

The Definition of Disability and Statistics

Presented by:

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**Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on
Disability Demographics and Statistics**

The Cornell University logo, featuring the word "CORNELL" in white, serif, all-caps font centered within a solid red square.

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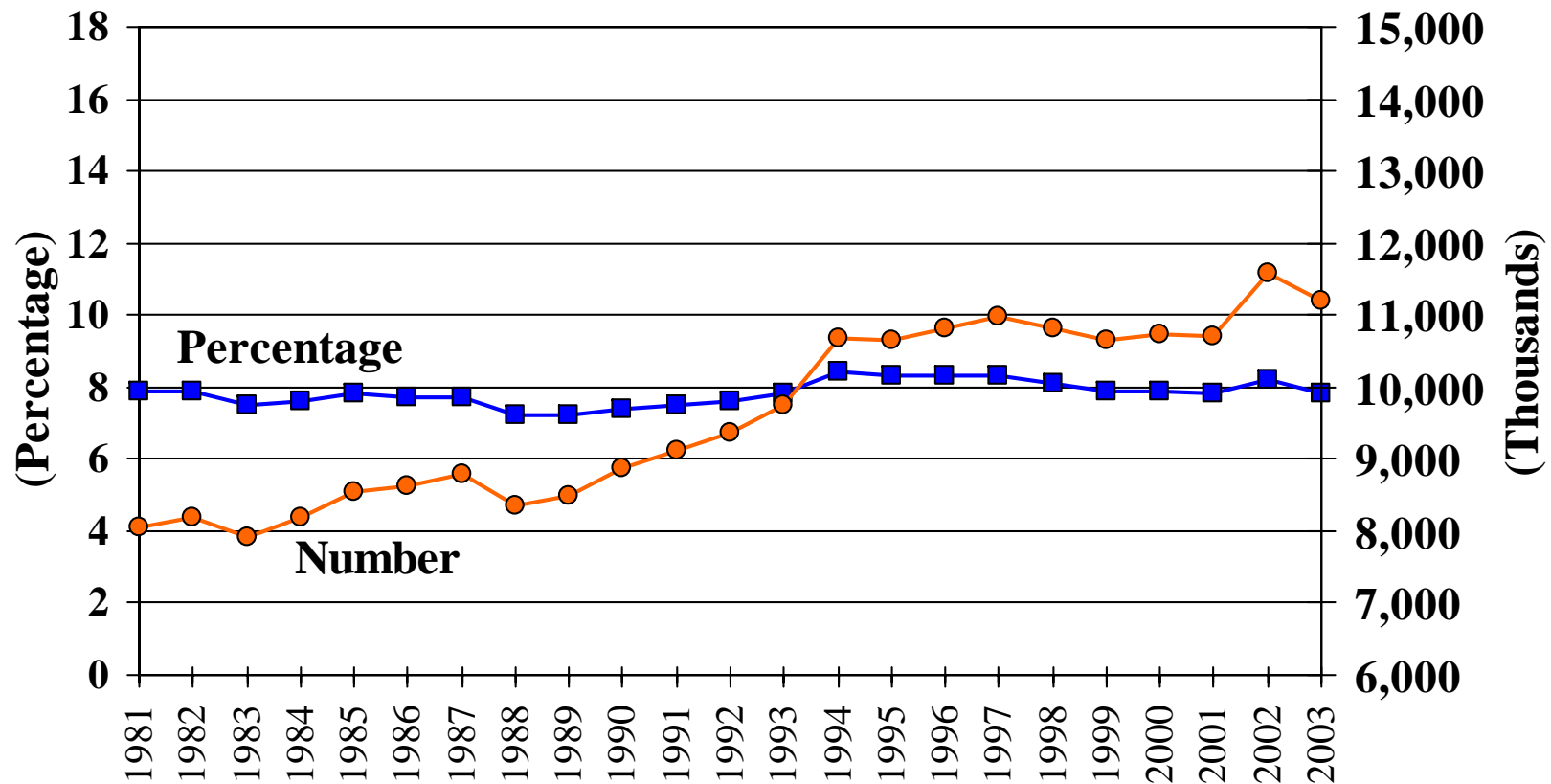
Objective of Today's Presentation

- Give a flavor of the powerful statistics that can be generated from national surveys that have disability-related information.
- Highlight the complex of defining disability in the context of disability statistics
- Discuss the role the definition of disability plays in drawing inferences from disability statistics.
- Give a Quiz.

