

# National snapshot of adults with intellectual disabilities in the labor force

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## Abstract.

**BACKGROUND:** Employment has been recognized as an important goal for improving the quality of life of adults with intellectual disabilities (ID). Governments at both the federal and state level have invested billions of dollars to encourage better outcomes for adults with ID as they transition out of high school and into the labor force.

**OBJECTIVE:** Given these important efforts, this study documented the employment situation of working-aged adults with intellectual disabilities across the country.

**METHODS:** Respondents included a nationally representative random sample of 1,017 parents/guardians of adult children (21 years of age or older) with an intellectual disability surveyed by Gallup. These parents/guardians were selected from approximately 341,000 households screened by Gallup. This methodology allowed for the inclusion of a sample of adults with ID who had never been in the labor force or even sought employment.

**RESULTS:** The results indicate a troublingly low employment rate for adults with ID and a puzzlingly low number who are even in the labor force.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The employment outlook for adults with ID will continue to be bleak until new ways are found to meaningfully incorporate this population into the labor force.

Keywords: Employment, intellectual disabilities, labor force, sheltered employment, unemployment

## 1. Introduction

When the economic downturn began in 2007, resulting in the Great Recession, the reaction among companies and businesses in the United States led to millions of Americans losing their jobs. Unsurprisingly, given the peak unemployment rate of 10% experienced during late-2009, there was an almost immediate focus on supporting out of work individuals and on the creation of jobs, culminating with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2013). While the bleak employment landscape affected many Americans, its effects were particularly felt by individuals with disabilities as it has

been suggested that the recession had a greater impact on this group (Kaye, 2010). The unemployment rate peaked at approximately 17% for individuals with disabilities over that time period (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2013).

Although the unemployment rate is a well-known and popular way to describe the employment landscape, other statistics should be considered in conjunction to fully understand the employment situation of adults with disabilities. The *unemployment rate* only takes into account those individuals who are in the labor force (i.e., either working or out of work yet seeking employment). For individuals with disabilities it is also important to consider the *employment rate*, as this figure takes into account all working-aged individuals, regardless of whether they are in or out of the labor force. During the period of 2008–2010 the estimated employment rate of adults with disabilities was extremely low,

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ranging from 39% to 34% compared with the much higher rates of 79% and 76% for individuals without a disability (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2010, 2011, 2012). Presently, the employment rate for adults with disabilities stands at 30%, in stark contrast to 76% for adults without disabilities (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2013).

Given this grim outlook, the employment of individuals with disabilities has been recognized as a priority by federal and state governments. Significant efforts have been made over the past decade, including the allocation of billions of dollars to address this issue (Mitus, Coughlin, & Scott, 2007; Silverstein, Julnes, & Nolan, 2005). This was an important investment made by the government, given that for individuals with disabilities, the benefits of employment are not unlike the benefits gained by individuals without disabilities. Employment provides opportunities for socialization and to become more financially independent (Schur, 2002), as well as foster a sense of productivity and self-worth (Kober & Eggleton, 2005). From the business perspective, companies that employ individuals with disabilities are viewed more favorably by the public (Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006; Burge, Ouellette-Kuntz, & Lysaght, 2007).

For adults with intellectual disabilities (ID) in particular, the attainment of meaningful employment has been stressed as an important goal, highlighted by the reauthorization of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (2000). Moreover, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) has made education and training that leads to employment the primary goal in transition programming for young adults with ID. Simply stated, employment has come to be viewed as the benchmark for assessing the success of special education.

Unfortunately however, many adults with ID are not attaining employment. Despite the financial investment being made and the investment in transition programming for youth with ID, it appears that little has changed with regard to the employment rate of these individuals over the past decade. It is difficult to derive national estimates as to the employment rate of adults with ID, given the variation in the way disability is defined (e.g. Taylor, Krane, & Orkis, 2010; Yamaki & Fujiura, 2002); however, the American Community Survey (ACS) includes the category of cognitive disability which provides a close approximation of the employment rate. According to the ACS, presently, less than one out of four adults with cognitive disabilities are employed. In fact, estimates of the employment rate

among these adults suggest that it declined slightly over the past 5 years; in 2008 it was reported that 28% of adults with cognitive disabilities were employed (Erickson et al., 2010), compared with the most recent estimate of 23% (Erickson et al., 2012). Furthermore, these numbers do not address the issue of underemployment. That is, when adults with ID are employed, they are most often employed part time and are paid a lower wage than their fellow workers without disabilities (Butterworth et al., 2012; U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2013).

