

Fact Sheet

Belonging to two minority or disadvantaged groups (women and people with disabilities), women with disabilities often face double discrimination and multiple barriers to achieving important life goals. Minority women with disabilities face even greater discrimination. Some issues that have been recognized include low employment rates and wages, poor access to health care, low educational levels, sexual and physical abuse, and lack of access to needed programs and services. Here are some key facts and information about women with disabilities in the United States.

Prevalence of Disability Among Women

- One out of every 5 women is limited in a major life activity (Toms Barker, 1997).
- Females are more likely to be limited in activities than are males (15.4% compared to 14.6%) (LaPlante and Carlson, 1996).
- About 11 million women over the age of 45 (29%) have conditions that somehow limit their activities compared with 9 million men (25%). Since women tend to live longer than men and since disability commonly increases with old age, women are less likely to have financial and familial support in old age (Hasler, 1991).

Economics of Disability and Employment Facts About Disabled Women

- Women with work disabilities are more likely to be poor than men with work disabilities (45% vs. 39%) (U.S. Department of the Census, 1984-85).
- From 1980–1989, earnings grew by only 52% for women with disabilities compared to 57% for women without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989, Series P-23, No. 160).
- The employment rate for disabled women is less than 50% the rate for men without disabilities (Baldwin, Johnson, and Watson, 1993).
- The average wage for disabled women is 58% of that of nondisabled men (Baldwin, Johnson, and Watson, 1993).
- Women with disabilities earn 14% less than women without disabilities (Baldwin, Johnson, and Watson, 1993).
- Disabled women are offered wages that are only 85% of the wages offered to disabled men with similar work characteristics (Baldwin, Johnson, and Watson, 1993).

Physical and Sexual Abuse

- Disabled females are more likely to be abused than females without disabilities (Sobsey, 1994).

Reproductive Health Issues

- Although disabled women are among the most frequent consumers of medical care, the literature reveals that there is a significant lack of attention to the variety of medical concerns of women with disabilities (National Institute on Health, 1994).
- The literature from women with disabilities and medical professionals shows that the general societal view is that women with disabilities are asexual and incapable of caring for a child (Carty, Conine and Hall, 1990).
- While women with disabilities feel social pressure to have children, women with disabilities are urged not to have children (Haseltine, Cole and Gray, Eds., 1993).

- Disabled women face numerous barriers to receiving reproductive health and family planning services. These barriers include problems related to physical access as well as difficulties in access faced by women with sensory, psychiatric and developmental disabilities (Haseltine, Cole and Gray, Eds. 1993).

About Families/AFDC Benefits and Services

- It is estimated that 22% of women under age 45 on AFDC self-report a disability compared to 9% of women not on AFDC and their disabilities are more likely to be severe than moderate. There are few linkages between the AFDC system and disability service systems so the extra needs of these disabled women are not being met (Adler, 1988).
- More disabled women are single heads of households compared to disabled men (2.4 million vs. .5 million) (NHIS, 1990).

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