

High income: lower disability rates

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A University of California-Berkeley-led study has found health disparities exist even between those with higher incomes.

"What was unusual was that we found that people in the middle class were still at a disadvantage, compared with those at just a slightly higher income," said Meredith Minkler, professor of health and social behavior and lead author. "The fact that there's a significant difference between people at 600 and 700 percent above the poverty level was a striking finding of this study." Although broken down by age, income and household size, the study showed, for example, a 65-year-old man making about \$50,000 had 44 percent more chance of disability than one making \$58,000.

"We have lots of evidence that wealthier people in society are healthier and live longer than the poorest," said Minkler, "but less settled is whether you see this gradient with respect to disability." The study said less smoking, less stress, better access to health care and healthier, safer environments are some possible explanations.

Co-authors of the study are Esme Fuller-Thomson of the University of Toronto and Dr. Jack Guralnik of the National Institute on Aging.

The research appears in the current issue of the New England Journal of Medicine.

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