

CORNELL

---

Rehabilitation Research and Training Center  
for Economic Research on Employment  
Policy for Persons with Disabilities

## ***State Estimates of Employment Rates for Persons with Disabilities: Report Summary***<sup>1</sup>

By Andrew Houtenville, Ph.D.

Statistics on the states' employment rates for persons with disabilities relative to their non-disabled peers may be of assistance to providers of employment services for persons with disabilities. Such information can help service providers, policy makers, and disability advocacy leaders to assess whether the employment rate of people with disabilities is improving over time, given policy, regulatory, and service intervention strategies.

A recent report from the Cornell University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) for Economic Research on Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities uses data from the March Current Population Survey to estimate employment rates for persons with and without a disability in the non-institutionalized working-age (aged 25 through 61) civilian population in the United States, and for each state and the District of Columbia for the years 1980 through 1998. The employment rate of persons with a disability relative to that of persons without disabilities are found to vary greatly across states. Over the last 20 years the relative employment rate of those with a disability dramatically declined overall and in most states.

The estimated employment rates are derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS), which is a monthly survey of the non-institutionalized population of the United States, conducted by the Bureau of the Census on behalf of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Information is collected from approximately 50,000 households (about 150,000 individuals) on labor

<sup>1</sup> A full copy of this report, entitled *Economics of Disability Research Report #2: Estimates of Employment Rates of for Persons with Disabilities in the United States by State, 1980 through 1998* prepared by Andrew Houtenville, Ph.D., is available from the Cornell University web site at: [http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/download.html?pub\\_id=654](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/download.html?pub_id=654)

