Health Care Access and Status of Children Raised by a Parent with Disabilities: Results from the 2007 and 2008 North Carolina BRFSS and CHAMP Surveys

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Background
Thirty percent of adults with a disability (ages 18-64) are responsible for the care of a minor living in their household, and approximately 20% of all parents of children under age 18 have a disability. Caregivers with a disability face unique parenting challenges as a result of their disability. Previous studies on children raised by a parent with a disability rely on small sample sizes or fail to include aspects of general health of the child.

Study Objective
The purpose of the current study is to characterize health care access and outcomes in children and adolescents raised by a primary caregiver with or without a disability.

Methods
Design
- Data included cross sectional surveys collected in 2007 and 2008 through the North Carolina BRFSS and CHAMP.
- The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an annual telephone survey that assesses health characteristics of adults age 18 and older.
- The Child Health Assessment and Monitoring Program (CHAMP) is an annual telephone survey that assesses health characteristics of children (birth-17 years). Eligible children for the CHAMP survey are drawn from the BRFSS.
- The CHAMP sample includes aspects of general health of the child.

Sample
- 66% of all BRFSS households with a child (ages 0-27) completed CHAMP.
- 23% of primary caregivers were identified as disabled.

Table 1. Sample sizes by survey year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Year</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRFSS</td>
<td>14,777</td>
<td>14,409</td>
<td>29,186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRFSS Households with Children</td>
<td>4,334</td>
<td>4,656</td>
<td>8,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete BRFSS</td>
<td>2,757</td>
<td>2,797</td>
<td>5,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete CHAMP (Current Study)</td>
<td>2,251</td>
<td>2,418</td>
<td>4,671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caregiver with a Disability</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>1,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caregiver without a Disability</td>
<td>1,444</td>
<td>1,808</td>
<td>3,252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures
Primary Caregiver with Disabilities: Disability status of the primary caregiver was based on respondent endorsements of one or more of the 4 disability questions on the 2007 and 2008 BRFSS surveys [2 questions from the Core Disability Module and 2 NC state added disability questions].

Child Health Care Access and Outcomes: Child health characteristics were assessed through the 2007 and 2008 North Carolina CHAMP surveys.

Statistical Analyses
- BRFSS and CHAMP data are weighted based on estimates from the North Carolina state census. SAS 9.2 (Cary, NC) software survey procedures were used to account for the complex survey design. The t-test statistic or t-test was used to access whether sample characteristics differed by caregiver disability. Logistic regression models were used to examine differences in child health characteristics by caregiver disability, after accounting for other covariates.

Results
Demographic Characteristics of Caregivers with and without a Disability (Table 1)
- Compared to caregivers without a disability, caregivers with a disability are:
  - more likely to have lower levels of education.
  - more likely to have a household income < 200% Federal Poverty Level.
  - older (mean age = 41.9 years vs. 38.5 years).
  - more likely to be a grandparent.
  - less likely to be married.
  - less likely to be employed for wages.

Findings highlight the particular health needs among children raised by a caregiver with a disability. Compared to children raised by a caregiver without a disability, children raised by a caregiver with a disability:
- are more likely to receive ‘fair or poor’ general health ratings.
- are more likely to be overweight/obese.
- are more likely to use more medical, mental health or educational services than their peers.

Conclusion
- Children of both caregivers with or without a disability have similar health care access and utilization.
- Children raised by a caregiver with a disability appear to have significantly worse health outcomes.
- Children with disabilities were more likely to be employed for wages.
- Children raised by a caregiver with a disability were more likely to use more medical, mental health or educational services than their peers.

Child Health Care Access and Utilization (Figure 2)
- Compared to children raised by a caregiver without a disability, children raised by a caregiver with a disability were:
  - more likely to be enrolled in Medicaid/NC Health Choice.
  - More likely to have dental insurance.

Child Health Status (Figure 3)
- Compared to children raised by a caregiver without a disability, children raised by a caregiver with a disability were:
  - more likely to report ‘fair or poor’ general health ratings.
  - More likely to be overweight/obese.
  - More likely to have asthma.
  - More likely to use more medical, mental health or educational services than their peers.

Child Health Care Access and Utilization (Figure 2)
- Compared to children raised by a caregiver without a disability, children raised by a caregiver with a disability were:
  - more likely to be enrolled in Medicaid/NC Health Choice.
  - More likely to have dental insurance.

Implications
- When providing support for persons with disability, there is a need to focus both on the person with a disability and on the needs of all of the family members.
- Development of ‘in-generational’ models of health care and services should be investigated.
- Further study is necessary to inform state and federal policies that may alleviate health disparities among children raised by a caregiver with a disability.
- The major finding of this study was that children raised by a caregiver with a disability had low household incomes. The impact of poverty on children living with a caregiver with a disability merits further research.