



Disability in Thailand

The Importance of Disability

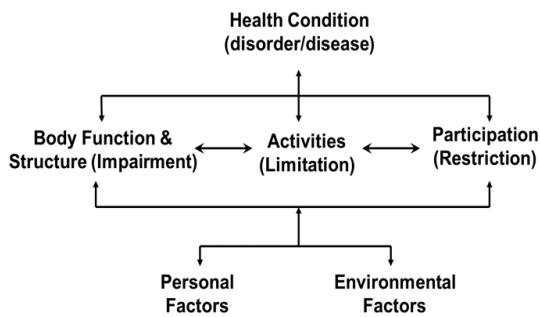
Disability is both a multidimensional concept and experience. Disability can affect anyone at any time – from birth through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age.

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 contexts¹. 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 Organization², 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

Thai Data on Disability and Methods

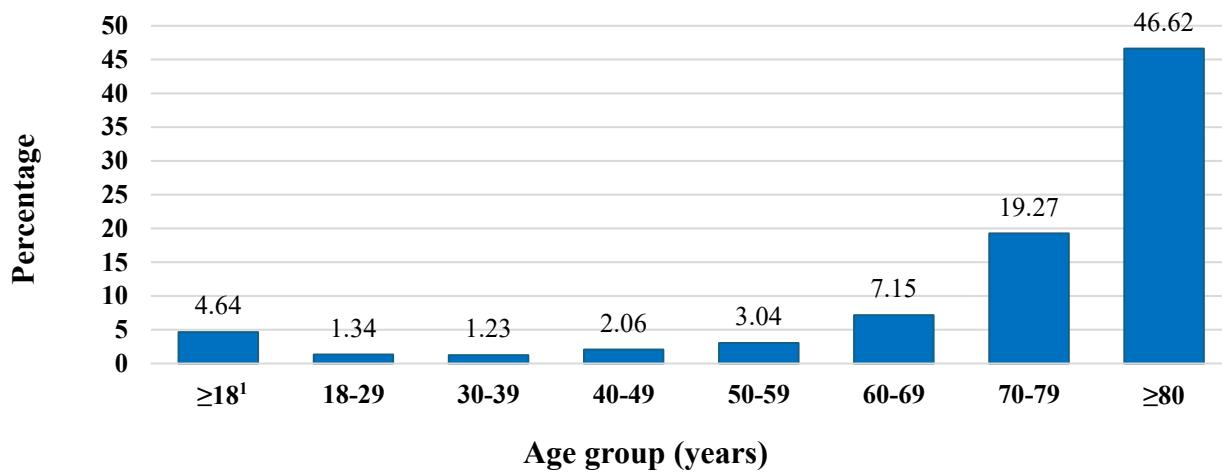
The analysis utilizes data from the six-question Washington Group Short Set (WG-SS), collected during the 2022 Disability Survey. This analysis focuses on the population aged 18 and above, with adjustments made for age to ensure comparability across countries under a standardized framework. The sampling plan employed **stratified sampling**, with Bangkok and the four regions of Thailand serving as five strata in total. Each stratum (excluding Bangkok) was further divided into two sub-strata based on administrative classifications by the Department of Provincial Administration: municipal areas and non-municipal areas.

- The **Enumeration Area (EA)** was used as the primary sampling unit, while individual households were the secondary sampling unit.
- A total of **88,273 households** were surveyed, with data collection carried out from October to December 2022.

Prevalence of Disability

- The age-adjusted percentage of persons aged 18 and over with disabilities is 4.64%.
- The likelihood of disability increases with age, from 1.34% in the 18–29 age group to 46.62% among those aged 80 years and older.
- This trend highlights the significant impact of aging on disability prevalence.

Figure 1. Prevalence of disability: age-adjusted and age-specific percentage of the population 18 years and over and by age group, Thailand, 2022



