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Employer Disability Practices Center

RUTGERS School of Management and Labor Relations | Burton Blatt Institute Syracuse University | NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY | INDIANA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Disability Employment and HR Practices

DIEP State of the Science Conference, May 12, 2025

Lawrence Houston (University of Houston)
Douglas Kruse (Rutgers University)

In partnership with National Organization on Disability

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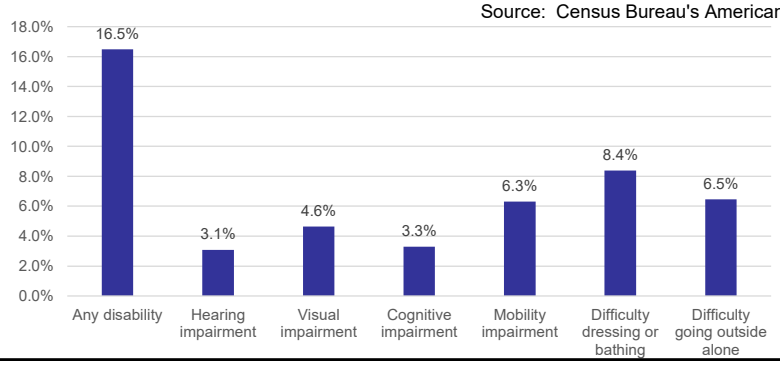
1. How many people with disabilities are there?

There are over 1 billion people with disabilities worldwide, and 47 million in the United States, among whom 23 million in U.S. are working age.

2023 Disability Prevalence, Age 18+

Source: Census Bureau's American Community Survey



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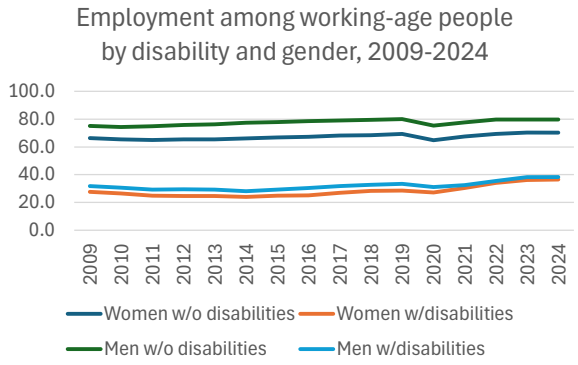
2. "Good news"

Employment of people with disabilities declined from 2009 to 2015, but is now higher than pre-pandemic



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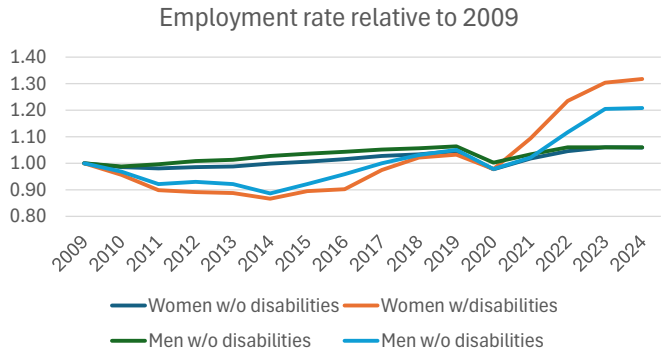
Easier to see improvement by indexing to 2009



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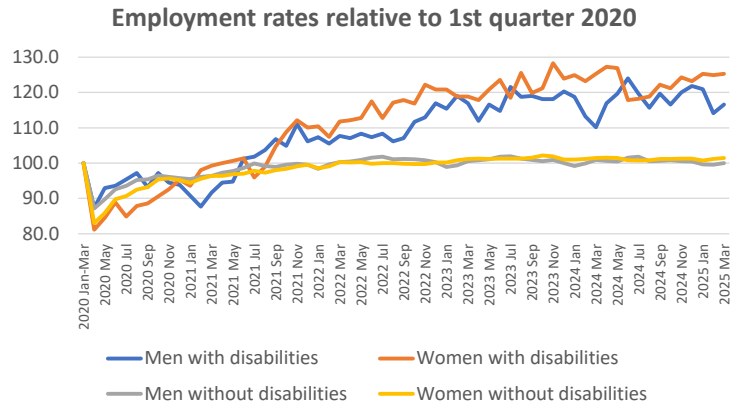
Closer look at post-pandemic



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3. "Bad news"

Despite advances in some areas, people with disabilities have made little economic progress.

