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Asian-Americans with Disabilities

Keywords:

Asian Americans, disabled, disability services, translation

Description:

This issue brief focuses on the specific issues faced by Asian-Americans with disabilities.

This issue brief focuses on the reasons suggested by researchers to explain the disparity between the number of Asian-Americans using disability services and the total number of Asian- Americans.

Key Points:

- There is little research and statistical information available about Asian-Americans with disabilities.
- Existing research reveals that Asian-Americans underuse disability services.
- There is a lack of outreach to Asian-American communities about disability services.
- Many traditional Asian belief systems and religions believe disabilities to be a taboo topic and possibly a consequence of a sin committed by the individual or their ancestors.

Brief:

Ethnic minorities have been found to underutilize public services, but Asian Americans seem to do so at a much higher rate based on the little available research that has been conducted in Chicago and California. Researchers attribute this gap between

projected proportions of disabled Asian-Americans and the number of Asian-Americans using services to a lack of culturally appropriate services, lack of translators, lack of information about available services, and the tendency of Asian-Americans to neglect using disability services based on traditional cultural beliefs about disabilities.

Ethnicity	Total Population	> or equal to 5 Years	5 - 15 Years	16 - 64 Years	> or equal to 65 Years
White alone	195,100,538	18.5	5.6	16.8	40.6
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	31,041,269	20.9	5.4	24.0	48.5
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	180,151,084	18.3	5.7	16.2	40.9
Black or African American alone	30,297,538	24.3	7.0	26.4	52.8
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	2,187,597	24.3	7.7	27.0	57.6
Asian alone	9,455,058	16.6	2.9	16.9	40.8
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	337,996	19.0	5.1	21.0	48.5
Some other race alone	13,581,921	19.9	5.2	23.5	50.4
Two or more races	6,206,804	21.7	7.1	25.1	51.8
Total	257,167,527	19.3	5.8	18.6	41.9

Percentage of Disability in the Civilian Non-institutionalized Population Over 5 Years of Age, 2000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3 (adapted from Panko Reis et al 2004)

A report produced by the Asian Human Services of Chicago in 1996 estimated that about 2,277 Asian Americans in the Chicago area might have developmental

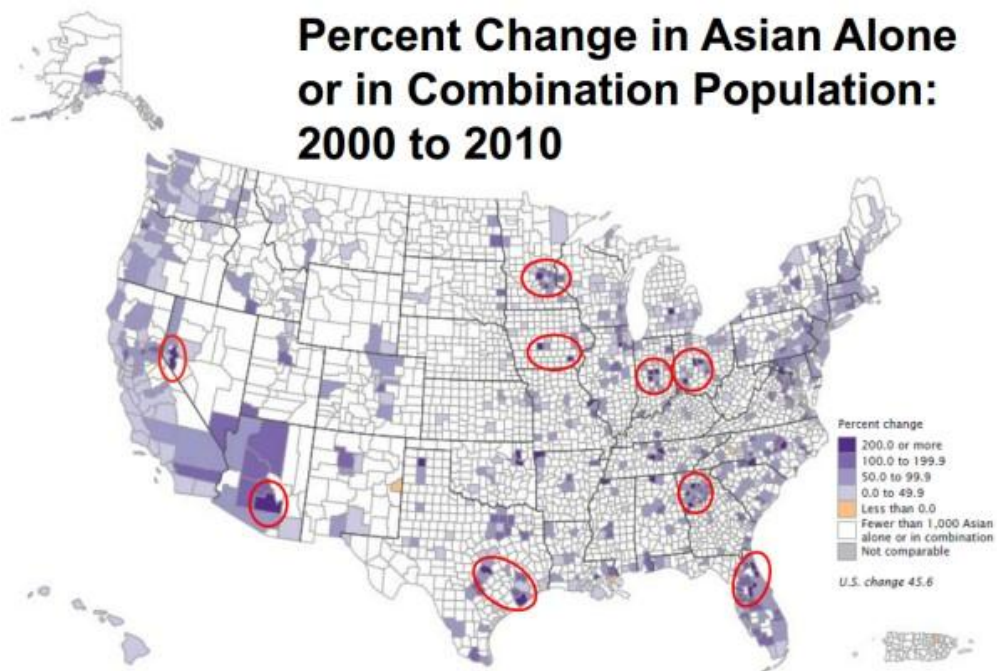
disabilities, but the number reported as being served was dramatically smaller at about 117. The report concluded that culturally appropriate services provided in their native tongues were needed to be able to provide adequate disabilities services to the Asian-American community in Chicago. Additionally, they found that the Asian-American community was not informed about disabilities services available to them. The Asian and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities of California organization also found that the Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders were not informed about disabilities services available to them.

Beyond the lack of awareness of available services, Asian-Americans may be less likely to seek institutional assistance with regards to disabilities. Traditional Asian belief systems, specifically Japanese and Chinese cultures, find disabilities as a sign of weakness and some even believe that they represent an evil omen. Across different Asian cultures, disabilities can be viewed as a weakness that causes the individual to deviate from societal norms. Furthermore, in traditional Chinese culture disabilities can be seen as a punishment for sins committed by that individual or their ancestors. This belief particularly inhibits the individual from understanding a disability as a medical condition and from seeking assistance. These traditional beliefs most likely diminish with each generation that an Asian-American family resides in the United States.

Given that traditional cultural beliefs still influence Asian-Americans the United States must focus disability service efforts on reaching that population and providing culturally appropriate services to them. The little research available for the main populations of Asian-Americans in the United States in Chicago and in California reveals

that to offer adequate disability services to this population, organizations and the government must offer culturally and linguistically appropriate services. Furthermore, there must be an organized outreach effort inform the Asian-American population about disabilities and services available to those affected by disabilities.

In addition to the decreased availability if disability services targeted toward Asian-Americans, having a disability tends to negatively impact Asian-Americans' employment more than for other ethnoracial minority groups. Notably, African-Americans and Hispanics with disabilities exhibit a higher rate of employment than Asian-Americans with disabilities. A study conducted in California between 2003 and 2008 showed that as a result of language and cultural barriers, disabilities tend to have a more isolating effect on Asian-Americans than on other ethnoracial minority groups.



Source: 2010 Census

The current research on Asian-Americans with disabilities shows that they underuse disability services as a result of lack of linguistically and culturally appropriate services and a lack of outreach informing Asian-Americans of disability services. The effect of disabilities and the under-usage of services tend to be an isolation of Asian-Americans from society, specifically in lower participation rates in the workforce in comparison to people with disabilities belonging to other ethnoracial minority groups. As shown on the map above, Asian-American populations are growing and changing in distribution across the country. Therefore, more research must be done to discover how to more specifically create outreach toward Asian-Americans with disabilities and prevent them from becoming an isolated part of the population.

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