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Labor Force Characteristics Of People With A Disability

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Overall, labor market indicators have improved in the years following the end of the recession. This is true for people with and without a disability. However, these groups experienced different degrees of improvement during this time and continue to have different employment patterns.

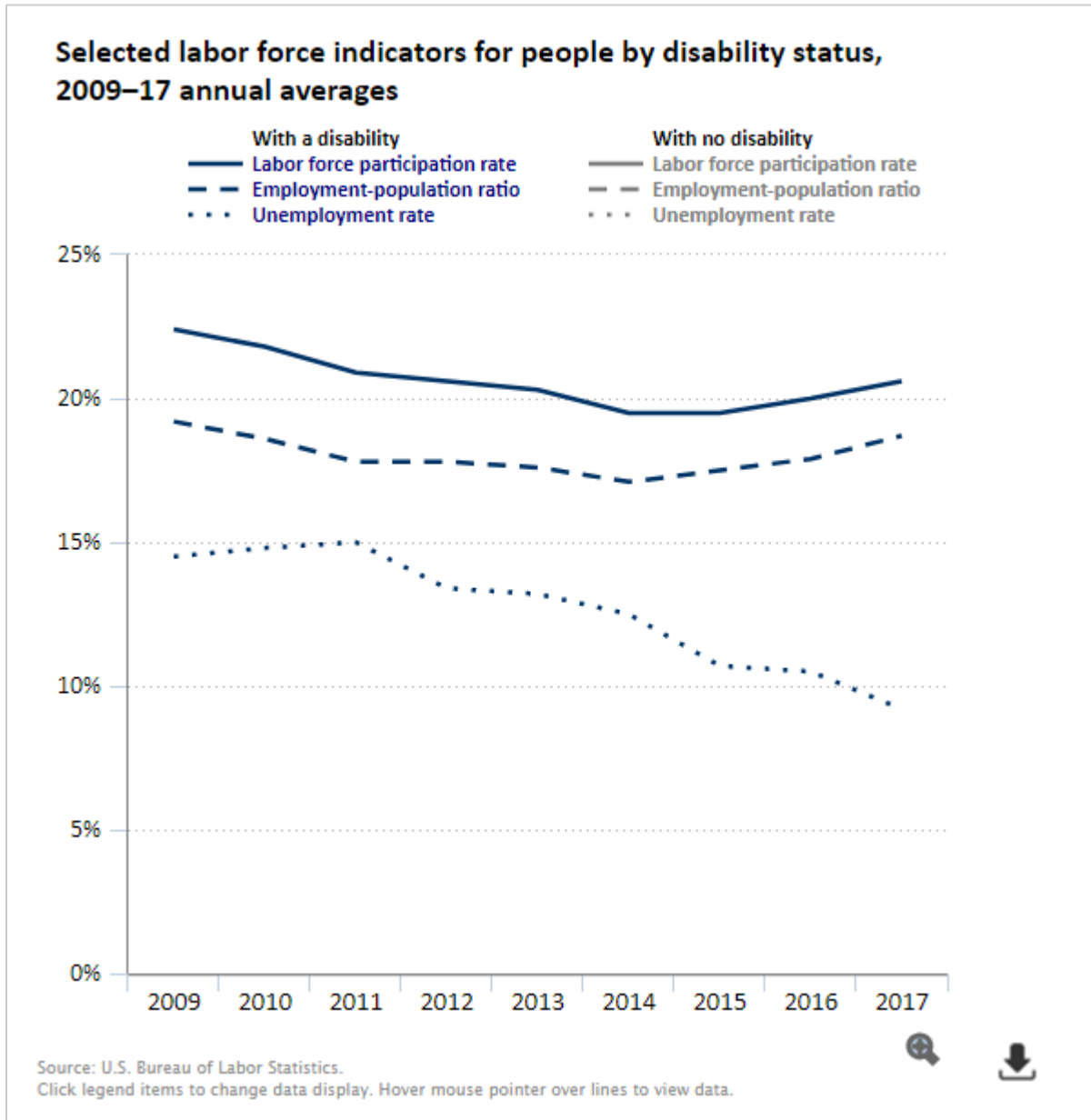
This Spotlight examines the labor force characteristics of people with a disability and puts these characteristics in context by comparing them to those of people with no disability.

Labor market continues to improve for people with and without a disability

Major labor market indicators show that the employment situation for people with a disability continues to improve as the expansion endures. Since the CPS began collecting disability data in June 2008, the unemployment rate—the percentage of the labor force that is unemployed—for people with a disability declined from a high of 15.0 percent in 2011 to a low of 9.2 percent in 2017.

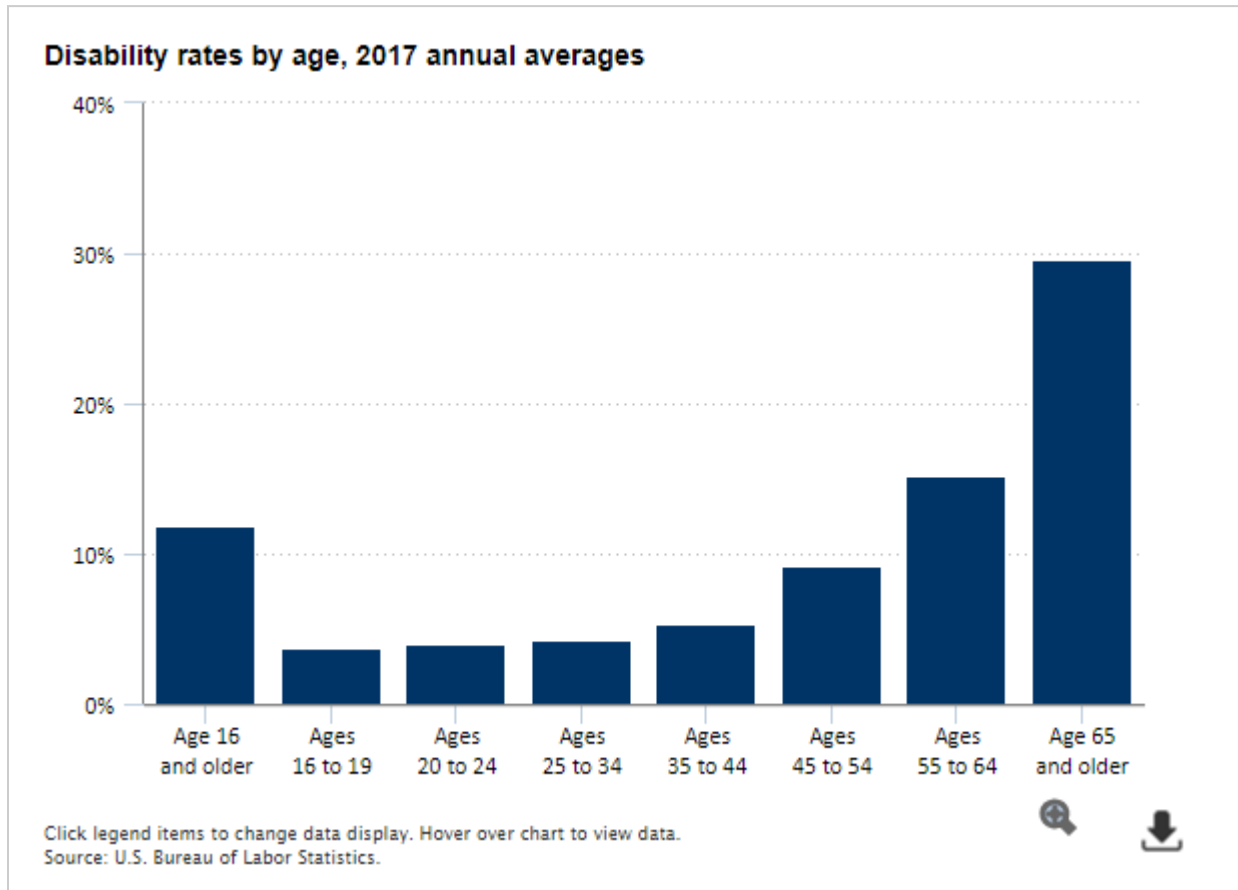
Although the labor force participation rate (the percentage of the population who are working or looking for work) and employment-population ratio (the percentage of the population who are employed) for people with a disability have trended up in recent years, these metrics were still below their 2009 levels in 2017.