Question 1

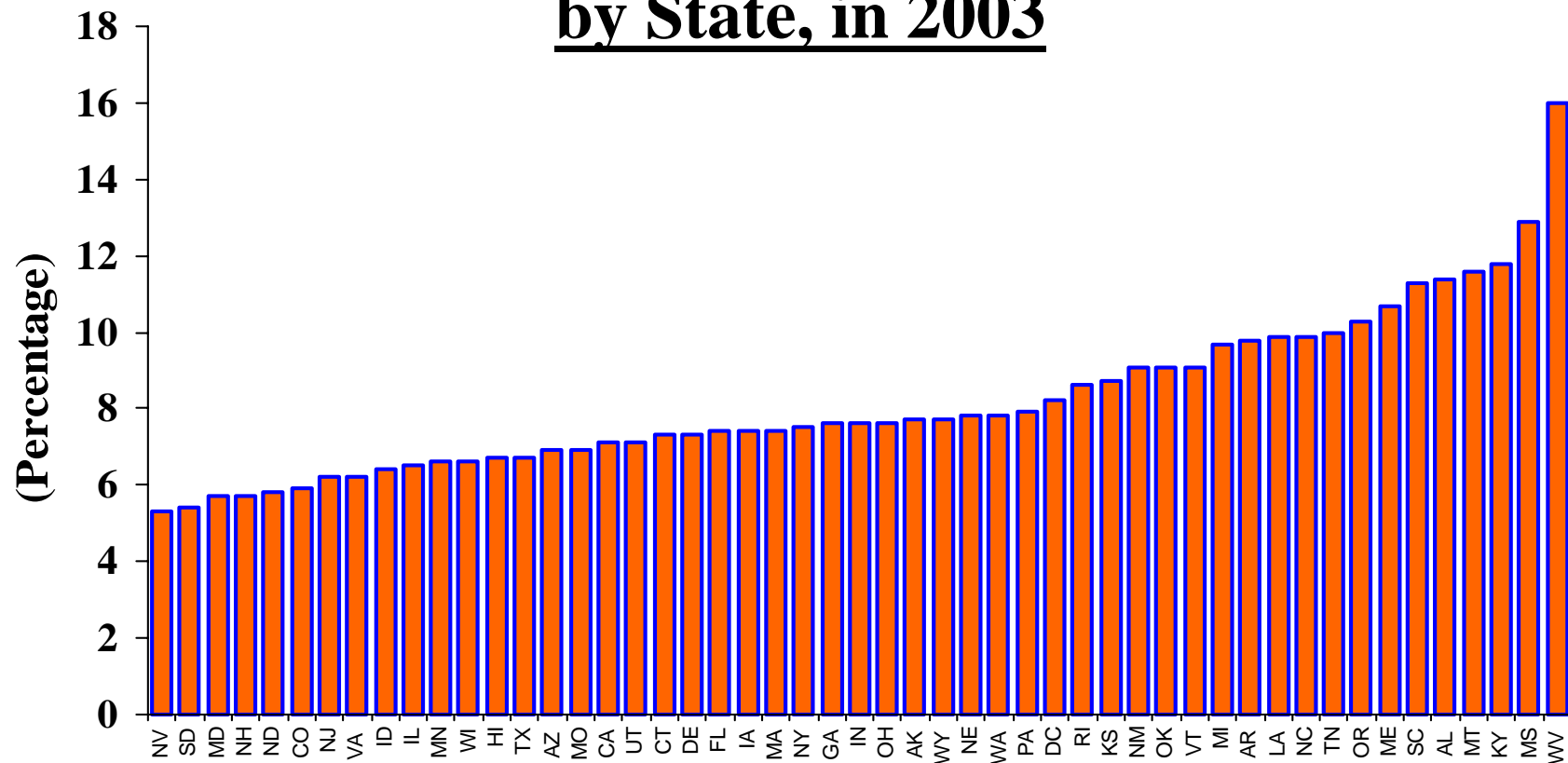
- It is not surprising that there is no single definition of disability among large national surveys and polls. These surveys have different purposes and histories. The population with disabilities is diverse in many ways: types of disabilities, the socio-environment component of disability, and the areas of personal and social activities affected by disability. Given all of this complexity and the normative nature of disability, why is it still important to know the number of people with disabilities? [Hint: What I am thinking of has something to do with money.]

Reporting of a Work Limiting Health Problem or Disability among Persons Ages 25-61



