

Disability Statistics Abstract

People With Activity Limitations in the U.S.

In 1989, an estimated 14.1% of all non-institutionalized U.S. residents—34.2 million people—had an activity limitation due to a chronic condition.

Limitation of activity refers to a long-term reduction in a person's capacity to perform activities that other people their age are generally expected to do.

People with activity limitations fall into one of three categories, in decreasing severity: unable to perform major activity, limited in the amount or kind of major activity, and limited in nonmajor activities.

For children under age 5, the major activity is playing; for ages 5-17, attending school; and for people age 18-69, working or keeping house. For people age 70 and over, major activity refers to ability to live independently. Older people who need or receive help from other people in routine care activities (doing every-

day household chores, necessary business, shopping, or getting around for other purposes) are classified as limited in amount or kind of major activity. Older people who need or receive help from other people in self-care activities (bathing, eating, dressing, getting around the home) are classified as unable to perform major activity. Nonmajor activities include all the other activities people generally do, such as civic, community, and recreational activities.

In 1989, 1 in 7 Americans—34.2 million people—had an activity limitation

Of the 34.2 million people with activity limitations, 10.1 million people (29%) were unable to perform their major activity; 13.2 million people (39%) were limited in the kind or amount of major activity they could perform; and 10.9 million people (32%) were limited in nonmajor activities (see Table 1, next page).

Age

Activity limitation was higher at older ages. Only 5.3% of people un-

der 18 were limited in activity, compared with 39% of those 70 and over.

The percentage limited in or unable to perform their major activity, however, was lower for people age 70 and over than for people age 65-69. This reflects the change in the definition of major activity at age 70 and over from work and housework to living independently.

Gender

All age groups combined, women were no more likely than men to be limited in activity. Although 14.4% of women were limited in activity, compared with 13.7% of men, this difference was not statistically significant. Boys were more likely to be limited in activity than girls (6.3% versus 4.3%, see Figure 1, page 3), but for no other age groups were any differences by gender in the overall rate of activity limitation significant.

However, there were gender differences by type of activity limitation. In the age range 18-69, men were more likely than women to be unable to perform their major activity and less likely to be limited in nonmajor activities. At ages 70 and above, men were equally as likely as women to need help in self care, less likely to need help in routine activities (which

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Table 1: Prevalence of activity limitation, 1989

	All persons		Limited in activity		Limited in nonmajor activity		Limited in amount or kind of major activity		Unable to perform major activity	
	1000's	%	1000's	%	1000's	%	1000's	%	1000's	%
All persons	243,532	100.0	34,218	14.1	10,920	4.5	13,246	5.4	10,052	4.1
Sex										
Male	118,009	100.0	16,117	13.7	4,720	4.0	5,917	5.0	5,480	4.6
Female	125,523	100.0	18,101	14.4	6,200	4.9	7,329	5.8	4,572	3.6
Age										
Under 18	64,003	100.0	3,405	5.3	978	1.5	2,075	3.2	353	0.6
18-44	104,196	100.0	9,418	9.0	2,823	2.7	3,899	3.7	2,696	2.6
45-64	46,114	100.0	10,215	22.2	2,600	5.6	3,564	7.7	4,051	8.8
65-69	9,903	100.0	3,653	36.9	766	7.7	1,330	13.4	1,557	15.7
70 and over	19,316	100.0	7,527	39.0	3,753	19.4	2,378	12.3	1,395	7.2
Race										
White	205,312	100.0	29,084	14.2	9,655	4.7	11,366	5.5	8,063	3.9
Black	29,891	100.0	4,441	14.9	1,077	3.6	1,594	5.3	1,770	5.9
Other (inc. unknown)	8,329	100.0	693	8.3	188	2.3	286	3.4	219	2.6
Household income										
Under \$10,000	26,185	100.0	7,014	26.8	1,941	7.4	2,523	9.6	2,550	9.7
\$10,000-19,999	41,040	100.0	7,972	19.4	2,461	6.0	3,013	7.3	2,498	6.1
\$20,000-34,999	56,718	100.0	6,728	11.9	2,232	3.9	2,804	4.9	1,692	3.0
\$35,000 or more	80,203	100.0	6,559	8.2	2,440	3.0	2,740	3.4	1,378	1.7
Geographic region										
Northeast	48,930	100.0	6,425	13.1	2,212	4.5	2,379	4.9	1,834	3.7
Midwest	59,540	100.0	8,141	13.7	2,591	4.4	3,308	5.6	2,242	3.8
South	83,148	100.0	12,661	15.2	3,900	4.7	4,877	5.9	3,885	4.7
West	51,913	100.0	6,991	13.5	2,218	4.3	2,682	5.2	2,091	4.0
Place of residence										
Metropolitan areas	189,860	100.0	25,301	13.3	8,141	4.3	9,807	5.2	7,353	3.9
Central city	74,410	100.0	10,883	14.6	3,368	4.5	4,049	5.4	3,465	4.7
Not central city	115,450	100.0	14,418	12.5	4,773	4.1	5,758	5.0	3,888	3.4
Rural areas	53,672	100.0	8,917	16.6	2,779	5.2	3,439	6.4	2,699	5.0

