

Additional costs of living for people who are sight impaired and for people who are Deaf

Research Findings

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Research to establish how much more it costs, as a minimum, to live with sight or hearing loss was carried out for Thomas Pocklington Trust by a team of researchers at the Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University and University Campus Suffolk.

This study of the additional household budgets required by disabled people calculated additional costs of living for a single working age person who is eligible for certification as sight impaired with some useable sight, and a single working age

Summary findings

Having a sensory impairment can bring a wide range of additional expenses that makes it cost substantially more to achieve a minimum acceptable living standard compared to someone without that impairment.

The budget for a working age person living alone who is sight impa

Research methods

The research asked three groups of people who are sight impaired and three groups of people are Deaf about the additional things that households with impairments similar to their own would require for a minimum standard of living. Participants discussed in detail whether MIS budgets covering different aspects of a single person's life would be adequate or needed to be supplemented. The method built consensus both within each group and across groups about what should change and why. The items that groups agreed as additional requirements were costed to create a budget for each case under consideration.

The standard MIS method was used when running the groups and additional attention given to communication. This involved talking through information and verbally recording decisions (rather than using flipcharts) in the sight impaired groups, and using British Sign Language interpretation in the Deaf groups.

Findings

1. Additional needs of a person who is sight impaired

Groups were asked about the minimum requirements of a single person who is certified as sight impaired and has some useable sight. They identified additional costs compared to a fully sighted person incurred across a wide range of categories, of which the most significant were as follows.

Paying for various technological equipment

This was required to enable communication, facilitate access to written materials, and make the best use of the sight that people have. Some of these would be one-off purchases such as a larger laptop, scanner, video magnifier, assistive software and IT training, whose cost would be spread across a long period. The cost of a higher grade mobile phone (to provide good quality accessibility features) than is included in the budget for a fully sighted person adds a greater cost on a recurring basis.

Additions:

Domestic help: £12.50

Technology: £12.39

Technology

Technological items incur a relatively modest weekly cost overall. For example, a larger screen laptop making it easier to communicate online using sign language is a one-off purchase adding only 7p a week on average. Most of the additional cost of technology arises from the recurring cost of a more expensive mobile phone and monthly package to allow using it for sign language communication.

Travel

The budget for travel was slightly higher than for hearing people, due mainly to the need for Deaf people to maintain geographically dispersed social networks, and having to take the train to a different towns or cities to meet friends and attend social activities.

Electricity

A small weekly addition to bills to cover the cost of running additional lighting and appliances.

Overall, the list below shows that over three quarters of the additional cost of being Deaf comes from interpreters, and most of the remaining amount from social activities.

Minimum weekly budget for a single working age adult who is Deaf (excluding rent)

Standard budget (regardless of disability): £198.60.

Additions:

Interpreter: £126.58

Social activities and holiday: £22.79

Technology: £6.10

Travel: £5.43

Other: (electricity, miscellaneous): £2.13

Total additions: £163.03

Total weekly budget: £361.63

The scope for future research

This study has demonstrated that it is possible to estimate the additional costs that someone with a given disability in a given household type needs to cover in order to maintain a minimum acceptable standard of living. The research succeeded in building a consensus among disabled people themselves about areas of need and involving them in identifying which additional items are required in a given case. Future research could help to build a fuller picture by looking at different levels and type of impairments, the effect of living with other people rather than alone and the costs associated with having a disability as a child and as a pensioner, compared to the present study of costs for someone of working age.

Authors

Katherine Hill, Abigail Davis, Donald Hirsch, Matt Padley and Noel Smith

The status of this research

The research reported here is independent research commissioned by Thomas Pocklington Trust. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Thomas Pocklington Trust.

How to obtain further information

The full research report sets out the method in more detail, and describes how groups discussed additional needs and the rationales given for including items in the budgets.

The report:

‘Disability and minimum living standards: The additional costs of living for people who are sight impaired and people who are Deaf’

can be obtained from www.crsp.ac.uk/news