Disability Statistics Abstract

Number 10

Disability Among Racial and Ethnic Groups

by Julia E. Bradsher, Ph.D.

Because disability involves not only medical considerations, but also social, economic, and cultural factors, the prevalence of disability can vary significantly from one segment of society to another. Recent data compiled by the U.S. Bureau of the Census have revealed significant differences in disability rates among Americans belonging to various racial and ethnic groups. This abstract summarizes those results, including data on racial/ethnic differences in disability rates by gender and within specific age groups.

The SIPP

Data presented in this abstract were collected by the Census Bureau in 1991 and 92, in its Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), an ongoing, nationally representative panel survey of the economic status of the non-institutionalized, civilian population living in the U.S. The survey is particularly focused on income distribution, federal and state income transfers and service programs, and policy issues that are currently relevant. Each panel of the SIPP includes about 21,000 households; interviews are conducted every four months during a period of approximately two and a half years.

For the purposes of this abstract, disability is a limitation in a functional activity or in a socially defined role or task. This is a broader definition than is often used, for example in the 1990 Decennial Census, resulting in larger estimates of disability.

Disability Rates Among Racial and Ethnic Groups

According to the SIPP, the overall rate of disability in the U.S. population is 19.4 percent (see Table 1).[1] The rate is highest for Native Americans (21.9%),[2] followed closely by blacks (20.0%) and whites (19.7%), while those of Hispanic origin have a significantly lower rate (15.3%). For Asians and Pacific Islanders, the disability rate (9.9%) is only half that for whites and blacks.

When disability rates are computed for men only, racial and ethnic differences become even more pronounced. Again, the highest rate of disability is among Native Americans (21.9%), followed by whites (19.1%), blacks (18.0%), people of Hispanic origin (14.3%), and Asians and Pacific Islanders (9.1%).

Women have a higher rate of disability than men in the general population, and this difference is seen within each racial/ethnic group (except among Native Americans, in which the difference in disability rates by gender is not significant). The order of the groups is the same as for men: Native Americans are highest (21.8%), followed by blacks (21.7%), whites (20.3%), people of Hispanic origin (16.2%), and Asians and Pacific Islanders (10.7%).

Severe disability, an inability to

Native Americans have the highest rate of disability of any racial/ethnic group, while blacks have the highest rate of severe disability.

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TABLE 1. Disability Status, All Ages, by Race/Ethnicity and Sex, 1991-92 (Numbers in thousands)

Race/Gender	TOTAL	With a Disability		With a Severe Disability	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All	251,796	48,936	19.4	24,117	9.6
Male	122,692	22,916	18.7	9,929	8.1
Female	129,104	26,020	20.2	14,187	11.0
White	210,873	41,521	19.7	19,736	9.4
Male	103,287	19,731	19.1	8,123	7.9
Female	107,586	21,791	20.3	11,613	10.8
Black	31,420	6,277	20.0	3,836	12.2
Male	14,764	2,655	18.0	1,582	10.7
Female	16,656	3,622	21.7	2,253	13.5
Native American	1,649	361	21.9	162	9.8
Male	852	187	21.9	76	9.0
Female	797	174	21.8	85	10.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	7,855	777	9.9	384	4.9
Male	3,789	343	9.1	148	3.9
Female	4,066	434	10.7	236	5.8
Hispanic Origin*	21,905	3,343	15.3	1,838	8.4
Male	10,957	1,568	14.3	756	6.9
Female	10,948	1,775	16.2	1,082	9.9

* Hispanic Origin may include people of any race

Source: McNeil, John M., Americans With Disabilities: 1991-92, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population P79-33, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washingtn, D.C., 1993.

perform a functional activity or role, affects 9.6 percent of the overall U.S. population. The rate of severe disability is highest for blacks (12.2%), followed by Native Americans (9.8%), whites (9.4%), and people of Hispanic origin (8.4%). Once again, Asians and Pacific Islanders have a rate (4.9%) roughly half that of the overall population.

If we consider only adolescents and working-age adults, the differences in disability rates among racial and ethnic groups become still more significant (see Table 2). Among people aged 15 to 64, the group with the highest disability rate is once again Native Americans (26.9%), followed by blacks (20.8%), whites (17.7%), those of Hispanic origin (16.9%), and Asians and Pacific Islanders (9.6%). It is interesting to note that, while the overall disability rate for this age group (17.9%) is substantially lower than that for all ages (19.4%), the rates for blacks, for Native Americans, and for people of Hispanic origin are comparable to or higher than those for ages 15–64 than for all ages (20.8% vs. 20.0% for blacks, 26.9% vs. 21.9% for Native Americans, and 16.9% vs.15.3% for Hispanic origin).

In contrast to the rates for the overall population, there are no significant differences observed between disability rates for men and women aged 15-64, overall or within any racial/ethnic group.

For severe disabilities among people aged 15–64, the rates follow the same pattern as for all ages: blacks had the highest rate (12.7%), followed by Native Americans (11.7%), people of Hispanic origin (9.1%), whites (7.4%), and Asians and Pacific Islanders (4.5%).