One area that has attracted particular attention in regard to the employment of adults with ID is the setting in which they are working – facility-based/sheltered employment settings or integrated/competitive employment settings, where most people do not have disabilities. Although sheltered or facility-based employment has been an option for adults with ID for decades, over 10 years ago the Rehabilitation Services Administration eliminated sheltered employment as a preferred outcome for individuals with disabilities receiving vocational services (Wehman, Revel, & Brooke, 2003). It has been noted that generally there are fewer individuals with ID working in sheltered settings today, although, unfortunately, there has not been a corresponding increase in the percentage working competitively (Butterworth, et al., 2012).

Although individuals with ID employed in sheltered settings are more likely to be immune from factors like a recession, as most who attain a job in this setting are unlikely to ever experience job loss, those who work in sheltered settings often lag behind their peers with ID employed competitively in terms of wages (Migliore, Mank, Grossi, & Rogan, 2007). Another concern for those in the field is that most adults with ID who are employed in sheltered settings are unlikely to ever transition into a more inclusive competitive employment (Blanck, Schartz, & Schratz, 2003), despite the tenet that these types of settings serve to prepare individuals with disabilities for competitive employment (Cimera, 2011).

There are several methodologies available for estimating the employment rate and describing the employment situation of adults with ID today, although it is somewhat difficult to make comparisons given the varying definitions of disability and methodologies used to derive these estimates. Often data collection efforts include only those individuals with ID that are accessing service delivery agencies (e.g. Butterworth, et al., 2012; Howarth, Mann, Zhou, McDermott, & Butkus, 2006) or those residing in certain states

(e.g. Moran, McDermott, & Butkus, 2001). The present study builds upon this existing knowledge base about the employment situation of individuals with ID and provides a national snapshot. The snapshot examines the participation of adults with ID in and out of the workforce, with a specific focus on both the unemployment rate and employment rate. The snapshot also takes a closer look at the type of employment setting in which individuals with ID are working and whether they are underemployed. The experiences of those individuals who are not in the labor force are also analyzed in detail. Our methodology allows us to generalize the results nationally and includes a wide cross-section of adults with ID, including those who may not be accessing service agencies, or may have never even attempted to enter the labor force.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

The sample included 1,017 respondents who were parents/guardians of adult children (21 years of age or older) with an intellectual disability. Telephone interviews were conducted with these respondents by the Gallup Organization. Of the 1,017 respondents interviewed, almost all (90%) were a parent of the adult child with ID<sup>1</sup>, most were female (62%) and most had attended at least some college (67%). Given the criteria that the child with ID was 21 years of age or older, it is unsurprising that 90% of the respondents were over the age of 50.

Of the adults with ID, 58% were male and 42% were female (See Table 1), and had a mean age of 36.1 years ( $SD = 10.4$ ), with 65% between the ages of 21 and 40. The majority of the adults with ID lived with family (59%), with most of the remainder residing in group homes (20%) or living independently (17%). The majority of the sample of adults with ID (80%) were white and irrespective of gender, race, or age, most (76%) received SSI/SSDI benefits. Nearly all (97%) of the adults with ID were diagnosed as having an intellectual disability by a physician, school personnel, or an agency, as reported by the parent/guardian respondent. In addition to an intellectual disability, 38% of the adults with ID were also reported to have been diagnosed with a behavioral problem.

### 2.2. Measures

The survey developed for this study was created in collaboration with the Gallup Organization with the goal of collecting information about the employment experiences of adults with ID. To develop an instrument specific to the objectives of this study, a thorough review was conducted of the measures that have been used to describe the employment of adults with ID. From this review, questions were generated that addressed not only employment status and history, but also several other related areas including the nature of the disability, the presence of behavior problems, and present residence. The final survey instrument was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

#### 2.2.1. Present employment status

The labor department defines employment as a working-age adult currently holding a job, regardless of the pay, hours, or type of work. Therefore, the respondents were first asked to indicate whether their adult child with ID has ever had a paid job. If yes, the respondent was asked whether their adult child with ID was currently employed. Those who responded no to either of the preceding questions indicated that the adult with ID was not currently employed.

