



**REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND BARRIERS TO CARE AMONG WOMEN WITH
DISABILITIES**

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ABSTRACT

Women with disabilities face many barriers when accessing healthcare. Barriers can include emotional stressors, inaccessible exam tables, and the lack of provider understanding about specific disabilities. Continued barriers to accessing reproductive healthcare for women with disabilities can impact satisfaction with care and health outcomes. The aim of this study was to understand the experiences of women with disability and the barriers they face in obtaining healthcare. In addition, analyses were conducted to compare the barriers reported by women with physical disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and both physical and cognitive disabilities. A national online survey of women with self-reported physical and/or cognitive disabilities was used to collect data. The study included 224 women, including 60.3% with physical disabilities, 21.9% with cognitive disabilities, and 17.9% with both types of disability. Overall, approximately 1 in 3 respondents reported that anxiety and embarrassment, difficulty following up on care, and insurance coverage were barriers in receiving care. Statistically significant differences in barriers reported by women with different disabilities were found for challenges with not understanding the healthcare system and beliefs that their provider did not understand them. Women with physical disabilities reported numerous access barriers, with the most common being inaccessible weight scales, inaccessible exterior doors into the building, and lack of accessible parking spaces.

Three out of four participants reported having at least 1 barrier with 25.4% of them reporting more than 5 barriers. This study highlights some of the challenges faced by women with disability in obtaining healthcare. To ensure that women's reproductive goals and healthcare needs are met, additional work is needed to address stigma, lack of coordination between specialists, and the range of barriers that prevent women from accessing and fully utilizing care. Additional research is needed to understand the unique needs of women with more severe cognitive disabilities, as they were underrepresented in this study and may face additional challenges and barriers to care.