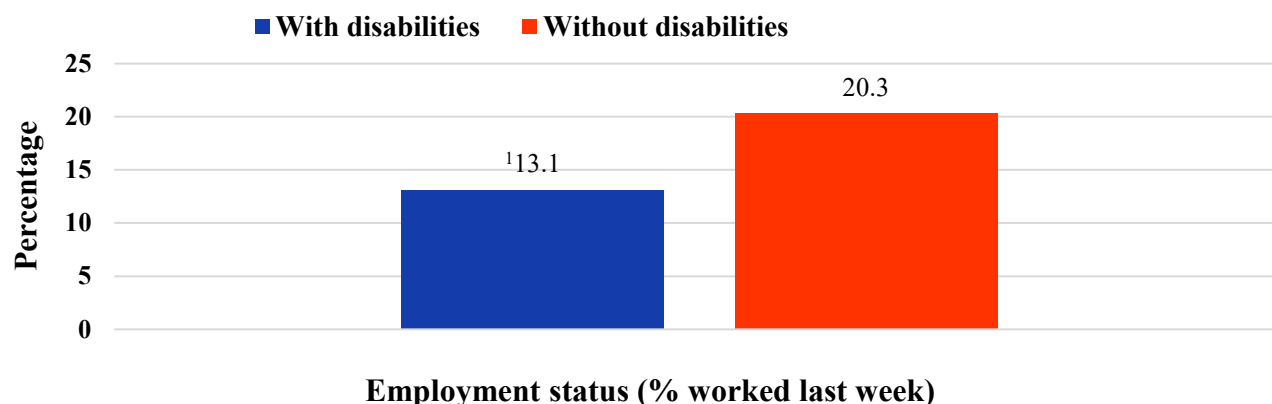
Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated "a lot of difficulty" or "cannot do at all" to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as with disabilities.

Data source: Malawi Population and Housing Census, 2018.

Employment Status

- In 2018, 13.1% of adults aged 18-64 with disabilities were employed in the last week compared with 20.3% of adults without disabilities.

Figure 5. Employment status by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18-64 years, Malawi, 2018

Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-64 years.[1]Significantly different from adults without disabilities (p<0.05).

Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated "a lot of difficulty" or "cannot do at all" to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as with disabilities.

Data source: Malawi Population and Housing Census, 2018.

References

1. Altman, B. (2001). "Definitions of Disability and their Operationalization, and Measurement in Survey Data: An Update." In Barnartt, S. and Altman, B. (Eds.) *Exploring Theories and Expanding Methodologies: Where We Are and Where We Need To Go* (Research in Social Science and Disability, Vol. 2, pp. 77-100). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

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