- **High rate of contingent work**: 22% of workers with disabilities are in contingent jobs (e.g., temporary, indep. contractor, gig, on-call work) compared to 14% of workers without disabilities
- **Occupational trends**: workers with disabilities overrepresented in slower-growing and lower-paying occupations
- **Workplace disparities**: Among employees with disabilities, pay is lower by an average 15%, and they have higher layoff rates

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4. Can employer HR practices make a difference?

- Can employer policies and practices make a difference in improving employment opportunities?
- Very little hard data on this question, and almost all existing evidence comes from cross-sectional surveys, raising causality concerns
  - cross-sectional studies find employers who implement practices have positive views of their effects (big surprise!)
  - one longitudinal study found that a written employer policy was better predictor than subjective management intentions in predicting disability hiring 6 months later (Araten-Bergman, 2016), and 3 disability training studies found improvements in work injuries, costs, or disability knowledge and attitudes

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Data

- Our data come from detailed annual employer surveys of members of National Organization on Disability
- We use data on 49 disability employment practices collected over 2019-2024 period
- 266 companies filled out survey in at least two of these years, and 91 did so in all six years
- Total employment of the 266 respondents was over 10 million, and close to 8.5 million in each year (over 5% of U.S. nonfarm payroll employment)

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Categories of Disability Employment Practices

49 disability employment practices (all yes/no) broken into 8 categories:

1. Accessibility
2. Accommodations
3. Disability inclusion
4. Recruitment
5. Promotion of disability initiatives
6. Self-ID encouragement
7. Support for disability groups & mentoring
8. Training

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These practices are positively correlated

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1	Accessibility	1.000							
2	Accommodations	0.418	1.000						
3	Disability inclusion	0.505	0.278	1.000					
4	Promotion of disability initiatives	0.534	0.350	0.615	1.000				
5	Recruitment	0.621	0.407	0.478	0.589	1.000			
6	Self-ID encouragement	0.320	0.298	0.294	0.306	0.446	1.000		
7	Support for disability groups/mentoring	0.282	0.232	0.517	0.461	0.326	0.193	1.000	
8	Training on disability issues	0.389	0.275	0.299	0.304	0.335	0.181	0.089	1.000

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Empirical strategy

Predicting seven outcomes:

1. Disability applications
2. Disability hires
3. Disability promotions
4. Disability management promotions
5. Disability number in management and professional jobs
6. Disability exits
7. Total number of employees with disabilities

To measure approximate percentage effects on outcomes, we specify each outcome as the natural logarithm of the outcome plus one: Ln(outcome+1)
(We get similar results when using negative binomial method to deal with zero values for the outcome.)

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Data Analysis

Due to positive correlations among practices both within year and over time, and concerns about changing sample sizes over time, we run regressions for each of the 7 outcomes that include:

1) Practice categories in all three years
2) Practice categories just in current year, or just last year, or just two years ago

And

3) Each practice category by itself
4) All practice categories together

Following slide presents just #2 and #3: practice categories just in one year, and each practice category by itself

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Predicting ln(disability hires+1)

Practices tested:	Sum	Accessibility	Accommodations	Disability inclusion	Promoting disability initiatives	Recruitment	Self-ID encouragement	Support for dis groups/mentors	Training
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
PANEL 1									
Practices in current year	0.025***	0.045*	0.120*	0.165**	0.056	0.071**	0.251**	0.043	0.051
Observations	519	519	519	519	519	519	519	519	519
PANEL 2									
Practices lagged 1 year	0.033***	0.047*	0.062	0.075	0.119***	0.112***	0.209**	0.100	0.034
	(0.010)	(0.026)	(0.062)	(0.063)	(0.039)	(0.032)	(0.103)	(0.072)	(0.048)
Observations	347	454	454	454	347	347	454	454	454
PANEL 3									
Practices lagged 2 years	0.042***	0.066*	0.135*	0.094	0.119**	0.127***	0.377***	0.087	0.067
	(0.013)	(0.035)	(0.078)	(0.079)	(0.049)	(0.043)	(0.136)	(0.075)	(0.050)
Observations	197	289	289	289	197	197	381	381	381
PANEL 4									
Practices in current year	0.044	0.109*	0.191*	0.114	-0.083	0.058	0.342***	-0.039	0.020
	(0.027)	(0.056)	(0.100)	(0.124)	(0.084)	(0.073)	(0.130)	(0.105)	(0.066)
Practices lagged 1 year	-0.007	0.012	0.051	0.049	0.169**	0.088	0.091	0.074	-0.009
	(0.025)	(0.051)	(0.092)	(0.115)	(0.073)	(0.079)	(0.121)	(0.102)	(0.067)
Practices lagged 2 years	0.021	0.019	0.080	0.036	0.071	0.041	0.359***	0.067	0.065
	(0.022)	(0.045)	(0.082)	(0.094)	(0.064)	(0.067)	(0.136)	(0.090)	(0.057)
Observations	197	289	289	289	197	197	381	381	381