People without a disability have had a much lower unemployment rate, and substantially higher labor force participation rate and employment-population ratio, than people with a disability.



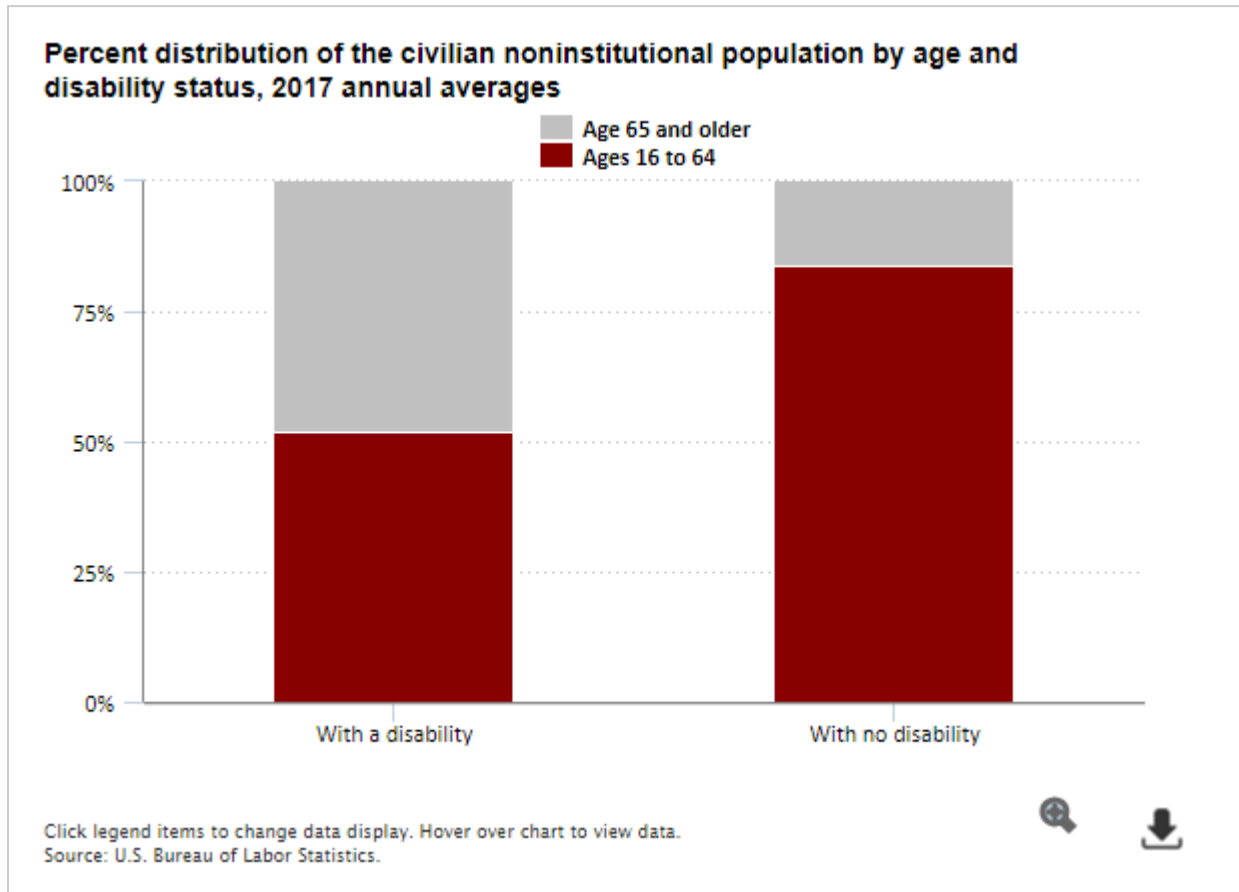
Older people are more likely to have a disability

The prevalence of disability increases with age. About 3 out of every 10 people age 65 and older, and about 15 percent of people ages 55 to 64, had a disability in 2017. Disability is much less common for people younger than age 55—about 6 percent of people ages 16 to 54 had a disability.



About one-half of people with a disability are age 65 and older

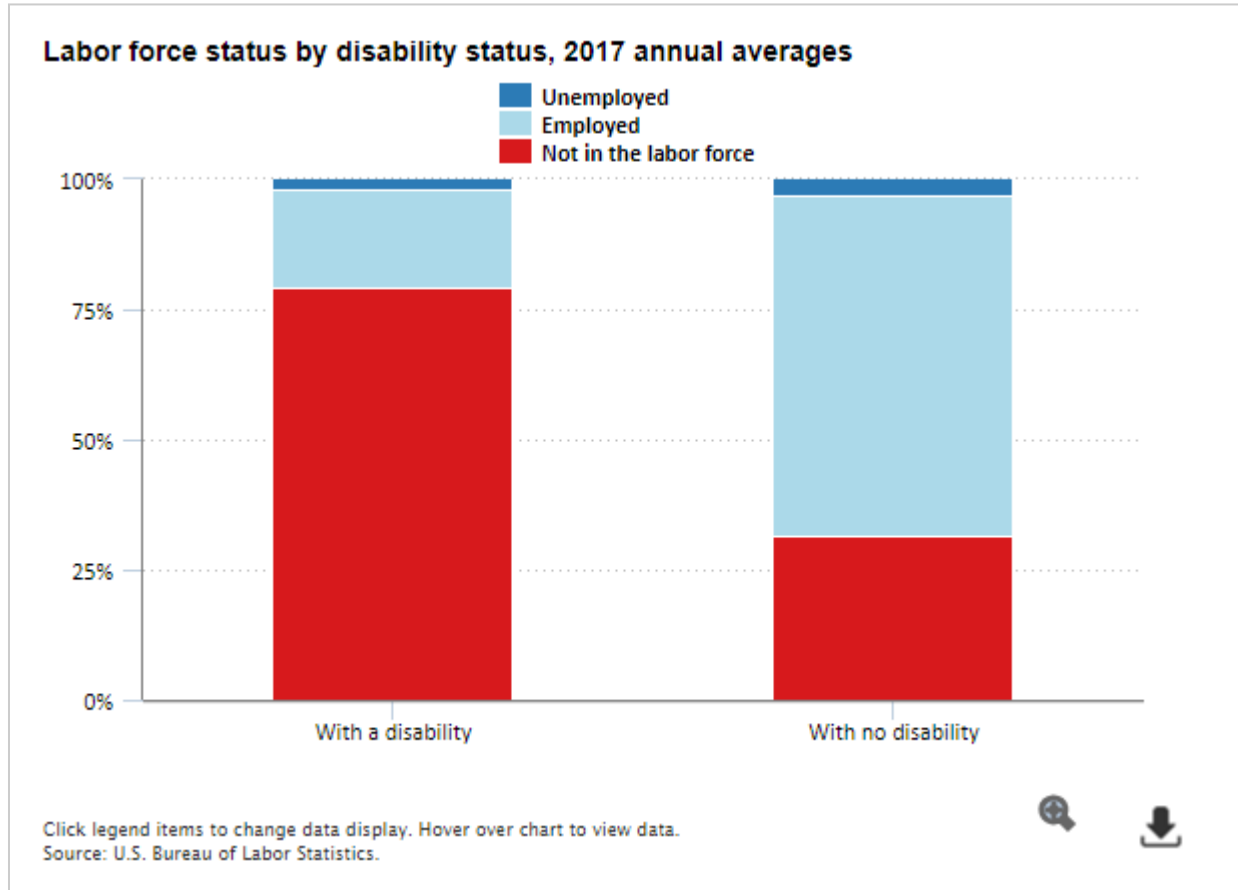
Reflecting the increased prevalence of disability with age, people with a disability tend to be older than people with no disability. Nearly half of all people with a disability were age 65 and older in 2017, three times larger than the share of those with no disability.



