

Statistical Brief

Americans With Disabilities

Due to a variety of physical, mental, and emotional conditions, an estimated 49 million noninstitutionalized Americans (about 1 in 5) have a disability. Of these persons, 24 million have a "severe" disability.

The first section of this Brief describes the disability status of persons aged 15 years and older; the last section details children's disabilities. The box on the back defines "severe" disabilities.

This Brief examines the number of persons with specific types of disabilities, their demographic characteristics, the impact of having a disability on employment status and health insurance coverage, and more. The data were collected in the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) between October 1991 and January 1992.

Difficulty with a functional activity is the most common type of disability for adults.

Functional activities include lifting and carrying a weight as heavy as 10 pounds, walking 3 city blocks, seeing the words and letters in ordinary newspaper, hearing what is said in normal conversation with another person, having one's speech

understood, and climbing a flight of stairs.

Thirty-four million adults aged 15 and older had a functional disability — *difficulty* performing at least one of these tasks; for 15 million of them, the disability was severe — they were *unable* to perform one or more activities. The latter figure includes 1.6 million who *could not* see words or letters in ordinary newspaper and 900,000 who were *completely*

unable to hear what was said in normal conversation.

Fewer adults have trouble with ADL's and IADL's than with functional activities.

Activities of Daily Living (ADL's) consist of getting in or out of a bed or a chair, bathing, getting around inside the home, dressing, using the toilet, and eating. About 8 million adults had difficulty with at least one of these tasks; 3.9 million of them required the

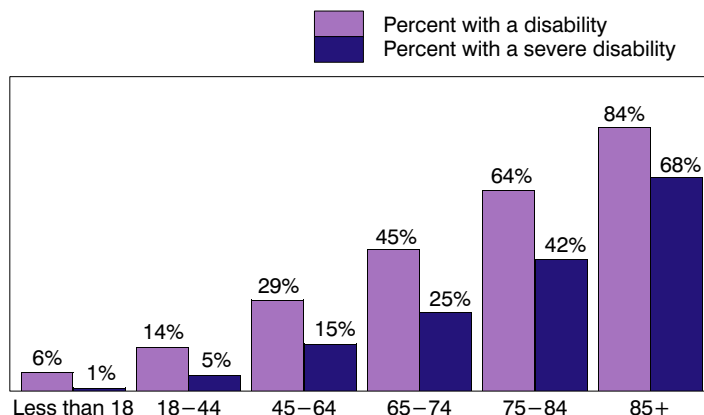
Physical Conditions That Cause Disabilities

Conditions most frequently cited by persons 15 years old and over with a functional, ADL, or IADL limitation as a cause of the limitation(s): 1991-92

| Condition | Number with condition (millions) |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Arthritis or rheumatism | 7.2 |
| Back or spine problems | 5.7 |
| Heart trouble | 4.6 |
| Lung or respiratory trouble | 2.8 |
| High blood pressure | 2.2 |
| Stiffness or deformity of extremity | 2.0 |
| Diabetes | 1.6 |
| Blindness or vision problems | 1.5 |

With Increasing Age Comes A Greater Likelihood of Having a Disability

Percent of persons with a disability and percent with a severe disability, by age group: 1991-92



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assistance of another person, making the disability severe.

Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL's) include going outside the home to shop or visit a doctor's office, doing light housework (such as washing dishes), preparing meals, keeping track of money and bills, and using the telephone. Twelve million adults had trouble with one or more of these activities; nine million needed assistance.

Not only were adults with functional, ADL, and IADL limitations considered to have a disability, but so too were those who —

- Used a wheelchair (1.5 million did so).
- Used a cane, crutches, or a walker for 6 months or longer (4 million).
- Had a mental or an emotional disability, such as Alzheimer's disease or mental retardation (6.9 million).
- Had a condition that limited the kind or amount of work they could do at a job (19.5 million aged 16 to 67).
- Had a condition that made it difficult to do housework (18.1 million aged 16 and over).

The elderly comprise a disproportionate share of persons with disabilities.

As the graph on the front illustrates, the chances of having a disability increased with age; most persons aged 75 or older had a disability. In fact, those aged 65 or more comprised a far larger share of those with disabilities (34 percent) than of the total population (12 percent); they constituted an even greater percentage (43 percent) of persons with severe disabilities.

Disability rates are higher among those with low levels of education.

Adults with a disability comprised a much larger share of persons without a high school diploma than of persons with higher levels

What is a Severe Disability?

Adults aged 15 and over were classified as having a severe disability if they used a wheelchair or had used another special aid for 6 months or longer, were *unable* to perform one or more functional activities or *needed assistance* with an ADL or IADL, were *prevented* from working at a job or doing housework, or had a selected condition including autism, cerebral palsy, Alzheimer's disease, senility or dementia, or mental retardation.

Disability and Health Insurance Coverage

Health insurance coverage patterns for persons 15-64 years old, by disability status: 1991-92

| | No disability | Non-severe disability | Severe disability |
|----------------------|---------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Private insurance | 80% | 74% | 48% |
| Government insurance | 5% | 7% | 36% |
| No coverage | 15% | 19% | 16% |

of education. For example, 23 percent of adults aged 25 to 64 who had not completed high school had a severe disability; for persons who were high school and college graduates, the respective figures were 9 percent and 3 percent.

Severe disabilities reduce employment chances.

Those with disabilities constituted 13 percent of all employed persons; those with a severe disability comprised 3 percent. Although having a less-than-severe disability does not have a large effect on one's chance of being employed, having a severe disability does. Among persons 21-64 years old, 81 percent without a disability and 76 percent with a disability that was not severe were employed. However, just 23 percent with a severe disability worked. Data show that persons with a disability — particularly a severe one — earn less than those without one.

Disabilities affect 3 million children under age 15.

Disability rates were 2 percent among children under 3 years old, 5 percent among those aged 3-5, and 6 percent among children aged 6 to 14.

The definition of disability was different for children than for adults. For those under age 6, a limitation in the usual kinds of activities done by most children that age and the receipt of services or therapy for developmental needs were considered disabilities. Children 3-14 limited in their ability to walk, run, or use stairs were categorized as disabled, as were 6-to-14-year-olds whose ability to do regular school work was limited.

More information:

Americans With Disabilities: 1991-92. Current Population Reports, Series P70-33. Contact Customer Services (301-763-4100) for ordering information.

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takes. The Census Bureau has taken steps to minimize errors, and analytical statements have been tested and meet statistical standards. However, because of methodological differences, use caution when comparing these data with data from other sources.
