

Researchers explore variations in employment outcomes for people with disabilities

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Dr. O'Neill is director of disability and employment research at Kessler Foundation. Credit: Kessler Foundation

A team of disability researchers has authored a new article that explores the underlying factors for the substantial geographic variation in

employment rates among people with disabilities in the U.S. Their findings are detailed in, "State and Local Determinants of Employment Outcomes among Individuals with Disabilities," which was published in the *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*. 2018, Vol. 29(2) 119 -128. The authors are Purvi Sevak, Ph.D., of Mathematica Policy Research, John O'Neill, Ph.D., of Kessler Foundation, Andrew Houtenville, Ph.D., and Debra Brucker, Ph.D., of the University of New Hampshire—Institute on Disability (UNH-IOD).

Throughout the U.S., there is wide variability in employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Among states, for example, rates vary from 25.3% in West Virginia to 52.8% in North Dakota. In Arizona, [employment rates](#) vary by county, from less than 30% to more than 40%. This wide variability among and within states suggested that environmental factors, such as the physical environment, local economic conditions, and policy variables play a role in the likelihood of finding people with disabilities in the workforce.

Working with national data from the 2009-2011 American Community Survey and a set of state- and county-level environmental variables, the team examined the relationship between employment outcomes of people with disabilities and the [environmental factors](#) of the counties and states in which they reside. Their findings provide clues to the geographic variations in employment across the U.S.

"We found that employment outcomes were most strongly related to the economic conditions and [physical environment](#); while the policy environment was less of an influence," noted co-author John O'Neill, Ph.D., director of disability and employment research at Kessler Foundation. "None of these factors, however, were as strongly related to employment as individual health and personal characteristics," he emphasized, "which is why all of these factors need to be weighed and considered in order to find effective ways to improve [employment](#)

[outcomes](#) for people with disabilities."

"The efforts we focus on policies aimed at benefiting individuals must be weighed within the broader context of the environment," said Dr. O'Neill. "For example, policies that expand educational opportunities will be more likely to result in [employment](#) if the local job market and [economic conditions](#) of the job market are considered."

More information: [DOI: 10.1177/2F1044207318782676](https://doi.org/10.1177/2F1044207318782676)

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