About 80 percent of people with a disability are not in the labor force

In 2017, about 8 out of 10 people with a disability were not in the labor force (people who are neither working nor looking for work). In contrast, about 3 out of 10 people without a disability did not participate in the labor force.

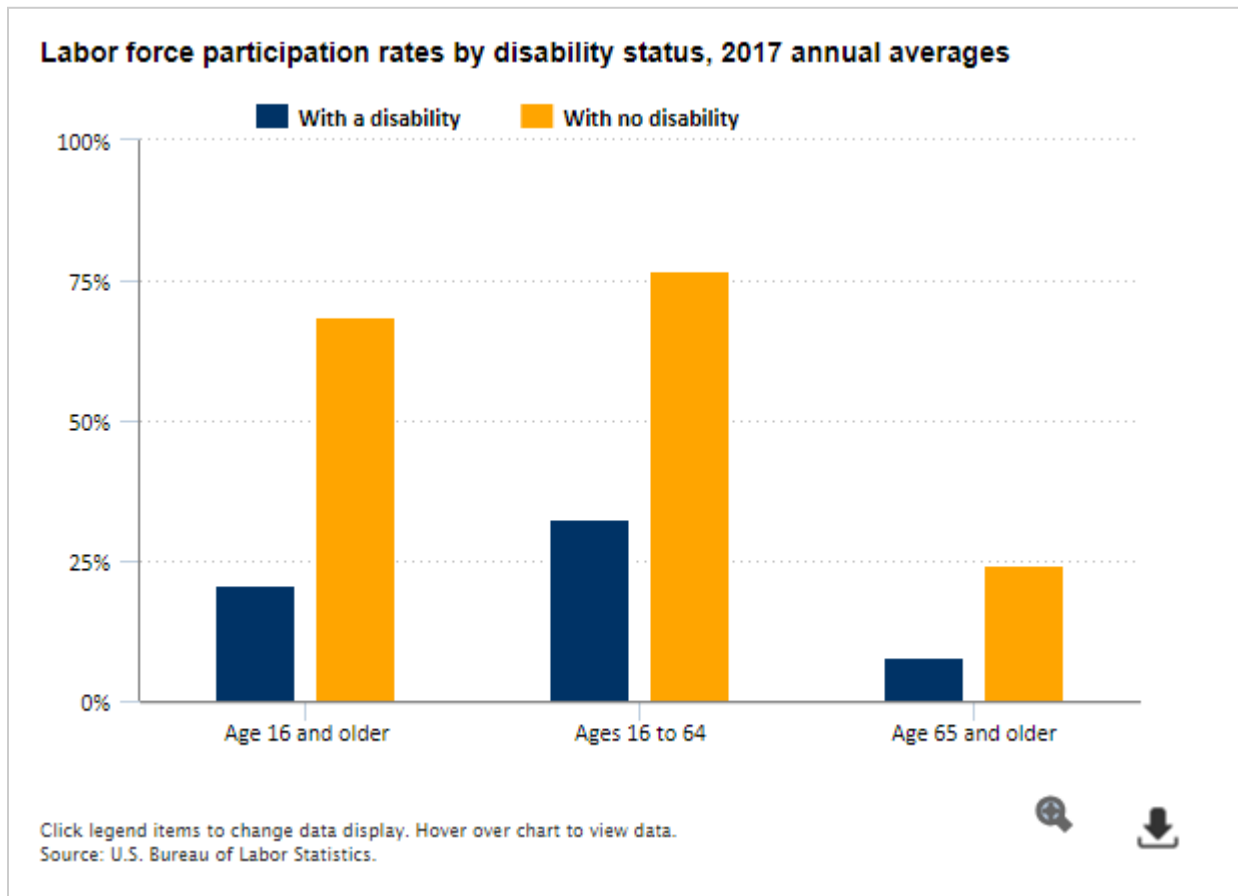
Many of those with a disability are age 65 and older; older people are, in general, less likely to participate in the labor force than people in younger age groups.



Labor force participation rate is much lower for people with a disability

People with a disability are much less likely to participate in the labor force than people with no disability. In 2017, 20.6 percent of people with a disability participated in the labor force, compared with more than two-thirds of those with no disability.

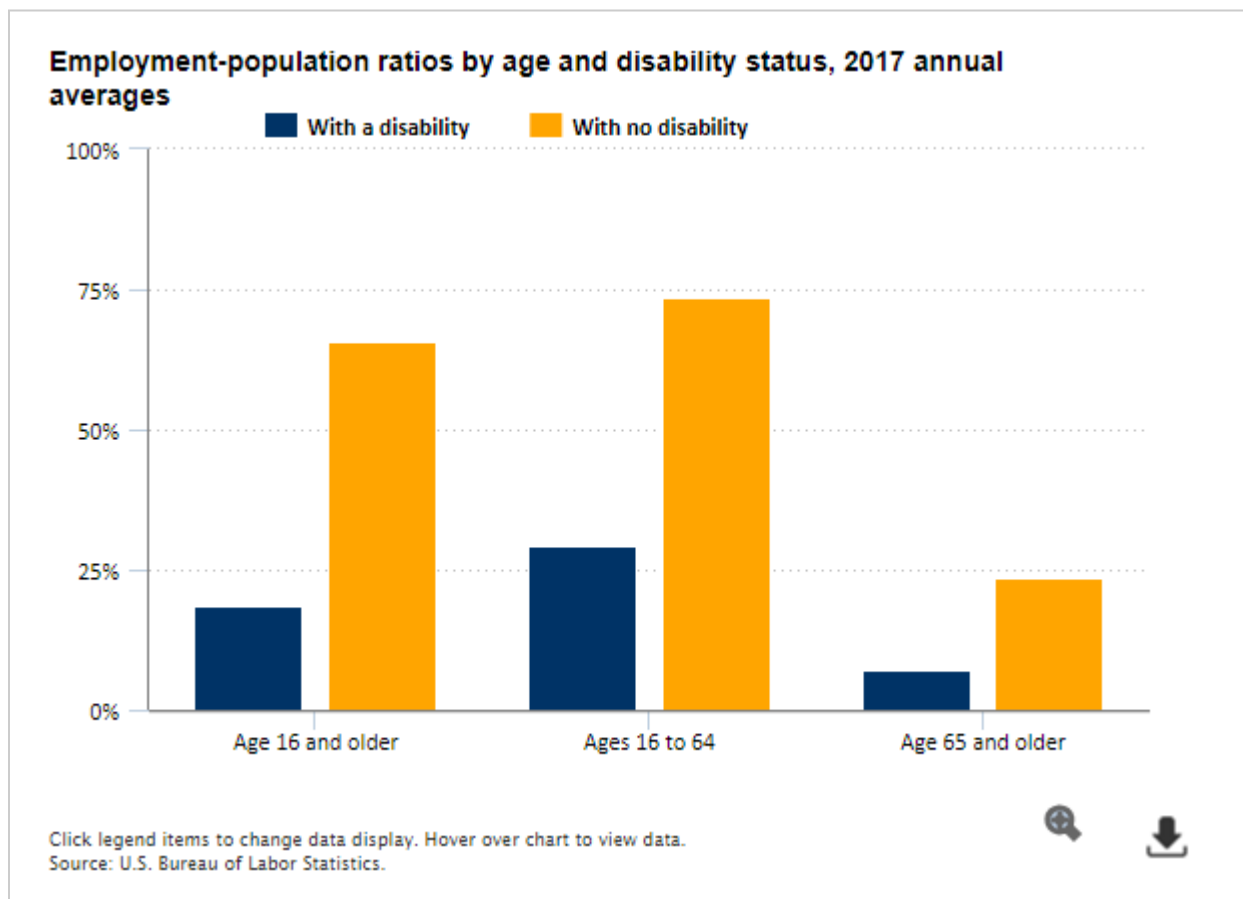
Although older people in general are less likely to participate in the labor force, even among younger people, those with a disability have markedly lower rates of participation than people with no disability. In 2017, people without a disability ages 16 to 64 were more than twice as likely to participate in the labor force as people with a disability in the same age group, 76.7 percent versus 32.6 percent. Among people age 65 and older, people without a disability were about three times more likely to participate in the labor force than people with a disability, 24.2 percent versus 7.7 percent.



