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

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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.

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.

Objectives

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

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Type</th>
<th>Physical Health</th>
<th>Mental Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unadjusted OR*</td>
<td>Adjusted AOR+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>Referent (0.97-1.39)</td>
<td>1.06 (0.87-1.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>1.16 (0.97-1.39)</td>
<td>1.06 (0.87-1.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>3.72 (3.03-4.57)</td>
<td>0.88 (0.69-1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>4.09 (3.48-4.82)</td>
<td>2.01 (1.86-2.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>10.46 (8.94-12.23)</td>
<td>2.32 (1.93-2.79)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 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.