



University of  
Connecticut

**A.J. Pappanikou Center for Developmental Disabilities**

*A University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service*

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# **Employment Of Persons With Disabilities In Connecticut**

*Real Choice Briefing Paper #2*

**Dale Borman Fink, Ph.D.**

Christine M. Gaynor, M.A., *Project Coordinator*

Mary Beth Bruder, Ph.D., *Principal Investigator*

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# EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN CONNECTICUT

## REAL CHOICE BRIEFING PAPER #2

### **Real Choice Briefing Papers**

This paper and others in the series are a product of the Real Choice System Change project at the University of Connecticut's Center for Disabilities in Farmington, Connecticut. The aim of the project is to help communities in

Connecticut become more inclusive of persons with disabilities in all arenas, including but not limited to schooling, employment, recreation, and community involvement.

The papers in this series are based on a (non-random) sample of 250 individuals with disabilities who completed an in-depth survey. Three-quarters of the respondents were adults and one-quarter children; they resided in 90 of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns.

For more information about the Center or the Real Choice System Change project, or for a copy of the full report of the Connecticut Real Choice Consumer Survey please visit our website, <http://www.uconnucdd.org/>.

# EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN CONNECTICUT

Among adults from 18 through 64 who responded to our survey, 58% were engaged in some kind of gainful employment, either part-time, full-time, or in self-employment. However, the full-time employment rate was just 17.5%. The employment rate in 2000 in Connecticut for persons aged 16 and over in the population in general, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, was 62.8%, of whom 80% were employed full time (35 hours or more).<sup>1</sup> This shows a huge disparity in employment between the population with and without disabilities, especially when it comes to full-time employment.

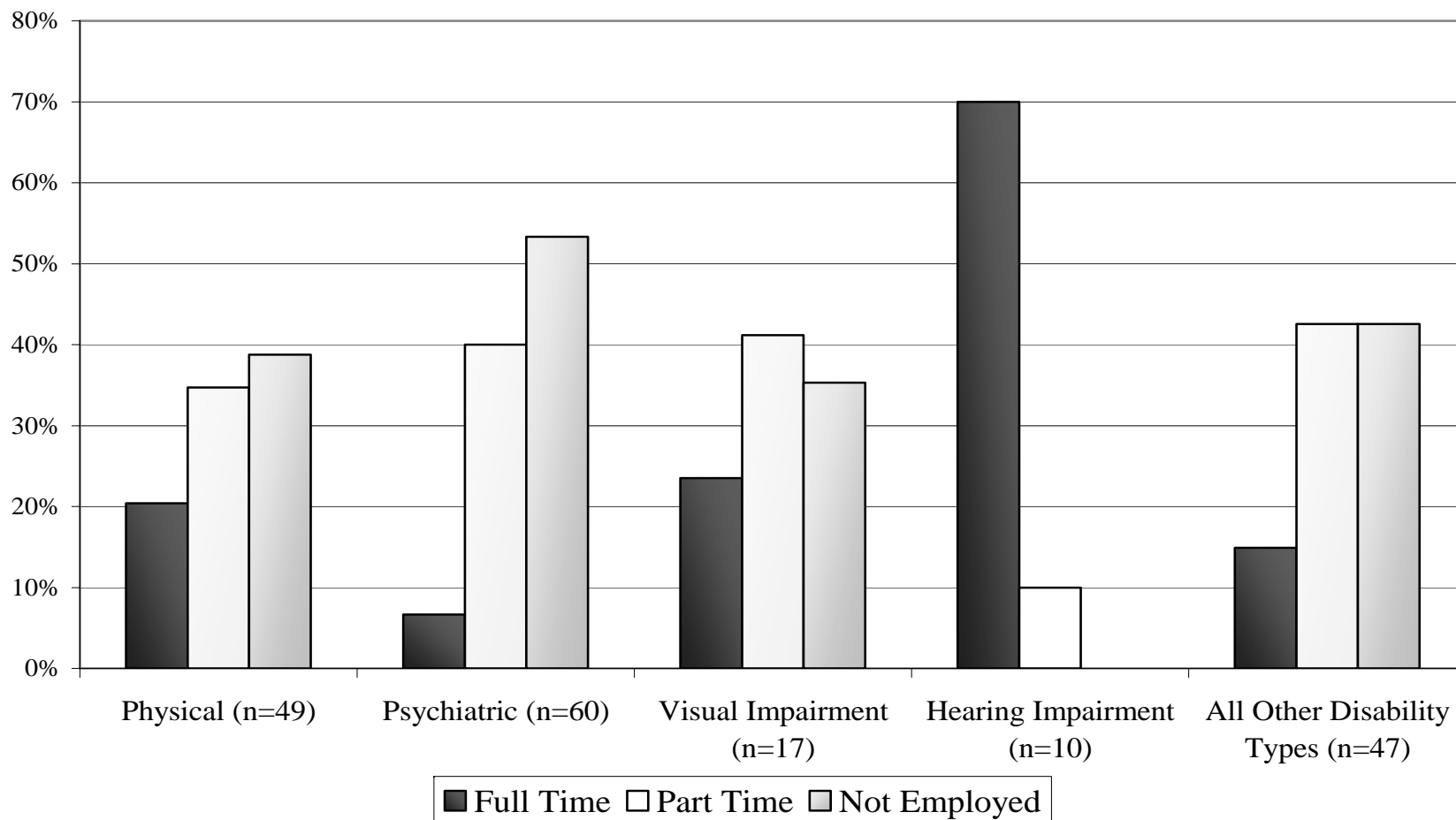
As the accompanying graph makes clear, the highest proportion of full-time employment came among those with deafness or hearing impairment (87.5%). Nearly all other disability types had rates of full-time employment lower than 25%.<sup>2</sup> Among our largest group of adults, those with psychiatric disabilities, the full-time employment rate was only 6.7%. Among the second most prevalent group, those with physical disabilities, the rate was slightly over 20%. Among the third most prevalent group, those who were blind or visually impaired, the full-time employment rate was 21%.

