

Disability

JOHN McNEIL

About 49 million Americans have a disability.

Based on information collected from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) during the last 3 months of 1991 and the first month of 1992, the number of persons with a limitation in a functional activity or a social role was 48.9 million. The number with a severe disability (unable to perform one or more activities or roles) was 24.1 million. These estimates exclude persons living in institutions.

Disability rates vary by age, sex, race, and ethnicity.

The overall disability rate was 19.4 percent, but the rate ranged from 5.8 percent for children under 18 years old, to 13.6 percent for persons 18 to 44 years old, to 29.2 percent for persons 45 to 64 years old, and to 53.9 percent for persons 65 years old and over. Among persons of all ages, the rate was 18.7 percent for males and 20.2 percent for

females. Differences by gender are affected by differing age patterns. The longer life expectancy of women means that women make up a relatively large share of older persons with a disability (64.2 percent of persons 65 years old and over with a severe disability are women).

Within the age category of 15 to 64 years, the prevalence of disability was low for Asians and Pacific Islanders (9.6 percent) and high for American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts (26.9 percent). The rate was 17.7 percent among Whites, 20.8 percent among Blacks, and 16.9 percent among persons of Hispanic origin.¹

Disability is associated with differences in income.

The presence of a disability is associated with lower levels of income and an increased likelihood of being in poverty. When persons 15 years old

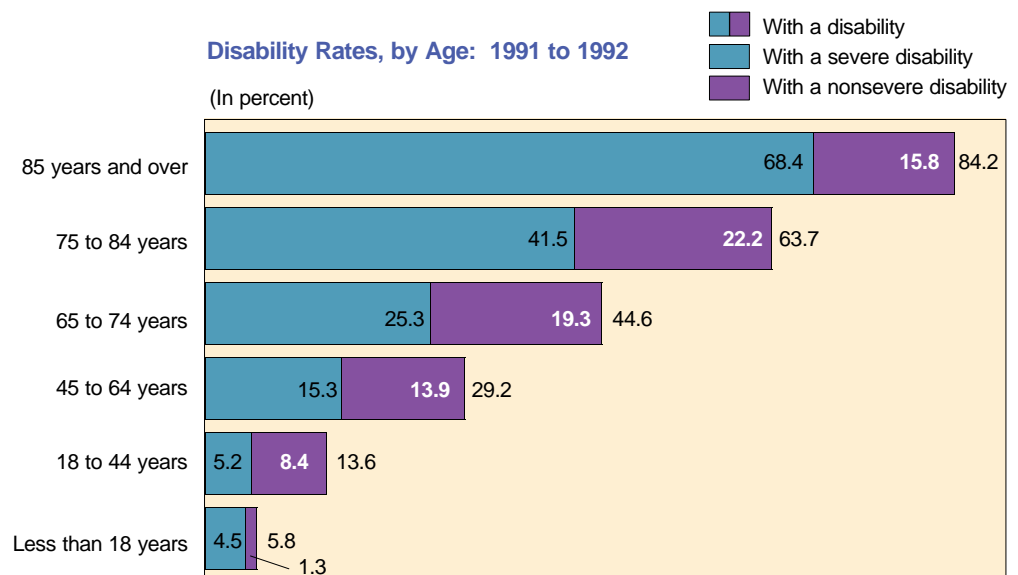
and over were classified by the ratio of their income (if the person was a family member, family income was the measure) to their poverty threshold, the proportion of persons falling into the below-poverty category was 12.2 percent among those with no disability, 14.1 percent among those with a disability that was not severe, and 24.3 percent among those with a severe disability. The proportion in the top category (a ratio of 4 or greater) was also correlated with disability status; the proportion was 34.1 percent for those with no disability, 26.0 percent for those with a nonsevere disability, and 14.1 percent for those with a severe disability.

A large proportion of persons receiving public assistance benefits have disabilities. Among the 8.8 million persons receiving cash assistance, the proportion with a disability was 62.4 percent. The disability rate was 48.2 percent among food stamp recipients and 30.7 percent among

¹Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. These data do not include the population of Puerto Rico.

Disability Rates, by Age: 1991 to 1992

(In percent)



those living in public or subsidized housing.

Disabilities mean a reduced chance for employment.

The overall employment rate for persons 21 to 64 years old was 75.1 percent, but the rate varied by disability status. The employment rate was 80.5 percent among the 117.2 million persons with no disability, 76.0 percent among the 15.0 million persons with a nonsevere disability, and 23.2 percent among the 12.6 million persons with a severe disability. From a different perspective, the percent of all employed persons who had a disability was 13.4 percent (10.6 percent of employed persons had a nonsevere disability, and 2.8 percent had a severe disability).

Disability also had an impact on earnings. For workers 35 to 54 years old, the average amount earned in a month was \$2,446 among those with no disability, \$2,006 among those with a nonsevere disability, and

\$1,562 among those with a severe disability.

The presence of a disability is associated with an increased likelihood of health insurance coverage from the Federal Government and a reduced likelihood of private coverage.

Among persons 15 to 64 years old with no disability, 80.0 percent were covered by a private health insurance plan, 5.2 percent were not covered by a private plan but did have government coverage, and 14.8 percent had no coverage. Among those in the same age group who had a nonsevere disability, the comparable rates were 74.1, 7.2, and 18.7 percent. The effect of disability on the likelihood of private coverage was particularly strong among those with a severe disability; only 48.1 percent were covered by a private plan, while 36.2 percent had government coverage, and 15.7 percent had no coverage.

Types of disabilities and conditions causing disabilities.

The SIPP collected information on a range of activities and asked about underlying conditions. Among persons 15 years old and over, the proportion reporting difficulties with specific activities included the following: seeing words and letters in ordinary newsprint, 5.0 percent; hearing what is said in a conversation with another person, 5.6 percent; walking three city blocks, 8.9 percent; lifting and carrying a full bag of groceries, 8.3 percent; and going outside the home alone to shop or visit a doctor's office, 4.0 percent. The number of persons in this age group who used a wheelchair was 1.5 million, and another 4.0 million persons used a cane, crutches, or a walker to get around (and had used such an aid for 6 months or longer).

Among those 15 years old and over who had difficulty with a physical activity or an

activity of daily living (ADL), the conditions most frequently cited as a cause of the difficulty were arthritis or rheumatism (mentioned by 7.2 million persons); back or spine problems (5.7 million); heart trouble (4.6 million); lung or respiratory trouble (2.8 million); high blood pressure (2.2 million); stiffness or deformity of the foot, leg, arm, or hand (2.0 million); diabetes (1.6 million); and blindness or vision problems (1.5 million).²

²There was not a statistical difference between the conditions of diabetes and blindness or vision problems nor was there one between the conditions of high blood pressure and stiffness or deformity of the foot, leg, arm, or hand.

For Further Information

See: Current Population Reports, Series P70-33, *Americans With Disabilities: 1991-92*.

Contact: John McNeil
Housing and Household
Economic Statistics
Division
301-763-8300

Disability Rates of Persons 15 to 64 Years Old, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1991 to 1992

(In percent)