Employment-population ratio for people with a disability is lower than for people with no disability

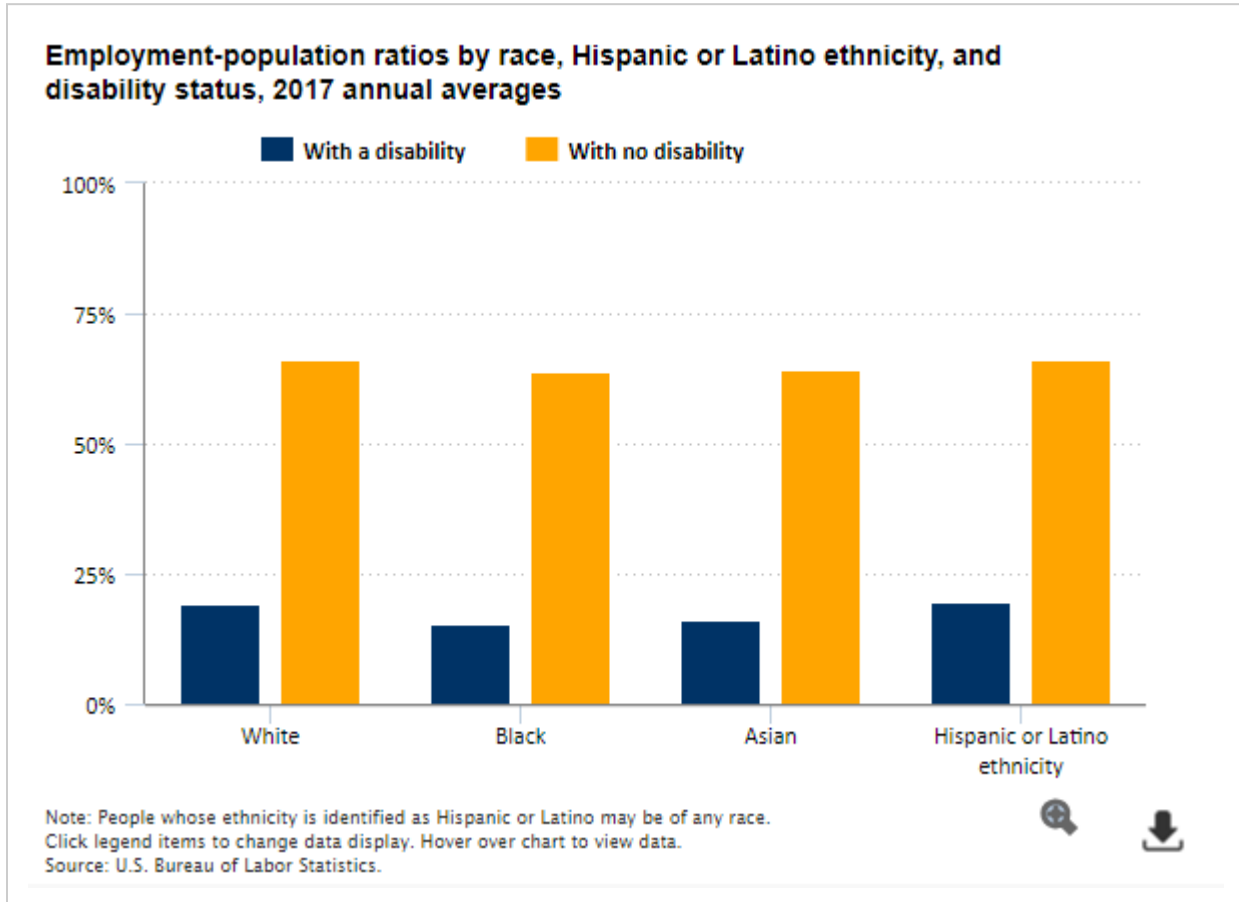
In 2017, workers with a disability were three times less likely to be employed than workers with no disability, 18.7 percent versus 65.7 percent. The lower ratio among people with a disability reflects, in part, the older age profile of people with a disability; older people, regardless of disability status, are less likely to be employed.

For all age groups, the employment-population ratios are much lower for people with a disability compared with people with no disability. The employment-population ratio for people with a disability ages 16 to 64 was 29.3 percent in 2017, while the rate for people without a disability ages 16 to 64 was more than twice as high, at 73.5 percent. Among people age 65 and older, the ratio was lower for those with a disability than for those without a disability, 7.3 percent versus 23.4 percent.



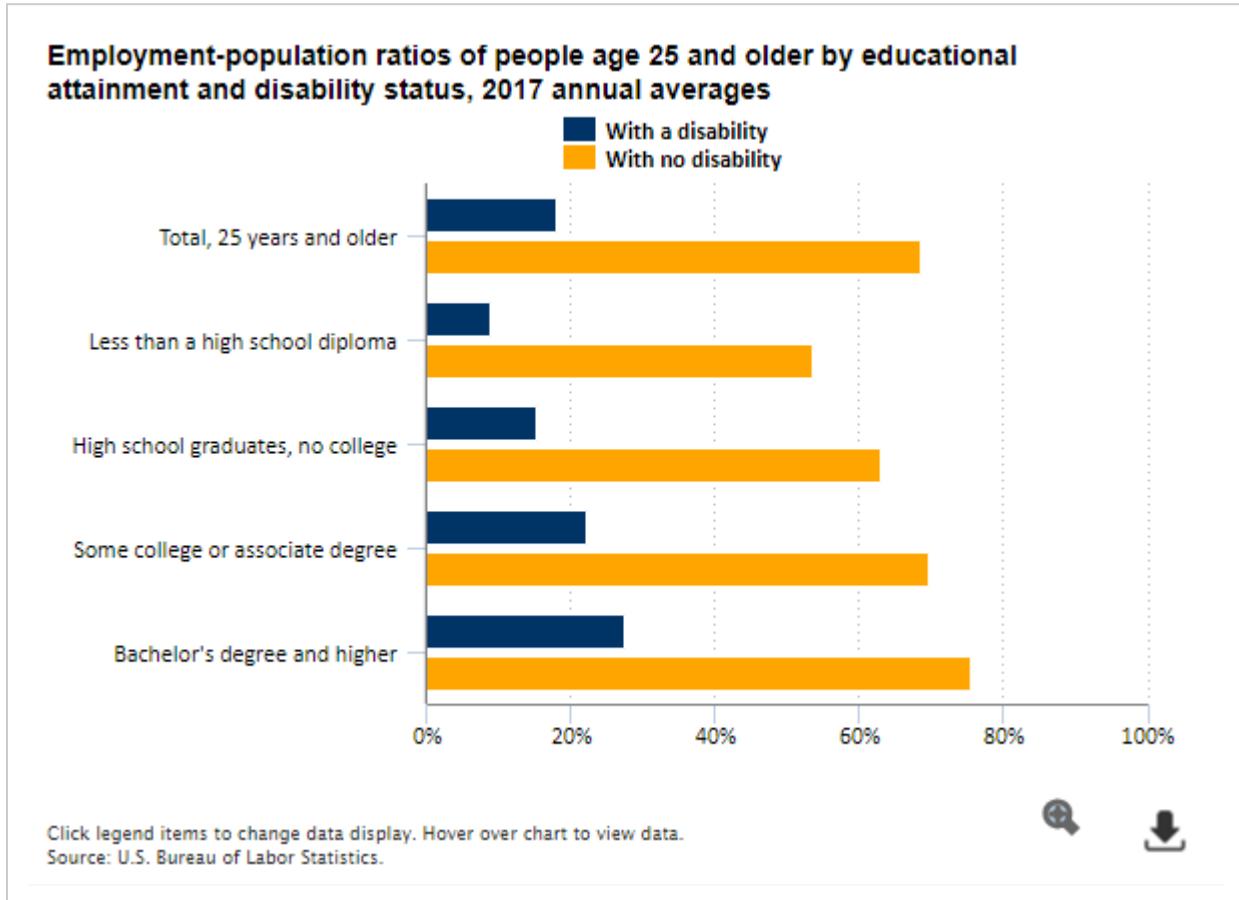
Regardless of race or ethnicity, workers with a disability are less likely to be employed

Across all major race and ethnicity groups, people with a disability are much less likely to be employed than people without a disability. The prevalence of disability continued to be higher for Whites and Blacks than for Asians and Hispanics in 2017. However, regardless of disability status, Whites and Hispanics were somewhat more likely to be employed than were Blacks and Asians.



