

African Americans and Disability: Being a Double Minority in America

Keywords

- Disability
- African Americans
- Stigma
- Obesity
- Double-minority
- Medicaid

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Description

This brief shall outline the issues of disability and disability advocacy as they relate to the African American population in the United States. Aside from hardships associated with discrimination there are underlying socioeconomic factors that contribute to this issue.

Key Points

- Disability is defined as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities."¹
- African Americans are reported as having the highest population percentage of disabled individuals.
- Many of the disabled have Medicare coverage only, and are not eligible for Medicaid.
- Due to underlying social and financial issues many African Americans are at a greater risk of contracting diseases that put them at a higher risk for debilitating illnesses.
- According to the American Community Survey, in 2007, an estimated 28.3 percent of non-institutionalized African Americans were employed as opposed to an estimated 36.9 percent of the total population.²

Percentage of the Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population With Any Disability by Age and Selected Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin Groups: 2000³

Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin	Total Population aged 5 and older	Percent with a disability			
		5 and older	5 to 15	16 to 64	65 and older
Total	257,167,527	19.3	5.8	18.6	41.9
White alone	195,100,703	18.5	5.6	16.8	40.6
Black or African American alone	30,297,703	24.3	7	26.4	52.8
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	2,187,507	24.3	7.7	27	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	5.1	21	48.5
Some other race alone	3,581,921	19.9	5.2	23.5	50.4
Two or more races	6,206,804	21.7	7.1	25.1	51.8
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	31,041,269	20.9	5.4	24	48.5
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	180,151,084	18.3	5.7	16.2	40.5

¹ Americans With Disabilities Act: <http://www.ada.gov/pubs/ada.html>

² Disability Statistics: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/disabilitystatistics/acs.cfm>

³ US Census, 2000: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/disability/disabstat2k/table2.html>

Brief

Disabled African Americans in America have faced an added difficulty in the area of civil rights and aid. African Americans in general have experienced a long history of discrimination, and while the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 helped to alleviate discrimination on the base of color, it was not until 1990 that the Americans With Disabilities Act was passed. The Act was mirrored after the Civil Rights Act as a method to mandate equal opportunity for disabled persons in the areas of “public accommodations, employment, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications.” Facing what has been coined a problem of “double consciousness,” the presence of a disability causes many disabled African Americans to struggle with identifying as black, disabled, and American. Being a “double-minority,” makes the hardships that this group faces even more amplified.

⁴The 2000 Census showed that African Americans, along with Native Americans have the highest percentage of non-institutionalized disabled persons across all age ranges. There is a growing movement

for the awareness of deaf African Americans. The NBDA (National Black Deaf Advocates), which was founded in

1981, is one such group seeking to overcome the hardships of racial and physical prejudices. A major struggle for deaf African Americans is the issue of consciousness. It is often discussed that to identify as black, deaf, and American is a

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serious hardship within the disabled community that also relates to blindness and other such conditions. According to the Glaucoma Research Foundation, African-Americans ages 45-65 are 14 to 17 times more likely to go blind from glaucoma than Caucasians, although the cause of this difference is still unknown.

Although with the advent of famous musicians such as Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder, the raised awareness of the possibility for great success as a disabled minority has increased, wrongful stereotypes of African Americans as inherently mentally inferior, poor, or lazy still remain. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act also encompasses those Americans with HIV/AIDS, being an African American with a sexually transmitted disease carries with it a social stigma. At the end of 2006 there were an estimated 1.1 million people living with HIV in America, of which almost half were African American. This also ties into the issue of poverty, and its adverse effects in regard to ensuring that individuals in need receive proper healthcare.

Obesity among Working-Age People, 2006

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Another tangent of this issue is the debate over whether or not obesity, and more specifically morbid obesity, should be considered as a disability. With African Americans consistently having the highest rates of obesity from 1988 to 2000 according to the CDC, and African American Women having the greatest likelihood across all gender and racial

⁴ Source: Authors' tabulations of 2006 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey.

divisions, they face a greater risk of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. The ADA has recently classified these diseases as disabilities, and the underlying causes of the prevalence of obesity among African Americans need to be examined.

Looking at the benefits and aid that African Americans receive, for men, the incidence of disability is higher than that of white men. Social Security statistics illustrate that 11.5 percent of disabled workers covered by social security are African Americans, but they receive 17.6 percent benefits.⁵ Also, disabled African Americans have a lower rate of employment on average compared to disabled individuals of other races, which points to the existence of other factors such that influence this equation.

Socioeconomic status has an impact on many other facets of life that contribute to the situations disabled African Americans face. Availability of healthcare, rates of obesity, environmental factors, and situations that influence behavior all exacerbate the difficulties of being African American and disabled in America.⁶

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⁵ CBPP:

<http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=88>

⁶Disability and American Families:

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs/>

Helpful Websites

Obesity: http://obesity1.tempdomainname.com/subs/fastfacts/Obesity_Minority_Pop.shtml
US Census Data: <http://www.census.gov/>
Glaucoma: http://www.glaucoma.org/learn/glaucoma_facts.php
National Black Deaf Advocates: <http://www.nbda.org>
Americans With Disabilities Act: <http://www.ada.gov/>
Health facts by state: <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/comparebar.jsp?ind=297&cat=6>
Disability statistics <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/disabilitystatistics/acs.cfm>

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