Minority Disparities in ADL Limitations Among Medicare Beneficiaries

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Objective: To estimate the proportion of Medicare beneficiaries with limitations by racial and ethnic groups from 1992 to 2004, and to study the influence of age and sex in the probability of having those limitations. Design: Annual, in-person survey. Participants interviewed up to four consecutive years. Setting: Community. Participants: 65,396 beneficiaries, age ≥ 65, who participated in the Medicare Current Beneficiaries Survey from 1992 to 2004. Main Outcome Measures: Number of Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs) for which the person had difficulties. Results: The mean yearly proportion of participants with any ADL limitation over the 13 years varied among groups: Asians/Pacific Islanders (25%, range during the 13 years, 19-29%), Whites (28%, range 25-33%), Hispanics (30%, range 25-37%), Blacks (36%, range 31-40%) and American/Alaskan Natives (38%, range 24-57%). For all participants, the proportion with any ADL (IADL) limitation decreased from 33.5% (41.8%) in 1992 to 27.1% (34.7%) in 2004. These findings were consistent in almost all minority groups. It appears as if the reduction in these proportions were due to decrease in reporting in the most severe category for ADL and in the moderate categories of IADL. Number of ADLs or IADLs with limitations is higher for females than males, and increases with age. Asians and Hispanics report more limitations than Whites and Blacks, starting around age 80. Conclusion: The proportion of those with activity limitations has decreased slightly over the last decade. However, there are still disparities in disability that have persisted over time.