

Risk of disability rises in states with income inequality

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A massive survey conducted by researchers at the University of Toronto reveals Americans living in states with high rates of income inequality are significantly more likely to have a disability that limits the completion of daily tasks such as dressing, bathing and mobility at home.

“We’ve always known personal income and education can affect one’s health outcomes,” says Esme Fuller-Thomson, study co-author and assistant professor of social work at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at U of T. “What we didn’t know until now was the substantial strength of the relationship between state-level income inequality and disability. This research shows that individuals have a higher likelihood of physical disability when they live in states where wealth is distributed very unevenly.”

Fuller-Thomson and Tahany Gadalla, study co-author and assistant professor of social work at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at U of T, looked at information collected from 645,000 Americans through the 2003 American Community Survey. Their study findings are published this month in the British journal *Public Health*.

Other key findings, which can be read online at <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/00333506> (under Articles in Press) include:

-- In states with greater inequality, the rich were also at a health disadvantage. Both rich and poor people living in states with unequal wealth distribution were more likely to have high-level disabilities than their counterparts living in states where income is distributed more equally.

-- Living in a state with unequal wealth distribution is nearly as much of a risk factor as gender in predicting certain disabilities. Overall, Americans living in states with high income inequality were 11 per cent more likely to have a disability than those living in states where wealth is more widely

distributed.

-- New York, Arizona and the District of Columbia were the three regions with the highest levels of income inequality.

Source: University of Toronto

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