may be sensitive to cultural factors), and more likely to be limited in nonmajor activities.

Race

While whites were more likely to have a limitation in a nonmajor activity (4.7% versus 3.6%), blacks were more likely to be unable to perform

their major activity than whites (5.9% versus 3.9%). Persons of other races were much less likely than whites or blacks to be limited in any category.

Household income

For every category of activity limitation, as household income rose, activity limitation declined (see Figure

2). About 26.8% of persons in households with incomes under \$10,000 (in 1989 dollars) had an activity limitation, compared to 8.2% in households earning \$35,000 or more a year.

Region & place of residence

The percent of the population with activity limitation or unable to per-

Figure 1: Activity limitation by age and gender, 1989

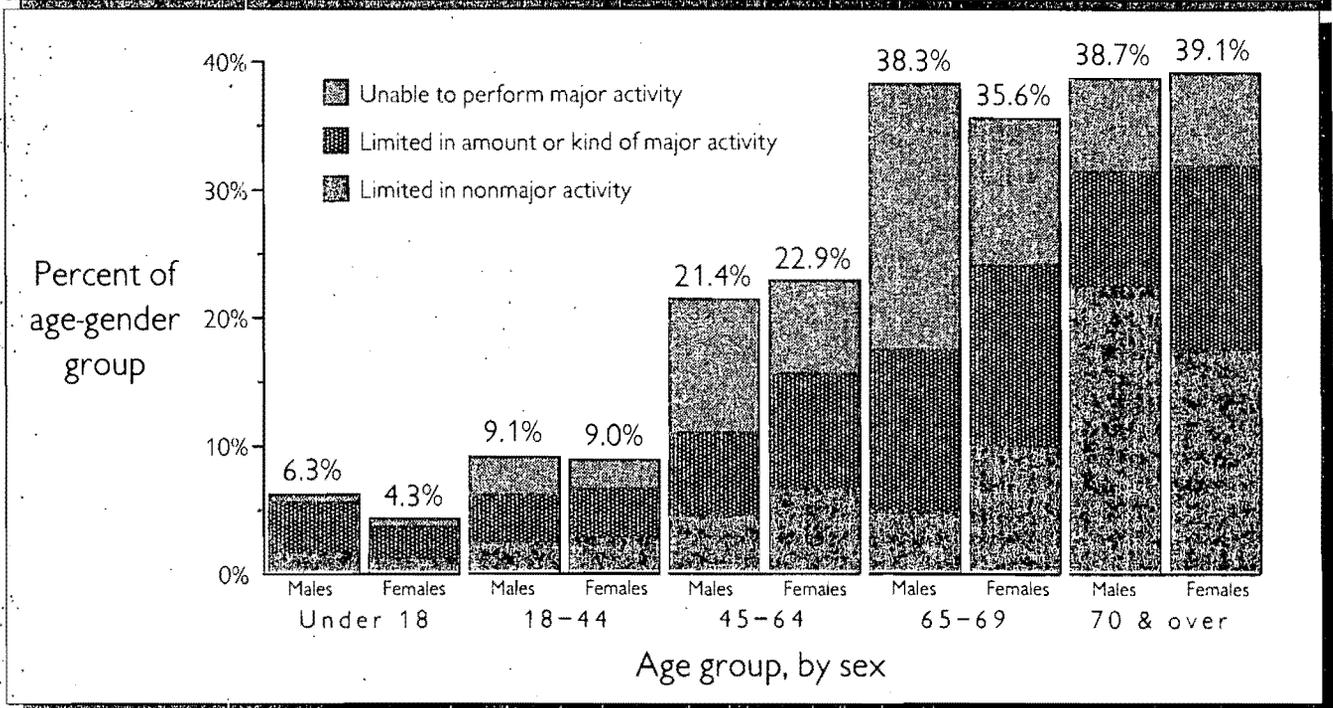


Figure 2: Activity limitation by household income, 1989

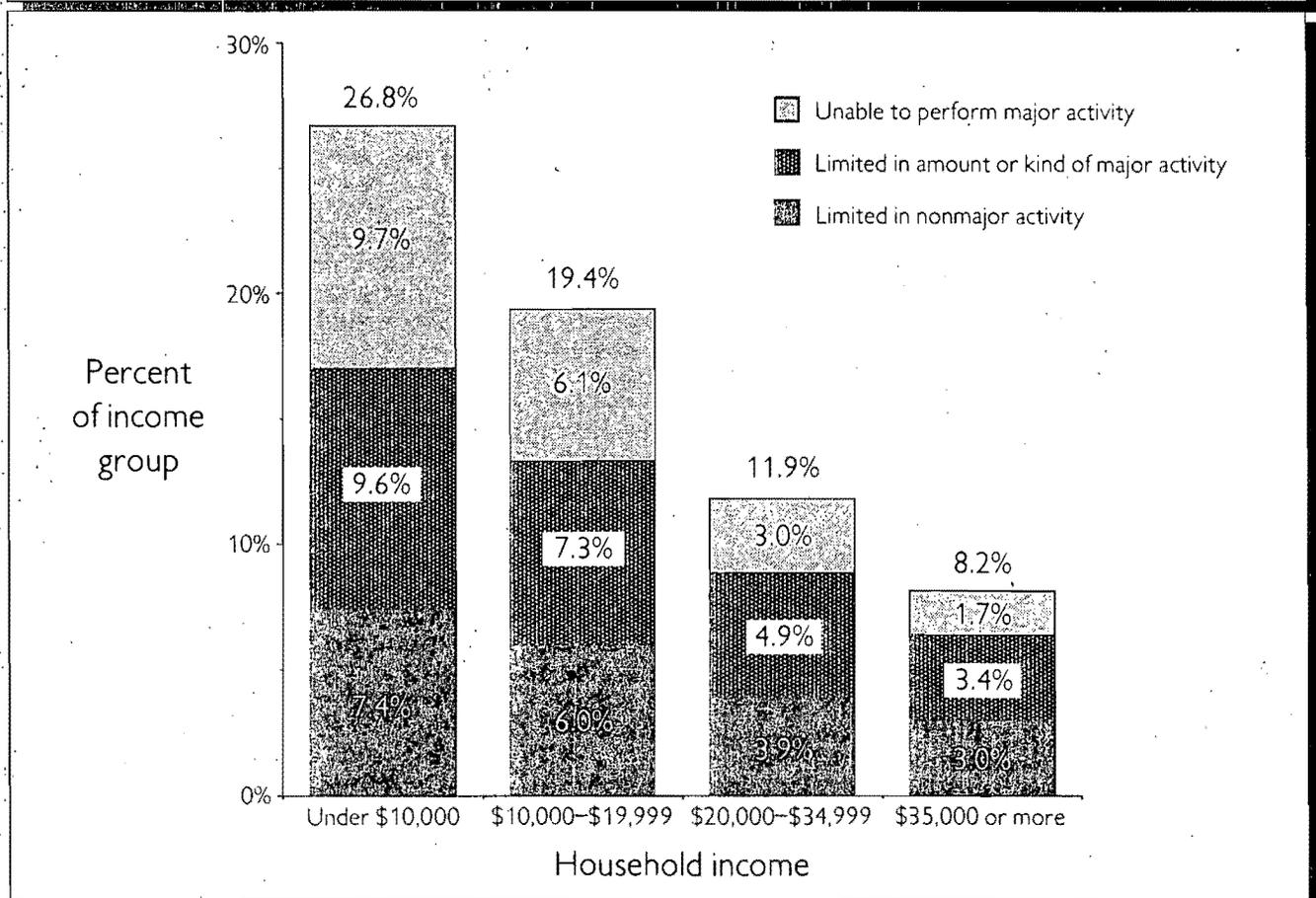


Table 2: Prevalence of conditions that cause limitations, 1983-85

Main Cause	Prevalence		All Causes	Prevalence	
	in 1,000's	%		in 1,000's	%
All conditions	32,540	100.0	All conditions	52,718	100.0
Orthopedic impairments	5,220	16.0	Orthopedic impairments	6,987	13.3
Arthritis	4,000	12.3	Arthritis	6,130	11.6
Heart disease	3,736	11.5	Heart disease	5,575	10.6
Visual impairments	1,438	4.4	Hypertension	3,506	6.6
Intervertebral disk disorders	1,424	4.4	Visual impairments	2,900	5.6
Asthma	1,411	4.3	Diabetes	2,111	4.0
Nervous disorders	1,289	4.0	Mental disorders	1,837	3.5
Mental disorders	1,284	3.9	Asthma	1,783	3.4