Combining full-time, part-time, and self-employment work, adults with visual impairment or blindness reached a 68% employment rate, compared to 61% for individuals with physical disabilities and 47% for those with psychiatric disabilities. None of our seven working-aged adults with learning disabilities reported full-time employment, but six of them had part-

time jobs, for an 86% rate. As displayed in the graph, the employment rate for survey respondents with deafness or hearing impairment was 100%.

Examining employment by age segments, we found that among those 22 through 35, 76% of our respondents reported that they were employed--about three-fourths part-time and one-fourth full-time. Among respondents aged 36 to 64 (the largest segment of our sample) the overall rate was 57%. One-third of the employed respondents, ages 36-50, worked full-time, and just one-fourth of those 51-64 were employed full-time.

**Figure 6: Frequency of Employment Within Disability Types**



\*Three respondents (6%) with physical disabilities and two respondents (20%) with visual impairments reported being self-employed.

## **How the Amount of Help Needed Influenced Rates of Employment**

Employment among our younger survey respondents was not related to the amount of help they needed with daily tasks. However, among older respondents, there was a reduced employment rate among those needing a lot of help. Fully 86% of survey respondents aged 22 to 35 who needed a lot of help were employed, while just 37.5% and 43% of respondents needing a lot of help were employed at ages 36 to 50 and 51 to 64, respectively. Thus it appears that those with more significant disabilities who have exited school more recently have been more likely to enter the work force and seek out the kinds of supports or accommodations they need than was the case in earlier generations.