If the adult with ID was identified as currently employed, respondents were asked a series of questions that described their child's current employment situation. First, the respondent was asked to answer the following question, "Is [your child] currently employed by a company or business in the community that is NOT associated with a day activity center or sheltered workshop setting?" "Yes" responses indicated that the adult with ID was competitively employed. Those who did not respond affirmatively to the preceding question were asked, "Is [your child] currently employed in a day activity center, sheltered workshop setting, or other program exclusively for people with disabilities?" "Yes" responses indicated that the adult with ID was employed in a sheltered setting. In cases where the adult with ID was currently employed, several follow-up questions were asked concerning hourly wage (above, below, or about minimum wage), average number of hours worked per week (open-ended), and the length of time employed (less than a year, 1 to 3 years, or over 3 years). Full-time employment was defined as working 35 or more hours per week. If the adult with ID was employed in a competitive setting, additional questions were asked concerning the occupational field

<sup>1</sup> The remaining 10% of respondents included foster parents, adult relatives, or other adult caregivers.

(open-ended), if they received support or employment services from a state or local agency, and if health insurance was offered at their place of employment. If the current job was not the first job the adult with ID has held, follow-up questions were asked about his/her first job, including age at which the job was acquired (open-ended).

If the adult with ID was identified as *not* currently employed, respondents were asked to indicate whether the adult with ID was presently looking for paid employment. Because the labor department defines the unemployed as working-age adults who are out of work, but are currently looking for work, those adults with ID from the sample that were formerly employed (that is, held a paid job at some point in their lives), and currently looking for work were considered “unemployed.” Additionally, those adults with ID between the ages of 21 and 24 were identified as being in a transition stage, thus for the purposes of the present study those in this age group who had ever looked for work were also considered unemployed.

If the adult with ID was identified as having never been employed, respondents were asked to indicate whether the adult with ID had ever looked for work. In cases where the adult with ID had never looked for work, respondents were asked to indicate whether the adult with ID had ever talked about wanting a job.

### 2.3. Procedure

To obtain the sample of respondent parents/guardians of adult children 21 years of age or older who were identified as having an intellectual disability, Gallup screened randomly-dialed US households using its Daily tracking. In the Daily tracking, respondents are randomly selected for telephone interviews from a national pool through dual-frame sampling, a methodology that includes listed landline and cell numbers in the US. Gallup’s Daily tracking contacts approximately 1,000 randomly selected homes a night, 6 days a week. Gallup also employed a multi-call design to reach respondents who were not successfully contacted on the first attempt. Potential respondents were called at home by Gallup during the week and on the weekends. This tracking took place over the course of 16 months from July 2011 to October 2012.

In total 351,710 adults participated in the screening process. Gallup employed a two-step screening process where respondents were first asked whether they had any children 21 years of age or older. Those who responded affirmatively were then asked if any of their

adult children had been diagnosed with mental retardation or an intellectual disability. The term mental retardation was included because it was believed that not all respondents would be familiar with the latest terminology.

For the purposes of the screening, respondents were asked only to indicate if their child did or did not have an intellectual disability and/or two other conditions (autism spectrum disorder and learning disabilities), to provide the respondent with some context for answering. If a respondent indicated that he or she was in fact the parent of an adult child with an intellectual disability, the respondent was asked for his or her permission to be called back at a later date to participate in a survey about their child’s work experiences and involvement in the community.

Of the 351,710 households who participated in the screening through the Daily tracking, 165,587 were identified as having a child age 21 or older. From that sample, 3,833 households (2.3%) were identified as having an adult child over the age of 21 with an intellectual disability. Of these households, 2,835 (75%) agreed to be called back to participate in the in-depth survey. At call back, 213 respondents were screened out as they indicated that their child did not in fact have an intellectual disability or that their child with ID was still attending high school. An additional 175 declined to participate. In order to focus this study on working-age adults, the 8 parents/guardians of adults with ID 65 years of age or over were excluded from analyses. The final sample consisted of 1,017 parent/guardians.

The in-depth telephone interview conducted by Gallup was piloted with a sample of 30 parents/guardians and was revised for length and clarity. For each telephone call, Gallup interviewers followed a scripted protocol, after which they introduced themselves and explained the purpose of the study. Participants were informed that their responses were voluntary and confidential and that they could decline to answer any questions or terminate the call at any time. The in-depth interviews were conducted for 20 minutes on average.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Labor force

The labor force is comprised of those who are currently *employed* or *unemployed* (out of work but looking for employment); the labor force participation rate is the

proportion of working-age people who are currently in the labor force. The labor force participation rate of adults with ID aged 21–64 in the present sample was 44% (see Table 2). In comparison, in 2011<sup>2</sup> it was estimated that the majority of working-age adults without disabilities (83%) were in the labor force (Erickson et al., 2012).