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Summary Results

		Disability applications		Disability hires		Disability promotions		Disability mgt. promotions		Disability mgt and professional positions		Disability exits		Total employees w/disabilities	
	When in place	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		(6)		(7)	
Any practice	current	2.6%	**	2.5%	***	4.7%	***								
	last year			3.4%	***			4.6%	***						
	2 years ago			4.3%	***			5.0%	***	6.4%	***				
Accessibility	current			4.6%	*					4.5%	*	-14.1%	**		
	last year			4.8%	*					-6.4%	*			3.5%	*
	2 years ago			6.8%	*			7.6%	**	11.1%	***			-3.7%	*
Accommodations	current			12.7%						13.3%	**	-31.5%	***		
	last year									10.6%	*				
	2 years ago			14.5%	*										
Disability inclusion	current	19.2%	**	17.9%	**					19.1%	***				
	last year	13.5%	*			-22.0%	***							9.1%	**
	2 years ago					26.4%	***	27.1%	***	38.1%	***	25.1%	**		

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Summary Results (continued)

		Disability applications		Disability hires		Disability promotions		Disability mgt. promotions		Disability mgt and professional positions		Disability exits		Total employees w/disabilities	
	When in place	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		(6)		(7)	
	current	14.2%	**					17.6%	***					-4.1%	*
Promoting disability initiatives	last year			12.6%	***					55.3%	***				
	2 years ago			12.6%	***			19.4%	***	16.9%	***				
Recruitment															
	current	8.0%	**	7.4%	**	14.0%	***	13.5%	**						
	last year			11.9%	***	10.3%	*	14.7%	***			12.1%	*		
	2 years ago			13.5%	***			11.9%	***	19.1%	***				
Self-ID encouragement practices	current			28.5%	**			35.9%	***					11.9%	***
	last year			23.2%	**									10.6%	*
	2 years ago	38.3%	*	45.8%	***									24.5%	***
Support for disability groups/mentoring	current	16.2%	*			25.5%	**			14.1%	*			6.5%	*
	last year														
	2 years ago														
Training on disability issues	current							8.4%	*						
	last year											-17.8%	*		
	2 years ago	14.7%	**					12.0%	**						

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Which specific practices are best?

Hard to isolate effects of specific practices due to high correlations with other practices.

But can run commonality analysis, identifying unique versus shared variance for each practice in a significant category, and rank practices by unique variance.

Unique variance is calculated as proportion of the variance in the outcome accounted for by disability practices in that category.

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Example of commonality analysis to identify most important specific practices

Disability practice category	Specific practice with highest unique variance	Unique variance
PREDICTING DISABILITY HIRES		
Disability recruitment practices	careers page for jobseekers w/disabilities	0.187
Self-ID encouragement	campaign to encourage dis self-ID	0.296
Accessibility practices	app process compliant w/508	0.084
Promotion of disability initiatives	disability press releases	0.120

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What do employees think?

About 6000 employees from 7 companies filled out employee surveys on disability practices and attitudes toward company and jobs

Preliminary results:

- Employees with disabilities tend to have more negative attitudes about jobs and companies (job satisfaction, org commitment, turnover intention, psychological safety) than employees without disabilities.
- The disability practices tend to be associated with better attitudes for ALL employees, with sometimes greater effects for employees with disabilities

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Conclusion

Employer disability practices appear to matter in improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Next steps:

1. Better ways to identifying complementarities? Do practices substitute for each other, or work better when bundled together?
2. Deeper analysis of employee data: Do employee perceptions of practices validate employer reports? How much do employer practices affect employee attitudes, and possibly help close the disability gap in attitudes?
3. Predict adoption and survival of practices

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