Persons with Disabilities

Labor market activity, 1994

Persons with disabilities—especially those with severe disabilities—had lower rates of labor force activity, were more restricted in their choice of occupation, were less likely to work full time, and were less likely to work in higher paying occupations, than their counterparts with no disabilities

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According to the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP),[1] only 29.5 percent of persons aged 20 to 64 years with severe disabilities participated in labor market activity—that is, they either had worked, had looked for work, or were on layoff from a job—during the month before the survey was administered. (See table 1.) This proportion was far below that for persons in the same age group with no disabilities (84.5 percent) and for those with moderate disabilities (81.6 percent).[2] This pattern of similar market activity rates between those with moderate and those with no disabilities, contrasted with sharply lower rates for those with severe disabilities, appears across many major demographic groups. The relative severity of the disability probably explains much of this difference, but other factors—notably, age and education—also may have some impact. (See box on pages 11–12 for disability statuses.)

Persons with severe disabilities tend to be older, on average, than the other two groups, and, of course, older people are less likely to be active in the labor market than are younger ones. Among persons aged 20 to 64 with severe disabilities, almost one-third were 55 to 64 years old. This figure compares with only about 10 percent of persons with no disabilities and 20 percent of persons with moderate disabilities. The implication is that a significant proportion of those with severe disabilities are in an age group in which many people have already retired. Nonetheless, when the labor market activity rate of persons with no disabilities is compared, age for age, with the rates of those with moderate and those with severe disabilities, it becomes clear that the last group consistently has lower rates than the other two groups.

Education, too, is another factor that is well known to affect labor force activity. People with lower educational attainment generally do not do as well as their better educated counterparts in regard to employment, unemployment, and earnings. Among persons 25 to 64 years old, those with severe disabilities are about 3 times as likely as those with no disabilities to have left school before completing high school and less than a third as likely to have completed 4 years of college. As with age, though, when labor market activity is compared across educational levels for the three disability status groups, those with severe disabilities consistently have significantly lower rates than the other two groups.

Disability and demographics

For both men and women, labor market activity rates were about the same for persons with no disabilities as for those with moderate disabilities. And, as is typical with broad measures of labor force activity, the men's rates were substantially higher than the women's rates. For persons with severe disabilities, however, the overall rates

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Table 1. Labor force activity of persons 20 to 64 years old, by sex and disability status, September 1994 to December 1994

[Numbers in thousands]

Characteristic	With no disability	With moderate disability	With severe disability
Total	123,042	15,569	14,350
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
With labor force activity	84.5	81.6	29.5
With no labor force activity	15.5	18.4	70.5
With labor force activity:			
Number	103,942	12,708	4,229
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
Worked during month	96.5	93.9	89.1
Full time	82.3	75.5	59.2
Part time	14.2	18.5	29.9
Worked and looked for work or on layoff part of month	1.1	1.9	2.3
Did not work during month and looked for work or on layoff	3.5	6.1	10.9
Men	61,077	7,942	6,181
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
With labor force activity	92.4	89.9	31.8
With no labor force activity	7.6	10.1	68.2
With labor force activity:			
Number	56,432	7,140	1,967
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
Worked during month	96.3	94.2	88.4
Full time	89.5	83.2	63.8
Part time	6.9	11.0	24.6
Worked and looked for work or on layoff part of month	1.1	2.0	3.4
Did not work during month and looked for work or on layoff	3.7	5.8	11.6
Women	61,965	7,627	8,169
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
With labor force activity	76.7	73.0	27.7
With no labor force activity	23.3	27.0	72.3
With labor force activity:			
Number	47,510	5,568	2,262
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
Worked during month	96.8	93.6	89.7
Full time	73.8	65.6	55.2
Part time	22.9	28.0	34.6
Worked and looked for work or on layoff part of month	1.1	1.9	1.4
Did not work during month and looked for work or on layoff	3.2	6.4	10.3

SOURCE: Survey of Income and Program Participation, Bureau of the Census.

were far lower, and the difference between men's and women's rates narrowed. Among those with no disabilities, for example, 92.4 percent of the men and 76.7 percent of the women reported that they had labor force activity during the month before the survey, a difference of about 16 percentage points. Among persons with severe disabilities, by contrast, only 31.8 percent of the men and 27.7 percent of the women had labor market activity, a difference of about 4 percentage points.