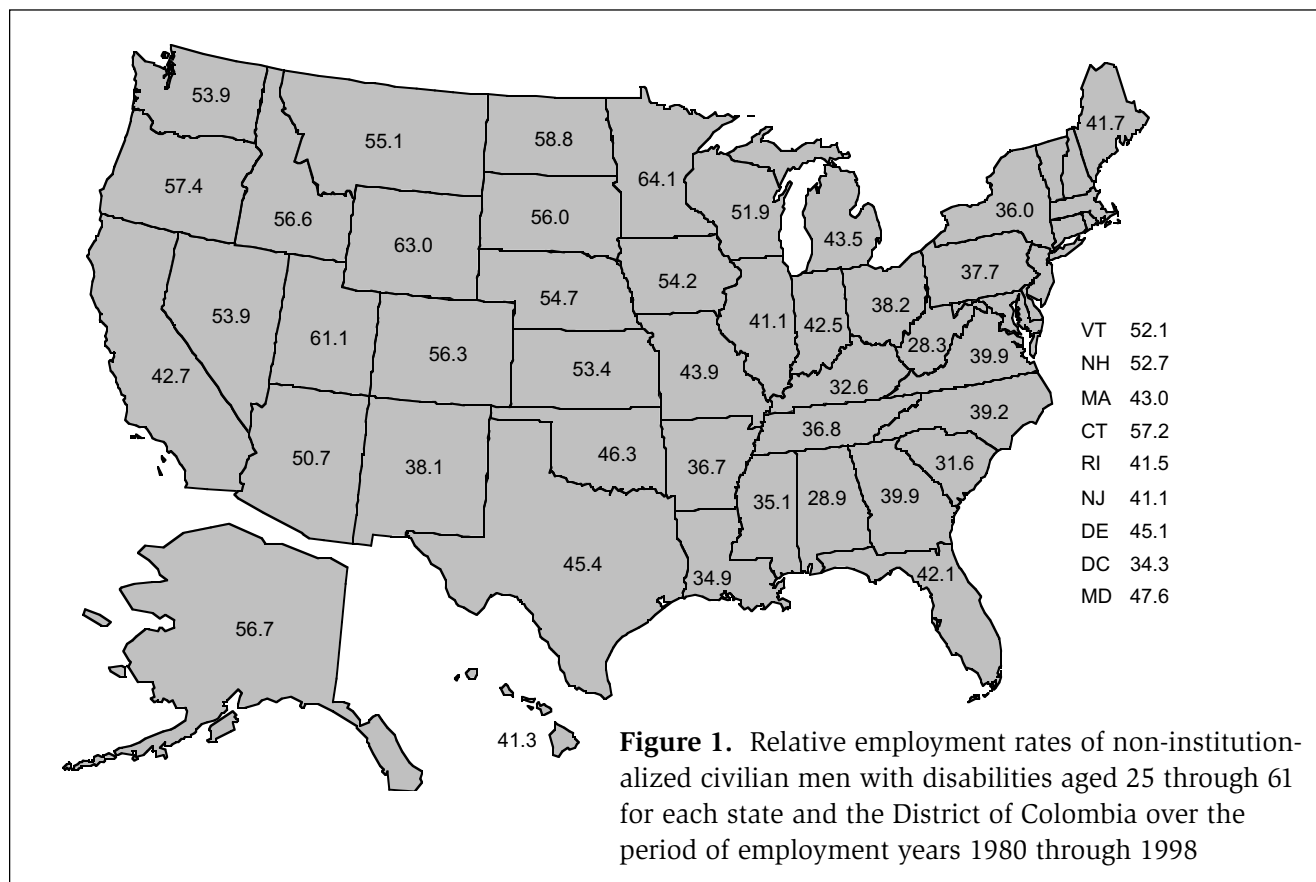
August 2001

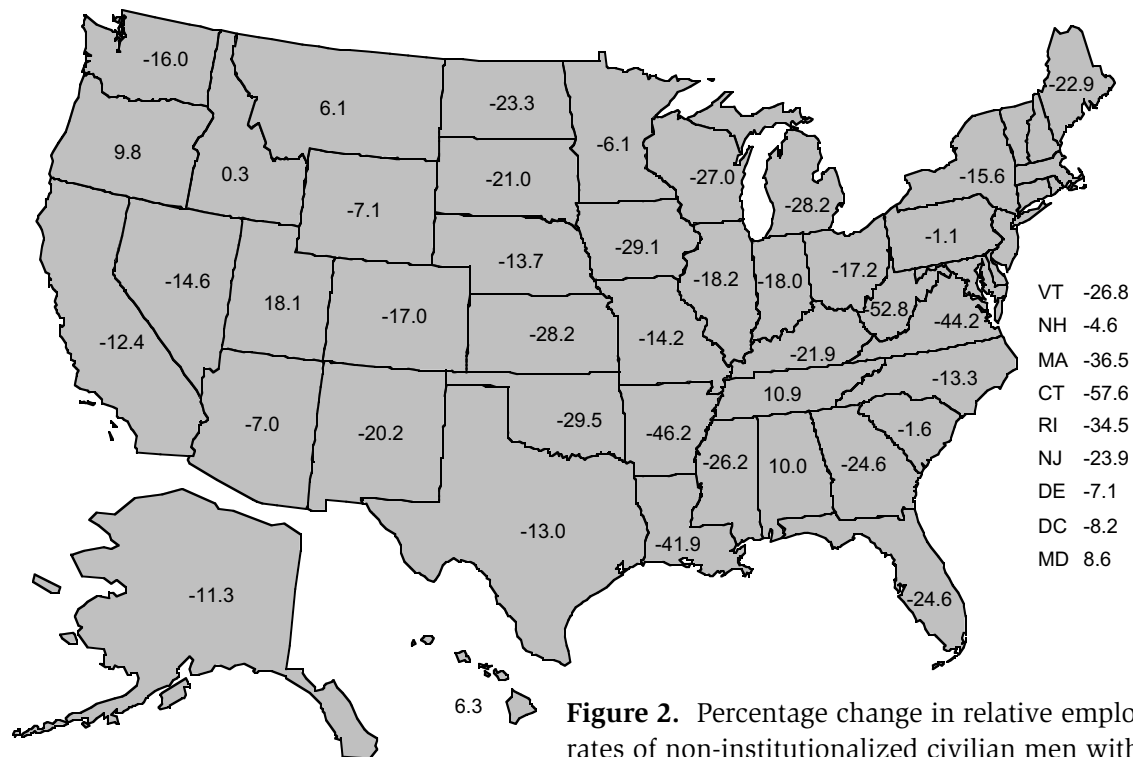
force characteristics (e.g., employment, earnings, hours of work). In this report, disability is defined using a single question in the March CPS. Persons with a disability are defined as those who report having (or are reported by the household's respondent as having) "a health problem or disability which prevents them from working or which limits the kind or amount of work they can do." This definition puts disability in the social context of work. This simple definition of disability is not linked to program participation. This measure of disability is commonly used in the economics literature (see Bound and Burkhauser, 1999).