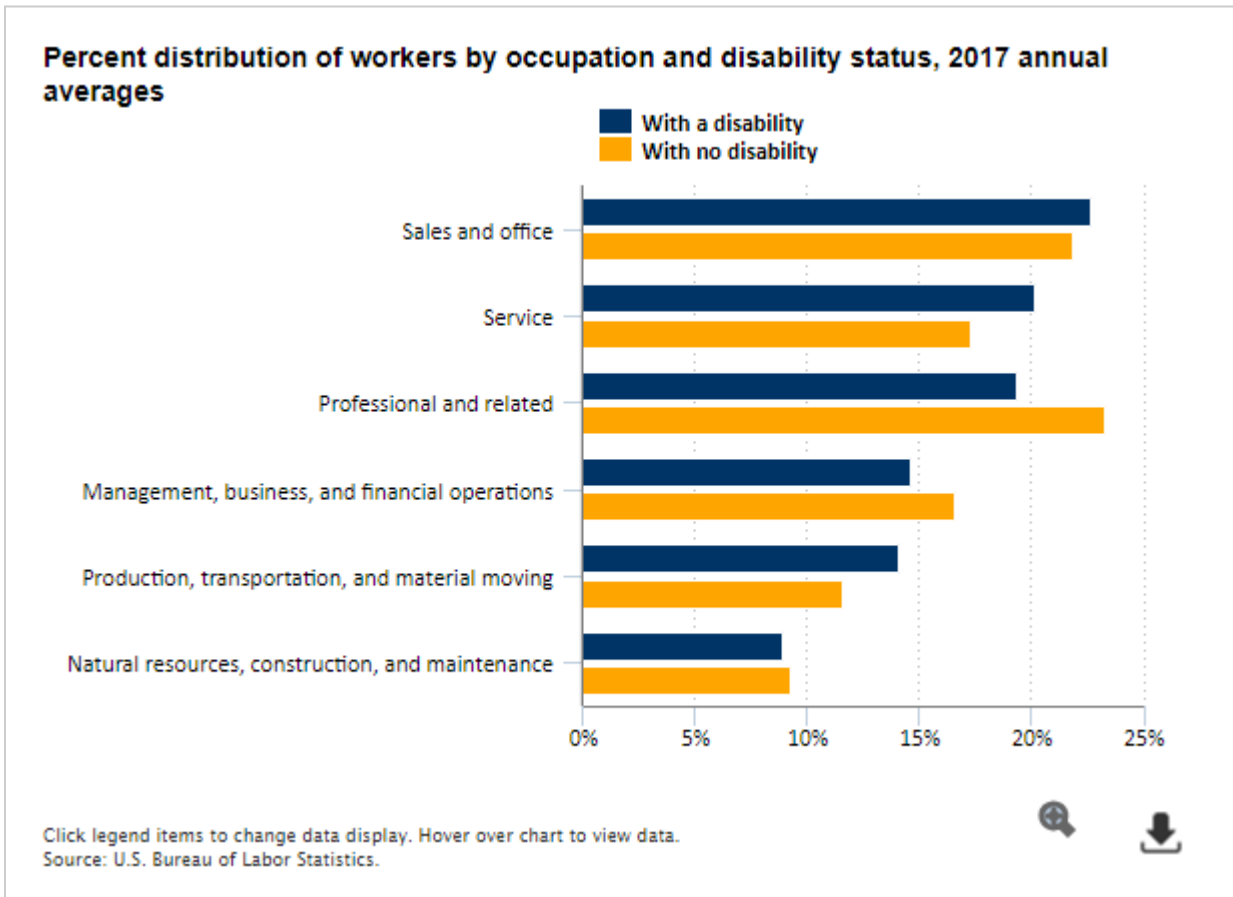
Regardless of disability status, those with a bachelor’s degree are more likely to be employed

Among people with and without a disability, those who had completed higher levels of education were more likely to be employed than those with less education. However, people with a disability who had attained at least a bachelor’s degree were still about three times less likely to be employed in 2017 than those with no disability. Across all levels of education, people with a disability are much less likely to be employed than people with no disability.



Workers with a disability are more concentrated in service occupations than those with no disability

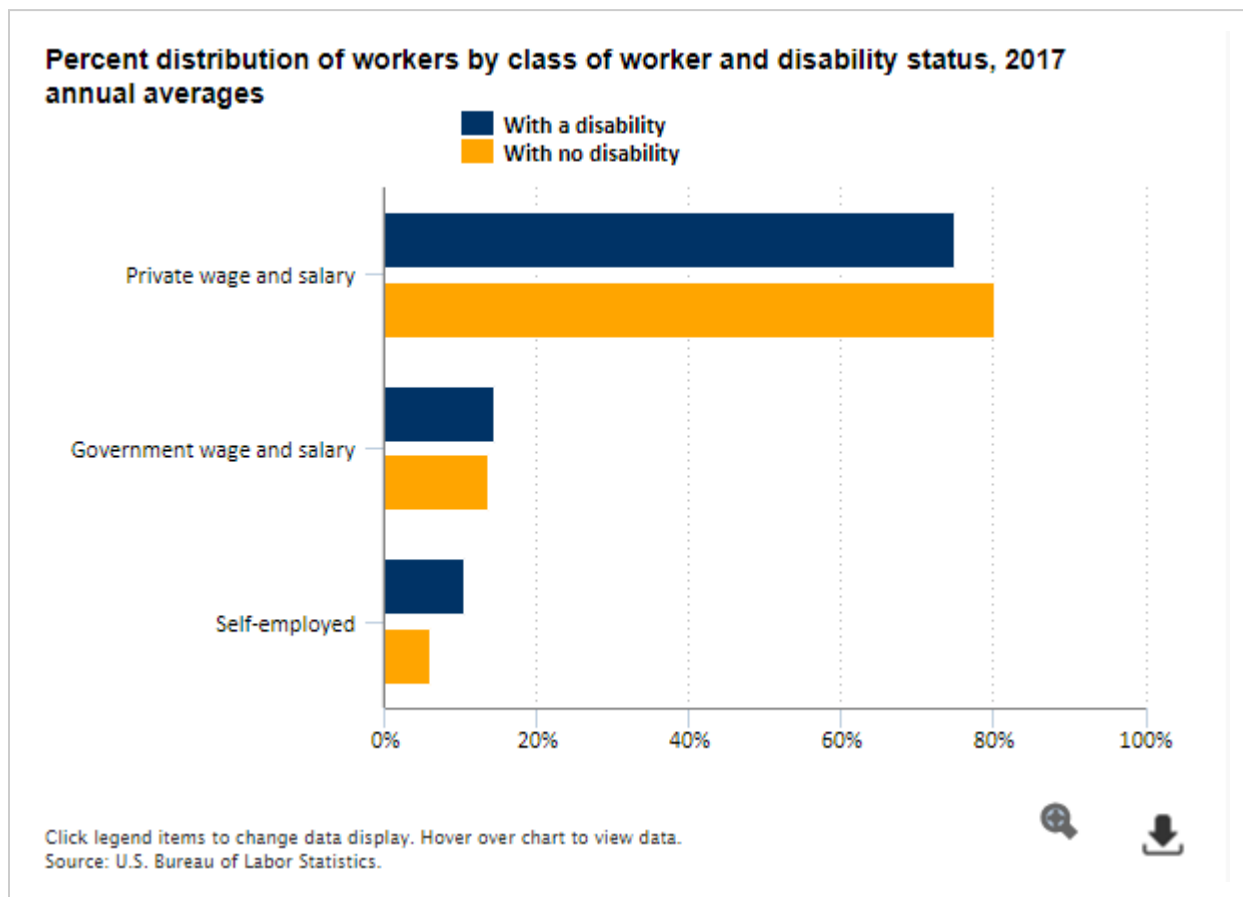
In 2017, 20.2 percent of people with a disability worked in service occupations, compared with 17.3 percent of people without a disability. Workers with a disability were also more likely to work in production, transportation, and material moving occupations than those without a disability (14.1 percent versus 11.6 percent). People with a disability were less likely to work in professional and related occupations than those without a disability (19.4 percent, compared with 23.3 percent). These occupational employment patterns have changed little since data became available in 2009.



