Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Employment and Social Security Receipt Among Working-Age Adults with Cognitive Disabilities

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Individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID), an underserved community, account for about 14% of the 9.7 million working age people in the U.S. who receive Social Security benefits, and are three times more likely to be poor than those with no disabilities. Members of racial and ethnic minority groups that have confronted persistent structural disadvantages and systemic racism in the U.S. are also substantially overrepresented among people with ID. For example, working age non-Hispanic Blacks are over 50% more likely to have ID than working age non-Hispanic whites. Despite efforts to increase employment of individuals with ID, less than a quarter are employed. According to American Community Survey data, about half of working age individuals with ID receive either Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Benefits (SSB) and there are substantial variations by race and ethnicity. For example, working age Hispanics with ID are about 20% less likely to receive any SS benefit compared to working age non-Hispanics.

The purpose of this study is twofold. Using data from the American Community Survey, we will:

1. Document racial and ethnic differences in work (full-time, part-time, none) and SSI/SSB receipt among individuals with ID from 2003 to 2019.

2. Estimate differential effects by race/ethnicity of both (recent) state-and local-level changes in the minimum wage and business cycles (particularly the Great Recession) on employment and SSI/SSB receipt among individuals with ID.