



**The Experiences of Black People with Disabilities and
Their Rights Under the Americans with Disabilities Act:
Findings from a Focus Group Study**

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Agenda

-  Team Introductions
-  Study Background
-  Methodology
-  Results
-  Discussion
-  Q&A

Webinar Host

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Welcome and Introductions



**Ann
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Speakers

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Image Center

Study Background

(Goodman et al., 2019)

1

Black individuals with disabilities (IWD) face unique challenges in many settings (e.g., workplaces, healthcare, education)

2

Intersection of race and disability amplifies barriers to asserting rights under the ADA

3

Limited research focus on Black IWD understanding of their legal rights

Study Background, Comparisons

(Goodman et al., 2019; The White House, 2023)

Black Americans report higher rates of disabilities:

- **14%** of working-age Black Americans vs. **11%** of white Americans
- By age **60**: **30%** of Black Americans vs. **20%** of white Americans

Black Students:

- **17.7%** of those served under IDEA but account for **39%** of expulsions in K-12 schools

Study Background: Health Disparities

(Barsky, 2024; Holliman, et al, 2023;
Green et al., 2004)

*Less likely to seek medical care and
more likely to have poorer outcomes*

*4× more likely to need amputation
due to poor diabetes care*

*More likely to be misdiagnosed with
schizophrenia over affective disorders*

*Higher disability rates among patients
with chronic pain syndrome*

Study Background: Workplace Accommodations Disparities

(Blanck et al., 2020; Hyseni et al., 2024; Abrokwa, 2018)

Workers of color are *less likely* to request accommodations.

When they do, they are *less likely* to receive them than white workers.

Black IWD may fear that asking for help signals failure for themselves and their communities.

Accommodations received may *not be aligned* with *functional needs*

Study Background, Continued



Courts begun to recognize threat of intersectionality on the rights, but progress is slow (Abrokwa, 2018)



Burden falls on individuals to understand and fight for their rights



Unclear how black IWD and their allies can be reached

Study Background, Research



Existing research often compares groups instead of centering lived experiences (e.g., Kilpatrick & Taylor, 2017)



Comparative studies reveal trends but may miss unique challenges



We need research that prioritizes Black IWD voices

Study Background – Research Questions

1. How do Black Americans with disabilities understand their rights under the ADA, and where do they access information about these rights?

2. What are the experiences and barriers of Black Americans with disabilities in accessing the rights?

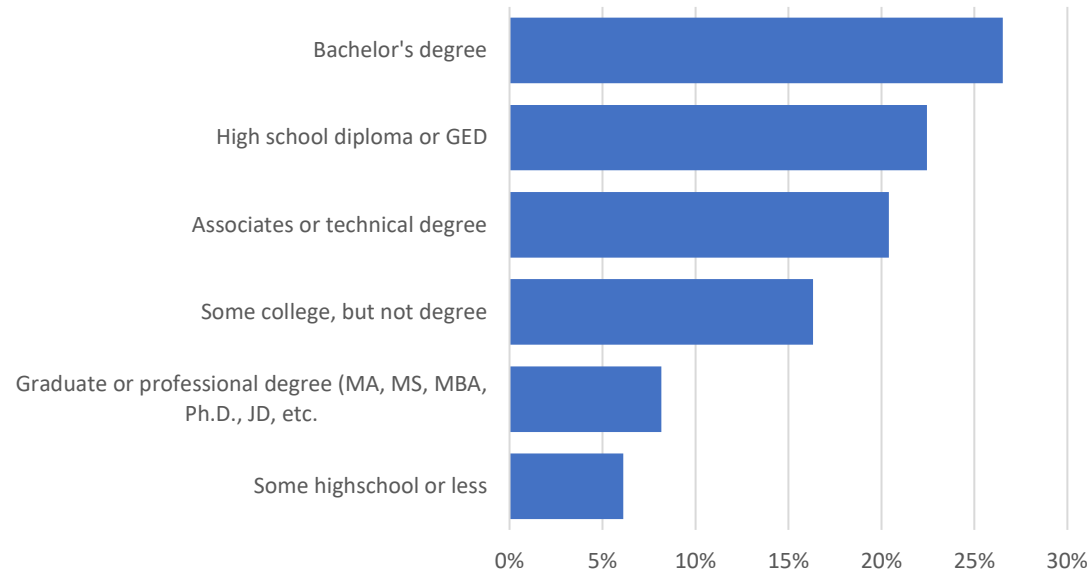
3. What strategies do they use in their efforts to assert and attain their rights?