### 3.1.1. Employed

The employment rate represents the proportion of working-age people who are currently employed. The employment rate of adults with ID aged 21–64 in the present sample was 34% (see Table 2). In comparison, in 2011 it was estimated that about three-quarters (76%) of working-age adults without disabilities were employed (Erickson et al., 2012). Of great import in describing the employment of adults with ID is the setting. Of the adults with ID in the sample, 18% were competitively employed and 13% were employed in a sheltered setting (see Table 2). The remaining 3% were either self-employed or their employment setting was not categorized.

*3.1.1.1. Competitively employed.* The competitive employment among the adults with ID in the sample encompassed a wide breadth of occupational fields, including customer service (28%), retail (17%), restaurant work (16%), office work (9%), and manufacturing (8%). Other occupations respondents mentioned included landscaping, construction, childcare, and animal care. Nearly all who were employed in a competitive setting (89%) were reportedly being paid around or above the minimum wage for their state. However, few (26%) were employed full-time. In comparison, it is estimated that about three-quarters (73%) of employed adults without disabilities are employed full-time (Erickson et al., 2012). In addition, only a third of those competitively employed were offered health insurance from their place of employment (35%).

Despite many competitively employed adults with ID being underemployed, many have achieved job stability. Of the adults with ID employed in a competitive setting, over half (62%) have been at their current job for 3 years or more. This stability may in part be aided by the community supports adults with ID receive. About a third of those competitively employed received support or employment services from a state or local agency (34%).

*3.1.1.2. Employed in a sheltered workshop.* Similar to adults with ID working in competitive settings, few adults with ID (20%) employed in a sheltered workshop were employed full-time. However, despite working a similar number of hours, compensation differed vastly between those employed in competitive and sheltered settings. Nearly all adults with ID (85%) who were employed in a sheltered setting were reportedly being paid below the minimum wage for their state.

Despite those drawbacks, sheltered workshop employees appear to be experiencing a high level of job stability. In fact, over three-quarters of adults with ID employed in a sheltered setting have been at their current job for 3 years or more (81%). Strikingly, only about half of sheltered workshop employees (51%) had ever been employed elsewhere.

### 3.1.2. Unemployed

The unemployed are working-age individuals who are not currently working, but are looking for a job. The unemployment rate is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed persons by the number in the labor force. The unemployment rate for working-age adults with ID in the present sample was 21% (see Table 2). In comparison, in 2011 adults without disabilities were reported to have an unemployment rate of about 9% (Erickson et al., 2012), indicating that the unemployment rate for those individuals with ID is more than twice as high as those without disabilities.

The unemployed in the present sample includes those adults with ID who have been previously employed (88%) as well as those who are in a transition stage (ages 21–24) and in search of their first job (12%). Interestingly, nearly all of the currently unemployed who are not seeking their first job came from a competitive setting (88%).<sup>3</sup> That is, there were very few adults with ID who were considered unemployed but had left or lost a job in a sheltered setting. Moreover, over half (62%) of the adults with ID who were considered unemployed had held a job within the past three years, this includes a sizable minority (41%) who have held a job within the past year.

The most common reasons given for losing a job were being fired or laid off (55%) or that the job was a temporary one that had ended (15%). Very few parents/guardians indicated that their child had chosen to leave their job volitionally (9%), with none indicating that their child's health or disability played a role. Other

<sup>2</sup>Information from 2011 was used as a comparison because the data collection began during this time period.

<sup>3</sup>This finding is based on adults with ID who have held more than one job.

Table 1  
Demographics for the adults with ID ( $N = 1,017$ )

Characteristics	Percentages	M (SD)
Gender		
Male	58%	
Female	42%	
Age		36.1 (10.4)
21–30	36%	
31–40	29%	
41–50	24%	
51–64	11%	
Residence <sup>5</sup>		
With Family	59%	
Group Home	20%	
On Own	17%	
Other	4%	
Race/Ethnicity		
White	80%	
Black	8%	
Hispanic	5%	
Other	6%	
Behavioral Problems <sup>6</sup>		
Diagnosed	38%	
Parent-Reported	14%	
None	48%	

responses included being unable to keep up with the work, the business closing, and moving.