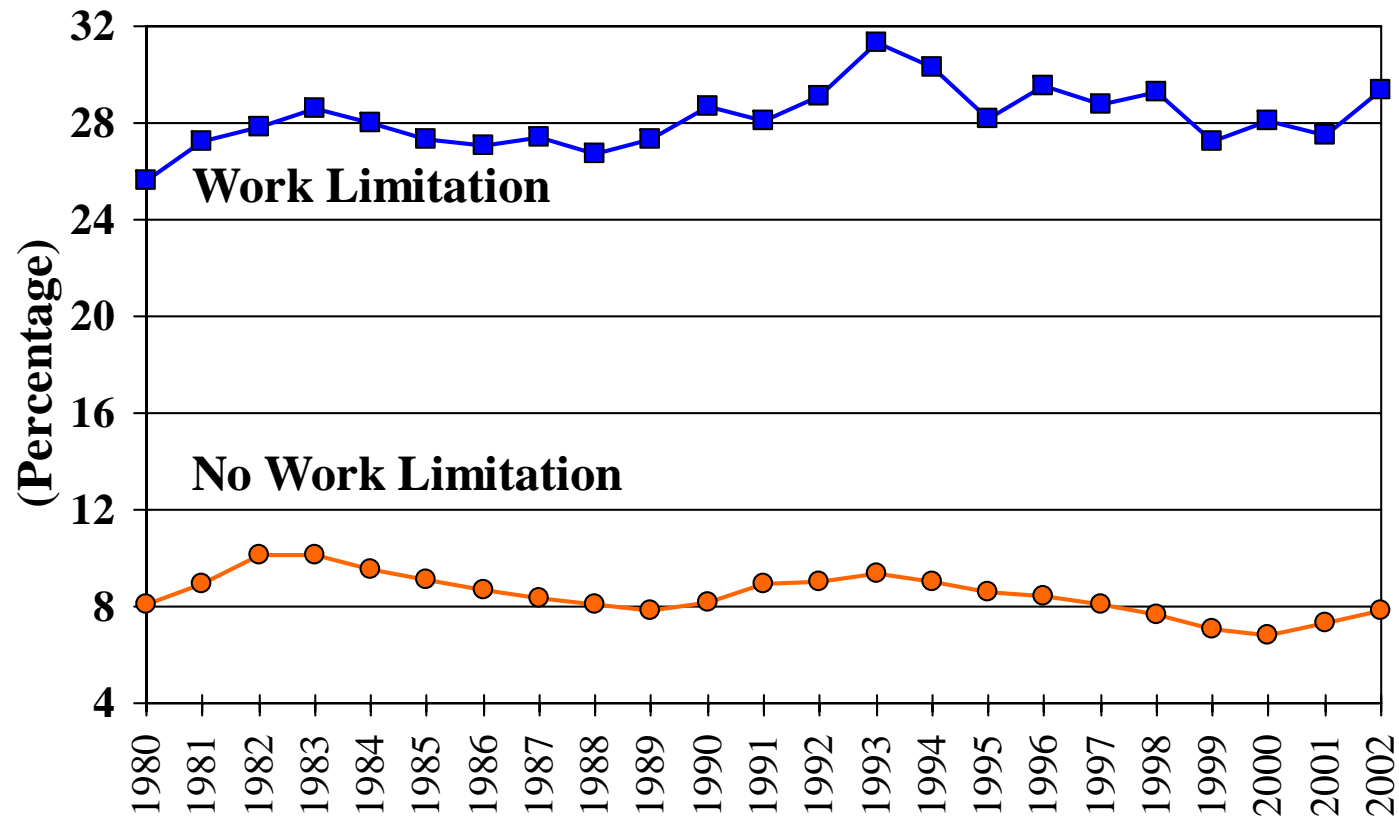
Source: Author's calculations using the Current Population Survey (CPS), 1981-2003.

Reporting of a Work Limiting Health Problem or Disability among Persons Ages 25-61, by State, in 2003



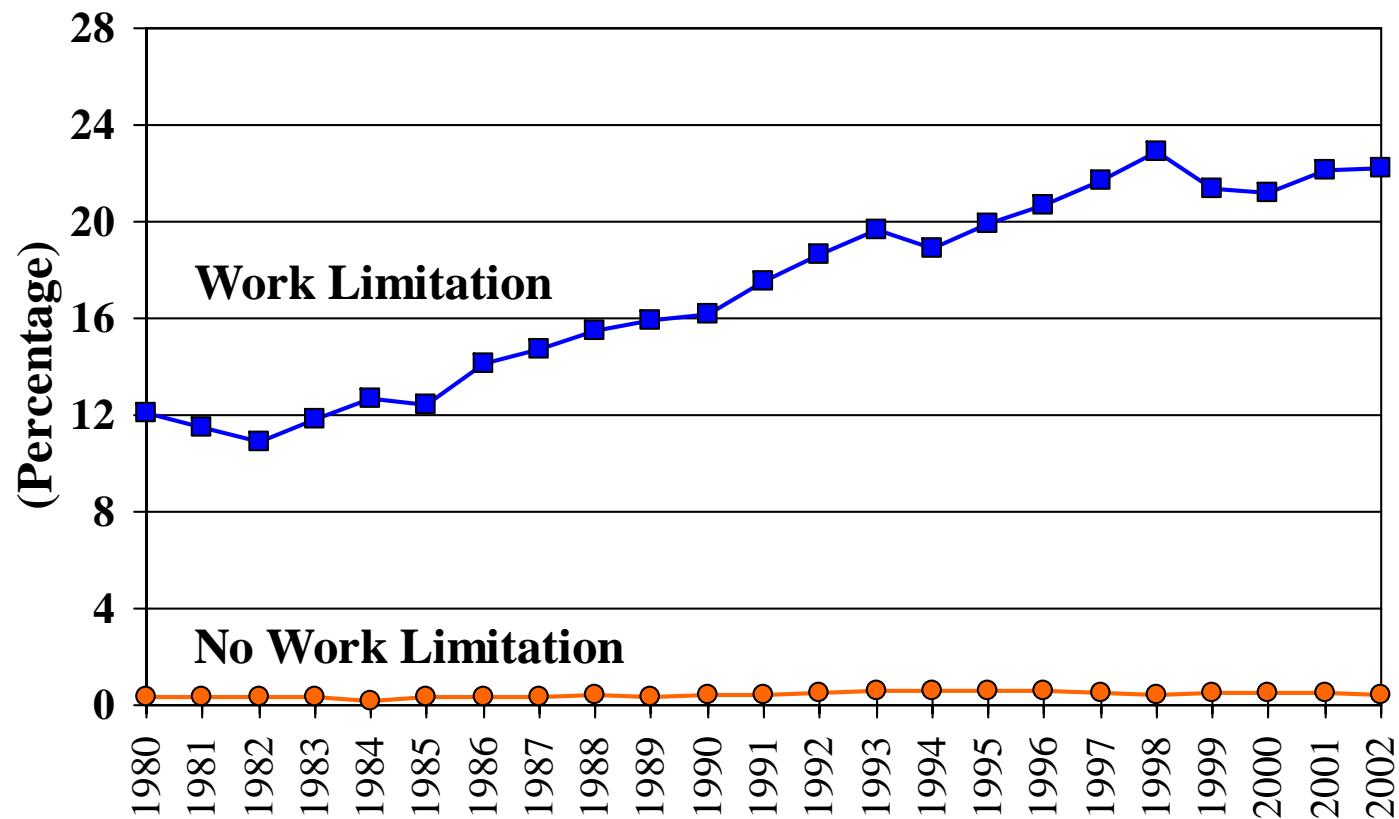
Source: Author's calculations using the Current Population Survey (CPS), 2003.