With regard to those in each disability group who were in the labor force, men were more likely to work full time than were women. (Once again, this is typical for the work force as a whole.) Among those with no disabilities, 89.5 percent of the men and 73.8 percent of the women were full-time workers. These proportions were somewhat smaller for those with moderate disabilities and substantially smaller for men (63.8 percent) and women (56.2 percent) with severe disabilities.

Labor market activity also varies by age. Typically, people in older and younger groups are less likely to have any sort of labor market activity than are those in central age groups (25 to 54 years old). As shown in table 2, persons aged 20 to 64 years with no disabilities or with moderate disabilities conformed to this pattern, but persons with severe disabilities did not. For those with severe disabilities, the labor force activity rate was highest (roughly 37 percent) for those 20 to 24 and 25 to 44 years of age. The rate declined somewhat among those 45 to 54 and fell sharply, to just 18 percent for the 55-to-64-year age group. The steep drop is not too surprising in view of the fact, noted earlier, that many in this age group have already retired.

Table 2. **Labor force activity of persons 20 to 64 years old, by age and disability status, September 1994 to December 1994**

[Numbers in thousands]

Characteristic	20 to 24 years	25 to 44 years	45 to 54 years	55 to 64 years
With no disability	16,238	70,749	22,905	13,150
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
With labor force activity	76.8	87.6	89.4	68.4
With no labor force activity	23.2	12.4	10.6	31.6
With labor force activity:				
Number	12,478	61,999	20,474	8,992
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Worked during month	92.8	96.8	97.6	97.4
Full time	67.0	84.5	85.8	80.6
Part time	25.8	12.3	11.8	16.7
Worked and looked for work or on layoff part of month	2.0	1.1	.7	.8
Did not work during month and looked for work or on layoff	7.2	3.2	2.4	2.6
With moderate disability	1,366	7,295	3,939	2,969
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
With labor force activity	79.6	84.2	87.6	68.2
With no labor force activity	20.4	15.8	12.4	31.8
With labor force activity:				
Number	1,088	6,144	3,450	2,026
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Worked during month	89.3	92.9	95.3	97.4
Full time	62.5	75.2	80.3	75.1
Part time	26.8	17.7	15.0	22.3
Worked and looked for work or on layoff part of month	4.0	2.2	1.1	1.5
Did not work during month and looked for work or on layoff	10.8	7.1	4.8	2.7
With severe disability	710	5,640	3,472	4,528
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
With labor force activity	37.2	36.4	31.6	18.0
With no labor force activity	63.0	63.6	68.4	82.0
With labor force activity:				
Number	264	2,053	1,098	814
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Worked during month	86.0	85.2	92.3	95.7
Full time	40.5	58.0	63.8	62.2
Part time	45.5	27.3	28.5	33.5
Worked and looked for work or on layoff part of month	6.1	2.3	1.7	2.1
Did not work during month and looked for work or on layoff	14.4	14.7	7.8	4.5

SOURCE: Survey of Income and Program Participation, Bureau of the Census.

The proportion of labor force participants with severe disabilities who worked full time did not drop off sharply with age. In fact, the proportions who worked full time in the age groups 25 to 44, 45 to 54, and 55 to 64 were quite similar, ranging from about 58 percent to 64 percent. (Just 40.5 percent of those 20 to 24 years old worked full time.) Further, this pattern was not very different from that of persons with no disabilities or with moderate disabilities. Among all three disability groups, full-time employment rates were higher for mature workers (25 to 64 years old) than for youth. Of course, the rates for persons with severe disabilities were considerably below the rates for the other two groups–-about 15 to 30 percentage points, depending on the age category.

Education and marital status

As shown in table 3, at each level of education, persons with disabilities were less likely to be engaged in labor market activity. Moreover, even though education improves outcomes generally and reduces the gap in the rate of labor force activity between those with severe disabilities and the other disability groups, the difference remains dramatic.