### 3.2. Out of the labor force

As stated previously, those currently employed, or currently unemployed and seeking employment, are considered to be in the labor force. In contrast, those currently not working and *not* seeking employment are considered out of the labor force. Over half of the adults with ID in our sample were out of the labor force (56%) (see Table 3).

#### 3.2.1. Formerly employed and not seeking employment

Just over a quarter of the adults with ID had been employed at some point in their lives (28%) (see Table 3). Of these previously employed adults, about three-quarters (74%)<sup>4</sup> had been working in a compet-

<sup>4</sup>This finding is based on the most recent job of adults with ID who have held more than one job.

<sup>5</sup> Responses to this question were open-ended and later coded as with family, on their own, in a group home, or other non-family residence.

<sup>6</sup>In addition to intellectual disability, the respondent was asked if their adult child with ID had ever been diagnosed with a behavioral disorder or an emotional disturbance. If respondent indicated no, they were asked whether the adult child with ID exhibits any behavior problems such as acting out (See Measures section).

Table 2  
Labor Statistics ( $N = 1,017$ )

Employment situation	Percentages
Labor Force Participation Rate	44%
Employment Rate	34%
Competitive Setting	18%
Sheltered Setting	13%
Other Setting	3%
Unemployment Rate	21%

Table 3  
Labor Statistics ( $N = 1,017$ )

Employment situation	Percentages
Out of the Labor Force	56%
Formerly Employed	28%
Never Employed	28%

itive setting. Most of these individuals had been out of work for an extended period; over three-quarters (77%) had been out of work for three years or more. The most common reasons for no longer being employed were being fired or laid off (37%), having their health or disability interfere with the job (23%), or that the job was a temporary one that had ended (13%). Other responses included insufficient wage, not liking a certain aspect of work, being unable to keep up with the work, the business closing, and moving. Of the formerly employed adults with ID, about a quarter were enrolled in a day program (26%).

#### 3.2.2. Never employed

Just over a quarter of working-age adults with ID (28%) have never been in the workforce (see Table 3). That is they have never held a job in either a competitive or sheltered workshop setting. In addition, few adults with ID who have never been employed had ever shown an interest in finding a paying job (24%), and even less had ever actively looked for a job (7%). Of those adults with ID who have never worked, nearly half were enrolled in a day program (45%).

## 4. Discussion

The preceding snapshot provided a comprehensive national picture of the employment situation of working-aged adults with ID. This includes not only an estimate of the employment rate, but also a glimpse into what it means to be employed for an adult with ID. Those not working were viewed as two distinct populations – individuals searching for work and those who are out of the labor force entirely.

Unfortunately, despite efforts that have been made over the past two decades, adults with ID have not made much progress in terms of employment. In fact, the finding that most stands out in this national snapshot is that less than half of the working aged adults with ID, or less than one out of every two, were in the labor force – that is, either currently employed or searching for work. Of those individuals who were not a part of the labor force, half had never worked, with most having never sought employment. While this labor force participation rate is higher than that reported for adults with cognitive disabilities (32%) through the American Community Survey (ACS) (2011), perhaps providing a somewhat less bleak picture than has been suggested, it stands in stark contrast to the employment situation of working aged adults without disabilities where four out of five are in the labor force (Erickson et al., 2012). The low labor force participation stems in part from the low rate of employment for adults with ID, but it also includes a puzzlingly low number of adults with ID who are presently looking for work.

Adults with ID who once held a job but were out of the labor force at the time of the survey were more likely to have left their previous position because their disability or health had interfered with their work (as reported by family members), than those who were still looking for work. This finding is consistent with previous research (Fogg, Harrington, & McMahon, 2010), and reflects the idea that many family members may believe that their child's disability makes it difficult for them to perform job duties. However, leaving the labor force in many cases may not be due to a lack of ability to perform a job, but rather the lack of ability to perform available jobs or to find an appropriate job.

The formerly employed adults with ID who were out of the labor force also tended to have been out of work for longer than those who were still seeking employment. It is possible that many of those who were interested in finding a new job remained unable to secure employment and therefore became discouraged and dropped out of the labor force entirely. "Discouraged workers" are described as those individuals that are no longer actively seeking work because they perhaps believe that there are no jobs available that they are able to perform (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2009). For adults with ID, this belief may not be completely unfounded.

