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**Physical Violence and Property Crime Reported
by People with and without Disability in New
South Wales 2002-2015**



**Centre for Disability
Research and Policy**

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Summary

Exposure to violence is damaging to peoples' personal health and wellbeing and can limit their social, civic and economic participation in society. We know that people with disabilities are more likely to witness and be the victims of violence, including violent criminal acts, than their non-disabled peers.

Unfortunately there is no system in place for routinely monitoring (at State, Territory or Federal level in Australia) the extent to which people with a disability are more or less likely to be the victims of crime. Neither the NSW *Recorded Crime Statistics* nor the Australian Bureau of Statistics annual survey of *Crime Victimization in Australia* record whether the victims of crime have a disability. As a result, we simply do not know how many people with disabilities in NSW each year have been the victims of crime (or potentially criminal acts), the magnitude of the additional risk of being a victim if a person has a disability and whether indicators are changing over time.

In this brief report we used data from an ongoing national survey, the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey (<http://melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/>) to try to answer some of these questions. Our results suggest that:

- In 2015, adults with disabilities in NSW were **four times more likely** than their non-disabled peers to report having been the victim of physical violence
- While the overall risk of physical violence has reduced over time for people with and without disability, it has **reduced more slowly for people with disability**
- As a result, **the gap between people with and without disability as victims of physical violence has widened**
- In 2015, adults with disabilities in NSW were **75% more likely** than their non-disabled peers to report having been the victim of property crime
- Again, **the gap between people with and without disability with regard to being victims of property crime has widened** though less noticeably than it has for physical violence
- We estimate that each year, **20,000** adults with disabilities in NSW report being the victims of physical assault and **40,000** adults with disabilities in NSW report being the victims of property crime
- We cannot determine what proportion of occurrences of physical violence and property crime would be considered as examples of bias crime.

Background

Exposure to violence is damaging to peoples' personal health and wellbeing and can limit their social, civic and economic participation in society. We know that people with disabilities are more likely to witness and be the victims of violence, including violent criminal acts, than their non-disabled peers.[1-5]

However, at present there is no routine monitoring at State, Territory or Federal level in Australia of the extent to which people with a disability are more or less likely to be the victims of crime. Neither the NSW *Recorded Crime Statistics* nor the Australian Bureau of Statistics annual survey of *Crime Victimization in Australia* record whether the victims of crime have a disability.[6, 7] As a result, we do not know how many people with disabilities in NSW each year have been the victims of crime (or potentially criminal acts), the magnitude of the additional risk of being a victim if a person has a disability, and whether these numbers and risks are changing over time.

In this brief report we try to answer some of these questions by estimating the:

- percentage of adults with and without disability in NSW who are likely to be victims of physical violence and property crime
- the number of people with disabilities who are likely to have been the victims of physical violence and property crime
- the magnitude of the additional risk of being a victim if the person has a disability
- whether these percentages, numbers and magnitude of risk factors have changed between 2002 and 2015.

Our Approach

The Data

To answer these questions we needed access to data on exposure to crime that:

- was likely to be representative of the population of NSW;
- had been collected regularly over time;
- in which we could identify whether people did or did not have a disability.

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey (<http://melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/>) fulfilled each of these three criteria.[8] The HILDA survey, which began in 2001, is based on a representative sample of approximately 7,500 households. Each year since then an attempt has been made to interview each member of the household who is over 14 years old. New people enter the sample permanently if they have a child with an existing member of the sample, or temporarily if they share a household with an existing member of the sample for as long as they continue to live in the household. In 2011 the sample was expanded with the inclusion of an additional 2,000 households.

Estimating the number of adults with disabilities in NSW who are likely to have been the victim of violence or property crime in the preceding year is based on the assumption that HILDA respondents from NSW are representative of the NSW population. We believe that this is a reasonable assumption given the way the HILDA dataset was constructed and given that it is possible to adjust the data (by 'weighting') to take account of known biases in recruitment to, and participation, in the HILDA sample.

Identifying Whether People Have a Disability

Every year HILDA asks participants whether they have a disability. The specific question is 'Do you have any impairment, long-term health condition or disability such as these [person is shown a list] that restricts you in your everyday activities and has lasted or is likely to last for 6 months or more?' This type of question is commonly used in large-scale surveys in Australia and other countries to identify whether people have a disability. The examples provided in the list are shown in box opposite.

