



Solicitors
Regulation
Authority

Consumer research study 2008

Experiences of disabled people using solicitors in England
and Wales

June 2009

1. Introduction

1.1 The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) is the independent regulator of more than 100,000 solicitors in England and Wales. Our primary purpose is to protect consumers by ensuring that solicitors meet high standards of conduct, and that appropriate action is taken where risks are identified.

1.2 We regulate in the public interest and, as such, aim to engage with the public to understand the concerns and experiences of people using legal services.

1.3 In order to identify how we can achieve this and improve confidence for people in using legal services, we commissioned a research study in August 2007. This study provided information on consumer attitudes around the provision of legal services and on the SRA as a regulator, and also explored consumer's knowledge of referral arrangements. The research involved an omnibus survey of almost 1,000 adults in England and Wales, and a series of focus groups.

1.4 The results of this research can be found here:
<http://www.sra.org.uk/securedownload/file/360>.

1.5 Eighteen months on, the SRA commissioned a follow-up research study, to act as a benchmark for some of the findings of the 2007 research study by seeking the views by telephone of 1,000 adults in England and Wales; however this follow-up study also introduced questions to explore further into the public's experiences when using solicitors, focusing specifically on the experiences of 500 people from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, and the experiences of 250 disabled people (respondents were asked to certify if they believed themselves to be disabled).

1.6 This report summarizes the key findings of the research study relating to the experiences of disabled people in accessing legal services.

2. Disabled people in England and Wales using solicitors

What legal services are used most often by disabled people?

- Disabled people are more likely than the general population of England and Wales to have used a solicitor in the past five years.
- This is particularly true for legal services such as wills / probates – 18% of disabled people have used a solicitor for these services recently, compared to 14% of the general population.

Are disabled people happy with the service they receive from solicitors?

- Nearly a third of disabled people feel dissatisfied in some way with their solicitor. The main reasons given for this are not keeping them informed about progress, and taking too long to complete the work.

- However, 94% of disabled people feel their solicitor communicated clearly and plainly to them.
- 32% of disabled people surveyed feel they were charged by their solicitors for costs incurred by the solicitor relating to their disability.
- 16% of disabled people have experienced difficulty in physically accessing a solicitor's office.
- A very small number of the disabled people surveyed had been turned down by a solicitor who declined to represent them; however none of the reasons given for being declined related directly to their disability.

Are disabled people aware of what to do if things go wrong?

- 38% of disabled people feel they do not know which organisation they would go to if they wanted to complain about a solicitor.
- Of those that did know, the most popular organisation to approach first of all is a local Citizens Advice office.

What types of information and support do disabled people access when choosing a solicitor?

- Disabled people are less likely than the general population of England and Wales to use an internet search facility to find their solicitor; they are also less likely to seek out information on a solicitor's background (including asking other people's opinions) before employing them.

How do disabled people feel about using alternative providers such as supermarkets and banks for their legal services?

- Disabled people are highly sceptical about the possibility of supermarkets or banks offering legal services. Most disabled people surveyed felt they would continue using 'traditional' high-street solicitors rather than a new provider such as a supermarket chain.

3. Further information

3.1 The full research report, along with summary documents, are available from the SRA's website – www.sra.org.uk.

3.2 If you want to discuss any of the findings of the research, please get in touch using the following details:

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