

## **Ex-Offenders with Disabilities May Experience Racial Gaps in Employment and Earnings**

For people who were incarcerated, employment may help foster stability and security, and may lower the risk of re-offending once they return to the community. However, ex-offenders with disabilities may encounter a variety of challenges when looking for well-paying employment after leaving the correctional system. In addition to facing challenges related to their disabilities, these individuals may have gaps in their education, training, or work history resulting from their time in prison. They may also face stigma or discrimination from employers due to having a criminal record. African Americans and Latino Americans, in particular, may face especially strong barriers to employment after incarceration. Past research has found that African Americans and Latino Americans in general are over-represented in the incarcerated population, tend to receive harsher sentences than White Americans, and secure lower-paying jobs than their White American counterparts after leaving prison. African American and Latino American ex-offenders with disabilities may face a triple stigma in the workplace, being a minority, having a disability, and having a history of incarceration. In a recent NIDILRR-funded study, researchers looked at the employment rates and wages earned by ex-offenders with disabilities who received vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. The researchers wanted to find out if there were differences in the percentage of being successfully employed or in earnings between White, African American, and Latino ex-offenders with disabilities. They also wanted to find out whether the ex-offenders with a substance use disorder or a mental health disability had lower employment rates than the ex-offenders with other types of disabilities.

Researchers at the [Langston University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Research and Capacity Building for Minority Entities](#) looked at data from 32,825 people with disabilities who applied for VR services while living in a correctional facility. The individuals had applied for VR between 2004 and 2013, received VR services, and exited either with or without a job. Based on demographic data, the individuals were categorized as either non-Latino African American, non-Latino White, or Latino. The researchers looked at the percentage of the individuals in each racial/ethnic group who were successfully employed after receiving VR services, as well as their hourly earnings. Other data for each individual included their age, gender, education level, the specific VR services they received, and whether or not they had a substance abuse disability or a mental health disability.

The researchers found that 43% of the individuals with disabilities were successfully employed after receiving VR services. A higher percentage of the non-Latino African American individuals were employed (46%) than of the White individuals (39%) or of the Latino individuals (33%). After accounting for the other demographic factors such as gender, age, education, and disability type, the non-Latino African American individuals still had a higher employment rate than the White or the Latino individuals.

However, when looking at hourly earnings, the researchers found that, on average, the non-Latino African American individuals who were employed earned about \$0.81 per hour less than the Latino individuals and about \$1.19 per hour less than the non-Latino White individuals.

Finally, the researchers found that after accounting for race/ethnicity, gender, age, education, and VR services received, the individuals with a substance abuse disability had a lower employment rate than the individuals without a substance abuse disability. There were no differences in employment between the individuals with and without a mental health disability.

The authors noted that, although the African American individuals in this study experienced higher rates of successful employment than the White individuals, they may have obtained less competitive jobs that paid less per hour. Further, the Latino individuals in this study were both employed at lower rates and paid less than the White individuals. Vocational rehabilitation providers may wish to acquire specialized training on the unique needs of individuals who are transitioning from the correctional system to employment in the community and culturally competent practices for working with individuals from historically stigmatized racial/ethnic minority groups. The authors also noted that employment practices such as Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) might be especially beneficial for ex-offenders, particularly those with a history of substance abuse.

To Learn More

The [Langston University RRTC](#) published a special issue of the Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling on vocational rehabilitation experiences of vulnerable minority and ethnic populations. Among the six articles is a study on the impact of disability and type of crime on employment outcomes of African American and Latino offenders. [The complete journal is available free in full text from the project's website](#) (PDF).

[ExploreVR](#) offers VR agencies easy and convenient access to a range of VR research, related data, and tools for planning, evaluation, and decision making. The [Vocational Rehabilitation Human Resources Guidebook](#) includes a section on cultural competency for counselors and administrators.

To Learn More About this Study

Ethridge, G., Dowden, A.R., Brooks, M., Kwan, N., and Harley, D. (2020). [Employment and earnings among ex-offenders with disabilities: A multivariate analyses of RSA-911 data](#). *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 52, 279-289. This article is available from the NARIC collection under Accession Number J83605.