Hypertension	1,239	3.8	Intervertebral disk disorders	1,699	3.2
Mental retardation	947	2.9	Nervous disorders	1,601	3.0
Diabetes	885	2.7	Hearing impairments	1,405	2.6
Hearing impairments	813	2.5	Mental retardation	1,047	2.0
Emphysema	649	2.0	Emphysema	994	1.9
Cerebrovascular disease	610	1.9	Cerebrovascular disease	939	1.8
Osteomyelitis/bone disorder	360	1.1	Abdominal hernia	595	1.1

Source: LaPlante, M. P. (1988). *Data on Disability from the National Health Interview Survey, 1983-85*. An InfoUse Report. Washington, DC: U.S. National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. Data are for all age groups.

Note: Nervous disorders include epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, and other selected nervous disorders. Mental disorders include schizophrenia and other psychoses, neuroses, personality disorders, other mental illness, alcohol and drug dependency, senility, and special learning disorders (mental deficiency is not included). Content of other condition categories is described in LaPlante (1988).

form their major activity was higher in the South than in any of the three other regions.

Regardless of the type of limitation, people in rural areas had higher rates of activity limitation than those in metropolitan areas. People in rural areas also had higher rates of activity limitation than those in central cities (except, the difference for the category unable to perform major activity was not significant.)

Chronic conditions that cause activity limitation

