DEP Project Summary: Contingent Work among People with Disabilities

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Research Strand: Job Quality & Retention

What are we Studying?

This study reviews how often people with disabilities work in contingent jobs, such as temporary, contract, and "gig" work, and whether these jobs meet their economic and employment needs. Specifically, we will examine how often people with disabilities take these jobs, why they take them, what kinds of jobs they prefer, and how their pay, benefits, and job security compare to workers without disabilities.

Why are we Studying this Issue?

People with disabilities are more likely than others to work in contingent jobs. While some choose these positions for flexibility to manage medical appointments or explore different work environments, contingent jobs often provide less job security, lower pay and benefits, fewer training opportunities, limited worker protections, and a larger disability pay gap compared to permanent positions. Understanding whether contingent work reflects worker preferences or labor market constraints is critical for developing effective employment policies.

How will we Study this Issue?

We will analyze data from nationwide surveys conducted in 2017, 2023, and 2025, with data each year on over 40,000 workers, including over 2,000 with disabilities. We will compare workers with and without disabilities on types of contingent work, reasons for taking these jobs, job preferences, pay and benefits, workplace accommodations, and use of SSI, SSDI, and other safety net programs. We will also examine how state policies protecting contingent workers (like those in New Jersey and Illinois) affect employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

How will this Study Impact Disability Employment Policy?

This first-of-its-kind comprehensive analysis will help policymakers understand how contingent work affects people with disabilities and assess the likely impacts of policies designed to protect and support contingent workers.

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