For an adult with ID it would not be difficult to become discouraged considering the employment prospects for this group. The adults with ID who were employed tended to be engaged in service or laborer type jobs, as has been documented previously (Yamaki

& Fujiura, 2002). These are the fields where low-skill workers are often employed, and thus the occupations that may be most open to hiring adults with ID. Over the past 30 years, however, low-skill jobs have made up an ever-shrinking proportion of the economy (Manyika et al., 2011; Dobbs et al., 2012), and even in occupations traditionally considered low-skilled, such as manufacturing, new hires are now often required to be high-skilled (Deitz & Orr, 2006). Without a change in this economic trend, it will be increasingly difficult for adults with ID to find appropriate and fulfilling job opportunities.

With regard to the present employment rate, only a third of adults with ID in the present study were employed. This employment rate suggests a slightly more positive outlook than that reported through the ACS (2011), where only about a quarter of adults with a cognitive disability (23%) were estimated to be employed, however it is strikingly lower than the reported employment rate of adults without disabilities (76%) (Erickson et al., 2012). This difference represents an employment gap of 42%, suggesting that working-age adults with ID are employed at less than half the rate of those without a disability. This finding confirms the troubling and persistently wide "gap" that has been well documented (Yamaki & Fujiura, 2002; Wehman, 2001). Given the important role employment can play in improving the quality of life for individuals with ID, including fostering a sense of self-worth and ensuring increased financial independence (Kober & Eggleton, 2011; Test, Carver, Ewers, Haddad, & Person, 2000), the employment rate of the adults with ID from our sample is disturbingly low.

Unfortunately, even those from the current sample who were able to find and retain employment, whether in a competitive or sheltered setting, were often underemployed—as has been documented elsewhere (Butterworth, et al., 2012). Our findings support this notion as the majority of adults with ID were likely to be working part-time and for a minimal wage – though those working competitively were much more likely to be earning at least the minimum wage for their state. However, it is important to note that although the adults with ID employed competitively tended to be compensated at a legal hourly rate, they may still be earning far less than their full-time employed counterparts who do not have a disability.

The bright spot for adults with ID is that consistent with past research (Pierce, McDermott, & Butkus, 2003), those who were employed seemed to experience a sense of job stability, regardless of the employment

setting and type of job. Specifically, while nearly all of those employed in a sheltered setting had been at their current job for over 3 years, over half of those employed competitively reported the same. This is a positive trend given the information for this study was obtained during the tail end of the “great recession.”

#### 4.1. Limitations

The present study summarized the employment situation of adults who were identified as having intellectual disability by a parent or guardian. Responses to survey questions were provided by family members and not the adults with ID themselves. This methodology was utilized as it allowed us to collect information about the life of the adult with ID dating back to their high school experiences. Because proxy respondents were used, no questions were asked that required the respondents to provide information from the perspective of the adult with ID, such as to how they felt about their current employment situation.

In addition, it is important to note that states vary widely in their policies and programs supporting the employment of adults with ID and adults with disabilities generally. The results aggregate across all of the states, but do not necessarily speak to the particular situations of individual states. Furthermore, adults with ID are by no means a homogeneous group, so as we move forward we need to look at the individual characteristics that may change the employment prospects of an adult with ID. Other studies have looked at how factors such as the nature of the disability, age, and family background influence whether an adult with ID becomes employed. The present study took this approach such that the findings would be representative of all adults with ID in the United States. Beyond providing a national snapshot of the employment situation of adults with ID, the wide-ranging description presented in this study was an attempt to provide a fuller picture than that which can be captured through employment statistics that are often presented in isolation. Subsequent studies should address the paths that most often lead to stable employment for adults with ID, as well as the individual characteristics that most often portend following in that path.

#### 4.2. Conclusion

In summary, it is clear that the low employment rate experienced by adults with ID suggests that there is still much work to be done. One advantage of the present

study is that we were able to access families of adults with ID regardless of whether they were involved with a disability service agency or receiving other support services. This allowed not only an exploration of the general employment experiences of a nationally representative random sample of adults identified as having an intellectual disability, but also those individuals with ID who had never been in the labor force, or even even sought employment. It is important that policy makers and researchers continue to seek out measures that allow for the identification of adults with ID as a distinct population such that we can access and collect information from those who are not employed or seeking employment. While the Department of Labor reports on the unemployment rate as an important economic indicator, for individuals with ID it is perhaps most important to consider and learn from the much larger group that is not participating in the labor force. Clearly, improving the quality of life of adults with ID needs to begin with more focus placed here – on finding new ways to bring these individuals into the labor force and supporting them through job loss and other transitions and interruptions to their employment.

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