

Behind the Numbers



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THE PEOPLE IN “SPECIAL POPULATIONS”

The Family and Children First Council’s definition of people who are in “special populations” begins “People of any age with significant disabilities.” How many people are we talking about? The answer turns out to depend on who is doing the asking and how the question is asked. In fact, according to one analysis¹, there are over twenty different definitions that have been used by government and private agencies for various statistical

purposes and to determine eligibility for different benefits and services. We shall soon see that in Montgomery County, home to about 542,000

people, the number with a disability is well over 44,000 but probably less than 100,000.

A good place for answers to questions that begin “how many people...” is usually the US Census Bureau. In both the national head count that it conducts every ten years and in the recently introduced annual American Community Survey, the Census Bureau uses a “functional limitation” definition of disability. Through a series of questions they determine whether a person has a sensory, physical, mental, self-care, go-outside-the-home and/or employment disability.²

According to the 2000 Census, almost one out of every five Montgomery County residents aged five or older had one (or more) of these disabilities. (The Montgomery County rate, 19.6%, was just

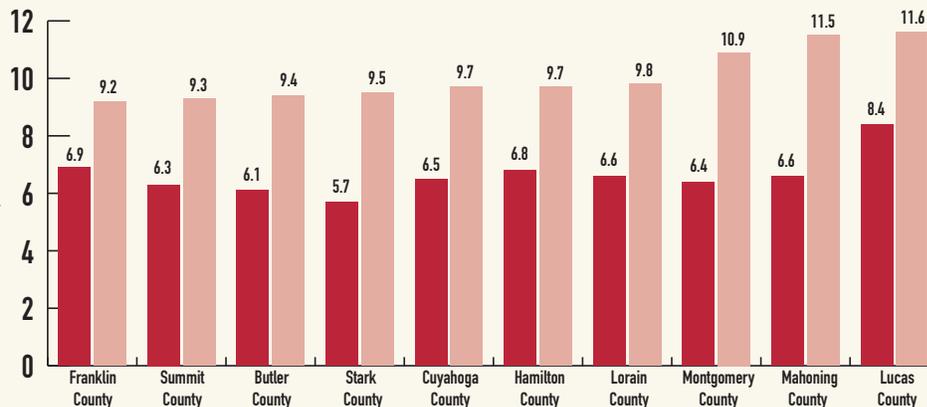
above the national rate, 19.3%.) That translates into just over 100,000 people. However, after completion of the 2000 Census, the Census Bureau identified a problem with parts of its survey. One result is that the overall estimate of the population with disabilities, as reported in the 2000 Census, is probably too high.

The problematic parts of the Census survey had to do with go-outside-the-home

it is among whites.⁴ Not surprisingly, the proportion of people with a disability increases with age. In Montgomery County in 2006 just under 8% of children aged 5 to 15 had a disability, while for those 65 and over the percentage was close to 38%. For those in-between, 16 to 64, the proportion was 15%.⁵

The relative incidence of disability types also changes with age. (See Figure 2.) About 16%

Figure 1. Percentage of people reporting a sensory, physical, mental and/or self-care disability in 2000.



of disabled 5 – 15 year-olds report a physical disability while 90% report a mental disability.⁶ For those who are 16 – 64 years old and have at

least one disability, the proportion with a mental disability falls to 43% while the proportion with a physical disability rises to 60%. For those 65 and over with at least one disability, the proportion with a physical disability is even higher– 79%– while the proportion with a mental disability drops to 27%. Because the overall prevalence of disability is so high in the oldest age group, people 65 and over actually have the highest prevalence of mental disability, just over 10%.⁵

disability and with employment disability. An analysis of the Census data for the remaining components of the survey, i.e., the sensory, physical, mental, and self-care components, revealed that just over 44,000 Montgomery County residents between the ages of 5 and 64³ had one or more of those disabilities. Because this re-analysis (conducted after identifying the problems with the survey) did not include those 65 and older, we can reasonably conclude that there are well over 44,000 Montgomery County residents with disabilities. Whatever the actual number is, Montgomery County has a higher proportion of residents with a disability than most of Ohio’s other large counties. (See Figure 1.)

Females are slightly more likely than males to report a disability, and the prevalence of disability is higher among non-whites than

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Buried in the national statistics describing children with disabilities are some troubling facts:⁷

- Almost one-third of the more than 500,000 children living in foster care have disabilities, and the majority of those waiting to be adopted are children with disabilities.

- ⊗ Poor families are twice as likely to have a child with a disability and 50 percent more likely to have a child with a severe disability.
- ⊗ About 48% of all children with disabilities are members of families living in poverty or part of the working poor.

Around the world people are becoming increasingly aware that **poverty and disability are linked in many ways**. As the United Nations said to mark the International Day of Disabled Persons in 1996:

People living in poverty tend to become disabled because of aggravating factors, such as malnutrition, squalid housing, hazardous occupations, and heightened exposure to violence. Conversely, people with disabilities tend to be poorer or to become impoverished because they lack jobs or access to income, basic social and medical services, and rehabilitation. On top of this, the poor with disabilities are often exposed to the devastating effects of discrimination, exclusion, sheer prejudice or superstition, and the denial of participation and influence in society.