In 2015, 30% of HILDA respondents who were living in NSW reported having a disability. This percentage rose from 13% among people aged 15-23 to 65% adults aged 65 or more.

These estimates of disability in NSW are higher than those reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (17.6% of people aged 0-64, 49.1% of people aged 65 and over).[9] This difference is most likely to be due to differences in the ways surveys are undertaken. For example, unlike HILDA, the *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers* collects information on

Sight problems not corrected by glasses/lenses
Hearing problems
Speech problems
Blackouts, fits or loss of consciousness
Difficulty learning or understanding things
Limited use of arms or fingers
Difficulty gripping things
Limited use of feet or legs
A nervous or emotional condition which requires treatment
Any condition that restricts physical activity or physical work (e.g., back problems, migraines)
Any disfigurement or deformity
Any mental illness which requires help or supervision
Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
Chronic or recurring pain
Long term effects as a result of a head injury, stroke or other brain damage
A long-term condition or ailment which is still restrictive even though it is being treated or medication being taken for it
Any other long-term condition such as arthritis, asthma, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, dementia etc

all household members from one informant. In addition, the format and nature of the questions used to identify people with disabilities differs.

Identifying Whether People Have Potentially Been a Victim of Crime

HILDA is undertaken by a combination of face to face interview and a self-completion questionnaire. Information on exposure to potential crime is collected as part of the self-completion questionnaire. The questionnaire states *'We now would like you to think about major events that have happened in your life over the past 12 months. For each statement cross either the YES box or the NO box to indicate whether each event happened during the past 12 months'*. The relevant items were:

- *'Victim of physical violence (e.g., assault)'*
- *'Victim of a property crime (e.g., theft, housebreaking)'*

These data were not collected in the first wave of HILDA in 2001.

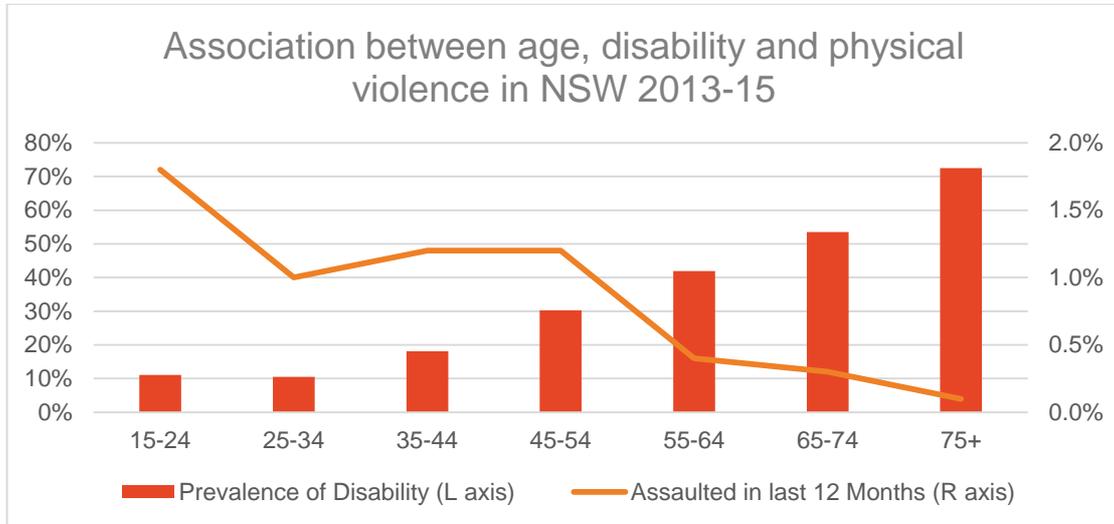
Analysing the Data

In the **Findings** section we present simple comparisons for each year of:

- The percentage of HILDA respondents with and without disability who were living in NSW who reported having been the victim of physical violence or property crime in the preceding year;
- The estimated number of adults with disabilities in NSW who are likely to have been the victim of physical violence or property crime in the preceding year (assuming that HILDA respondents from NSW are representative of the NSW population);
- Adjusted prevalence rate ratios of the association between disability status and crime victimisation.

