

Employment and Disability Policy: The Role of the Psychologist

Persons with minor or major disabilities represent a significant portion of the U.S. working-age population. Based on the 1993 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), approximately 30 million (19%) men and women 18 to 64 years of age report some type of physical or mental limitation. For approximately 55% of these individuals (about 10% of those 18 to 64), the limitations are severe (The Lewin Group 1998).

Despite repeated attempts to introduce employment and disability policies over the past several decades to improve employment status of persons with disabilities, employment inequity continues. According to Burkhauser and Houtenville (1999), using the Current Population Survey (CSP) for working age civilians in 1997, only 20% of men and 11% of women with work disabilities were working full time year round, compared to 80% of men and 54% of women without work disabilities who were working full time.

The purpose of this symposium is to provide a forum to present information on the various public policies currently in place and emerging that affect the employment of people with disabilities. Representatives from the Social Security Administration's Office for Employment Support Programs, the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities, the Rehabilitation Services Administration, and the president's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities will discuss current initiatives from their respective federal agencies. The implications of the Workforce Incentive Act (WIA) and the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIA) for reducing this disparity in employment outcomes will be highlighted. Additionally, findings from a recent study of reasons for unemployment after spinal cord injury and the policy implications of these findings are included.

Representatives from the Division of Rehabilitation Psychology and the American Psychological Association's Public Policy Office will discuss the implications of these employment and disability policy initiatives for the practice of psychology and the role of psychologists in promoting employment for people with disabilities.