Addressed to a global audience, this message underscores the challenge in achieving locally the FCFC’s vision for people who are in special populations, namely, that they “have the opportunity to participate fully in every aspect of community life that they desire.” Stated simply, for too many members of special populations poverty is one more burden. In Montgomery County, 19.8% of people ages 5 and over who have a disability are living in poverty compared to 12.7% of those without – a 56% higher rate.⁵

A hallmark of full participation in American society is employment. People with disabilities – by any measure – do not achieve full participation. According to a recent Harris Poll, 63% of adults with disabilities said they want a paying job.⁷ Yet in 2005, only 38.4%⁸ of Ohioans between the ages of 21 and 64 with a sensory, physical, mental or self-care disability were employed, compared to 78.1% of non-disabled Ohioans between those ages.³ The percentage of disabled adult Ohioans who are unemployed but actively looking for work (according to the criteria used by statisticians to determine labor force participation) may seem low –

around 7% – but it is high enough to yield an unemployment rate that is over twice that of non-disabled Ohioans.⁹

With this employment picture in mind it is not surprising that the median earnings in Ohio for people age 16 and over with a disability (in 2006 inflation adjusted dollars) was \$16,669, less than 62% of the median earnings of the population with no disability, \$27,224.¹¹

Perhaps the challenge of attaining full participation is made more evident by taking a step back and looking at some recent history. Figure 3 displays data on mean household income and employment rates for three different years.¹² 1989 and 2000 were peak years for their respective business cycles and 1992 marked a recession. Not only is the gap between workers with and without disabilities apparent, it actually grew wider from one economic peak to the next.

These observations have spawned a robust national debate about many aspects of this issue. We hope they also sharpen the local will to achieve the desired community outcome of positive living for special populations.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY RESIDENTS – DISABILITIES BY AGE (2006)

AGE	5 TO 15	16 TO 64	65 AND OVER
% of population reporting one or more disabilities	8%	15%	38%
<i>Of those reporting a disability in an age group:</i>			
% with a mental disability	90%	43%	27%
% with a physical disability	16%	60%	79%

Figure 2. The relative incidence of disability types changes with age. Person may report more than one disability.

	1989 (peak)	1992 (recession)	2000 (peak)	% change 1989 – 2000
Mean Household Income				
Men without disabilities	\$35,863	\$33,968	\$39,401	+ 9.4
Men with disabilities	\$21,178	\$19,774	\$20,572	- 2.9
Employment Rate				
Men without disabilities	96.1%	94.8%	95.2%	- 1.0
Men with disabilities	44.0%	41.6%	33.1%	- 28.4

Figure 3. Men with and without disabilities both suffered in the 1992 recession compared to the 1989 business cycle peak but they fared much differently between the 1989 peak and the 2000 peak. Mean household income is expressed in constant 2000 dollars. For percentage change the average of the two years is used as the base.

¹ Mashaw, J., & Reno, V.P. (Eds.) (1996). Balancing security and opportunity: The challenge of disability income policy. Washington, DC: National Academy of Social Insurance; cited by www.disabilitystatistics.org, accessed on Dec. 27, 2007.

² For a more complete discussion of the issues surrounding efforts to define “disability” see www.disabilitystatistics.org.

³ Houtenville, A. J., Erickson, W. A., Lee, C. G. (2005, April 4). Disability Statistics from the Decennial Census 2000. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (StatsRRTC). Retrieved January 6, 2008 from www.disabilitystatistics.org.

⁴ For example, in 2006 the prevalence in Ohio was reported to be 13.3% among whites and 19.4% among blacks; nationally the figures were 12.7% and 17.5% respectively.

⁵ These data are contained in or derived from Table S1801, Disability Characteristics, 2006 American Community Survey for Montgomery County, available at <http://factfinder.census.gov>. Readers should refer to this site for more information on the Survey, including margins of error.

⁶ The total is greater than 100% because some people report more than one disability.

⁷ James P. Baker, David B. Mixner and Seth D. Harris. The State of Disability in America: An Evaluation of the Disability Experience by the Life Without Limits Project. United Cerebral Palsy. Washington, DC. (2007).

⁸ <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/disabled/disabday.htm>. Accessed on Jan. 22, 2008. These data are not available at the county level.

⁹ 15.4% compared to 6.4% by analysis of data derived from Houtenville et al., op. cit.

¹¹ Table S1802, Selected Economic Characteristics for the Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population By Disability Status, 2006 American Community Survey for Ohio, available at <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

¹² From David C. Stapleton and Richard V. Burkhauser (Eds.) The Decline in Employment of People with Disabilities: A Policy Puzzle (2003) W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. Kalamazoo, Michigan. A much fuller discussion of these and related data is available here.