The effect of education varied by sex as well as by disability category. Among men with no disabilities, the labor market activity rate for those with less than 4 years of high school (90.2 percent) was fairly close to the rate for those who had completed at least 4 years of college (94.8 percent). For women with

Table 3. Labor force activity of persons 20 to 64 years old, by selected characteristics and disability status, September 1994 to December 1994

[In percent]

Characteristic	Total			Men			Women		
	With no disability	With moderate disability	With severe disability	With no disability	With moderate disability	With severe disability	With no disability	With moderate disability	With severe disability
Percent with labor force activity									
Years of school completed by persons 25 to 64 years old:									
Less than 4 years of high school	75.2	74.4	17.3	90.2	89.2	20.3	58.9	57.1	14.8
Four years of high school, no college	84.7	81.2	31.2	94.5	90.2	33.0	75.9	72.4	30.0
Some college	87.3	85.7	39.1	94.6	91.1	40.3	80.8	80.2	38.4
College graduate	90.0	86.4	52.4	94.8	90.1	57.7	84.5	82.4	47.8
Marital status:									
Married	84.1	80.8	29.1	95.3	91.6	31.8	73.4	68.4	27.0
Unmarried	85.1	82.8	29.8	88.0	87.1	31.9	82.2	78.8	28.3
Race and ethnicity:									
White	84.9	82.1	31.0	93.1	90.4	34.6	77.5	73.1	28.2
Black	82.3	79.4	24.1	87.2	85.7	20.7	78.2	74.9	26.4
Hispanic	79.6	77.9	24.4	92.1	94.4	24.1	66.5	62.3	24.6
Percent with labor force activity who worked full time									
Years of school completed by persons 25 to 64 years old:									
Less than 4 years of high school	80.4	72.9	55.1	85.9	79.2	64.4	71.2	61.2	45.6
Four years of high school, no college	83.4	74.0	58.6	92.0	82.4	61.6	73.7	63.7	56.6
Some college	84.0	79.7	62.1	92.4	87.5	76.1	75.2	70.2	52.3
College graduate	87.4	82.7	70.1	93.4	91.0	67.9	79.7	72.7	72.6
Marital status:									
Married	83.9	77.6	65.9	94.0	87.8	76.7	71.5	62.1	56.0
Unmarried	79.8	72.6	53.3	82.0	75.6	51.9	77.3	69.5	54.5
Race and ethnicity:									
White	82.8	76.2	59.7	90.6	83.7	65.6	73.2	66.0	54.2
Black	79.9	68.7	57.3	82.2	77.3	53.2	77.6	61.7	59.6
Hispanic	82.3	69.3	61.7	87.3	75.7	69.7	75.0	60.1	55.7

SOURCE: Survey of Income and Program Participation, Bureau of the Census.

no disabilities, though, the effect of increased education was much more apparent: about 59 percent of those with less than a high school education had labor market activity, compared with 84.5 percent of those with at least 4 years of college. Among those with severe disabilities, education had a much greater positive impact on labor market activity: whereas only 20.3 percent of men with severe disabilities who had less than a high school education also had labor market activity, 57.7 percent of those who had completed college participated in the labor market. For women with severe disabilities, the proportions were 14.8 percent and 47.8 percent, respectively.

With regard to persons with severe disabilities, it is not clear from these data whether education alone affects labor market activity or whether a common set of variables—in this case, disabilities—affects *both* education *and* labor market activity. To be classified as having severe disabilities, an individual must have one of a number of conditions or limitations. (See box on pages 11–12.) Some of these conditions or limitations may impede acquiring an education, while others may make labor market activity difficult. Still others may create problems in both endeavors.

By and large, more education translates into higher full-time employment rates for both men and women across all three disability groups. For example, among men with no disabilities and with less than 4 years of high school, 85.9 percent who reported labor force activity worked full time, compared with 93.4 percent of those who were college graduates. For women with no disabilities, the proportions were 71.2 percent and 79.7 percent, respectively. Among persons with severe disabilities, however, the difference was far smaller, with 64.4 percent of

men who had not completed high school working full time, compared with 67.9 percent of those who had completed college. For women with severe disabilities, a college education had a considerably more dramatic effect on labor market outcomes: just 45.6 percent of the women with less than 4 years of high school worked full time, as opposed to 72.6 percent of the college graduates.

