

Employment Trends of Young Adults with Cognitive Disabilities: 2004–2011

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Engaging in employment at a young age is critical for workforce participation later in adulthood. This Data Note compares, for youth ages 16–21, the employment rates of those who have cognitive disabilities with the employment rates of their peers without disabilities.

Our data is derived from the American Community Survey (ACS) for the eight-year period 2004 through 2011. In the ACS, respondents are considered to have a cognitive disability if there is an affirmative response to the question, “Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?”

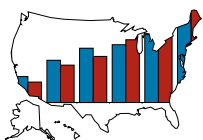
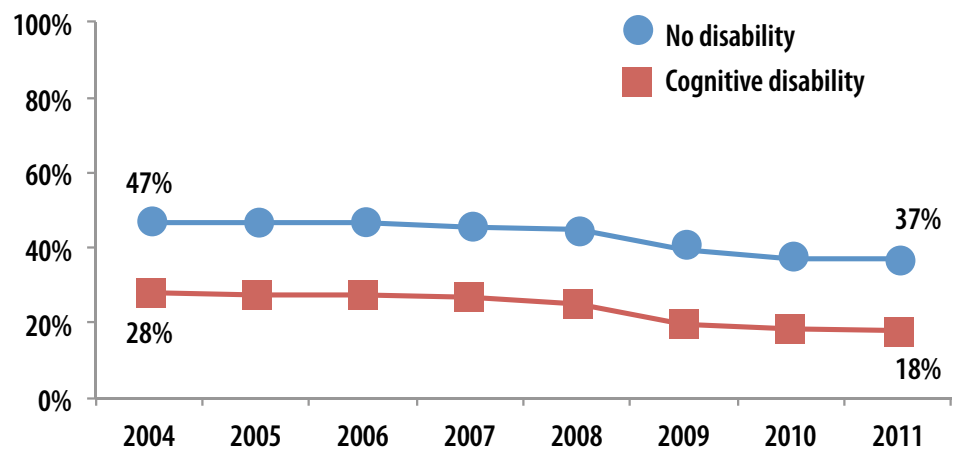
The ACS defines “employment” as working at a job during the week prior to the survey, regardless of the number of hours worked or job type. Using this definition, we calculated the employment rate as the percentage of people who reported working out of the total number of respondents in each group.

Our analysis reveals a disparity in employment rates between youth with cognitive disabilities and youth without disabilities, both nationally and within each state. Over the eight years examined, national employment rates of young adults with cognitive disabilities declined from 28% to 18% (mean = 24%). The nationwide employment rates for their peers without disabilities were higher, though they also declined from 47% to 37% over the eight years (mean = 43%) (Figure 1).

Disparities in employment rates for these groups were similarly wide or even greater at the state level, with employment rates of youth with cognitive disabilities always lagging behind employment rates for youth without disabilities (Figure 2). The only similarity between the two groups was the 1–2% annual average decline in employment rates in most states over these years.

Closing the gap between the employment participation of young adults with cognitive disabilities and that of their peers without disabilities remains a critical goal for policy and practice.

Figure 1. Employment rate of young adults, nationally: 2004–2011



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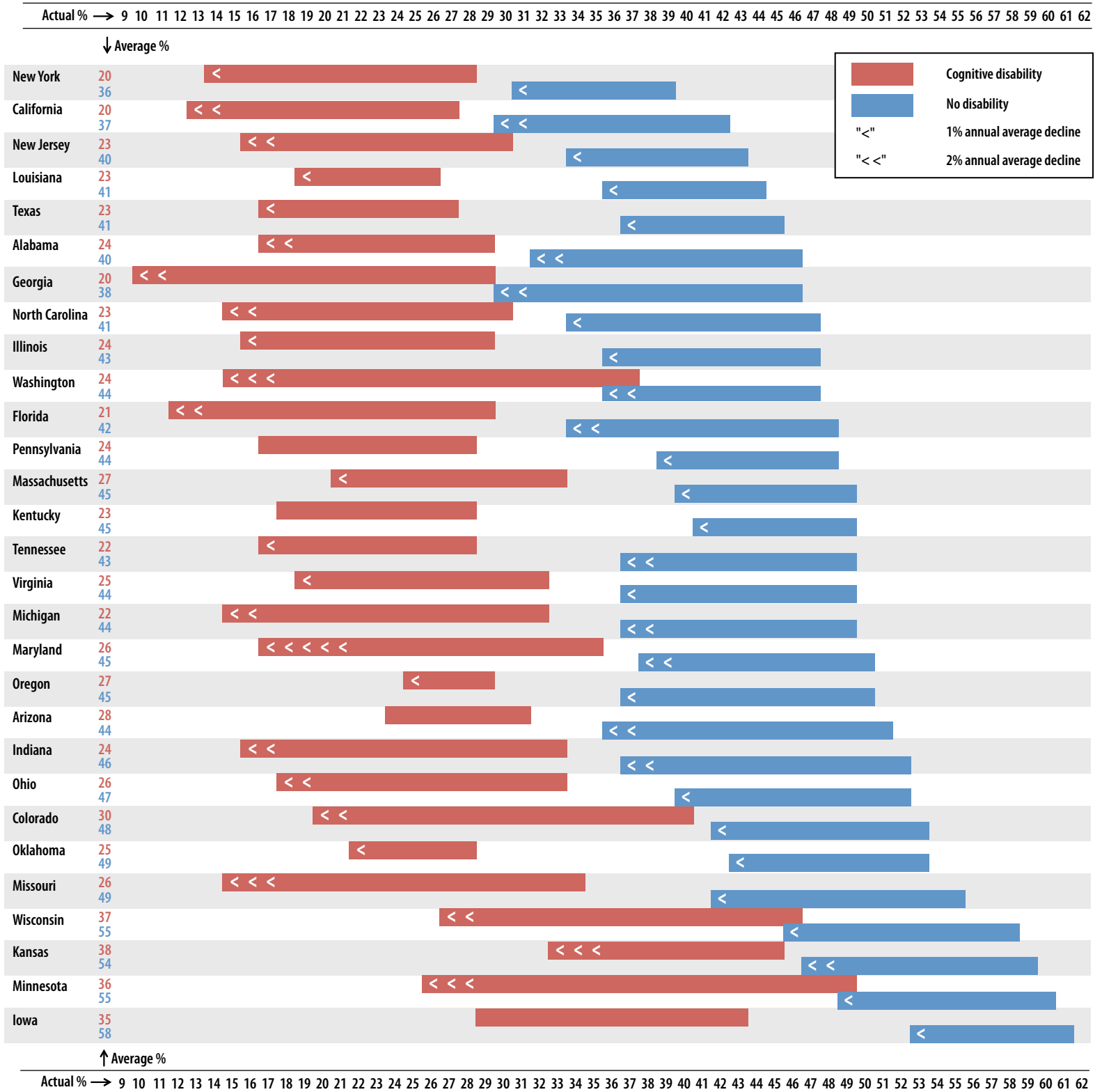
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Figure 2. Employment rate of young adults, state-level: 2004–2011



Note. States that did not include samples with at least 30 respondents for most of the years are not included in this figure.

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