

DISABILITY IN NEW YORK CITY



POVERTY, HARDSHIP, AND COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities is observed every year on December 3rd to promote the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in society.¹ The 2020 theme of this commemoration is “Building back better: toward a disability-inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 world.” Persons with disabilities are generally more disadvantaged² than those without, and are also more likely to contract COVID-19—likely because of barriers to public health information.³ While New York City has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, little attention has been paid to New Yorkers with disabilities and their socioeconomic situation before and during the pandemic.

Using data from the 2018 American Community Survey, this report shares findings on disability prevalence in New York City. It also uses Poverty Tracker data to highlight the socioeconomic inequalities that New Yorkers with disabilities faced before the pandemic and how these inequalities are potentially being exacerbated by the pandemic.

KEY FINDINGS

- Among working-age New Yorkers, eight percent have a disability and 19 percent live in a household with a person who has a disability.
- New Yorkers with lower levels of education and racial and ethnic minorities are more likely than others to experience a disability.
- New Yorkers with disabilities are much more likely to experience poverty compared to those without disabilities (33 percent vs. 21 percent).
- New Yorkers with disabilities are much more likely to experience hardship compared to those without disabilities (48 percent vs. 28 percent).
- Food hardship was particularly prevalent among those with a disability. Nearly 20 percent of those with a disability reported food hardship, compared to just 6 percent of those without a disability.
- New Yorkers with disabilities were more likely to say they were unable to work since January 1st compared to those without disabilities (38 percent vs. 31 percent).

¹ United Nations (2020).

² United Nations (2019).

³ World Health Organization (2020).



DATA

In the following report, we use data from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) to establish rates of disability across New York City and among various demographic groups. We use Poverty Tracker data, collected between 2018 and 2020, to investigate the relationship between disability, poverty and hardship. We also examine how COVID-19 has impacted work among New Yorkers with disabilities. For results using Poverty Tracker data, we use two panels of data; the first sampled in 2015 (n=3,908) and a supplemental panel sampled in 2017 (n=853). (Read more about the Poverty Tracker [here.](#))

RESULTS

We consider a New Yorker as having a disability if they report at least one of the following six functional difficulties asked about in the ACS: serious difficulty hearing; serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses; serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs; serious difficulty dressing or bathing; serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions as the result of a physical, mental, or emotional condition; and serious difficulty doing errands alone as the result of a physical, mental, or emotional condition.

We find that 19 percent of working age New Yorkers live in a household where someone has a disability and that eight percent of working age New Yorkers (24-64 years old) have at least one of these six forms of disability. This represents approximately 400,000 working age New Yorkers living with a disability. Table 1 highlights the proportion of working age New Yorkers with a disability among various demographic groups, considering disability prevalence by race, gender, and education. Groups with lower socioeconomic status such as Black New Yorkers, Hispanic New Yorkers, and those with less than a high school degree face higher rates of disability. While 6 percent of White New Yorkers have a disability, this number rises to 10 percent among Black New Yorkers and 12 percent among Hispanic New Yorkers. Seventeen percent of those with less than a high school degree have a disability, which declines as education increases. Just 4 percent of New Yorkers with a bachelor’s degree or more have a disability.

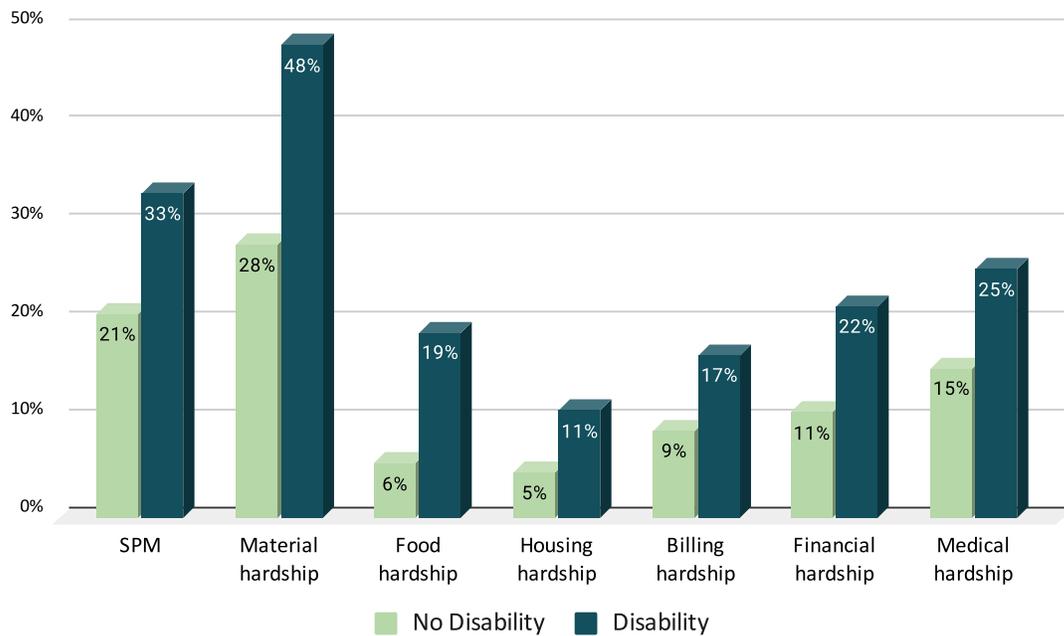
Table 1. Racial minorities and those with lower levels of education have elevated rates of disability, (New Yorkers 24-64 years old)

Rate of People With Disabilities	
<i>New York City</i>	8%
RACE	
<i>White Non-Hispanic</i>	6%
<i>Black Non-Hispanic</i>	10%
<i>Hispanic</i>	12%
GENDER	
<i>Male</i>	8%
<i>Female</i>	9%
EDUCATION	
<i>Less than HS</i>	17%
<i>HS graduate or GED</i>	9%
<i>Some college or associate's degree</i>	10%
<i>Bachelor's degree or more</i>	4%

Source: Authors’ calculations based on the 2018 American Community Survey.