People with a disability are more likely to be self-employed

Employed workers with a disability are more likely to be self-employed than those with no disability. In 2017, 10.6 percent of people with a disability were self-employed, compared with 6.0 percent of people without a disability. (Self-employed here refers only to the self-employed whose businesses are unincorporated; the self-employed with incorporated businesses are included among wage and salary workers.) People with a disability were also more likely to work in government than workers without a disability in 2017—14.4 percent, compared with 13.6 percent. Conversely, a smaller share of workers with a disability were private wage and salary workers than were those with no disability (74.9 percent versus 80.3 percent).

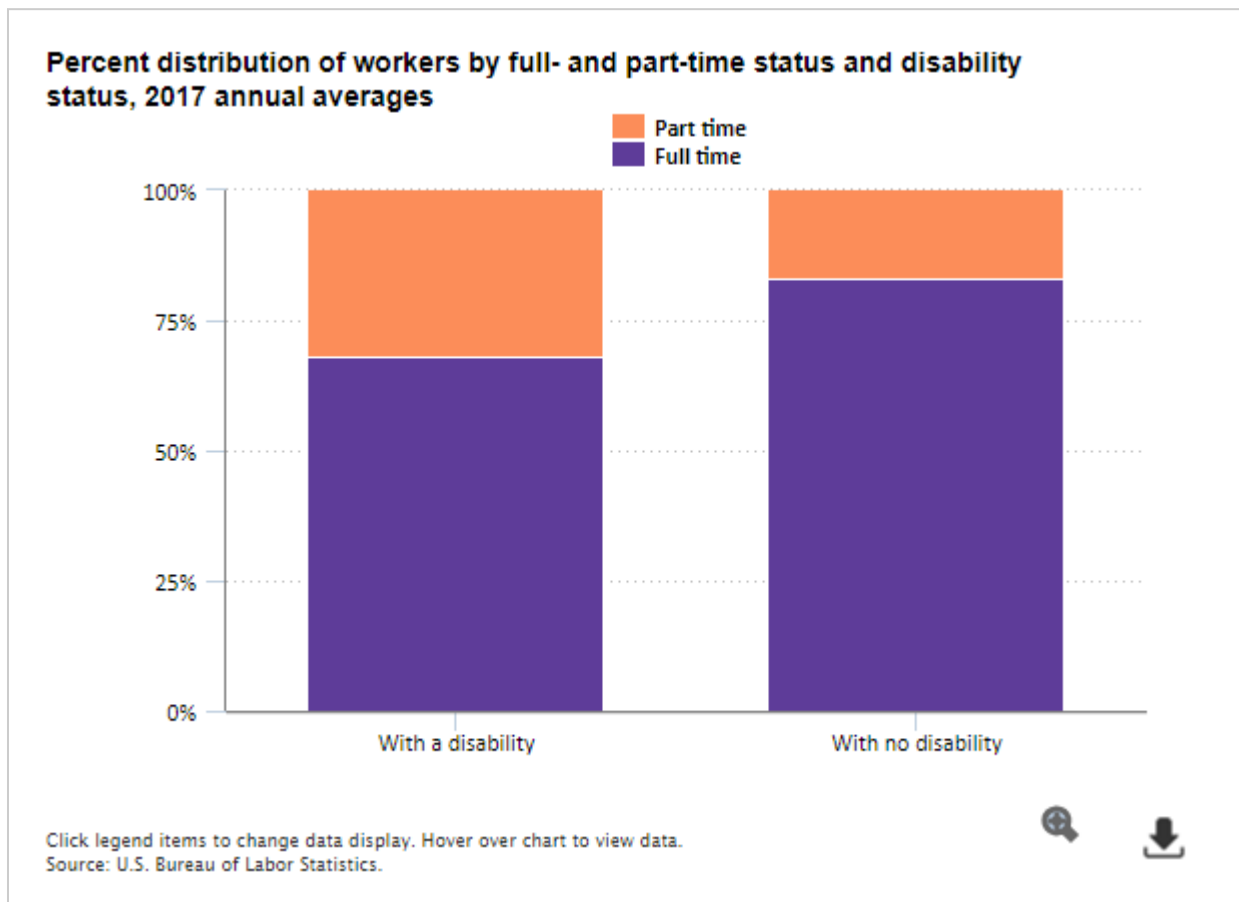
The higher self-employment rate among people with a disability may reflect their older age profile—recall that workers with a disability are more likely to be age 65 and older. Older people have relatively high self-employment rates. In 2017, while 6.2 percent of all workers were self-employed, 16.2 percent of workers age 65 and older were self-employed.



People with a disability are more likely to work part time than people with no disability

In 2017, about one-third of workers with a disability usually worked part time, compared with less than one-fifth of those without a disability. This pattern has persisted since 2009.