Poverty Rate, by Work Limitation Status (Ages 25-61)



Source: Author's calculations using the Current Population Survey (CPS), 1981-2003.

Receipt of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), by Work Limitation Status (Ages 25-61)



Source: Author's calculations using the Current Population Survey (CPS), 1981-2003.

Question 2

- OPPS: How many people with disabilities are there in the United States and what is the definition of disability?

Possible Answer

- 54 million is often cited.
 - Corresponds to a prevalence rate of 20.6 percent.
 - Based on Census Bureau estimates using the 1994 SIPP.
 - Non-institutionalized, Civilians, the 2000 Census reports about 2 million people living in disability-related institutions.
 - A “kitchen sink” definition of disability (e.g., one or more ADLs/IADLs; use of a wheelchair, a cane, crutches, or a walker; receipt of federal disability benefits)
 - Source: <http://www.census.gov/prod/3/97pubs/p70-61.pdf>

Other Answers

- National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)
 - 34 million (or 12 percent of) non-institutionalized civilians of all ages are limited in usual activities due to one or more chronic health conditions in 2002.
 - Source: www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_10/sr10_220.pdf
- American Community Survey (ACS)
 - 41 million (or 13 percent of) non-institutionalized civilians ages 5 and older have a disability in 2002
 - Source: www.census.gov/acs/www
- March Current Population Survey (CPS)
 - 22 million (or 10 percent of) non-institutionalized civilians ages 16 to 64 reported a work disability in 2002.
 - Source: www.census.gov/hhes/www/disability.html