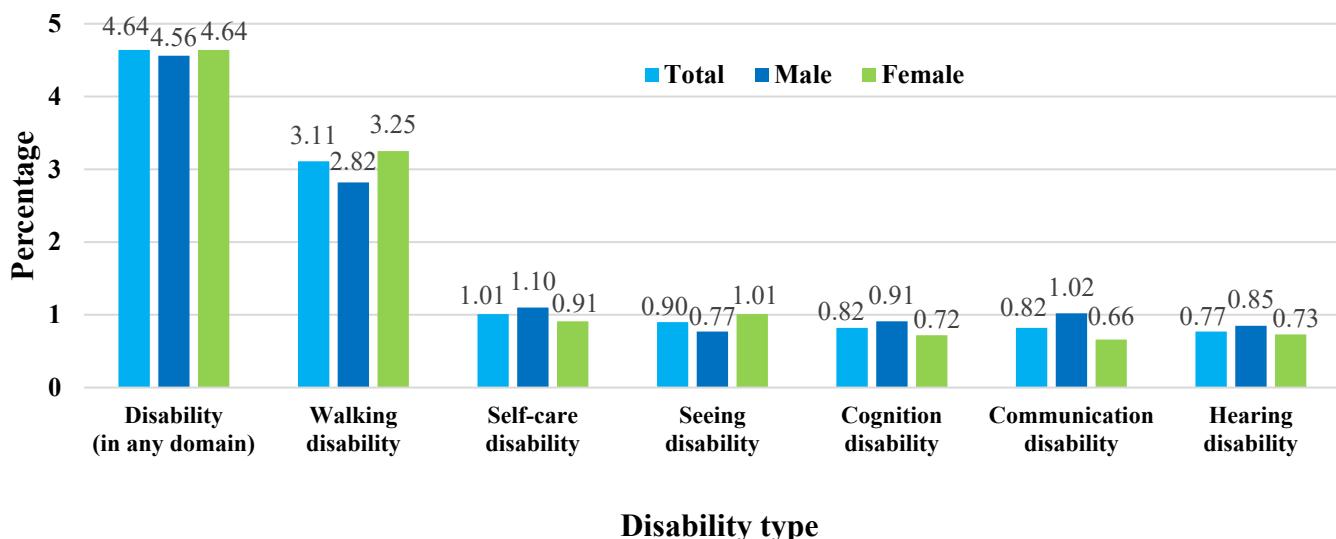
¹Total for ≥18 is age-adjusted using the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](https://www.un.org/development/desa/population/prospects/)) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70–79, and ≥80 years.

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: Thailand, The 2022 Disability Survey.

- In 2022, among individuals aged 18 years and over:
 - The most common difficulty reported by persons with disabilities was walking, affecting 3.11% of the population. This was followed by self-care (1.01%), seeing (0.90%), cognition (0.82%), communicating (0.82%), and hearing (0.77%).
- Analyzed by sex:
 - Females had a slightly higher prevalence of disability (in any domain) than males (4.64% vs. 4.56%).
 - The types of difficulties varied between sexes, with males experiencing higher rates of difficulty in self-care, cognition, communicating, and hearing and females reporting more difficulties with walking and seeing than males.

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, Thailand, 2022



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.

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: Thailand, The 2022 Disability Survey.

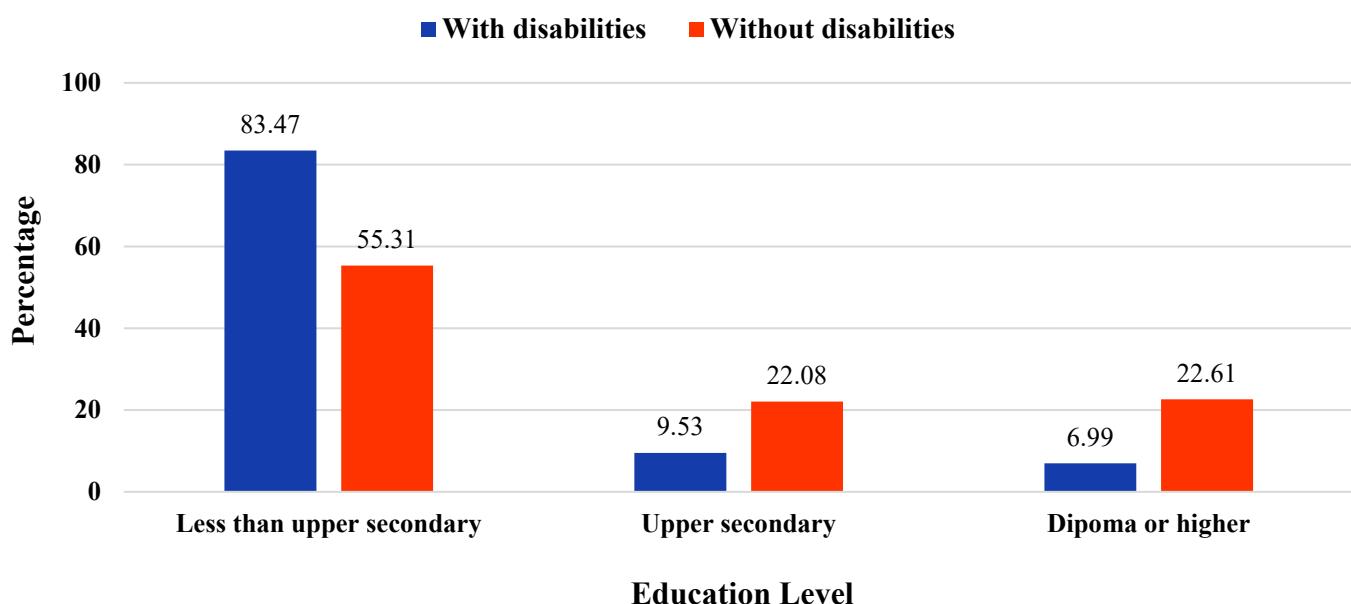
Outcomes Disaggregated by Disability

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 Goals³, 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 and employment status are disaggregated by disability status.