Marital status—or rather, the lifestyles associated with different marital categories—appears to affect the labor force activity and full-time employment rates among both those with no disabilities and those with moderate disabilities. Married men in these categories were more likely to have labor force activity and to work full time than were unmarried men. For women, however, the situation was reversed: married women were less likely to have labor force activity or to work full time than their unmarried counterparts. These differences by gender and marital status are probably linked to family roles. Despite the sweeping changes in family life that have occurred over the past three decades, married women still retain much of the responsibility for child care, while married men continue to be much more oriented toward labor market activity. Unmarried women, on the other hand, must support not only themselves, but, increasingly, their children as well.

In contrast, the marriage gap—that is, the differences in labor market activity and full-time employment by marital status noted earlier—virtually disappeared among women with severe disabilities. It remained, however, for men with severe disabilities who worked full time.

Table 4. **Percent of persons 20 to 64 years old with labor force activity who were looking for work or who were on layoff, by selected characteristics and disability status, September 1994 to December 1994**

[In percent]

Characteristic	With no disability	With moderate disability	With severe disability
Total	4.6	8.0	13.3
Men	4.8	7.8	15.0
Women	4.3	8.2	11.7
Age			
20 to 24 years	9.2	14.8	20.5
25 to 44 years	4.3	9.2	17.0
45 to 54 years	3.1	5.9	9.6
55 to 64 years	3.4	4.1	6.6
Years of school completed by persons 25 to 64 years old			
Less than 4 years of high school	8.3	11.9	16.2
Four years of high school, no college	4.4	8.0	10.8
One to 3 years of college	3.3	5.0	15.4
Four or more years of college	2.3	4.3	10.1

SOURCE: Survey of Income and Program Participation, Bureau of the Census.

Looking for work or on layoff

Persons with disabilities were more likely than those with no disabilities to report that they were looking for work or that they were on layoff. (See table 4.) Among those with moderate disabilities who had some labor force activity, 8.0 percent[3] were looking for work or were on layoff, as were 13.3 percent of those with severe disabilities. These proportions compare with 4.6 percent for persons with no disabilities.

Among those with no disabilities or with moderate disabilities, men and women showed very little difference in the proportions who looked for work or were on layoff. Men with severe disabilities were somewhat more likely than women with severe disabilities to be looking for work or to be on layoff. Persons who were 20 to 24 years old were more likely to be looking for work or to be on layoff than were persons in any other age group, whatever their disability status.

For all three disability categories, the incidence of unemployment or layoff tended to decrease as the number of years of school completed rose. This circumstance, however, did little to offset the impact of disability: among those with less than a high school education, persons with severe disabilities were about twice as likely as those with no disabilities to be looking for work or to be on layoff. The relative gap was even greater for those who had completed at least 4 years of college: those with severe disabilities were more than 4 times as likely as those with no disabilities to be looking for work or to be on layoff.

Occupation and industry

To a certain extent, the lower levels of education of persons with disabilities may affect their choice of occupation. For example, these individuals were more likely than those with no disabilities to be employed in service occupations and as operators, fabricators, and laborers—occupations that generally require less education. (See table 5.)

For workers employed in white-collar—managerial, professional, technical, sales, or administrative support—occupations, disability status made very little difference to the proportions that worked the entire month. By contrast, among workers in the remaining major occupation groups, those classified as having a severe disability tended to be less likely than those with no disabilities to work the full month. For instance, 95.3 percent of workers with no disabilities who were in service occupations worked the entire month, compared with 88.7 percent of those with severe disabilities.