Prevalence rate ratios are calculated by dividing the victimisation rate reported by respondents with a disability by the victimisation rate reported by respondents without a disability. This means, for example, if 4% of respondents with a disability reported exposure to physical violence in the last year compared to 2% of respondents without a disability, the prevalence rate ratio for the association between disability and exposure to physical violence would be $2 \left(\frac{4}{2}\right)$, i.e., twice as likely.

However, we needed to 'adjust' the prevalence rate ratios to take account of the associations between age, gender, risk of disability and risk of exposure to potential crime. For example, disability is much more common among older people, but exposure to physical violence is much more common among younger people (Figure 1).



Given this we would expect (all other things being equal) that participants with disability should report **LESS** exposure to crime than respondents without disability simply because they are, on average, an older group than people who do not have disabilities. The 'adjustment' to the prevalence rate ratios statistically controls for the expected effects of these age-related and gender-related differences and allows us to make like-by-like comparisons of the risk of exposure to potential crime between people with disabilities and people without disabilities of a similar age and gender. This means that we can be confident that any observed differences between groups are not simply due to between-group differences in age or gender. Technically, the adjustment was made using Poisson regression with robust standard errors, a multivariate statistical technique, with the statistical modelling being undertaken using the GENLIN procedures in IBM SPSS Statistics v24.[10]

