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# Disability Statistics Abstract

Number 4

## People with work disability in the U.S.

**A**n estimated 9% (14.2 million) of working-age people in the United States have some work disability—defined as a limitation in work due to chronic illness or impairment. About 4% (6.3 million) are limited in the amount or kind of work they can perform. Some 5% (7.9 million) have severe work limitation (Table 1), defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census as not working at all or receiving Medicare or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

These estimates and others presented here are for civilians aged 16 to 64 and are based on data from the U.S. Current Population Survey (CPS) of people living in households. Estimates are for 1990 (and other years where indicated).

### Age and gender

The proportion of people with work disability increases greatly

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### About 1 person in 11 in the United States has some work disability

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with age: 1.8% of people aged 16 to 24 are limited in the amount or kind of work they can perform, rising to 7.9% of people aged 55 to 64. Similarly, the proportion of people with severe work limitation rises from 1.9% for ages 16 to 24 to 14% for ages 55 to 64.

Men are more likely to be limited in the amount or kind of work they can do (4.2%) than are women (3.7%). Similarly, a higher percentage of men have severe work limitation (5.2%) than of women (4.8%).

### Race and Hispanic origin

Whites and blacks are equally likely to be limited in the amount or kind of work they can do (4.4% each). However, blacks are more likely (11.2%) to have severe work limitation than are whites (4.8%).

About 3% of Hispanics are limited in the amount or kind of work they can do. Unlike

whites, blacks and Hispanics are over 2 times as likely to have severe work limitation than to be limited in the amount or kind of work they can perform.

### Education

The likelihood of work disability decreases with higher educational attainment. About 4.6% of people who are not high school graduates are limited in the amount or kind of work they can do, followed by 4.3%

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### People who are not high school graduates are 9 times as likely as college graduates to have severe work limitation

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of high school graduates, 3.7% of people who have only attended college, and 2.9% of college graduates. People who are not high school graduates are 9 times as likely as college graduates (11.5%) to have severe work limitation (1.3%).

**TABLE 1. Work Disability and Demographics: United States, 1990**

	Total Persons (1,000s)	With no work limitation		With limitation in amount or kind of work		With severe work limitation	
		Persons (1,000s)	Percent of total	Persons (1,000s)	Percent of total	Persons (1,000s)	Percent of total
<b>Total</b>	157,958	143,808	91.0	6,267	4.0	7,883	5.0
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	77,039	69,819	90.6	3,251	4.2	3,969	5.2
Female	80,919	73,989	91.4	3,017	3.7	3,913	4.8
<b>Age</b>							
16–24	31,741	30,594	96.4	561	1.8	586	1.9
25–34	42,793	40,343	94.3	1,266	2.9	1,184	2.8
35–44	36,931	34,034	92.2	1,457	3.9	1,440	3.9
45–54	25,263	22,304	88.3	1,289	5.1	1,670	6.6
55–64	21,231	16,533	77.9	1,695	7.9	3,003	14.0
<b>Race and Hispanic origin</b>							
White	133,542	122,290	91.6	5,406	4.4	5,846	4.8
Black	18,722	16,194	86.5	717	4.4	1,811	11.2
Hispanic <sup>1</sup>	13,132	12,026	91.6	358	3.0	748	6.2
<b>Education</b>							
Not H.S. grad.	34,114	28,625	83.9	1,577	4.6	3,912	11.5
High school grad.	60,651	55,279	91.1	2,622	4.3	2,749	4.5
Some college	31,553	29,574	93.7	1,167	3.7	812	2.6
College grad.	31,641	30,330	95.9	902	2.9	409	1.3

<sup>1</sup> Persons of Hispanic origin can be of any race.

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census (1991). Poverty in the United States: 1988 and 1989. *Current Population Reports*, Series P-60, No. 171.

## Labor force participation

Most people with severe work limitation are unable to work (Table 2). This group has a labor force participation rate of only 12.3%, with 9.6% currently employed and 2.7% laid off or looking for work. Most of those with severe work limitation who worked in the previous year had irregular and/or part-time jobs—about three-fourths of all those who worked in 1989.

In contrast, of people limited in the amount or kind of work

they can do, 64.8% are in the labor force, with 57.6% employed and 7.2% laid off or looking for work. Of those who worked in the previous year, 60.8% worked irregularly and/or part time.

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## Two of five people with severe work limitation are poor

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Of people not limited in work, 79.9% are in the labor force with 75.7% employed and 4.2% unemployed. Of those who worked in the previous year, 36.7% worked irregularly and/or part time.