Workers with severe disabilities who were in professional specialty and technical occupations were about as likely as those with no disabilities to work full time. These, however, were the exceptions; across most occupations, persons with

Table 5. **Employed persons 20 to 64 years old, by disability status, occupation, and industry, September 1994 to December 1994**

Occupation and industry	With no disability			With moderate disability			With severe disability		
	Total	Percent who worked—		Total	Percent who worked—		Total	Percent who worked—	
		Entire month	Full time		Entire month	Full time		Entire month	Full time
Occupation									
Total	100.0	96.8	85.6	100.0	93.5	81.4	100.0	91.2	66.8
Executive, administrative, and managerial	12.7	98.7	93.9	8.9	98.5	90.8	8.3	97.9	84.3
Professional specialty	15.1	97.8	86.0	11.1	95.3	83.9	8.6	96.9	82.3
Technicians and related support	4.4	97.8	86.1	4.4	97.4	87.3	2.2	100.0	89.2
Sales workers	10.4	96.8	78.6	10.1	95.3	70.8	9.5	92.2	60.9
Administrative support, including clerical	17.3	97.0	82.9	15.7	93.7	80.9	17.0	94.1	69.2
Service occupations	12.4	95.3	71.6	15.7	92.3	64.0	21.6	88.7	49.5
Precision production, craft, and repair	10.7	96.0	95.9	12.2	94.3	92.4	8.8	89.1	78.2
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	15.8	95.2	89.8	20.0	89.3	87.0	21.2	87.9	66.7
Farming, forestry, and fishing	1.3	97.2	86.0	1.9	88.3	82.7	2.7	78.3	54.3
Industry and class of worker									
Total	100.0	96.8	85.3	100.0	93.9	80.5	100.0	91.3	66.3
Agriculture (wage and salary and self-employed)	1.2	97.8	86.0	1.3	85.7	81.2	1.6	90.0	71.7
Nonagricultural	98.8	96.8	85.3	98.7	94.0	80.5	98.4	91.3	66.2
Wage and salary	73.0	96.4	85.3	70.8	93.0	80.9	72.4	90.9	65.6
Mining	.6	98.2	97.8	.7	95.1	100.0	.5	88.9	88.9
Construction	4.3	91.5	90.7	4.4	85.6	90.7	2.4	85.2	85.2
Manufacturing	17.3	97.0	95.7	17.5	94.1	92.4	16.2	89.8	80.8
Transportation and public utilities	5.1	97.5	91.0	5.0	94.3	91.2	3.5	89.1	71.3
Wholesale trade	3.7	97.9	93.4	3.5	95.6	89.9	2.8	88.5	77.9
Retail trade	13.7	95.7	72.7	14.3	91.4	66.6	16.8	91.1	51.2
Finance, insurance, and real estate	6.0	98.0	89.6	3.8	97.9	84.5	4.5	94.0	78.6
Service	22.3	96.4	79.8	21.7	93.2	73.9	25.8	91.8	58.9
Private household	.4	95.9	60.7	.7	91.3	40.0	1.2	82.2	20.0
Service, except private household	21.9	96.4	80.1	21.0	93.3	75.0	24.6	92.3	60.8
Self-employed	10.3	97.4	83.4	13.0	97.3	75.3	10.4	92.2	64.0
Government	15.5	98.1	86.3	14.9	95.8	83.6	15.5	92.5	70.6

SOURCE: Survey of Income and Program Participation, Bureau of the Census.

Table 6. **Mean monthly earnings and earnings ratios of wage and salary workers 20 to 64 years old, by sex and disability status, September 1994 to December 1994**

[In nominal dollars]

Labor force status	With no disability		With moderate disability		With severe disability		Women's earnings as a percent of men's earnings		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Workers with no disability	Workers with moderate disability	Workers with severe disability
Total	$2,633	$1,737	$2,244	$1,482	$1,663	$1,228	66.0	66.0	73.8
With job entire month	2,658	1,760	2,283	1,518	1,715	1,244	66.2	66.5	72.5
Worked all weeks	2,677	1,781	2,329	1,552	1,775	1,294	66.5	66.6	72.9
Usually full time	2,800	2,036	2,506	1,854	2,262	1,666	72.7	74.0	73.7
Usually part time	936	869	824	752	464	636	92.8	91.3	137.1
Missed some weeks	1,280	693	892	724	681	413	54.1	81.2	60.6
Usually full time	1,452	962	951	1,002	871	553	66.3	105.4	63.5
Usually part time	602	356	563	433	248	304	59.1	76.9	122.6
With job during part of month	938	556	927	488	600	552	59.3	52.6	92.0
Usually full time	1,082	816	1,048	648	965	770	75.4	61.8	79.8
Usually part time	362	298	322	227	201	339	82.3	70.5	168.7

SOURCE: Survey of Income and Program Participation, Bureau of the Census.