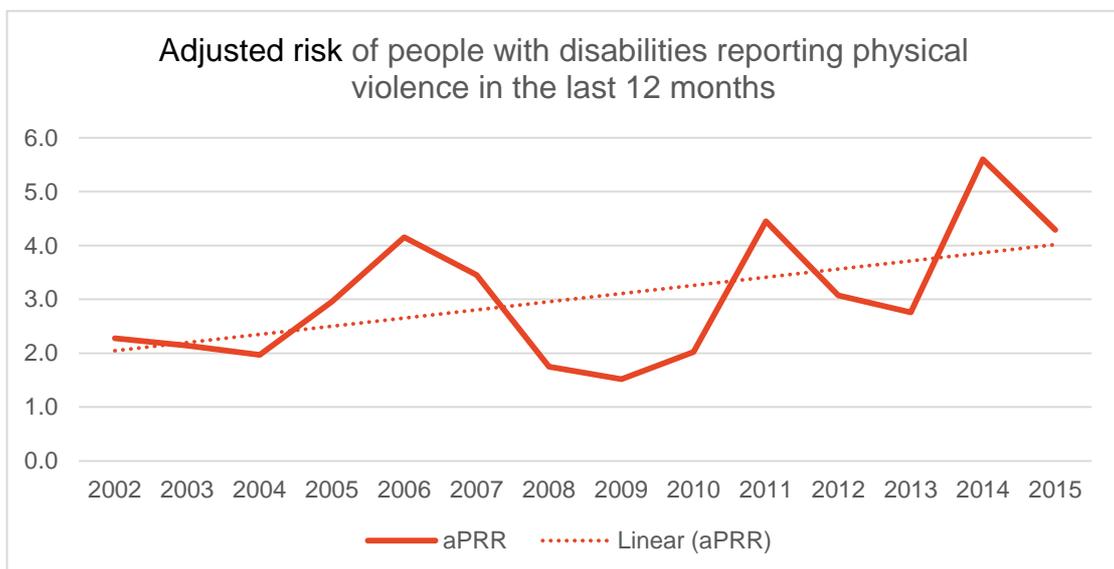
Findings

Physical Violence



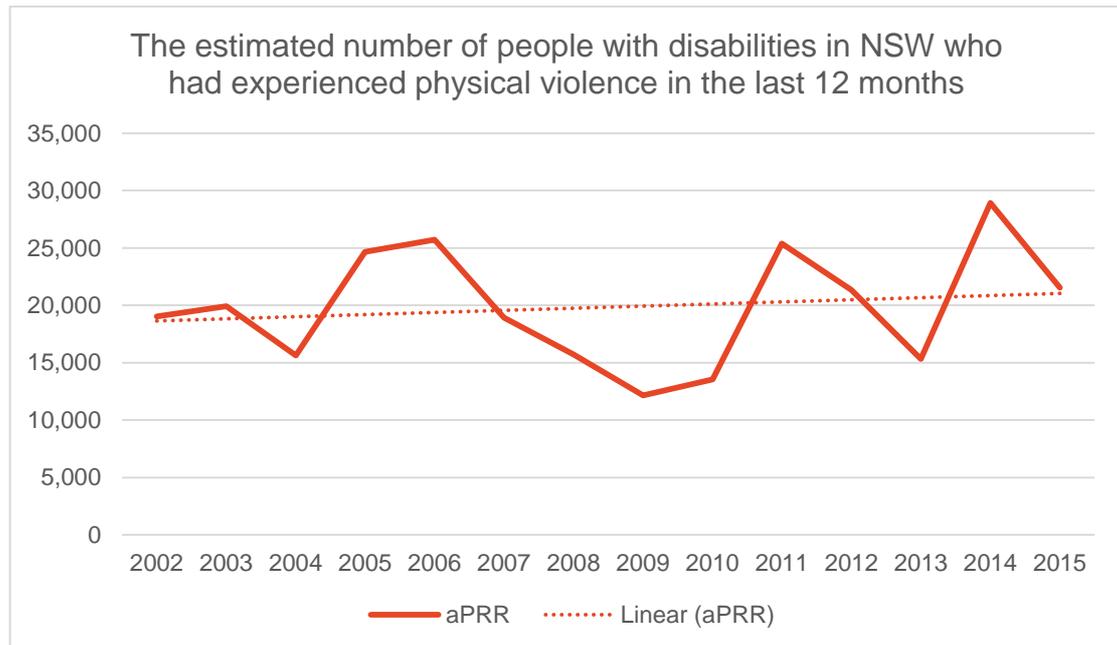
The solid lines show the actual percentages over time for people with disabilities (red line) and people without disabilities (orange line). The dotted red and orange lines smooth out the bumps and show the linear trend over time. The graph shows that in most, but not all years, people with disabilities were more likely than people without disabilities to report being the victims of physical violence. For both groups the percentages exposed to physical violence have reduced over time. The trend lines suggest that the scale of improvement is greater for people who do not have disabilities.

However, these are raw percentages and, as we discussed above, we would expect people with disabilities to be less likely to report having experienced physical assault as they are, on average, older and physical assault is more common among younger people. Hence we need to also look at risk adjusted for age and gender.



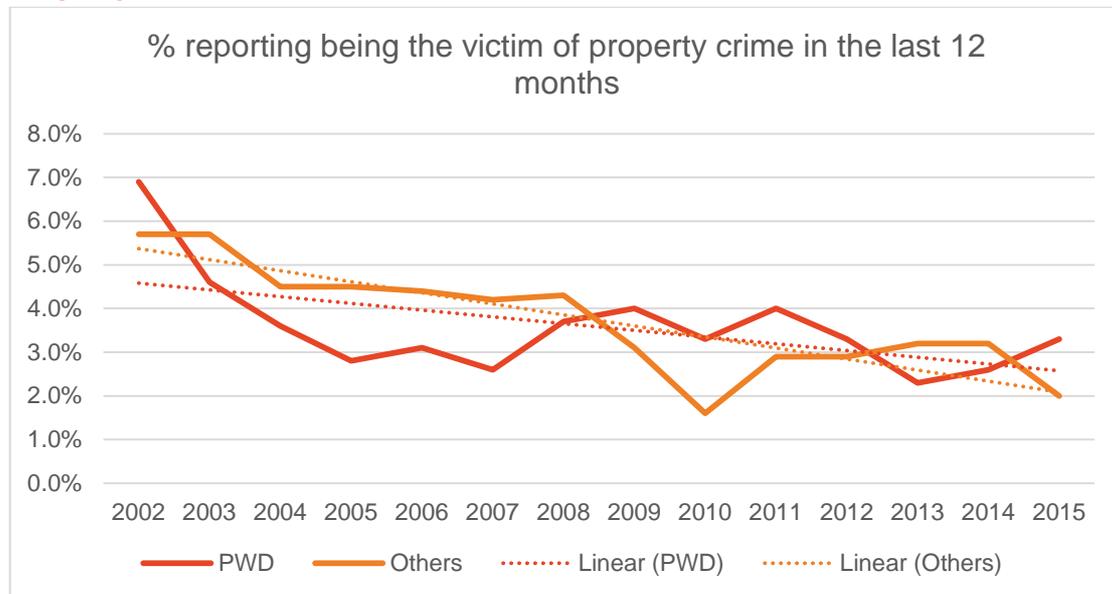
While adjusted risk (prevalence rate ratio) varies over time, the linear trend is upward from 2.0 in 2002 to 4.0 in 2015. In other words, when we take out or control for the likely effects of age and gender differences between the two groups, in 2015 people aged 15 or over