Educational Attainment

- 83.47% of persons with disabilities had completed less than upper secondary level education.
- In comparison, 55.31% of persons without disabilities had completed less than upper secondary level education.
- Only 6.99% of persons with disabilities had completed an associate degree or higher.
- By contrast, 22.61% of persons without disabilities had achieved an associate degree or higher.

Figure 3. Education level by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Thailand, 2022



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.

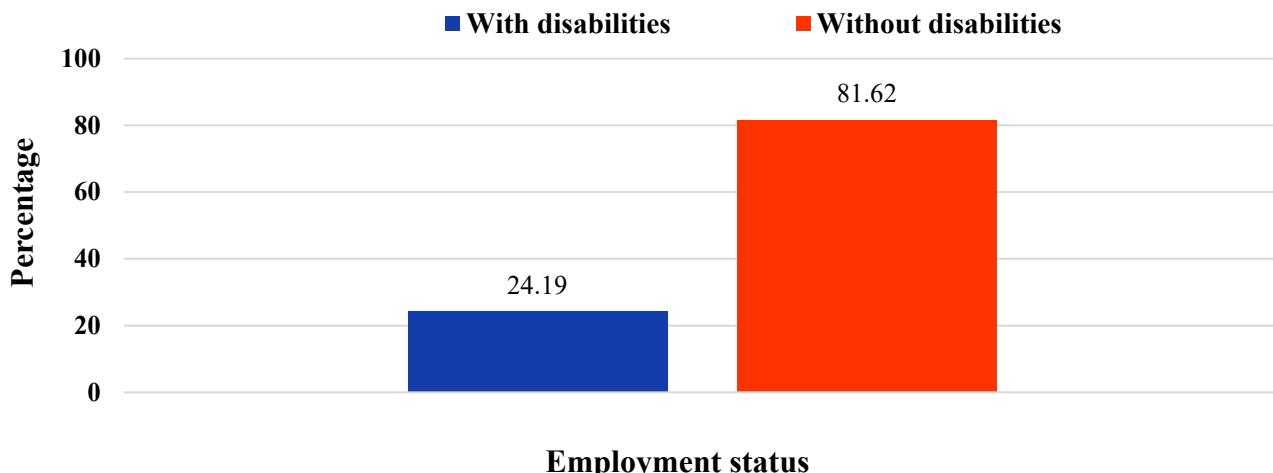
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Data source: Thailand, The 2022 Disability Survey.

Employment Status

- Only 24.19% of persons with disabilities aged 18 and over were employed during the 12 months prior to the survey — roughly one in four.
- In comparison, 81.62% of individuals without disabilities were employed during the same period.

Figure 5. Employment status by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18-64 years, Thailand, 2022



Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](https://www.un.org/en/development-group/population/prospects/)) using the following age groups: 18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-64 years.

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. The retirement age in Thailand is generally 60 years old.

Data source: Thailand, The 2022 Disability Survey.

The 2022 Disability Survey in Thailand sheds light on the barriers faced by persons with disabilities, revealing disparities in education and employment. These findings serve as a call to action, urging society to embrace inclusivity, break down systemic barriers, and create opportunities that empower persons with disabilities to thrive and contribute fully to the community.

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.
2. World Health Organization. (2001). *The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*. WHO.
3. United Nations General Assembly. (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57b6e3e44.html>.

Appendix

Disability in Thailand: Insights from the 2022 Survey

The National Statistical Office of Thailand has been conducting disability surveys consistently since 1974. Beginning in 2007, these surveys have been conducted every five years to ensure updated and comprehensive data. The surveys adopt the definition of disability outlined in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). This approach ensures that the collected data aligns with international standards.

For the 2017 and 2022 surveys, the office employed advanced tools to gather detailed information on disabilities. In this context, disability refers to a condition or situation in which an individual has limitations or impairments in physical, mental, learning, communication, or operational capacities. These limitations hinder their ability to lead a life or participate in societal activities on an equal basis with others. According to the United Nations (UN), the term "persons with disabilities" is defined in the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons as "Any person unable to ensure by himself or herself, wholly or partly, the necessities of a normal individual and/or social life, as a result of a deficiency, either congenital or not, in his or her physical or mental capabilities." Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines a disability as "any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being, resulting from an impairment."

Based on these definitions, the following tools were selected for use in the surveys:

1. **Child Functioning Module (CFM):** This tool, developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG) in collaboration with UNICEF, was used to collect data on disabilities among children aged 2–17 years.
2. **Washington Group Extended Set on Functioning (WG-ES):** For individuals aged 18 and above, the survey utilized an extended version of the WG questionnaire, including the Washington Group Short Set (WG-SS). This short set comprises six questions designed to identify difficulties in key areas such as vision, hearing, mobility, cognition, self-care, and communication.