Disability and poverty in Nigeria

Policy brief from Curb Cut. Results of 1 November 2026.

Key finding

People in households with a member aged 5 or older who has a severe difficulty are 11.7 percentage points more likely to be multidimensionally poor than people in comparable households (95% confidence interval 6.1 to 17.2 points). In comparable households without such a member, 62.9% of people are multidimensionally poor. Standardised to the same mix of households, the figure with such a member would be 74.6%.

Exposure is rare, so the main estimate leans on few households. Among households where the comparison is better supported (those whose estimated chance of having such a member was between 0.01 and 0.99, 38.3% of people), the difference is 8.1 points (95% confidence interval 2.1 to 14.1). It is a secondary estimate, reported next to the main one. Of 52,022 households in the sample, 545 (1.1% of people) were left out for missing poverty data and 59 (0.2% of people) for missing disability answers.

What this does and does not show

This is **an adjusted association, not a causal effect**. It does not show that disability makes households poorer. Two reasons:

1. Poverty can come first. Earlier poverty can lead to disability, for example through poor nutrition, unsafe work or little health care, and earlier poverty also goes with poverty today. A survey at one point in time cannot tell which came first.
2. Some shared factors were not measured. Religion, ethnicity, conflict, local health services and the household's earlier poverty are not in the survey, and a factor like these could account for part or all of the difference. How strong such a factor would need to be.

How strong would a hidden factor need to be? Two answers to two different questions. In the worst case, a factor lined up perfectly with both poverty and which households have such a member, accounting for 1.8% of what is left unexplained in each, could bring the estimate to zero. A factor as strong as the head's education, place or urban or rural, and lined up with poverty and exposure the way each of those is, would move it only to between 10.7 and 12.7 points. On the risk-ratio scale, the E-value is 1.66.

Who counts as having a severe difficulty comes from MPI's own disability questions (not the Washington Group's DISABILITY3 measure). For seeing, hearing and walking, the survey asks how hard it is only of people who said yes to a difficulty and use glasses, a hearing aid or walking equipment. People who said yes but have no aid were not asked, and here they count as not severe. Aids cost money, so this probably puts some severely disabled people from poorer households in the comparison group; the pre-registration expected this to pull the estimate towards zero. Counting all of them as severe instead (secondary question S5, 4,086 households with such a member) gives 5.4 points (95% confidence interval 1.5 to 9.7). The yes/no screener does not separate some from a lot of difficulty, so this group probably includes milder cases; S5 came out lower than the main estimate, so it is not an upper bound.

How it was checked

The plan was registered publicly before any poverty figure was split by disability (https://osf.io/kes3p/, 2026-11-01 05:49:21 UTC), with deviations logged so far: none. Our rebuilt index reproduces NBS's published comparison (Table 7: 72.0% against NBS's 71.4% poor with a person with a disability, 61.8% against 61.8% without; the check passed). Eight other reasonable choices give 10.1 to 13.0 points; leaving out one zone at a time gives 9.3 to 12.7. Shuffling exposure 100 times gave estimates centred near zero. A random extra factor moved the one-repetition estimate by 0.34 points, within the 2.55 points that the fold split alone moves it (check passed). A survey-weighted linear model gives 8.0 points (3.4 to 12.6).

Other registered results

- NBS's broad definition (S2): 6.8 points (3.5 to 10.2). The household head has the difficulty (S3): 10.2 points (4.1 to 16.4).
- Where the difference sits (S4, points out of 100 on the deprivation score): health 2.0 (0.9 to 3.2), work and shocks 1.3 (0.5 to 2.2), education 0.4 (-0.2 to 1.0), living standards 0.3 (-0.5 to 1.0). Descriptive only.

- **Exploratory** (the same people in 2018/19 and 2023/24, General Household Survey-Panel): of 15,229 people aged 15 and over in 2018/19, 13,266 were found again; 10,933 had no severe difficulty in 2018/19 and complete answers, and 364 of them had one by 2023/24. Work: -26.4 percentage points (-33.2 to -19.7): the share who worked went down by more, or up by less, among people whose severe difficulty began between the rounds than among comparable people without onset. Consumption: 0.035 log points (-0.045 to 0.114): the interval includes zero, so the survey cannot show a difference in consumption. Two rounds only; the comparison assumes the two groups would otherwise have changed alike, which cannot be tested, and the communication and work questions are worded differently in the two rounds.

What this suggests for policy

- **Find these households.** Multidimensional poverty is more common in households with a severely disabled member (an adjusted association). Poverty programmes and social registers can record disability, with the Washington Group questions, so that these households can be reached.
- **Ask everyone the severity questions.** MPI 2021 asked how hard seeing, hearing or walking is only of people who use an aid. Asking the Washington Group Short Set of every member aged 5 and over would close the main measurement gap in this survey.
- **Read the number as a description.** It shows where poverty is concentrated, not what would happen if disability were prevented or supported. Policies should be judged on their own evaluations.

Data, registration and citations

- Full results, checks and explanations: https://batestguy.github.io/curb-cut/poverty.html
- Pre-registration: https://osf.io/kes3p/ (frozen at tag p5-freeze, commit 22b8acee10b304f25201627d5cf4da47c2544a19).
- National Bureau of Statistics, Multidimensional Poverty Index Survey 2021, v1.0 (NGA-NBS-MPI-2021-v1.0); NBS, Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index (2022), Table 7. Aggregated reporting only; a copy of this brief goes to the National Data Archive.
- NBS and the World Bank, General Household Survey-Panel, Waves 4 (NGA_2018_GHSP-W4_v03_M) and 5 (NGA_2023_GHSP-W5_v02_M), World Bank Microdata Library.
- Curb Cut’s disability prevalence figures elsewhere use the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2024 (National Population Commission and ICF, The DHS Program); no DHS data are used in this brief.
- Only estimates that passed a disclosure check (at least 30 households or people in each group; the smallest group behind any published estimate has 60 households or people) are published.