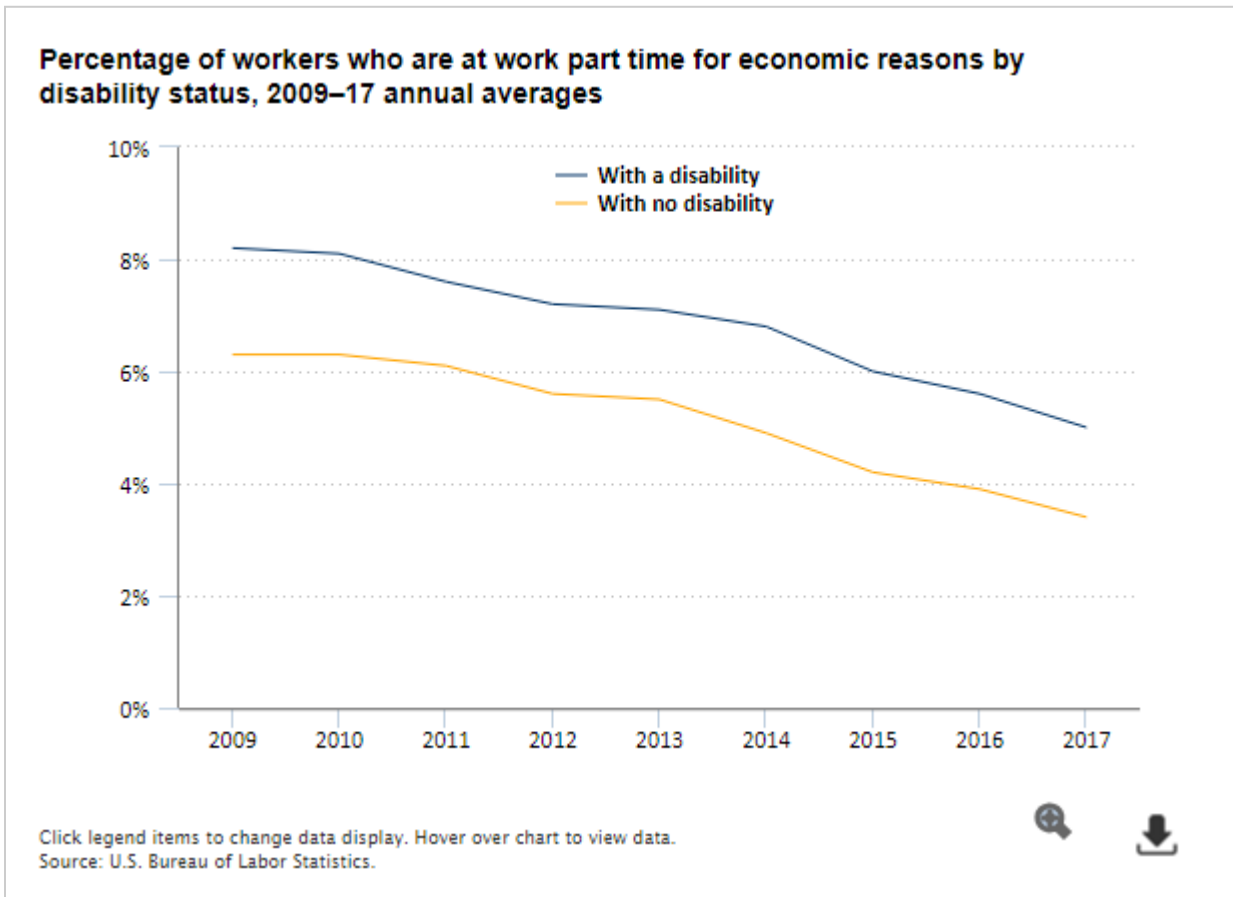
In general, regardless of disability status, older workers are more likely to work part time (that is, work less than 35 hours per week) than younger workers. Among workers with a disability, half of those who were age 65 and older worked part time in 2017, compared with nearly 3 in 10 who were ages 16 to 64. Among workers with no disability, 38 percent of those age 65 and older worked part time, compared with 16 percent of those who were ages 16 to 64.



Workers with a disability slightly more likely to work part time involuntarily

People who work part time for economic reasons are often referred to as involuntary part-time workers. Involuntary part-time workers want to work full time but work less than 35 hours per week because their hours were reduced due to slack business conditions or they could not find a full-time job.

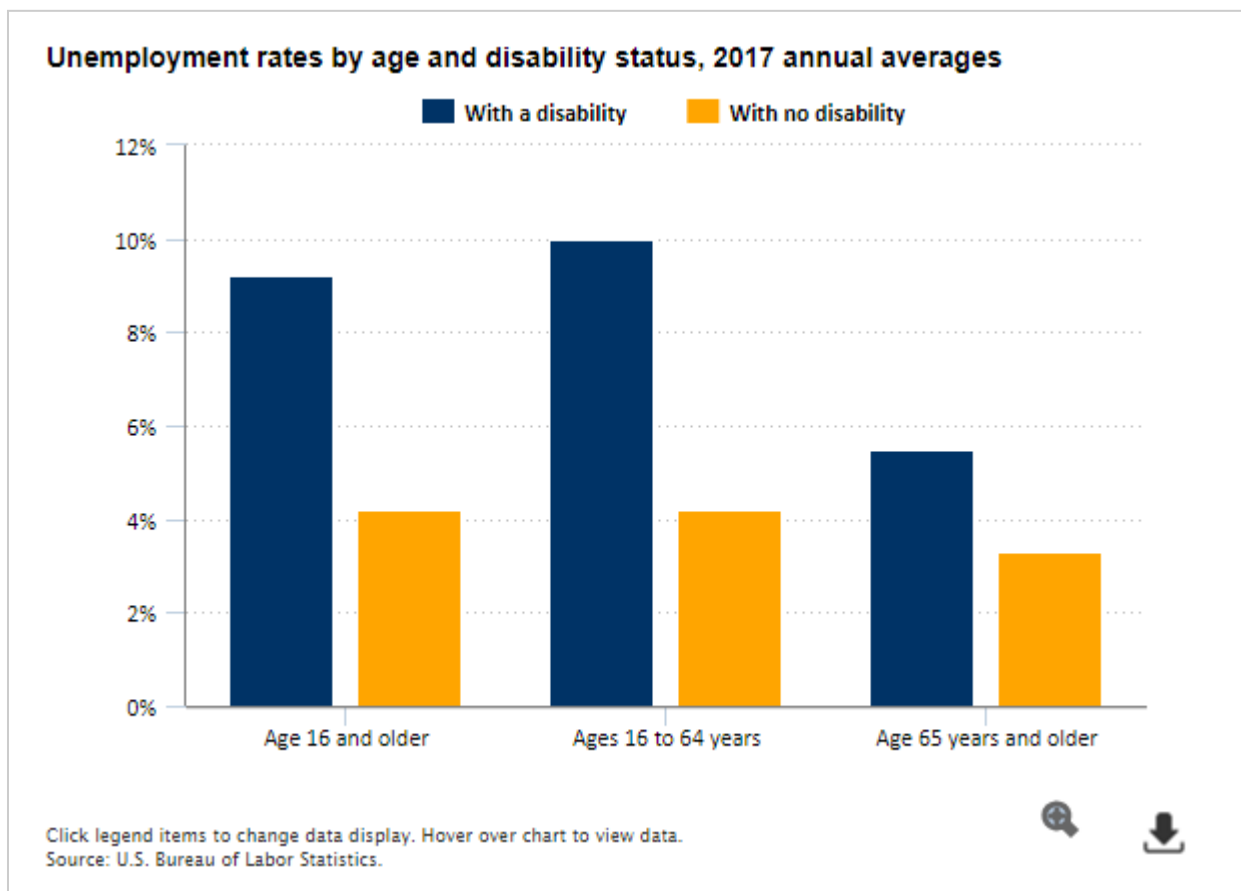
In 2017, 5 percent of workers with a disability worked part time involuntarily, compared with about 3 percent of those with no disability. While these percentages decreased for both groups during the economic expansion, workers with a disability continue to work part time for economic reasons at slightly higher rates than workers with no disability.



Unemployment rate for people with a disability is more than double that of people with no disability

As the expansion continued in 2017, the unemployment rates for people with a disability and those with no disability declined. However, the unemployment rate for people with a disability was still about twice that of people with no disability in 2017, 9.2 percent compared with 4.2 percent.

Unemployment rates were higher among younger workers regardless of disability status. Among people with a disability in 2017, the unemployment rate for people ages 16 to 64 was 10.0 percent, compared with 5.5 percent for those age 65 and older. Among people with no disability, the unemployment rate was 4.2 percent for those ages 16 to 64 and 3.3 percent for those age 65 and older.