- 4 Focus Groups
- Participants were recruited through snowball and convenience sampling
 - Centers for Independent Living (CIL)
- 50 Participants (Women – 57%; Men – 33%)

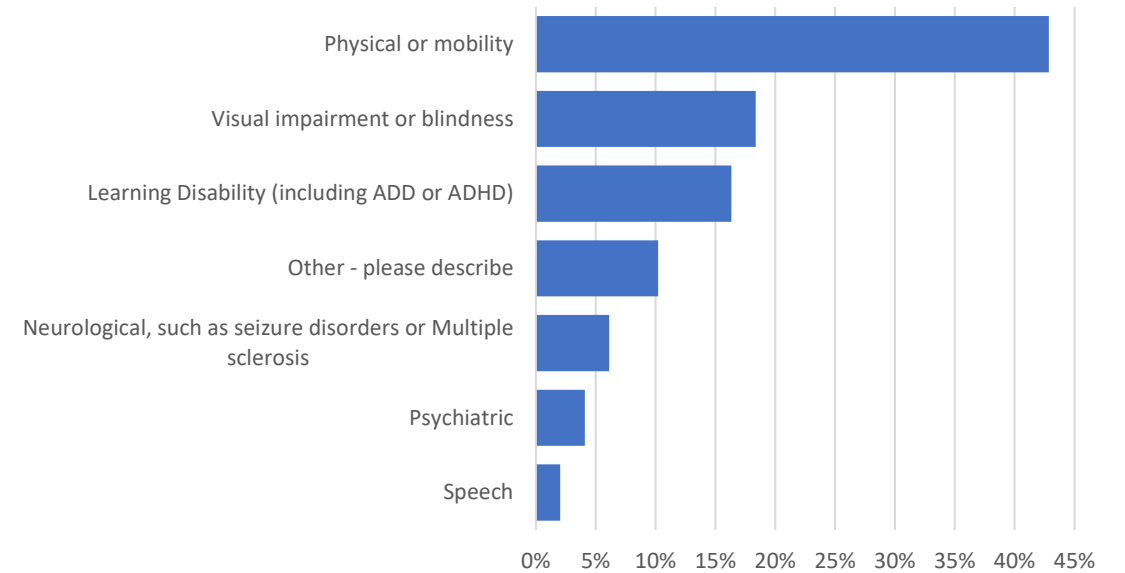
Methodology

Methodology - Participants

Level of Education



Primary disability



Sample Interview Questions

- Can you think of a situation when you felt discriminated against because of your disability (e.g., school, work)?
- Describe a situation where you had to advocate for yourself (in school, on a job)

Methodology, Interview Questions

Methodology - Team

Coding team:
Two coders and
one auditor

Thematic
Analysis (Braun
and Clarke, 2012)

Results

7 key themes

- Understanding and knowing their rights under ADA
- Identity Struggles and Belonging
- Inadequate disability resources and supports
- Discrimination and marginalization
- Continued Advocacy
- Sources of information
- Disability supports and accommodations.

Theme 1: Understanding and Knowing Their Rights Under ADA

- **ADA promotes inclusion and equal access (N = 28)**

“It allows people with disabilities to have the same rights as non-disabled people... covers basic living, employment, and getting services.”

- **Disability rights under ADA are integral to civil rights (N = 15)**

“The ADA allowed people to see that disability rights is combined. It's not something actually separate from basic civil rights. It causes an inclusion. It brought forth an inclusion of the disabled community into basic civil rights for people.”

Theme 1: Understanding and Knowing Their Rights Under ADA (cont.)

Lack of awareness and desire to know more about the ADA (N = 11)

“If I'm being honest, I really didn't understand it. I didn't know nothing about it. I am so glad I'm on here to get some tools from it and some points about it.”