Labor force concepts: Survey of Income and Program Participation versus Current Population Survey

Labor force estimates derived from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) cannot be compared with those derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS), which is the primary source of official Government labor force data on demographic groups. This is because the questions determining labor force status that are included in each of the two surveys are very different and because the reference periods—those to which the questions refer—also are different.

Respondents to the CPS are asked a battery of questions to determine whether they are employed, unemployed, or not in the labor force, concepts that are quite precisely defined. For example, employed persons are (a) those who, during the reference week, did at least 1 hour of work as paid employees, worked in their own business or profession or on their own farm, or worked 15 hours or more as unpaid workers in an enterprise operated by a member of the family and (b) all those who were not working, but who had jobs or businesses from which they were temporarily absent. Unemployed persons are those who had no employment during the reference week, were available for work, except for temporary illness, and had made specific efforts to find employment sometime during the 4-week period ending with the reference week. (Persons who were waiting to be recalled to a job from which they had been laid off need not have been looking for work to be classified as unemployed.)[1]

The SIPP does not use the same standards as the CPS in determining labor force status. In the case of employment, for instance, the SIPP asks whether the person had a job or business, full time or part time, even if it was for just a few days during the reference period. (Those in the military are counted as employed in the SIPP, but are not included in the universe of the CPS.) If the respondent answers that he or she did not work, the survey instrument asks whether the respondent looked for work or was on layoff.

The reference periods of the two surveys also differ. The CPS questions focus on respondents' activities during the week containing the 12th of the month. SIPP questions, however, are directed at the 4 months preceding the survey: respondents are presented with a calendar and asked to report their labor force status for each week over the 4-month reference period. The analysis presented in this article uses data only from the month before the survey, however. Thus, persons with labor force activity spent some time working, seeking work, or being on layoff in the previous month. Data are shown separately for those who worked (either full time or part time) the entire month, those who worked part of the month and either looked for work or were on layoff part of the month, and those who did not work, but looked for work or were on layoff, the entire month.

[1] For more information on the CPS, see *Employment and Earnings* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 1998), pp. 225–28. For more information on the SIPP, see Constance F. Citro and Graham Kalton, eds., *The Future of the Survey of Income and Program Participation* (Washington, DC, National Academy Press, 1993); and the two Bureau of the Census reports, *Americans with Disabilities: 1991–92*, Series P70–33, and *Americans with Disabilities: 1994–95*, Series P70–61. Or visit the Web site <http://www.sipp.census.gov/sipp/>.

disabilities were less likely than persons with no disabilities to work full time.

Perhaps surprisingly, there were only relatively minor differences in the overall distribution by industry and class of worker between those with disabilities and those with no disabilities. Although workers with severe disabilities are not excluded from any particular industry, the occupational employment data suggest that these workers may have somewhat limited occupational opportunities within industries.

Mean monthly earnings

While not much difference is apparent in the extent of labor market activity between those with no disabilities and those with moderate disabilities, mean monthly earnings are lower for persons with moderate disabilities and are lower still for those with severe disabilities. (See table 6.) For instance, men with no disabilities earned $2,633, whereas their counterparts with moderate disabilities and with severe disabilities earned $2,244 and $1,663, respectively.

Undoubtedly, the educational and occupational differences across disability groups affect earnings. Even so, some of the earnings differences—particularly those relating to persons who worked something other than full time all month—may have to do with the way the data are aggregated, because earnings tend to vary with the amount of time worked.

As measures of time spent at work, the concepts of full time, part time, and part month are not very precise. For example, full time is defined as 35 hours a week or more. Thus, someone who works just 35 hours a week is classified as a full-time worker, as is someone who works 60 hours a week. Likewise, a part-time worker can work from 1 to 34 hours a week. And similarly, part month means any period of time less than a full month. Hence, there can be quite a large difference in the number of hours worked even between two individuals who are in the same work-time classification.