## Income poverty status and benefits

People severely limited in work report income from earnings and other sources for 1989 averaging \$7,812, about half the

income of people limited in amount or kind of work and about 40% of the income of people not limited in work (with mean incomes of \$16,484 and \$19,851, respectively). About 42.3% of people severely limited in work are poor (defined as

**Almost half of women with severe work limitation are poor**

having incomes below 125% of the poverty line), twice the rate (21.7%) of people limited in amount or kind of work and almost four times the rate (12.1%) of people without work disability.

Almost half of women (45.2%)

**TABLE 2. Work Disability, Work Status, and Income: United States, 1989 and 1990**

	With no work limitation		With limitation in amount or kind of work		With severe work limitation	
	Persons (1,000s)	Percent of total	Persons (1,000s)	Percent of total	Persons (1,000s)	Percent of total
<b>Total</b>	143,808	100.0	6,267	100.0	7,883	100.0
<b>Labor force status in 1990</b>						
In labor force	114,847	79.9	4,058	64.8	968	12.3
Employed	108,791	75.7	3,609	57.6	755	9.6
Unemployed	6,056	4.2	449	7.2	213	2.7
Not in labor force	28,961	20.1	2,210	35.3	6,914	87.7
<b>Work experience in 1989</b>						
Worked during year	121,103	84.2	4,780	76.3	1,162	14.7
Year-round full time	76,606	53.3	1,870	29.8	260	3.3
Irregularly / part time	44,497	30.9	2,910	46.4	902	11.4
Did not work	22,705	15.8	1,488	23.7	6,720	85.3
<b>Income of persons in 1989<sup>1</sup></b>						
Median		NA		\$11,838		\$5,911
Mean		\$19,851		\$16,484		\$7,812
<b>Ratio of income to poverty in 1989<sup>1,2</sup></b>						
Under 1.00	12,999	9.0	1,094	17.4	2,640	33.5
1.00 to 1.24	4,480	3.1	267	4.3	692	8.8
1.25 to 1.49	4,907	3.4	263	4.2	565	7.2
1.50 to 1.99	11,328	7.8	617	9.8	924	11.7
2.00 and above	111,035	76.7	4,041	64.3	3,061	38.8
<b>Benefits in 1989<sup>1</sup></b>						
Social Security	3,905	2.7	647	10.3	3,346	42.5
Supplemental Security Income	-	-	-	-	2,266	28.7
Food stamps	7,772	5.4	736	11.7	1,949	24.7
Public housing	2,061	1.4	171	2.7	466	5.9
Subsidized housing	1,271	.9	96	1.5	345	4.4

<sup>1</sup>Includes people in the military.

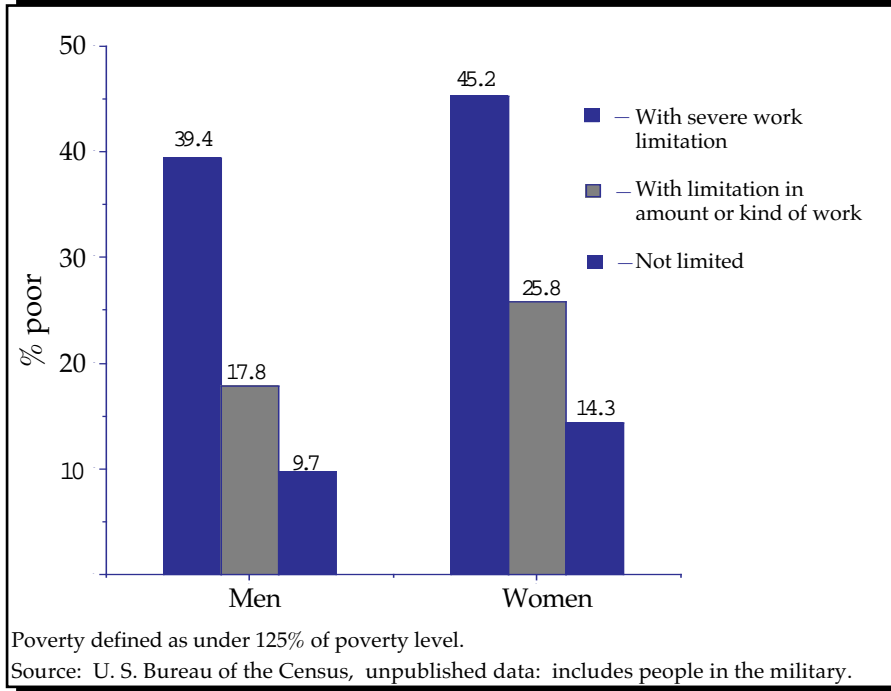
<sup>2</sup>Ratio of income of families or unrelated individuals to federal poverty line.