Disability rates for various ages within each racial/ethnic group are shown in Figure 1.[3] Within each group, the rate increases more or less steadily with age. Throughout

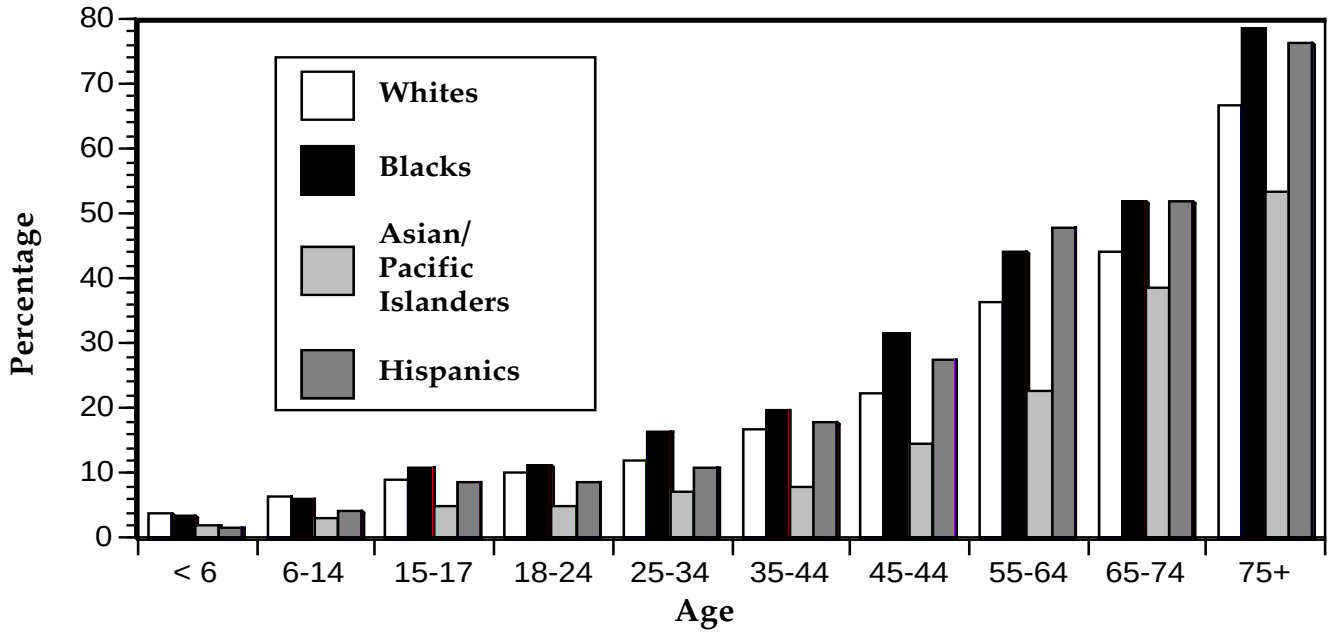
TABLE 2. Disability Status, Ages 15-64, by Race/Ethnicity and Sex, 1991-92 (Numbers in Thousands)

Race/Gender	TOTAL	With a Disability		With a Severe Disability	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All	165,040	29,482	17.9	13,171	8.0
Male	81,154	14,504	17.9	5,862	7.2
Female	83,886	14,978	17.9	7,309	8.7
White	138,773	24,559	18.0	10,286	7.4
Male	68,920	12,363	17.9	4,611	6.7
Female	69,853	12,197	17.5	5,675	8.1
Black	19,815	4,122	20.8	2,516	12.7
Male	9,116	1,769	19.4	1,103	12.1
Female	10,699	2,353	22.0	1,413	13.2
Native American	1,062	285	26.9	125	11.7
Male	544	137	25.1	56	10.3
Female	518	149	28.7	69	13.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	5,391	515	9.6	245	4.5
Male	2,574	236	9.2	92	3.6
Female	2,816	279	9.9	153	5.4
Hispanic Origin*	14,166	2,396	16.9	1,284	9.1
Male	7,113	1,154	16.2	550	7.7
Female	7,053	1,242	17.6	734	10.4

* Hispanic Origin may include people of any race

Source: McNeil, John M., Americans With Disabilities: 1991-92, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population P79-33, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washingtn, D.C., 1993.

FIGURE 1. Percentage of Persons with a Disability, by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group, 1991-92



the life span, Asians and Pacific Islanders show the lowest rates of disability of any racial/ethnic group. The highest disability rates vary by age group, with white children having a higher rate of disability than other groups, blacks with the highest rates for ages 15–54 and above 65, and people of Hispanic origin with the highest rate of disability for ages 55–64.

Notes

1. Sampling errors for all estimates presented in this abstract do not exceed 30 percent of the estimate. See McNeil (1993) for further discussion of reliability of estimates.

2. We use the term "Native Americans" to refer to the category defined in the SIPP as American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts.

3. Native Americans are not shown in this figure due to the small sample size.

Credits

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