Theme 2: Identity Struggles and Need for Belonging

Desire for a 'normal' life, career and social support (N = 9)

“When I walk out the door, I want people to see me for who I am...not the blind lady that lives across the street. So, you know, see us for who we are and not, you know, our disability.”

Disability salience in multiple marginalized identities (N = 9)

“But like I say, I feel as a disabled person, I'm my own race. I'm not black or white. It's just my race is disabled. And you're either going to run across a person who wants to help, or you're going to run across a person who does not want to help. And that's my experience”

Theme 2: Identity Struggles and Need for Belonging (cont.)

Psychosocial Impact and Struggles (N = 13)

“So, I struggled in silence for a minute until I was trying to figure out, okay, how do I adjust my own self to pass classes.”

“You have to work harder than the average person like 10 times harder. Just to let them know you're, you are a better worker than the other person. Not that you're competing, but in the way you are because they're already staring you down”

Fighting disability stereotypes and stigma (N = 5)

“Years ago when I had to collect unemployment, I went to unemployment and I had my sister with me. Well, the person behind the desk says, can you tell her that she needs to come back in two weeks? And I said, excuse me, I can hear. I'm blind, I'm not deaf. My sister said here, she can hear. Why don't you talk to her?”

Theme 3: Inadequate Disability Resources and Supports

Four categories

Lack of support for accommodations ($N = 14$)

Lack of integration of disability services, and supports, access barriers ($N = 12$)

Lack of access to information ($N = 10$)

Inadequate funding and resources ($N = 5$)

Theme 3: Inadequate Disability Resources and Support - Participant Experience

“for example, it took me about seven months to find an ADA accessible apartment because by – there are no laws to restrict renters from just renting out these apartments to folks that don’t even need the requirements that I am looking for. So, that limits the resources, especially those with low incomes.”

Theme 3: Inadequate Disability Resources and Supports - Participant Experience (cont.)

“I was in junior college, and one of my professors -- I knew a little bit now about some accommodations, but I figured let me ask. So, I asked my professor could he give me a printed copy of the notes, because I can't see the board. I can't see the projector or anything. And he straight out told me no. And I said there's no way that I can be able to pass this class without [(notes)]. Everyone else that's here is able to take notes down, and I'm the only one here that can't take notes down because I can't see the board.”

Theme 4: Discrimination and Marginalization- Categories

**Three
categories**

Discrimination based on disability ($N = 28$)

Discrimination based on multiple
marginalized identities ($N = 22$)

Discrimination based on race ($N = 6$)

Theme 4: Discrimination and Marginalization

Discrimination based on their disability

“I had an experience where I went on a job interview and the lady told me that they had already filled the position and when I was still searching for a job, I seen that same job listing in the paper. So, I knew they hadn't filled the position, but it was just I guess whatever issues that they had with me on my disability that they felt like I couldn't get the job done adequately.”

Discrimination based on their race

“Sometimes [because of] the color of the skin you don't get the information readily. And for some reason black people got to push more and more and more to get ([information]) because the next person, our other color counterparts, get the information. Sometimes they don't even ask. The information is given to them.”

Theme 4: Experiencing Discrimination and Marginalization

Discrimination Based on Multiple Marginalized Identities

“But because of our disability, you're just adding the fact that, okay, if we have racial disparities, okay, if we have a disability to go along with that, that makes it tenfold to me, because, you know, you're dealing with the fact that economically we're struggling to get proper medical attention, but then when you put on the fact that it's a disability also, it's sort of like now you're dealing not with just one issue, you're dealing with the both of them at the same time.”

Theme 5: Continued Advocacy and Empowerment

Four categories

Self and Other Advocacy for Disability rights and Accommodations ($N = 37$)

Collective Advocacy ($N = 16$)

Continued fight for Disability rights ($N = 16$)

Increasing visibility and awareness among communities about disability ($N = 24$)

Theme 5: Continued Advocacy and Empowerment

Self and Other Advocacy for Disability Rights and Accommodations

“An example of a situation I had to advocate for myself was when I advocated for the right to have interpreters at my doctor’s appointment since I have a hearing disability. I contacted his office ahead of time to request an interpreter, explaining how important it is for me to have such access. Lucky for me, I had an interpreter in my next appointment.”