with disabilities in NSW were four times more likely to report having been physically assaulted than their non-disabled peers. This increased risk appears to be the result of better progress in reducing exposure to physical violence among people who do not have disabilities.

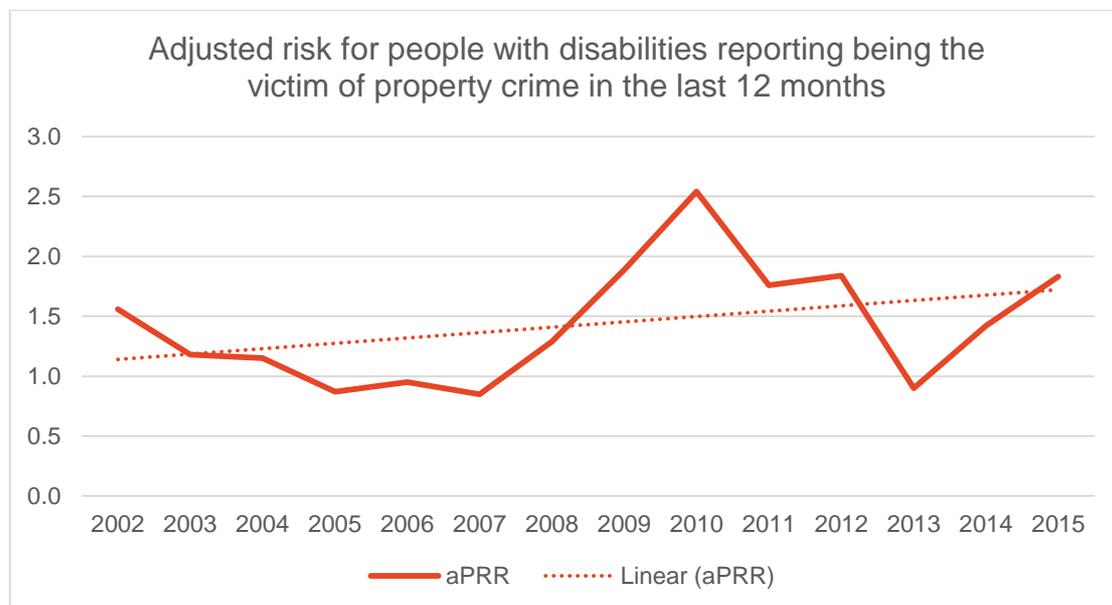


The estimated number of people with disabilities aged 15+ in NSW who have been assaulted in the previous 12 months has remained relatively static at approximately 20,000. The lack of progress in reducing the number of people exposed to violence (given the percentage has decreased) reflects the overall growth in the population of NSW.

