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Frank A. Smith

University of Massachusetts Boston, frank.smith@umb.edu

John Butterworth

University of Massachusetts Boston, john.butterworth@umb.edu

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Indicators of Labor Market Success for People with Intellectual Disabilities

By Frank A. Smith and John Butterworth

Reporting meaningful indicators of labor market success for individuals with disabilities, particularly Intellectual Disabilities (ID), is challenging for a number of reasons. Measures that allow people to indicate specific disabilities like ID are uncommon in large national data sets. Additionally, the use of the “traditional” unemployment rate reported by the Department of Labor as an indicator of labor market success for people with disabilities leaves people who are not in the labor force, a significant group when it comes to subpopulations of people with disabilities, out of the calculation. In this data note, we discuss the implications of using the 2007 American Community Survey (ACS) from the U.S. Census Bureau for indicators of labor market success, including for people with ID.

While the ACS does not collect information on people with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) specifically, it does allow people to self-report on six disability questions. Any individual who answers yes to one or more of these 6 items is categorized as having any disability. Someone with a mental disability is anyone who indicates that because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition lasting six months or more, they have difficulty learning, remembering, and concentrating. Based on the description, it is reasonable to assume that individuals with ID would be represented in this category. The table on the next page displays indicators of labor market success for four groups of civilian, non-institutionalized, working-age individuals: People who do not have a disability, people who indicated they have at least one disability (Any Disability), people with a mental disability, and people with a mental disability who had Supplemental Security Income (SSI) in 2007. This last group is likely to include people who have the most significant mental disabilities. The table also displays the unemployment rate as traditionally calculated for these same groups.

The table confirms the low levels of participation in employment for individuals with disabilities. People with disabilities are employed at much lower rates than those without disabilities, and people in each disability category are much less likely to be in the labor force than people without disabilities. Individuals with disabilities also fare poorly using the calculation of unemployment rate. People with mental disabilities who receive SSI have the lowest employment rate (percent employed) with only 9% of individuals in this group being employed. While the most striking differences are in overall employment participation, unemployment rates for people with disabilities who are in the labor force are two to three times the unemployment rate for people without disabilities. These figures may reflect a longer job search and the difficulty individuals with disabilities face in reentering the workforce after a job loss.

INDICATORS OF LABOR MARKET SUCCESS

Employed

People with jobs.

Unemployed

People who do not have jobs and have actively looked for work in the past 4 weeks.

Not in the Labor Force

People who do not have jobs and have not actively look for work in the past 4 weeks.

Unemployment Rate

Number of people unemployed/Labor force
(Labor force=number of people employed +
number of people unemployed)

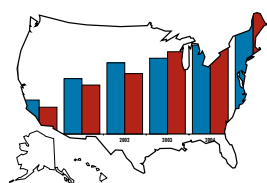
These data suggest the importance of examining both employment participation and unemployment rate in order to gain a full understanding of the employment experiences of individuals with disabilities. It is important to note the figures in this data note are from a period that was before the recent economic downturn. The recent availability of similar data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics using data from the Current Population Survey provides an opportunity to examine national trends in these figures on a monthly basis. The sample for the Current Population Survey, however, is too small to allow for employment estimates at the state level. The larger sample size of the ACS allows analysis at the state level. To access state level information, please visit www.statedata.info.

Table: Labor Market Success Indicators by Disability Status

	No Disability (%)	Any Disability (%)	Mental Disability (%)	Mental Disability with SSI Income (%)
A. Percent Employed	75%	36%	28%	9%
B. Percent Unemployed	5%	6%	6%	3%
C. Percent Not in the Labor Force	20%	58%	66%	88%
Total (A+B+C)	100%	100%	100%	100%
Unemployment Rate (number unemployed / number employed + number unemployed)	6%	14%	19%	23%

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