Men generally made more money than women, whatever the disability category.[4] The lone exception was women with severe disabilities who usually worked part time. These women had higher mean monthly earnings than those of men in the same category. This distinction may be partly due to the fact that male part-time workers tend to be younger than female part-time workers and younger workers have lower earnings.[5]

THE EFFECTS OF A DISABILITY on the work activity of individuals are pervasive and, in a global sense, negative. This is particularly evident in labor force activity rates: persons with severe disabilities participated in the labor market at dramatically lower rates than did persons with no disabilities or with moderate disabilities. Moreover, persons with disabilities tend to be less educated and, therefore, to be restricted occupationally. Also, the likelihood of persons with severe disabilities working full time was considerably lower than that of persons with no disabilities. This reduced likelihood of working full time contributed to the fact that the earnings of those with severe disabilities were substantially lower than the earnings of individuals with no disabilities. In addition, persons with severe disabilities were consistently—and considerably—more likely than persons with no disabilities to be looking for work or to be on layoff. Even relatively high levels of educational attainment (which has a profound impact on most facets of labor market activity) do not change these relationships in any significant way. □

Footnotes

[1] The Survey of Income and Program Participation is a household survey sponsored by the Bureau of the Census and is designed to help meet the statistical needs of many Federal agencies. SIPP collects core data on employment, on income, and on participation in certain Federal Government programs (primarily means-tested programs, such as the food stamp program, the Women, Infant, and Children's (WIC) supplemental nutrition program, and the Supplementary Social Insurance (SSI) and other cash assistance, medicaid, and housing assistance programs). It also collects periodic data on characteristics, such as disability, that are relevant to one's eligibility for, and status in, such programs. (See box, pages 11–12, for the kind of information that is used to identify persons with disabilities.) The data in this article are based on information collected by SIPP between October 1994 and January 1995.

SIPP began in October 1983, with the collection of data for the 1984 panel. Households in a SIPP panel (containing 20,000 households) are visited every 4 months and are asked core questions about their status during the previous 4 months. The original survey design called for eight interviews at 4-month intervals for households in a given panel. The original design was modified for some panels, largely because of budgetary problems. New panels were introduced each year, so that at any given time, beginning with the introduction of the 1985 panel, data collection would be ongoing for more than one panel. This overlap feature meant that cross-sectional estimates could be based on two panels instead of one. The introduction of the 1996 panel marked a major change in the design of SIPP. The new design is intended to enhance the value of the survey for longitudinal analysis and calls for 12 visits at 4-month intervals with a panel of approximately 37,000 households. The new design does not include an overlap feature; the next scheduled panel will begin in the year 2000.

For additional information about the SIPP, visit the Web site <http://www.sipp.census.gov/sipp/>. Readers may also wish to see Constance F. Citro and Graham Kalton, eds., *The Future of the Survey of Income and Program Participation* (Washington, DC, National Academy Press, 1993). The Bureau of the Census has published two reports using disability data from SIPP: *Americans with Disabilities: 1991–92*, Series P70–33; and *Americans with Disabilities: 1994–95*, Series P70–61. SIPP disability data are also available at the Web site <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/disable.html>.

[2] The striking similarity in the labor market activity rates between persons with no disabilities and those with moderate disabilities is difficult to interpret, because those who are classified as having moderate disabilities include all individuals with disabilities who have not been determined to have a severe disability. It is likely, therefore, that the group with moderate disabilities ranges from persons with virtually no disabilities to those with disabilities that are close to severe.

[3] This percentage and the related ones that follow are not unemployment rates. The SIPP questions and reference period do not allow for the construction of unemployment rates similar to the official rates produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics using the Current Population Survey. Also, the percentages are a share of the population, rather than a share of the labor force, which is the basis for the official unemployment rate. (See box on page 9.)

[4] See "Usual Weekly Earnings of Wage and Salary Workers: First Quarter 1998," in *News*, USDL 98–148 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Apr. 20, 1998), table 1.

[5] *Ibid.*, table 2.

Measuring disability status in the Survey of Income and Program Participation

Identifying people with disabilities in the context of a household survey such as the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is by no means easy. The main challenge is to achieve some level of consistency across respondents. That is, different respondents with similar conditions or problems should answer the same questions similarly. The specific questions that are asked, of course, depend on the definition of disability that is adopted.