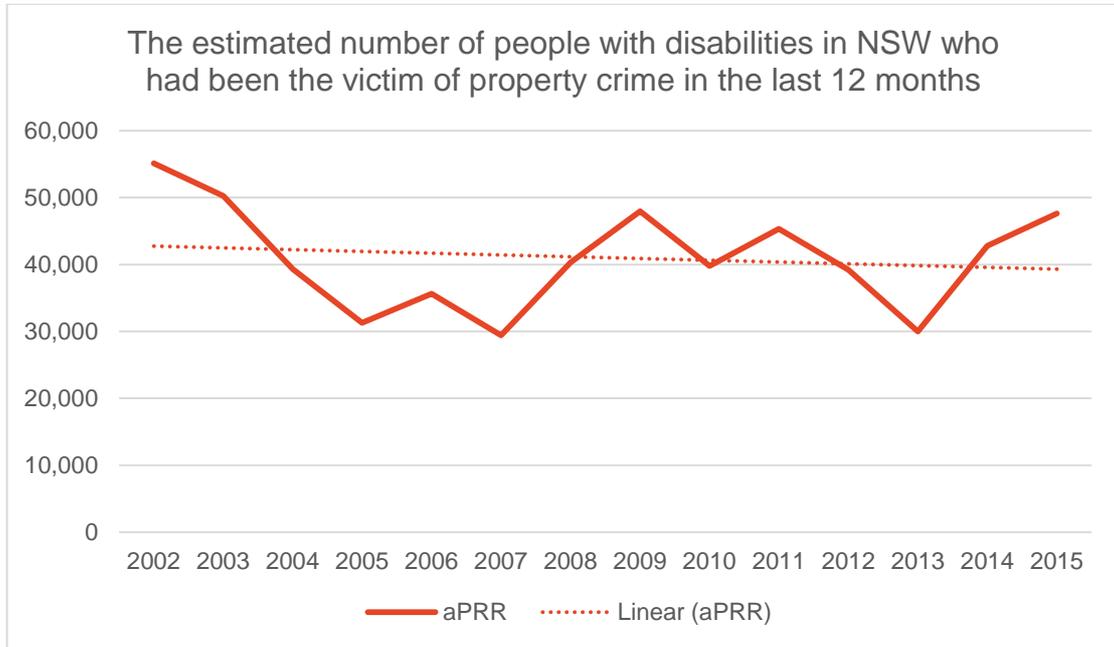
Property Crime



Similar to physical violence, there has been a downward trend over time in the percentage of people with and without disabilities who report having been the victim of property crime in the last 12 months. Unlike physical violence, the difference between the two groups is much smaller. Again, however, we need to look at adjusted risk.



While adjusted risk shows a lot of variability over time, there appears to be a general upward trend rising from just over 1 in 2002 (1 indicating no difference in risk) to approximately 1.75 in 2015 (indicating that people with disabilities are 75% more likely to report property crime than their non-disabled peers).



The estimated number of people with disabilities aged 15+ in NSW who have been the victim of property crime in the previous 12 months has remained relatively static at 40,000.

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Appendix 1: Data Table

Year	NSW sample size	Assault				Property Crime			
		PWD	Others	N PWD	PRR	PWD	Others	N PWD	PRR
2002	3,704	2.3%	1.8%	19,027	2.28	6.9%	5.7%	55,110	1.56
2003	3,573	1.8%	1.5%	19,913	2.14	4.6%	5.7%	50,263	1.18
2004	3,464	1.4%	1.4%	15,628	1.97	3.6%	4.5%	39,304	1.15
2005	3,431	2.2%	1.4%	24,651	2.96	2.8%	4.5%	31,296	0.87
2006	3,371	2.2%	1.0%	25,715	4.15	3.1%	4.4%	35,633	0.95
2007	3,456	1.7%	0.9%	18,930	3.45	2.6%	4.2%	29,436	0.85
2008	3,212	1.5%	1.6%	15,706	1.75	3.7%	4.3%	40,331	1.29
2009	3,443	1.0%	1.4%	12,144	1.52	4.0%	3.1%	47,953	1.89
2010	3,583	1.1%	0.9%	13,542	2.02	3.3%	1.6%	39,803	2.54
2011	4,772	2.2%	0.8%	25,379	4.45	4.0%	2.9%	45,305	1.76
2012	4,748	1.8%	1.2%	21,331	3.07	3.3%	2.9%	39,223	1.84
2013	4,773	1.2%	0.7%	15,331	2.76	2.3%	3.2%	29,992	0.90
2014	4,816	2.2%	0.8%	28,914	5.60	2.6%	3.2%	42,811	1.42
2015	4,729	1.5%	0.6%	21,548	4.29	3.3%	2.0%	47,635	1.83
Average	3,934	1.7%	1.1%	19,840	3.03	3.6%	3.7%	41,007	1.43

Notes:

- PWD: % exposure for people with disabilities in previous 12 months
- Others: % exposure for people without disabilities in previous 12 months
- N PWD: Estimated number of people exposed with disabilities aged 15+ in NSW
- PRR: Prevalence rate ratio adjusted for gender and age