Theme 5: Continued Advocacy and Empowerment - Collective Advocacy

“Collectively, we could be a voice individually you might make a little noise. So, we have we have to unite. We would be a powerful force to work with, but it seemed like was so divided. You know whether it's divided based on disability or whatever you know, if we would come together, our voices would be heard, and I told them we need it Me too Movement. You got a me too and we got to the Black Lives Matter? Why don't we have one, you know. And I think if we did, things would be so different for us, and that's all I have to say.”

Theme 5: Continued Advocacy and Empowerment

Continued Fight for Disability Rights

“I think we get to sit at the table when we show up like now, when we show up and we share the different experiences, and keep fighting. And you know what ya’ll? Being disabled, it is a fight. It is. And like the young lady said, every day. And I was just sharing with my family, it seems like every time I need something, I’ve got to fight for it”

Theme 5: Continued Advocacy and Empowerment

Increasing Visibility and Awareness Among Communities About Disability

“And then there’s a group of us that, you know, we try to get together at least once a month just to go out to the restaurant. And I’m telling you, heads turn when they see a group of people with disabilities. Wow, they can do that? Yes, we can. And more.”

Theme 6: Sources of Information

Proactively sharing information with others
(*N* = 20)

Disability Organizations
(*N* = 19)

Learning from others within their community (*N* = 13)

Social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok) (*N* = 14)

Learning by being involved with the community (*N* = 9)

Other: Mass media (e.g., TV commercials, newspapers), government websites, churches, schools, and health care professionals (*N* = 23).

Theme 6: Sources of Information - Participant

“So, the information today and after the 90’s, that’s from meeting other people that’s in the situation that I’m in because I didn’t meet a lot of people that were in a wheelchair. So, after that, when I met – that was C, who I met, and that was most around the people I have been around in wheelchairs, that was telling me about programs that I never knew.”

Theme 7: Receiving Disability Supports and Accommodations

“there's certain theaters in Boston that has special seating accommodation for those in electric chairs and wheelchairs, but those with vision impaired, they put them in the aisle that's rised up so they are -- the vision is better. It's really -- it's really awesome, because we worked so hard while I was a lobbyist to get these things done.”

Theme 7: Receiving Disability Supports and Accommodations

Evolving and Diverse Needs

“Because you notice every -- the way that the world is moving on, the accommodations, of course, are going to be different. Those things were good then, but people are getting out more -- people with disabilities are getting out more, so we're going to need more different accommodations.”

Fight for Access & Equity Continues...

Black IWD face persistent struggles to access services, resources, and rights.

Racism and Disability Stigma

Barriers to access are harder to overcome.

Fight for Access & Equity Continues...

Lived Experiences

Their experiences reflect deep disparities in social & economic opportunity.

The journey toward equity is not just about rights—it's about the daily fight for dignity and inclusion.

Unyielding Advocacy – a Strength

- Black IWD are making their needs known in the workplace, education, and healthcare.
- Coming together to amplify their voices, demanding systemic changes.



Recommendations – Future Research

- Role of systemic racism in the implementation and enforcement of ADA policies for Black communities
- Interventions: Peer-led advocacy programs role in empowering Black IWD
- Role of social support in helping black IWD engage in advocacy
- Exploring strategies to shift negative perceptions and stigma around disability

Recommendations

- Make disability visible in social movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter)
- Strengthen collective action in local communities

BLACK LIVES WITH DISABILITIES MATTER



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Recommendations (cont.)

- Prioritize Disability Education & Awareness
 - Receiving early information is key
 - Use grassroots networks (e.g., disability org.) to disseminate ADA information
 - Leverage social media & digital platforms
 - Empower peer-leaders & community advocates



Download Information on Study



Upcoming Webinar

**#2 Intersectionality: Unpacking Discrimination,
Stigma, and Multiple Marginalization**

June 3: 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. ET

YOUR THOUGHTS MATTER – LET’S DISCUSS (Q&A)

What resonated with you the most from this presentation?

What role can you play in increasing disability awareness for and in Black communities?

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Thank You for Joining Us!

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