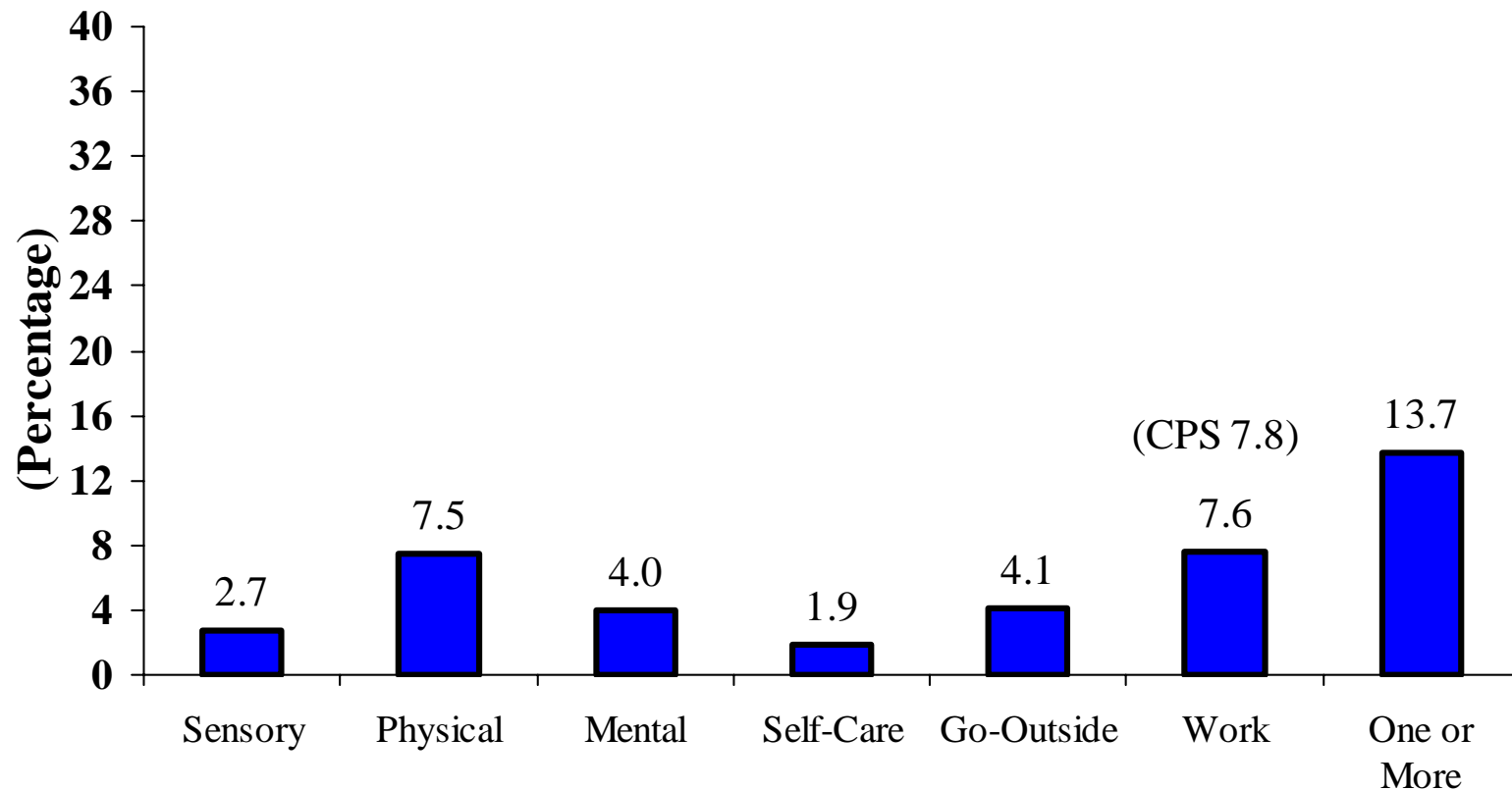
Question 3

- What is the best definition of disability available in Federal surveys? Explain your answer.
 - Possible Answer: There is no gold standard. It depends on the reason why you need to define disability. You must choose wisely, and whenever possible, get information in as great a deal and from as many sources as possible.

Example: Disability-Related Questions in the ACS and 2000 Census Long-Form

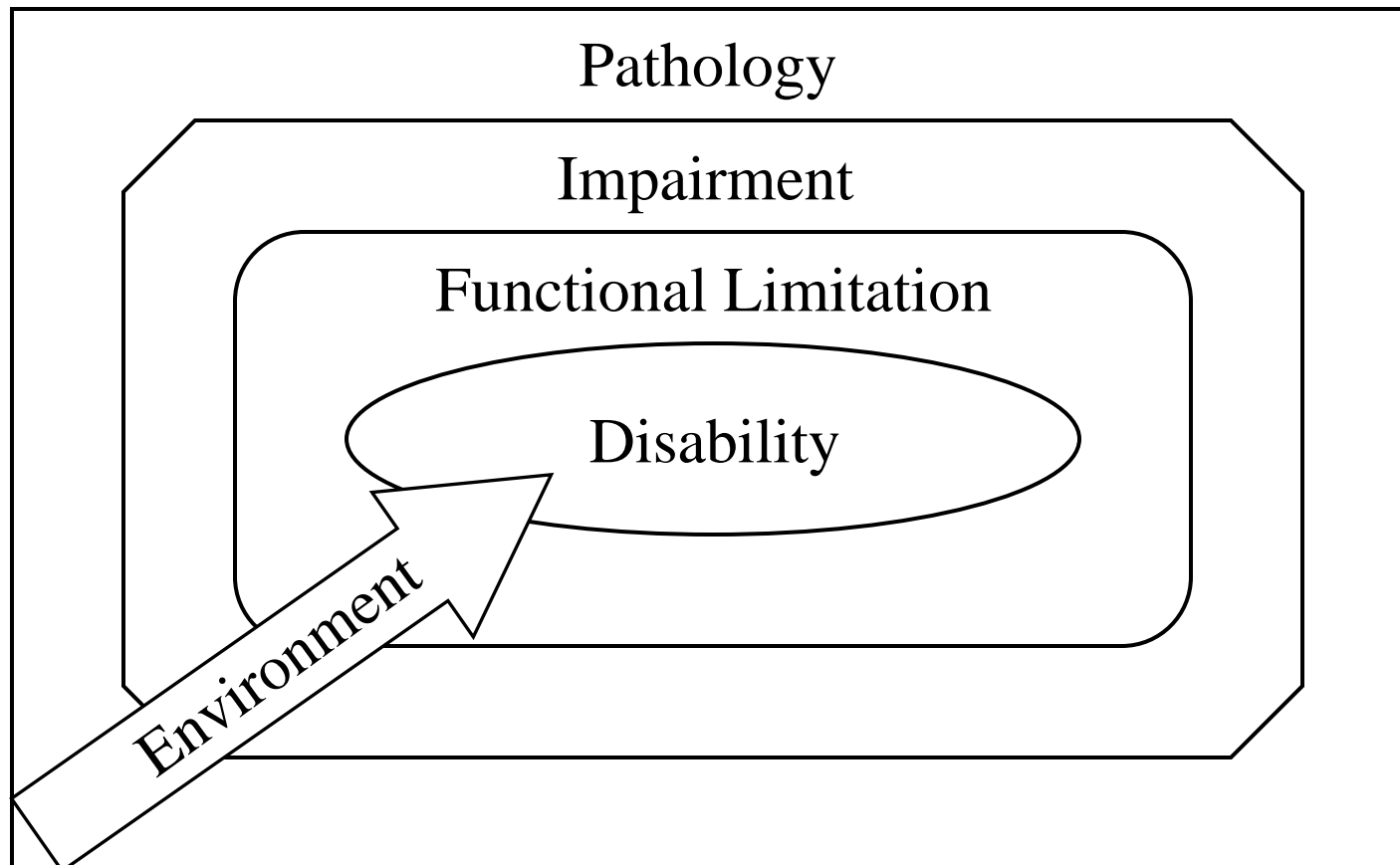
- **Does this person have any of the following long-lasting conditions:**
 - (a) Blindness, deafness, or a severe vision or hearing impairment?
 - (b) A condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying?
- **Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition lasting 6 months or more, does this person have any difficulty in doing any of the following activities:**
 - (a) Learning, remembering, or concentrating?
 - (b) Dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home?

