

Using the Census to get information about disabilities

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The Census Bureau has several pages on its site that deal with disability issues and conducts multiple surveys from which the information is derived.

Here's the Census Bureau's overview of disability information in the Census:

<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/disability/disability.html>

The 2000 decennial census included information about disability.

Question 16 was a two-part question that asked about the existence of the following long-lasting conditions: (a) blindness, deafness, or a severe vision or hearing impairment (sensory disability) and (b) a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities, such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying (physical disability). Item 16 was asked of a sample of the population 5 years old and over.

Question 17 asked if the individual had a physical, mental, or emotional condition lasting 6 months or more that made it difficult to perform certain activities. The four activity categories were: (a) learning, remembering, or concentrating (mental disability); (b) dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home (self-care disability); (c) going outside the home alone to shop or visit a doctor's office (going outside the home disability); and (d) working at a job or business (employment disability). Categories 17a and 17b were asked of a sample of the population 5 years old and over; 17c and 17d were asked of a sample of the population 16 years old and over.

Starting in 2010 the questions asked on the Census "long form" to a sample of the population will now come from the annual American Community Survey

Here's information about disabilities in that survey:

http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/methodology/content_test/P4_Disability.pdf

The questions are similar, but you need to be careful when comparing Census 2000 data to ACS data, since they come from different products.

The Census Bureau cross-tabs the disability variables with race, age and employment information. Keep in mind that the numbers may seem lower than what you're used to (54 million) because these questions are for non-institutionalized people only. Institutionalized numbers are available in special reports or in raw data downloads. Here's more about disability and group quarters: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/disability/GQdisability.pdf>

Here's a sample table:

View the [collapsed version of this table](#). Geographies missing from this table are:

| | United States | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| | Estimate | Margin of Error |
| Total: | 189,181,224 | +/-34,269 |
| In the labor force: | 147,563,389 | +/-114,497 |
| Employed: | 133,202,340 | +/-128,486 |
| With a disability: | 6,723,694 | +/-44,045 |
| With a hearing difficulty | 2,020,785 | +/-22,359 |
| With a vision difficulty | 1,250,935 | +/-20,917 |
| With a cognitive difficulty | 1,917,392 | +/-21,989 |
| With an ambulatory difficulty | 2,563,687 | +/-24,609 |
| With a self-care difficulty | 584,413 | +/-14,298 |
| With an independent living difficulty | 1,106,530 | +/-17,145 |
| No disability | 126,478,646 | +/-131,626 |
| Unemployed: | 14,361,049 | +/-64,155 |
| With a disability: | 1,479,136 | +/-20,476 |
| With a hearing difficulty | 294,771 | +/-8,552 |
| With a vision difficulty | 269,047 | +/-8,832 |
| With a cognitive difficulty | 689,870 | +/-13,216 |
| With an ambulatory difficulty | 551,931 | +/-14,012 |
| With a self-care difficulty | 125,631 | +/-7,231 |
| With an independent living difficulty | 312,096 | +/-8,603 |
| No disability | 12,881,913 | +/-58,363 |
| Not in labor force: | 41,617,835 | +/-103,506 |
| With a disability: | 10,851,757 | +/-60,585 |
| With a hearing difficulty | 1,598,473 | +/-18,418 |
| With a vision difficulty | 1,749,791 | +/-25,152 |
| With a cognitive difficulty | 5,257,981 | +/-51,941 |
| With an ambulatory difficulty | 6,684,598 | +/-42,417 |
| With a self-care difficulty | 2,658,073 | +/-30,364 |
| With an independent living difficulty | 5,137,200 | +/-44,719 |
| No disability | 30,766,078 | +/-84,270 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 American Community Survey

You can do further cross-tabs by using special sample data, known as PUMS.

There are other questions that also relate to disability issues such as Medicaid coverage and source of earnings.

Another survey that has information about income sources related to disabilities is the SIPP – the Survey of Income and Program Participation. The survey includes:

- Limitations in seeing, hearing, speaking, lifting, and carrying, using stairs, walking
- Limitations in activities of daily living (ADLs) - getting around inside the home, getting in/out of a bed/chair, bathing, dressing, eating, toileting
- Limitations in instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) - going outside the home, keeping track of money or bills, preparing meals, doing light housework, using the telephone
- Use of wheelchairs, crutches, canes, or walkers
- Presence of conditions related to mental functioning
- Presence of a work disability

Because the sample is relatively small it really can only be used for analyses at the national, state and large metropolitan area level.