## **Comparison to National Sample**

It is instructive to compare our data to results from surveys conducted by Harris Interactive in conjunction with the National Organization on Disability. Harris surveyed adults without disabilities as well, so it is possible to compare our data both to their nationally drawn random sample of adults over 18 with disabilities and to their nationally drawn random sample of persons without disabilities. The Harris/N.O.D. survey found much lower employment among their respondents with disabilities. Only 32% of their national sample of working-age (18-64) respondents with disabilities reported being employed – just three-fifths of the 58% that we found. This was the case even though the proportion of adults in our sample who needed a lot of help for daily activities (16%) approximated the percentage in their sample (19%) that needed help with basic needs. Of course, neither the 32% they found nor the 58% we found compared to the 81% employment rate of working-aged people without disabilities whom they sampled.<sup>3</sup>

There was also a discrepancy between the two surveys in the proportion of those without jobs who were seeking employment. Among our respondents this came to 43.5%, but among the Harris sample it was considerably higher: two-thirds of the non-employed respondents under 65 years of age.<sup>4</sup> On closer inspection, we found that responses to our survey varied dramatically by the ages of respondents. While 87.5% of those not currently employed at ages 22-35 were looking for work (higher than the percentage in the Harris sample), a substantially lower 42% of respondents not employed at ages 36-50 were looking for work (much lower than among the Harris respondents with disabilities). Among respondents to our survey between the ages of 51 and 64, just one-third (32%) of those not currently employed reported that they were seeking employment.

### **What does this mean for me?**

Our survey sample was not random, so our findings can only be suggestive and not definitive. The fact that compared to a national sample we found a higher proportion of persons with disabilities employed in Connecticut is nevertheless encouraging for anyone with a disability entering the labor force in this state. We are particularly heartened by the finding that among respondents aged 22 to 35 who needed a lot of help with daily tasks the employment rate was 86%. Even assuming that our sample is far from representative of all persons in that category, these data suggest that among adults who received education and transitional support through the provisions of IDEA as amended since the late 1980s, there has been some noteworthy success in gaining entry into the workforce for Connecticut citizens with significant disabilities. The overall higher employment rate compared to the Harris sample, together with the figures for young adults who need a lot of help, lead us to hope that Connecticut residents



may have higher expectations than those in other states about the accommodations and supports employers will supply when they do enter the labor force.

What is not encouraging is that so few of our survey respondents, other than those who were deaf or had hearing impairment, were employed full-time. We did not ask respondents if they would have preferred to work full-time, so we are not in a position to draw strong conclusions on this point. However, it seems highly unlikely that such high percentages of those in the labor force wish to work part-time. It does not seem plausible that only 7% of those with psychiatric disabilities or 0% of those with learning disabilities (for example) wished to work full-time.

The high proportion of voluntarily unemployed respondents (i.e., those indicating they are not seeking employment) leads us to wonder if Connecticut residents with disabilities are fully informed about programs available to help people with significant disabilities keep their Medicaid (Title XIX) and other benefits while they work. Public policy in regard to the employment of individuals with disabilities has evolved in recent years in some positive ways. We urge anyone reading this publication who is unfamiliar with these policies to seek out further information from us or from another source of their choosing.

For more information about the University of Connecticut's A. J. Pappanikou Center on Developmental Disabilities, or the Real Choice System Change project, please visit our website, <http://www.uconnucedd.org/>. Or call us at (860) 679-1500.

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics: Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment, 2002 Section II: Estimates for States, table 13  
[http://www.bls.gov/opub/gp/pdf/gp02\\_13.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/gp/pdf/gp02_13.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> One-third of working-aged respondents with cognitive disabilities and a similar proportion of those with neurological impairments reported full-time employment. However, the number of respondents involved was very small. The individuals with these two kinds of disabilities are not displayed separately on the graph, but are merged among the “other” disabilities.

<sup>3</sup> Harris Interactive (2000) Gaps Survey. We used the earlier Gaps survey for this comparison because it disaggregated the working-aged data from older respondents.

<sup>4</sup> Harris Interactive (2000) Gaps Survey.