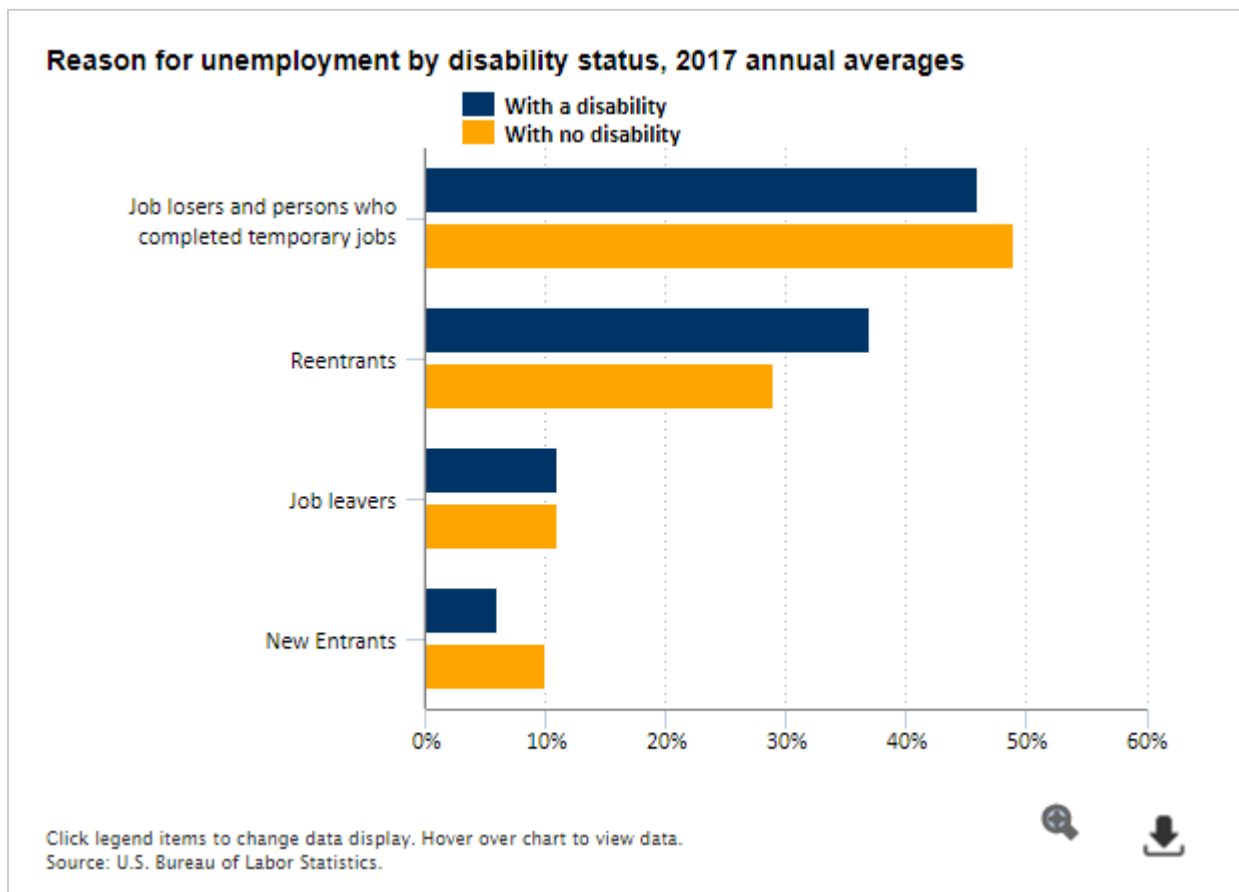


Unemployed with a disability more likely to be labor force reentrants than people with no disability

Unemployed people are further classified by what they were doing before they began looking for work. People who were working before they began their job search would fall into either the job losers category or the job leavers category. People who were doing something else before beginning their job search are classified as either new entrants to the labor force looking for their first job or reentrants to the labor force after a period of labor market inactivity.

In 2017, unemployed people with a disability were more likely to be reentrants to the labor force than unemployed people with no disability (37 percent compared with 29 percent). Unemployed people with no disability were more likely to be new entrants to the labor force than those with a disability (10 percent versus 6 percent).

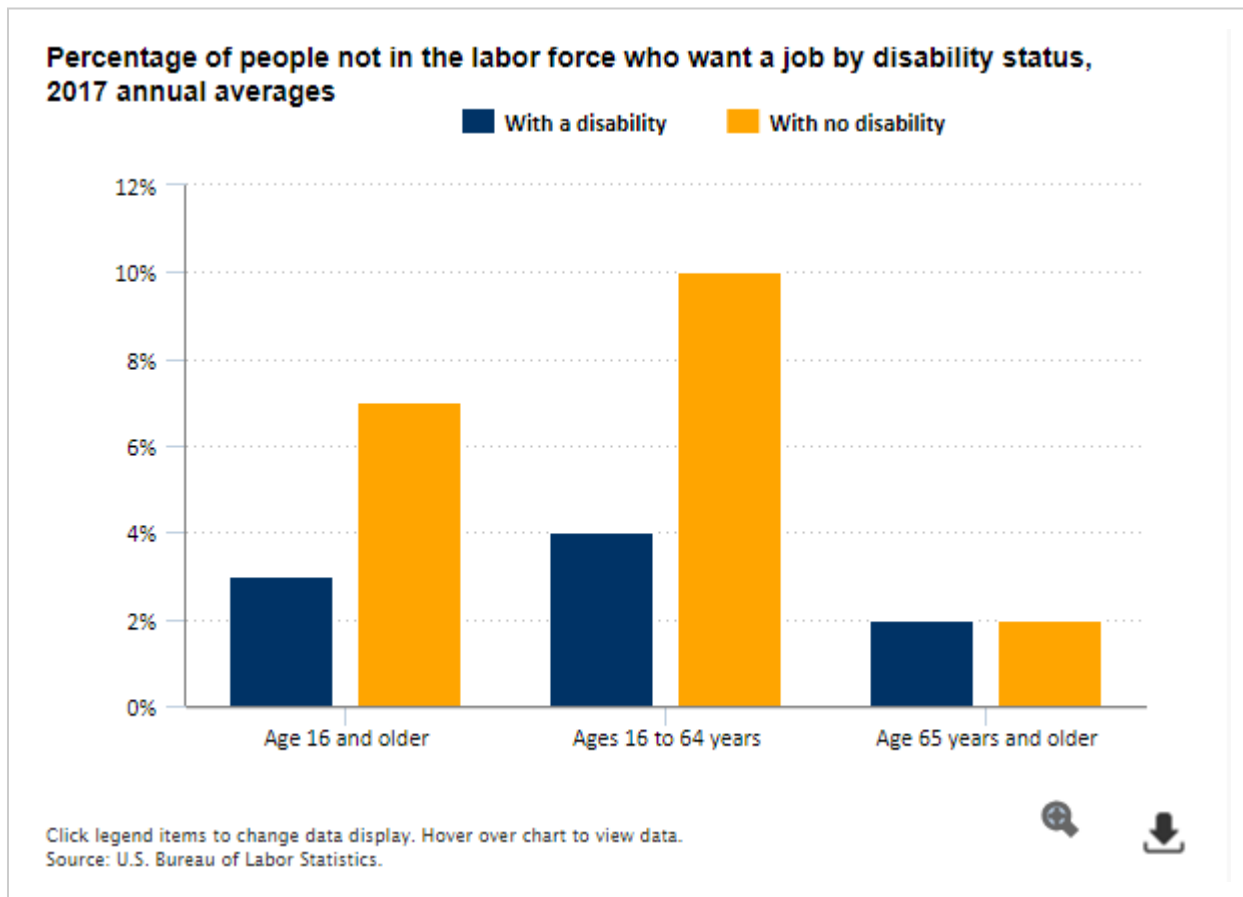
Again, this may reflect the older age profile of people with a disability. Unemployed people age 65 and older were more likely to be reentrants to the labor force than people ages 16 to 64 (36 percent compared with 29 percent in 2017), and they were less likely to be new entrants than their younger counterparts (2 percent compared with 10 percent).



Regardless of disability status, a small fraction of those not in the labor force want a job

The majority of people with a disability, or 80 percent, were not in the labor force in 2017, which means they were neither working nor looking for work. The low rate of labor force participation among people with a disability partially reflects their older age profile.

Regardless of disability status, the vast majority of those who are not in the labor force do not want a job. Among people who were not in the labor force, about 3 percent of those with a disability and about 7 percent of those without a disability reported they wanted a job in 2017. These figures were slightly higher for those ages 16 to 64, 4 percent of those with a disability and 10 percent of those with no disability. Among people age 65 and older, only about 2 percent of each group reported that they wanted a job.



More information

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The data presented in this Spotlight on Statistics are from the [Current Population Survey \(CPS\)](#), a monthly nationwide sample survey of approximately 60,000 households. With support from the [Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy](#), questions to identify people with a disability were added to the CPS in June 2008.

For additional information about people with a disability, please see the following link: <https://www.bls.gov/cps/demographics.htm#disability>.