

# Differences in Physical and Mental Health Status for People with Different Types of Disabilities

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## Background

- Research shows that persons with disabilities experience disparities in health compared to people without disabilities.
- Study of disparities between subgroups of people with disabilities has been much more limited.
- Some types of disabilities may be related to health problems such as chronic conditions. Therefore, people with different types of disabilities may have differences in perceived health status.

## Objectives

- To examine disparities in perceived health status by disability type among working age adults with disabilities
- To see whether evidence of disparity changes as statistical models control for potential confounders

## Methods

### Data Source

- Medical Expenditure Panel Survey—Household Component
  - A nationally representative survey of health, healthcare coverage, utilization, and expenditures
- Combined data from 2002-2008

## Methods

### Study Sample

- 24,374 non-institutionalized adults with disabilities, ages 18-64.
- Identification of people with disabilities: “Yes” to one or more of the following types of limitations:
  - Hearing impairment (reference group)
  - Vision impairment
  - Cognitive limitations
  - Physical functional limitations

### Outcome variables

- Perceived physical health
- Perceived mental health
- Both coded as fair/poor vs. excellent/very good/good

### Statistical Analysis

- Unadjusted model: examined odds of fair/poor health by disability type alone
- Adjusted model: controlled for demographics, socioeconomic status, and health conditions
- Used Stata 12.0 to account for complex survey design

## Acknowledgements

The members of the Expert Panel are Elena Andresen, PhD; Charles Drum, JD, PhD; Glenn Fujiura, PhD; Lisa Iezzoni, MD, MSc; Gloria Krahn, PhD, MPH; Jana Peterson-Besse, MPH, PhD. The contents of this presentation were developed under a grant from the Department of Education, NIDRR grant number H133A080031. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

## Results

Disability Type	Physical Health		Mental Health	
	Unadjusted	Adjusted	Unadjusted	Adjusted
Hearing	Referent	Referent	Referent	Referent
Vision	1.16 (0.97-1.39)	1.06 (0.87-1.28)	<b>1.32 (1.02-1.71)</b>	1.04 (0.79-1.36)
Cognitive	<b>3.72 (3.03-4.57)</b>	0.88 (0.69-1.12)	<b>12.49 (9.79-15.94)</b>	<b>5.03 (3.87-6.54)</b>
Physical	<b>4.09 (3.48-4.82)</b>	<b>2.01 (1.68-2.40)</b>	<b>2.32 (1.83-2.93)</b>	0.82 (0.63-1.06)
Multiple	<b>10.46 (8.94-12.23)</b>	<b>2.32 (1.93-2.79)</b>	<b>9.10 (7.30-11.36)</b>	<b>1.88 (1.44-2.44)</b>

\* OR=Odds Ratio; + AOR=Adjusted Odds Ratio; Bold indicates statistical significance.

## Conclusions

- In unadjusted models, people with vision impairment or physical limitations had poorer mental health than the reference group, and people with cognitive limitations had poorer physical health. However, these effects were no longer significant when controlling for confounders.
- People with multiple disabilities had greater odds of both poor physical health and poor mental health even when controlling for chronic health conditions and other variables.
- People with physical disabilities rated their physical health more poorly, while people with cognitive disabilities rated their mental health more poorly.
- Additional research is needed to more fully understand the overlap between “disability” and “health” and identify aspects of poor health among people with disabilities that may be preventable.