We analyze Poverty Tracker data to compare rates of poverty and material hardship between New Yorkers with and without such disabilities (figure 1). Disability is captured in the Poverty Tracker through the same functional difficulty questions noted earlier for the ACS. We find that those with disabilities experience elevated rates of poverty compared to those without disabilities (33 percent vs. 21 percent). Unsurprisingly, this pattern holds when focusing on material hardship with 48 percent of New Yorkers with disabilities facing a material hardship compared to just 28 percent of those without a disability. (Read more about how we define material hardships [here](#).) When looking at individual hardships (food, housing, billing, financial, and medical), we find elevated levels of hardship across all domains, with the largest difference in the proportion facing food hardships. While 19 percent of those with a disability experience a food hardship over a year, just 6 percent of non-disabled New Yorkers have such an experience.

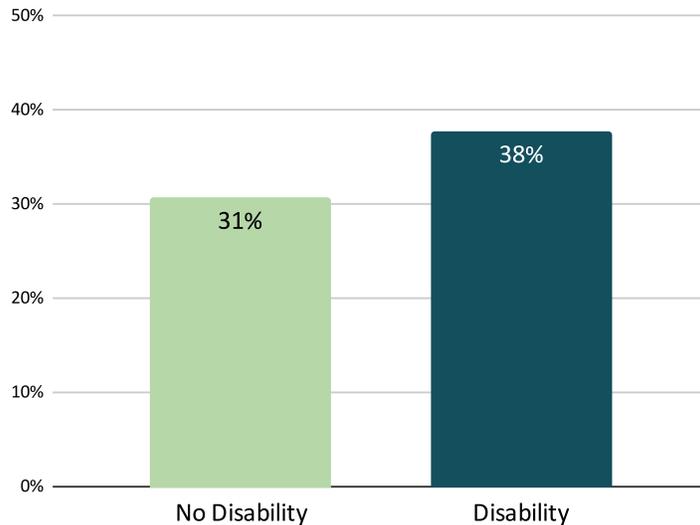
Figure 1: New Yorkers with disabilities have elevated levels of poverty and hardship, (New Yorkers 24-64 years old)



Source: Authors' calculations using data from the 2015 Poverty Tracker panel. Poverty, hardship, and disability status questions were asked of this panel in 2018 and 2019.

Finally, we examine self-reports on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on New Yorkers ability to work (see figure 2). Of the Poverty Tracker sample first surveyed in 2017, we ask respondents, "Since January 1st, were there any days when you were not able to work for a reason related to the coronavirus?" Among those with disabilities we find that 38 percent of those who worked in this time frame experienced days where they were not able to work as a result of coronavirus, higher than the 31 percent among those without a disability.

Figure 2: New Yorkers with disabilities were more likely to say they couldn't work since January 1, 2020 due to coronavirus, (New Yorkers 24-64 years old)



Source: Authors' calculations using data from the 2017 Poverty Tracker sample, our measure indicating not being able to work as a result of coronavirus was collected between late March and June 2020. Disability status was asked about in 2019.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUDING REMARKS

There has been growing attention to disability and its links to wellbeing and poverty in the United States⁴ and globally with consistent evidence that persons with disabilities tend to experience lower educational attainment and employment rates, and are more likely to be poor than persons without disabilities. Persons with disabilities tend to face higher costs of living, notably higher out of pocket health expenditures,⁵ attendant care and transportation costs.⁶ People with disabilities were also disproportionately affected by job loss during the Great Recession.^{7, 8} Given this fact, persons with disabilities may be particularly affected by the economic fallout that is unfolding because of the pandemic.

Among working age New Yorkers, disability is not rare. Approximately eight percent of working-age adults in New York City are living with a disability and 19 percent live in a household where someone has a disability. While many New Yorkers with disabilities are not poor, they are overall more likely to experience poverty and material hardship. In addition, they are more likely to report work disruptions as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.

New Yorkers with disabilities were already more likely than those without to experience poverty and hardship—especially food hardship—prior to the pandemic. During the present COVID-19 crisis, their disadvantage seems to be exacerbated. As the economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis is unfolding, attention needs to be paid to New Yorkers with disabilities and the barriers they may face to retain employment and access social protection. The inequalities highlighted in this report stress the need for anti-poverty policies and programs that are inclusive of New Yorkers with disabilities and their families.

4 Brucker, Mitra, Chaitoo, and Mauro (2015).
5 Mitra, Findley, and Sambamoorthi (2009).
6 Mitra, Palmer, Kim, Mont, and Groce (2017).
7 Kaye (2010).
8 Livermore and Honeycutt (2015).

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ABOUT US

The Center on Poverty and Social Policy at the Columbia School of Social Work produces cutting-edge research to advance our understanding of poverty and the role of social policy in reducing poverty and promoting opportunity, economic security, and individual and family-wellbeing. The center's work focuses on poverty and social policy issues in New York City and the United States. *For the latest policy briefs, go to povertycenter.columbia.edu.*

ABOUT THE POVERTY TRACKER

Launched in 2012, the Poverty Tracker surveys a representative sample of New Yorkers every three months, providing critical information on the dynamics of poverty and other forms of disadvantage in the city. In addition to measures on poverty and disadvantage, the Poverty Tracker collects a wealth of information on other topics such as employment, assets and debts, and health. *For the latest reports, go to robinhood.org/programs/special-initiatives/poverty-tracker.*