

The Question

Is the effect of parental disability on children’s education different among parents with more/less education?

How we answer it

We use data from the American Community Survey between 2008 and 2019 to compare outcomes for children of veterans who became disabled during their military service. We focus on veterans because, among those who developed a disability during service, the severity of the disability should be close-to random.

What we find

More severe disabilities result in parents enrolling their kids in private school less often than similar parents with less severe disabilities.

This reduction is particularly large for children of college-educated parents, who tend to spend more on children’s education when not disabled but whose earnings drop the most when severely disabled.

These disproportionate effects also appear to extend into young adulthood: the likelihood an older teen (15-18) in our study had a young-adult (19-29) sibling living at home increased when parents were more severely disabled – but only for children of college-educated parents. Our data can’t tell us exactly why this happens – but we hypothesize that it could be a result of young adults forgoing college or attending institutions closer to home.