Prevalence of Disability among Persons Ages 25-61, by Type, 2002 American Community Survey

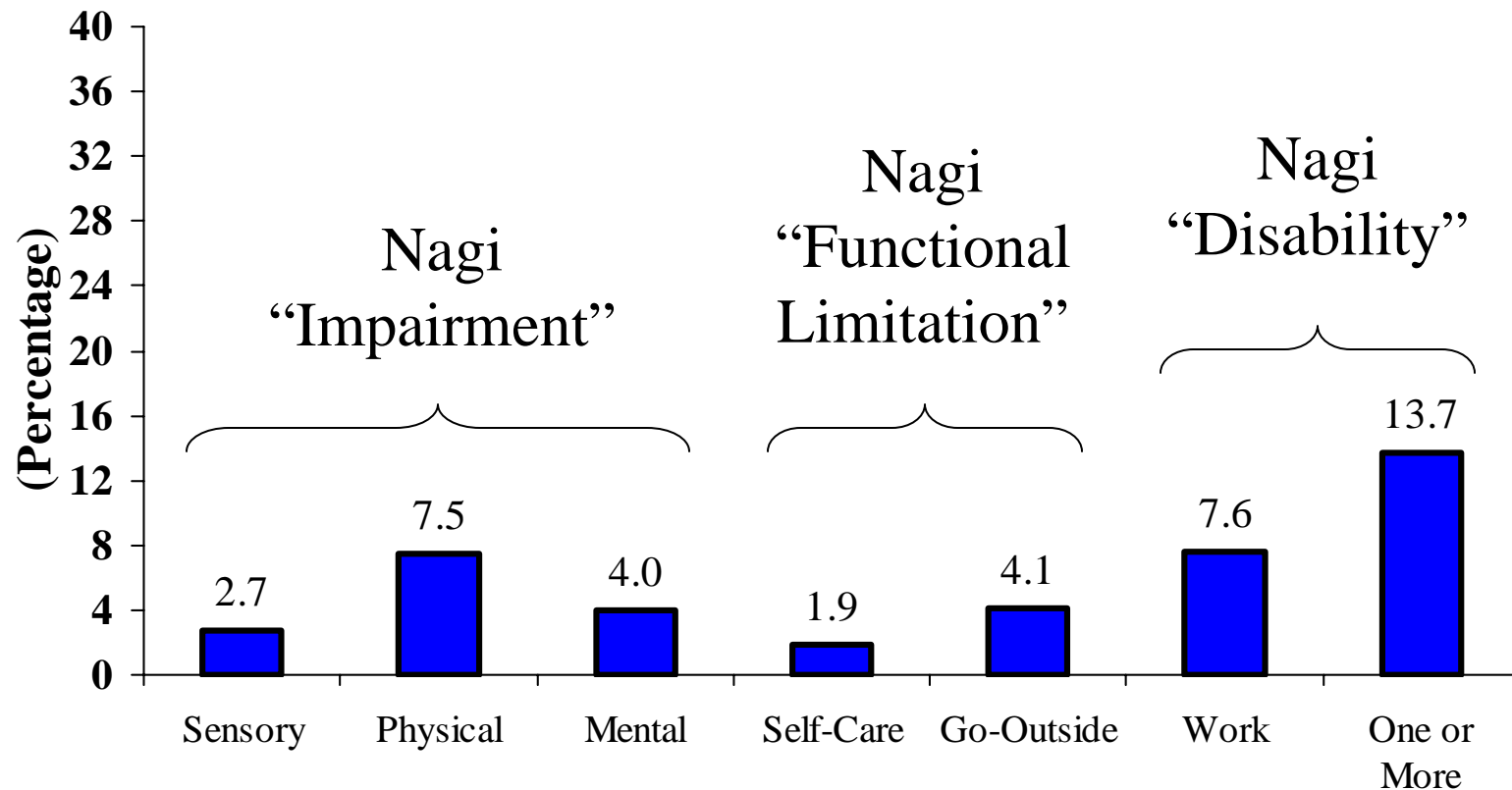


Source: Calculations by Robert Weathers, Cornell University, using the 2002 American Community Survey.

Conceptual Definition of Disability—Nagi



Prevalence of Disability among Persons Ages 25-61, by Type, 2002 American Community Survey



Source: Calculations by Robert Weathers, Cornell University, using the 2002 American Community Survey.