In this report, states are ranked according to the relative average annual employment rates of persons with a disability. (The relative employment rate is the employment rate of those with disabilities as a percentage of the employment rate of those without disabilities. The larger this number is, the closer are the employment rates of those with and without disabilities.) Minnesota had the highest relative average annual employment rates for men with a disability (64.1 percent), and West Virginia

had the lowest (28.3 percent). For women with a disability, relative average annual employment rates ranged from 67.7 percent in Minnesota to 29.8 percent in Mississippi. In general, states with lower employment rates for those with a disability also had lower relative employment rates. *Figure 1* portrays these results.

This Cornell University report also compares changes in relative employment rates for persons with a disability between the growth periods 1985-1989 and 1994-1998. States are ranked according to the percentage change in the relative average annual employment rate of those with a disability between the periods 1985-1989 and 1994-1998. A positive percentage change in relative employment signifies a closing of the employment gap between those with and without a disability. Conversely, a negative percentage change in relative employment signifies a widening of the employment gap between those with and without a disability. As portrayed in *Figure 2* (page 3), there was wide variation in change in employment outcomes of men with a disability, ranging from a rise of 18.1 percent in Utah to a fall





**Figure 2.** Percentage change in relative employment rates of non-institutionalized civilian men with disabilities aged 25 through 61 for each state and the District of Columbia over the five-year-growth periods of the 1980 and 1990s business cycles.

of 57.6 percent in Connecticut. Overall, the gap widened. Only eight states experienced a narrowing of the employment gap between men with and without a disability. The pattern for women was similar.

There are two other reports by Cornell University providing state specific data that might be of interest to state providers of rehabilitation employment services and disability advocacy organizations. These reports provide estimates of the prevalence of disability, and median household size-adjusted income for persons with disabilities in the United States by state from 1980 through 1998. Copies of report summaries on this information or the full reports are available on-line from Cornell University under “publications” at <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/rrtc>. Questions about the reports or the analysis should be directed to Andrew Houtenville, Ph.D., RRTC Senior Research Associate, Cornell University, at email [ajh29@cornell.edu](mailto:ajh29@cornell.edu) or phone 607-255-5702.

## References

- Bound, J., & Burkhauser, R.V. (1999). Economic Analysis of Transfer Programs Targeted on People with Disabilities. In O. C. Ashenfelter & D. Card (Eds.), *Handbook of Labor Economics*, Volume 3C. Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, pp. 3417-3528.
- Houtenville, Andrew. (2000). *Economics of Disability Research Report #2: Estimates of Employment Rates for Persons with Disabilities in the United States by State, 1980 through 1998*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Economic Research on Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities.

## Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Andrew T. Chen, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research Scholar and Cornell University student, for assistance in the preparation of this report summary.

---

**For further information about the Cornell RRTC contact:**

Susanne Bruyère, Ph.D.	<b>tel</b> (607) 255-7727
Project Director	<b>fax</b> (607) 255-2763
Cornell University	<b>TDD</b> (607) 255-2891
106 ILR Extension Building	<b>e-mail</b> <a href="mailto:smb23@cornell.edu">smb23@cornell.edu</a>
Ithaca, NY 14853-3901	<b>web</b> <a href="http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/rrtc">www.ilr.cornell.edu/rrtc</a>

**This paper is being distributed** by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Economic Research on Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities at Cornell University.

**This center is funded** to Cornell University, in collaboration with The Lewin Group (Falls Church, VA), and the Urban Institute (Washington, D.C.) by the U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (*Grant No. H133B980038*).

**This research and training effort** is an across college effort at Cornell University between the Program on Employment and Disability in the Extension Division of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations and the Department of Policy Analysis and Management in the College of Human Ecology. The Lewin Group is an internationally recognized research and consulting firm specializing in health and human services policy and management. The Urban Institute is a non-profit policy research organization which focuses on efforts to solve society's problems, improve government decisions and their implementation, and increase citizens' awareness about important public choices.

**The Co-Principal Investigators are:**

**Susanne M. Bruyère**—*Director, Program on Employment and Disability, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Extension Division, Cornell University*

**Richard V. Burkhauser**—*Sarah Gibson Blanding Professor and Chair, Department of Policy Analysis and Management, College of Human Ecology, Cornell University*

**David C. Stapleton**—*Director, Cornell Center for Policy Research, Cornell University*