Hundreds of chronic conditions can cause activity limitation. But the three that rank highest—orthopedic impairments, arthritis, and heart disease—are mentioned as the main cause by almost 40% of all people with activity

limitation, and make up 37% of all conditions mentioned as causing activity limitation. (These estimates are averages for the period 1983-85. These years were combined to increase the statistical reliability of the estimates.)

About 52.7 million chronic conditions were reported as causing people to be limited in activity—an average of 1.6 limiting conditions per person.

Data Source

Data are from the National Health Interview Survey, a continuous survey of the civilian, non-institutionalized U.S. population. See Adams, P.F., & Benson, V. (1990). Current Estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, 1989. *Vital Health Stat*, 10 (176); and LaPlante, M. P. (1988). *Data on Disability from the National Health Interview Survey, 1983-85*. An InfoUse Report. Washington, D.C.: U.S. National Institute on Disability and

Rehabilitation Research.

Credits

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This abstract is one of a series presenting information from published sources on disability in the U.S. Statistics presented here are subject to both sampling and nonsampling error. Estimates with low statistical reliability (standard error > 30% of the estimate) are flagged with an asterisk. All comparisons mentioned in this abstract are statistically significant at the .10 level of significance or better unless noted otherwise. Comparisons and relationships discussed may be affected by other unanalyzed factors.