Definitions of disability can be categorized into four broad conceptual areas:[1]

1. A *specific condition* (active pathology) that interferes with normal, everyday life.

2. An *impairment* that involves:
   a. A specific condition. (See item 1.)
   b. Residual losses or abnormalities that remain after the condition is controlled or eliminated.
   c. Losses or abnormalities not associated with any specific condition.

3. A *functional limitation* that affects the way in which an individual functions, such as a limitation in the ability to see, hear, walk, or lift something heavy, like a bag of groceries.

4. An *inability or limitation in performing a social role or task*, such as working at a job, obtaining an education, or caring for oneself.

The SIPP uses both the functional limitation concept and the concept of inability or limitation in performing a social role or task in forming its definition of disability. This leads to some problems, however. Using the second of the two concepts to identify persons with disabilities introduces an element of uncertainty, especially over time. An individual who has a disability in one period due to an inability or limitation in performing a social role or task may not be disabled in a different period if some change takes place in his or her condition or environment. On the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that the first of the two concepts—of a functional limitation—would consistently identify people with a disability. That is, individuals with a specific functional limitation (say, visual impairment) are likely to be identified as members of the appropriate universe both on a current basis and over time.

The SIPP disability topical modules collect information regarding both functional impairment and inability or limitation in performing a social role or task, which is then used to determine one's disability status. The types of information collected are, in general outline, as follows:

1. Whether a person uses a wheelchair, a cane, crutches, or a walker.

2. Whether the person finds it difficult or is unable to:
   a. See words and letters in ordinary newspaper print.
   b. Hear what is said in a normal conversation with another person.
   c. Have his or her speech understood.
   d. Lift and carry a full bag of groceries.
   e. Climb a flight of stairs without resting.
   f. Walk three city blocks.

3. Whether the person finds it difficult or is unable to use the telephone.

4. Whether the person has difficulty with, or needs the help of, another person with:
   a. Getting around inside the home.
   b. Getting in and out of bed or a chair.
   c. Taking a bath or shower.
   d. Dressing.
   e. Eating.
   f. Using the toilet, including getting to the toilet.
   g. Going outside the home to shop or visit a doctor's office.
   h. Keeping track of money and bills.
   i. Preparing meals.
   j. Doing light housework, such as washing dishes or sweeping the floor.

5. Whether the person has any of the following conditions:
   a A learning disability.
   b. Mental retardation.
   c. Any other developmental disability.
   d. Alzheimer's disease, senility, or dementia.
   e. Any other mental or emotional condition.

6. Whether the person has a condition that limits the kind or amount of work that he or she can do and whether the person is prevented from working at a job.

7. Whether the person has a condition that limits or prevents work around the house.

8. Whether the person receives supplemental security income (SSI) payments and whether the person is covered by medicare. (If the person is under 65 years, he or she must have qualified for these programs on the basis of having a disability.)

In the SIPP, a person is considered to have a disability if any of the following conditions is met:

(a) The person has difficulty with one or more of the

Continued—Measuring disability status

activities mentioned in items 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7 of the preceding list.

(b) The person has one or more of the conditions listed in item 5.

(c) The person uses a wheelchair or is a long-term user of a cane, crutches, or a walker.

(d) The person is under 65 years and receives SSI or is covered by medicare.

A person is considered to have a *severe* disability if any of the following conditions is met:

(a) The person is unable to perform one or more of the activities mentioned in items 2, 6, and 7 of the preceding list.

(b) The person needs the help of another person to perform one or more of the activities mentioned in item 4 of the preceding list.

(c) The person has mental retardation, another developmental disability, Alzheimer's disease, senility, or dementia.

(d) The person uses a wheelchair or is a long-term user of a cane, crutches, or a walker.

(e) The person is under 65 years and receives SSI or is covered by medicare.

[1] See Saad Nagi, "Disability Concepts Revisited: Implications for Prevention," in Andrew M. Pope and Alvin R. Tarlov, eds., *Disability in America: Toward a National Agenda for Prevention* (Washington, DC, National Academy Press, 1991), appendix A.

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