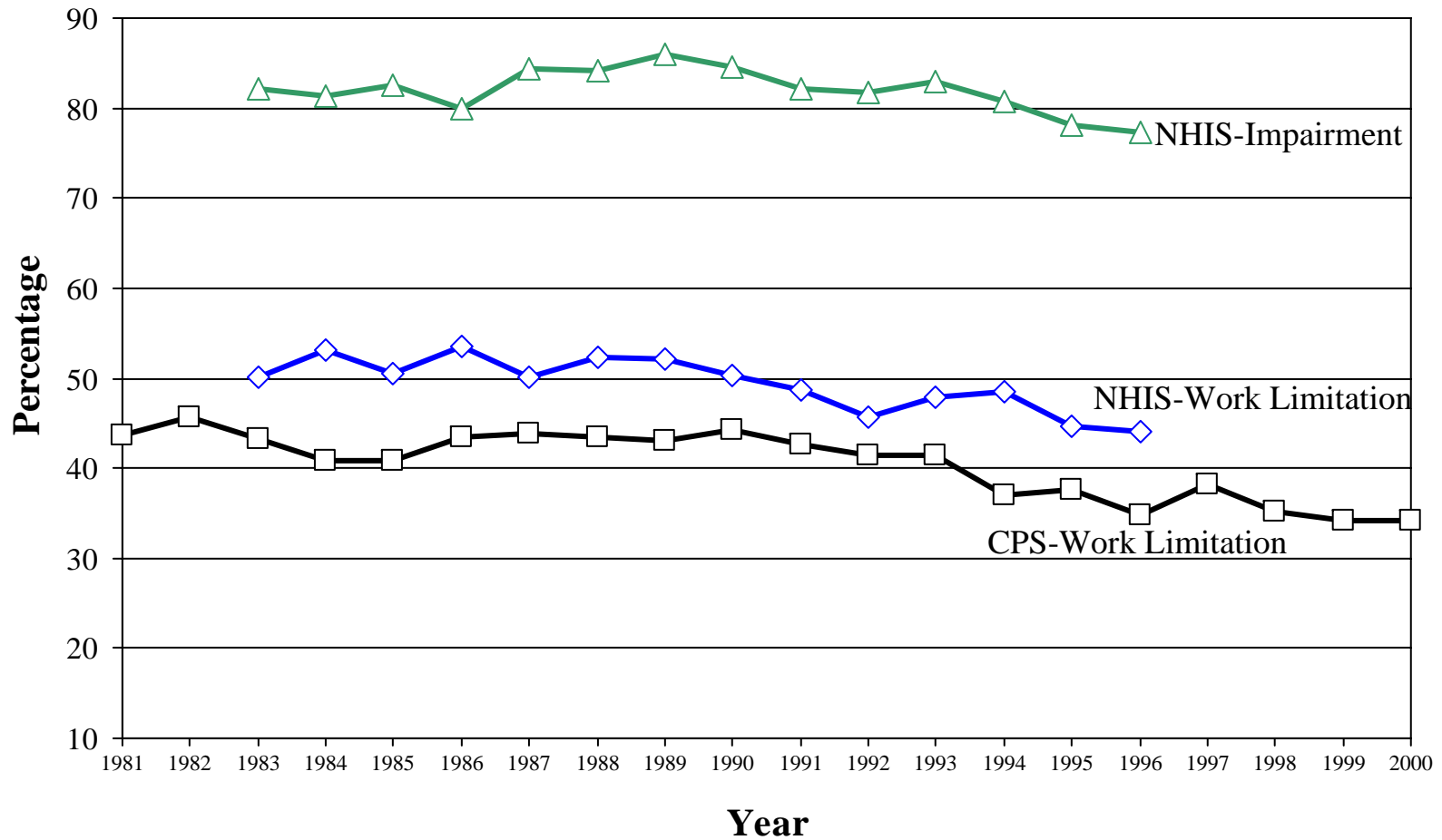
Question 4

- How many people who reported being “blind in both eyes” DID NOT report a health condition or impairment that limited the kind or amount of work they could do.
 - Possible Answer: About 31 percent.

Prevalence of Reporting Specific Impairments
Among Working Age Persons
(NHIS, pooled 1983-96)

Group	Prevalence Rate	Share Reporting Work Limitation
Blind in Both Eyes	0.15%	69.0%
Deaf in Both Ears	0.37	38.0
Cerebral Palsy	0.09	74.5

Employment Rate Among Working Age Men who Report Disability, Using Alternative Disability Definitions from the NHIS and CPS, 1981-2000



