

## Employment and Unemployment of People with Serious Mental Illness

Individuals with serious mental illnesses want to work but are significantly underrepresented in the workplace. Numerous studies over many years have shown a consistent pattern – people with disabilities have high unemployment rates and people with serious mental illnesses have the highest unemployment rate of any group with disabilities, despite the fact that most of these people have both the desire and the capacity to work.<sup>1</sup>

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for 2009 show that people with disabilities are much less likely to be employed than those with no disability:<sup>2</sup>

- In 2009, of those ages 18 to 64 years living in the community, 74.3 percent of people without disabilities were employed, compared to only 35.3 percent of individuals with disabilities.
- This disparity in employment rates is even more remarkable when you consider that a large proportion of those with a disability, 8 in 10 (compared with 3 in 10 workers without a disability) are not even counted in the labor force participation rate, which is the portion of the population that is working or actively looking for a job (must have taken tangible steps to obtain employment within the last four weeks). Workers with a disability are more likely than those with no disability to have jobs that are less than full-time. Among workers with a disability, 32 percent work part time compared with 19 percent of workers without a disability.

For people with mental illnesses, employment rates are lower when compared to those with no reported mental illness:

- Between 1989 and 1998, the employment rate for people with serious mental illness ranged from 32 to 61%, depending on the survey.<sup>3</sup> The employment rate for people who had schizophrenia and related disorders ranged from 22-40%.

### Employment Status and Mental Illnesses

Health Status	No Reported Mental Illness	Serious Mental Illness	Serious Mental Illness – Schizophrenia and Related Disorders
<b>Percent Employed</b>	76-87%	32-61%	22-44%

- In addition, in 2006, only 22% of all persons served nationally in community mental health programs were employed.<sup>4</sup>

The labor force participation rate for people with mental illnesses is even lower than the rate for people with disabilities (30%): Among those with serious mental illness, the labor force participation rate ranged from 21.5% in 1985 to 27.2% in 1994.<sup>5</sup>

Even when employed, most are severely under-employed:

- 70 percent of people with serious mental illnesses who have college degrees earn less than \$10 an hour.<sup>6</sup>

Stigma and misinformation about mental disabilities is a significant barrier to employment. Many employers underestimate their ability or fear unpredictable behavior. Employers may be unduly concerned that individuals with serious mental illnesses will have poor attendance, problems with performance, or will need accommodations that will be too costly. For example, accommodations commonly sought by individuals with serious mental illnesses—such as telecommuting, flexible work schedules and intermittent breaks during work hours—often have no cost, such as telecommuting options, flexible work schedules and intermittent breaks during work hours.<sup>7</sup> Another option is for individuals with these disorders to access a supported employment program.

When people with psychiatric disabilities are employed, everybody wins. Employment helps those with mental illness live autonomously, build meaningful personal relationships, become integrated into society and attain social, emotional, familial and general well-being.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Promoting Independence and Recovery through Work: Employment for People with Psychiatric Disabilities, *Briefing Document for the National Governors Association, Center For Best Practice (NGA) Webcast Transforming State Mental Health Systems: Promoting Independence and Recovery through Work: Employment for People with Psychiatric Disabilities*, July 31, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Disability Employment Policy, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Current Population Survey, [www.bls.gov/cps](http://www.bls.gov/cps)

<sup>3</sup> Mechanic, D., Bilder, S. & McAlpine, D (2002). Employing Persons With Serious Mental Illness. *Health Affairs*, September/October 2002; 21(5): 242-253.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, F.A., & Bhattarai, S., 2008. Persons Served in Community Mental Health Programs and Employment. DataNoteSeries, Data Note XVII. Boston, MA: Institute for Community Inclusion.

<sup>5</sup> Trupin L., Sebesta, D.S., Yelin, E., et al: Trends in Labor Force Participation Among Persons with Disabilities, 1983-1994. Disability Statistics Report 10. Washington, DC, US Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Promoting Independence and Recovery through Work: Employment for People with Psychiatric Disabilities, *Briefing Document for the National Governors Association, Center For Best Practice (NGA) Webcast Transforming State Mental Health Systems: Promoting Independence and Recovery through Work: Employment for People with Psychiatric Disabilities*, July 31, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Office of Disability Employment Policy, *Maximizing Productivity: Accommodations for Employees with Psychiatric Disabilities*. Available at: [www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/psychiatric.htm](http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/psychiatric.htm).

<sup>8</sup> Kessler Foundation, National Organization on Disabilities and Harris Interactive: 2010 gap Survey of Americans with Disabilities (September, 2010). [www.2010disabilitysurveys.org/index.html](http://www.2010disabilitysurveys.org/index.html) & Bond, G.R., Becker, D.R., Drake, R.E., Rapp, C.A., Meisler, N., Lehman, A.F., Bell, M.D., & Blyler, C.R., Implementing Supported Employment as an Evidence-Based Practice, *Psychiatric Services*, March 2001.