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## Pain and Participation

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# Research Summary

## Pain and Participation

The objective of the Pain Interference Patterns research project is to understand how pain and environmental conditions, like access barriers, affect community participation of people who report physical, sensory and cognitive impairment. The information will be used to develop strategies for increasing participation in rural communities.

People with disabilities often face barriers to full participation in home, school, work and community activities. Barriers to participation include a variety of factors including but not limited to:

- Inaccessible transportation
- Inaccessible buildings and public spaces
- Health conditions like depression, circulation problems and pain

Because the majority of individuals with a disability report experiencing pain as a secondary condition, we wanted to know how pain impacted participation in life activities. To help answer this question, we asked individuals with disabilities to complete four surveys over 18 months about their pain levels, environmental barriers, and participation in daily activities.

### Research Participants

Of the 525 people who participated in this research study, most reported some kind of impairment, from hearing and vision loss to significant mobility loss. As a whole, the group reported an average daily pain level of 4.68 on a 0-10 pain scale (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Pain Rating Scale

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*RTC:Rural conducts research, education, and training to improve the ability of people with disabilities to live full and independent lives in rural communities.*

# Preliminary Results

Based on responses from the first survey, we learned that:

- Community participation can be broken into three categories:
  - Medical, including doctor, other healthcare and pharmacy visits
  - Shopping, including grocery stores, shopping malls, and box stores
  - Free time, including religious activities, socializing outside the home, community activities, exercise, and entertainment
- Individuals who participated more frequently in community activities reported higher rates of pleasure and happiness.
- Married people were less likely to participate in free time activities than their single counterparts.
- People who managed pain with rest had less free time activities.
- People with high pain levels had less medical and free time activities.
- The way people thought about pain was more of a barrier than pain itself—this is called catastrophic thinking about pain.

## Conclusion

Although we are still analyzing data, we are gaining a better understanding of how pain interferes with participation. For more technical information about the participation categories and analyses, please see our research report *Pain Interference Patterns* at [rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/rtcBlog/wp-content/uploads/PIP.pdf](http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/rtcBlog/wp-content/uploads/PIP.pdf) and look for more research reports in the future.

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