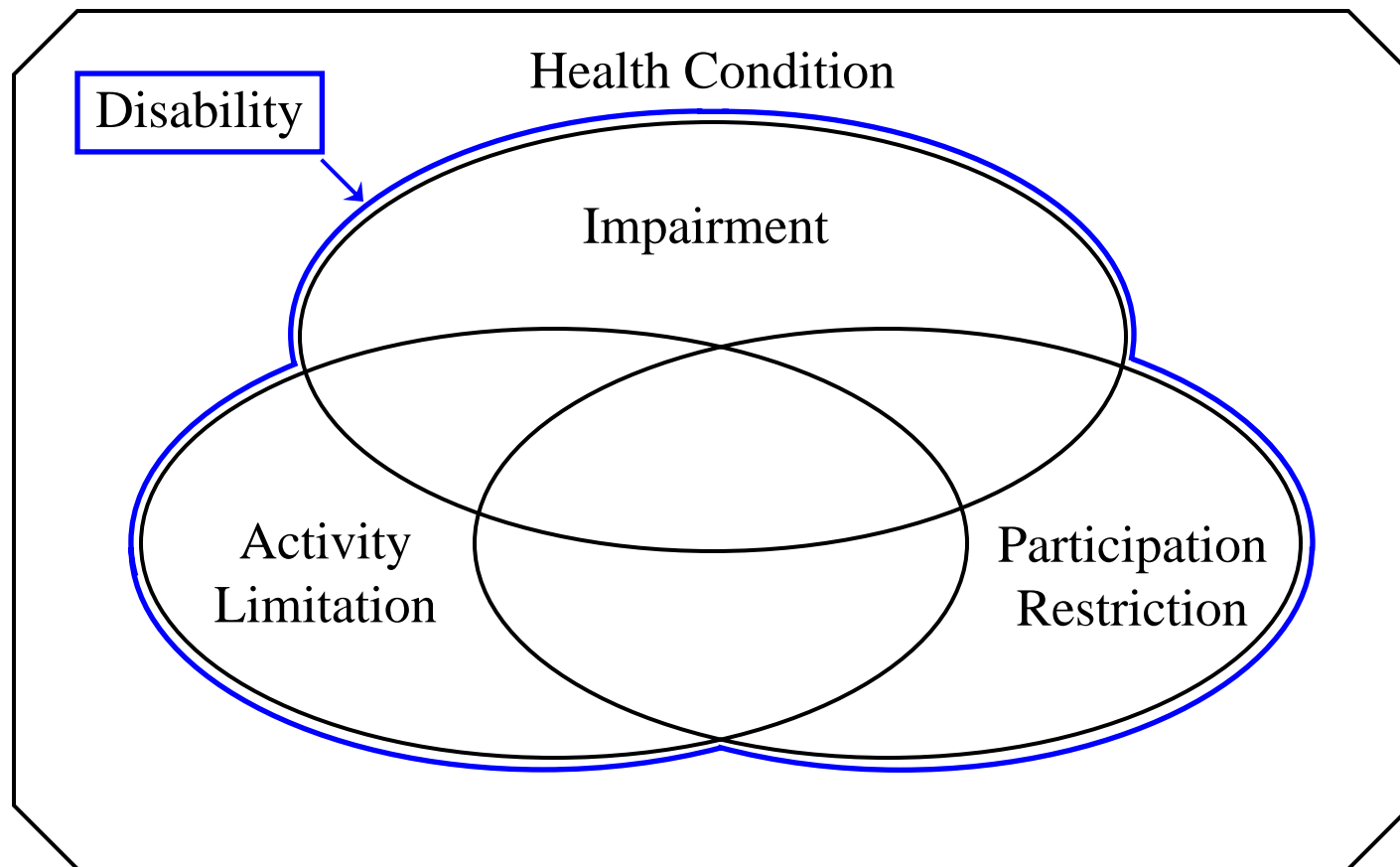
Question 5

- While I am here ... The unemployment rate is around 5 to 6 percent. What is the unemployment rate among people with disabilities?
 - Possible Answer: About 20 percent, depending on the definition of disability.

Question 6

- The unemployment rate is the percentage of the labor force who are employed. The labor force is defined as those are employed or have actively looked for work in the last four weeks. Why wouldn't the unemployment rate be a good measure to identify the lack of employment among working age people with disabilities? [Hint: Who would be left out of the labor force?]
 - Possible Answer: It drops people who have not "actively looked for work in the past four weeks", thus it would miss people with disabilities that are discouraged in the job search process, and it would also miss people on DI and SSI—a population we know increase dramatically in the 1990s.

Conceptual Definition of Disability—ICF/WHO



Question 7

- The Nagi frameworks acknowledge the role of the environment in the transformation of “pathologies/impairments” into “functional limitations/ disabilities”. The ICF is attempting to codify and quantify the environmental components of “disability”. Suppose you suggested to a health insurance company that it use the ICF rather than their current health based classification system (ICD-10). What do you think would be the response of the health insurance company? What would a workers compensation insurance company say?

Question 8

- In what way does the Social Security Administration (SSA) explicitly incorporate the role of the environment in their disability determination process? [Hint: It is not very explicit or expansive.]
 - Possible Answer: Whether there exists a job in the national economy for which the applicant can do with a reasonable degree of retaining.

Question 9

- Suppose the Social Security Administration (SSA) codified the entire ICF within their disability determination process. What implications do you think this would have for SSA policy and recent efforts of SSA to return to work?
 - Possible Answer: It might motivate SSA to work to address environmental barriers to employment and other activities.

Question 10

- What currently causes labor lawyers (representing both people with disabilities and employers) a great deal of uncertainty?
 - Possible Answer: Based on my discussions with a few labor lawyers -- the lack of a clear definition of disability.

Contact Information

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