



FAST FACTS

Disability in Adulthood and Work- Family Relationships

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How many adults in the U.S. are disabled and receiving care?

- **Fact 1:** 61 million adults in the United States live with a disability (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2019).
- **Fact 2:** In 2018, 2,073,293 individuals applied for Disability Insurance through the Social Security Administration. Only 733,879 people were awarded (Social Security Agency 2018).

What policies protect employed adults with disabilities?

- **Fact 1:** “If you have a disability and are qualified to do a job, the ADA protects you from job discrimination on the basis of your disability.” “If you have a disability, you must also be qualified to perform the essential functions or duties of a job, with or without reasonable accommodation, in order to be protected from job discrimination by the ADA” (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2019).
- **Fact 2:** The Rehabilitation Act (1973) prohibits “discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment and in the employment practices of federal contractors” (EARN 2019).

What are some of the personal struggles associated with coping with a disability as a previously able-bodied adult?

- **Fact 1:** When individuals returned home after being in care, “there was an associated high level of inactivity, which for some led to feelings of boredom and restlessness.” Additionally, having to rely on the assistance of others, led to feelings of a loss of independence and freedom (Hodson 2016:429).
- **Fact 2:** Changes in social interaction occurred, specifically “in the way they were treated by others in their home, and how they socialized with their friends” (Hodson 2016:430).

How many adults with disabilities are employed, self-employed, or unemployed?

- **Fact 1:** “In 2018, the employment-population ratio—the proportion of the population that is employed— was 19.1 percent among those with a disability. The unemployment rate for both persons with and without a disability declined from the previous year to 8.0 percent and 3.7 percent, respectively” (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019).

- **Fact 2:** “Employed persons with a disability were more likely to be self-employed than those with no disability” (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019).

What types of support systems do working adults with disabilities receive in the workplace?

- **Fact 1:** The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) “provides a nationwide service for all entities interested in employment of people with disabilities.” JAN consultants guide employers with resources that provide positive work experiences for individuals with disabilities (Solovieva, 2010:3).
- **Fact 2:** Personal Assistance Services (PAS) also provide accommodations for individuals whose disabilities affect activities of daily living, such as eating, drinking, and getting dressed (Solovieva 2010:3).

What are the main struggles involved with spousal care for a disabled spouse or partner?

- **Fact 1:** Disruption is created by “structural alterations (roles, distribution of work, balance of power) as well as changes to relationship functioning (support, communication, intimacy). Additionally, “changes to taken-for-granted husband and wife roles disrupted the marriage and “the perceived over-protection increased the survivor’s frustration, which triggered anger and bad behavior” (Anderson 2018:2261).
- **Fact 2:** Some individuals with disabilities “described their partners as being limited in their capacity to enact care through domestic help or instrumental care in the home...when partners did appear to make adjustments and care in new ways, some participants expressed discomfort with the disruption of relational dynamics” (Gibson 2018:907).
- **Fact 3:** The unexpected financial expenditures for residual disabilities caused strain. Many were faced “with economic insecurity...with little ability to anticipate when things might get better, in the prime of their earning years” (McCarthy 2015:e95).
- **Fact 4:** Individuals who had to assume the role of caretaker sometimes “led to loss of occupational or social status” (McCarthy 2015:e95).

How does disability impact marital quality?

- **Fact 1:** “Communication patterns typically associated with marital problems - such as withholding emotions, negativity during conflict and with-drawing from the situation” (Anderson 2018:2263).
- **Fact 2:** “Participants consistently utilized ‘coping’ rhetorically in reference to their partners, as being incapable or unwilling to express their emotions” (Gibson 2018:905).
- **Fact 3:** For individuals who are younger and experience disability, “compromised physical intimacy” leads to a strained relationship (McCarthy 2015:e95). Additionally, in one study, “sexual arousal, frequency and satisfaction decreased after stroke” (Anderson 2018:2254).
- **Fact 4:** “Marital relationships can have a positive influence on the quality of life of those with chronic illness” (Anderson 2018:2242).
- **Fact 5:** Traumatic instances can bolster relationships by encouraging each individual to “reevaluate their priorities.” Some couples found that their relationship became stronger and closer (McCarthy 2015:e97).

How does disability impact work-family management strategies?

- **Fact 1:** Joint social activities and the wives' personally meaningful activities decrease, which leads to an increase in reported marital unhappiness. Some spouses report that involvement in personal activities declined because they felt guilty for participating in activities that their partner could not (Anderson 2018:2261).
- **Fact 2:** The spouse or partner assumes a care-giver role within the relationship and "the workload previously handled by two people shifted to the spouse" (Anderson 2018:2261).
- **Fact 3:** "Only when couples began to perceive they had some control of their situation did they begin to think about what lay ahead of them and their marriage" (Anderson 2018:2260).
- **Fact 4:** "Career disruption arises from events that significantly interrupt an employee's expected progression or sequence of job roles. Examples include job loss, taking a less demanding job to facilitate non-work roles, and an inability to pursue desirable work opportunities." Additionally, the path of the "ideal worker" can be disrupted by committing to the caregiving role (Bainbridge 2017:3).
- **Fact 5:** Caregivers often undertake jobs that are part-time and are based at home. "These jobs typically have low pay, few employee benefits, limited opportunities for social interaction, and are repetitive and unchallenging." Often, this situation of underemployment leads to stress and negative well-being (Bainbridge 2017:3).

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About the Author

Margaret Tippet is a senior sociology student at Ithaca College and former intern for the Work and Family Researchers Network. Her career plans are to pursue a professional degree in communications and public policy after her graduation in May 2020 (Last updated December 2019).