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census (1991). Poverty in the United States: 1988 and 1989. *Current Population Reports*, Series P-60, No. 171; and unpublished data.

with severe work limitation are poor (Figure 1). One in four women (25.8%) limited in the amount or kind of work they can perform is poor, compared to 14.3% of women without work disability who are poor. Although the proportion of men with work disability who are poor is not as high as for women, two in five men (39.4%) who are severely limited in work are poor, while one in six men (17.8%) who are limited in amount or kind of work is poor. In contrast, 9.7% of men not limited in work are poor.

Of people with severe work limitation, 42.5% receive Social Security retirement or disability cash benefits and 28.7% receive Supplemental Security Income benefits. People with work disability are more likely than those without work disability to receive food stamps or housing benefits.

**FIGURE 1. Work Disability, Gender, and Poverty: United States, 1989**

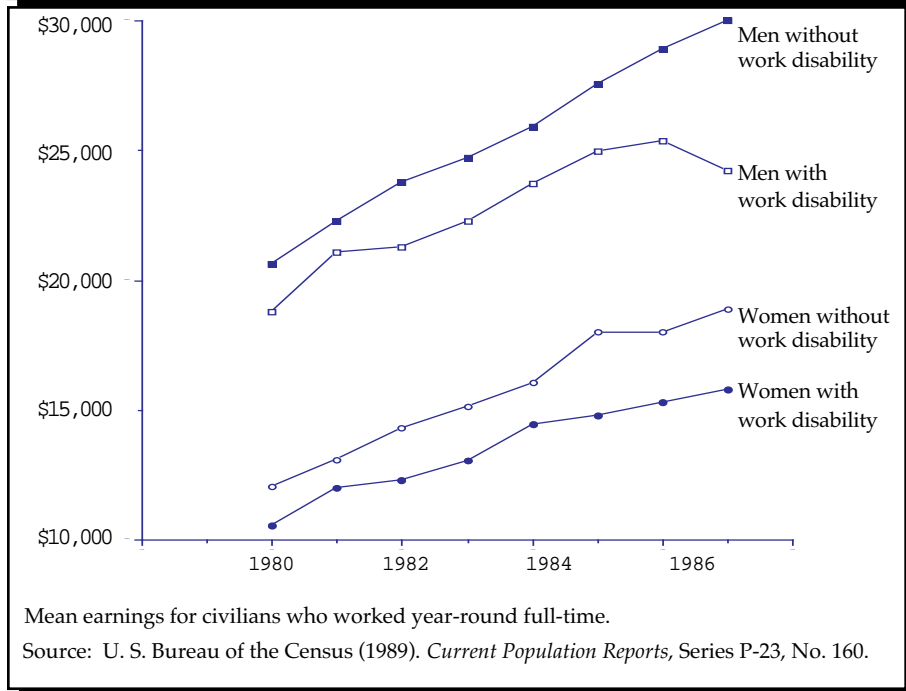


**Trends in earnings**

Earnings for people with work disability lag behind the earnings of the rest of the working-

age population, according to CPS statistics for 1980 to 1987 (Figure 2). Earnings grew 45.3% for men without work disability but only 29% for men with work disability. Earnings grew by 57.2% for women without work disability but only 49.5% for women with work disability.

**FIGURE 2. Work Disability, Gender, and Mean Earnings, 1980 to 1987**



**Credits**

The Disability Statistics Abstract series is produced by the Disability Statistics Program, Institute for Health & Aging, School of Nursing, University of California, 201 Filbert Street, Suite 500, San Francisco, CA 94133-3203, with funding from NIDRR. Written by Mitchell P. LaPlante, Ph.D.; Shawn Miller, M.Ed.; & Karen Miller, M.Ed. Editorial assistance by Ida VSW Red, M.S.L.S.

This abstract is one of a series presenting statistical information on disability in the U.S. Statistics presented here are subject to both sampling and nonsampling error. Estimates with low statistical reliability (standard error > 30% of the estimate) are flagged with an asterisk. All comparisons mentioned in this abstract are statistically significant at the .10 level of significance or better unless noted otherwise. Comparisons and relationships discussed may be affected by other unanalyzed factors.