

## Employment and Economic Well-Being of People with Disabilities

At present, the Census does not formally track the economic well-being of working-age people with disabilities in the same way it does other vulnerable populations. The failure to track their poverty rate has failed to spotlight the increase in their poverty rate relative to the rest of the population. Current research data indicates that working-age people with disabilities did not share in the great economic growth of the 1990s. Their risk of poverty relative to those without disabilities rose. And the unintended consequence of government policy may be responsible.

While current data are not perfect and do underestimate the population with disabilities, these data can be used to measure trends in the “true” population’s employment rate. Doing so makes it possible to investigate the consequences of policy variables on the employment and economic well-being of the population with disabilities.

The most promising policy changes appear to be ones that:

- make work pay for people with disabilities (i.e., they make rewards to work sufficient to make work a better option than income support for people with disabilities);
- make it more profitable for employers to hire people with disabilities; embody a reasonable, but not excessive, expectation that people with disabilities should help support themselves through work; and/or
- move toward a set of accessible, integrated, easy-to-navigate, consumer-controlled supports that make it easier for people with disabilities to work.

Outcomes will be used with key organizations to determine their needs and help them maximize the use of our research in their ongoing efforts to enhance employment opportunities of people with disabilities.

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## False Memory\*

Children, adolescents, and even adults may report with all sincerity that they had been sexually abused in the past or witnessed a murder or other crimes. But sometimes the person, though earnest, is wrong: The memory is a false one. Having false memories—“recalling” events that did not happen—is a real phenomenon that is vitally important to law and medicine.

Research is addressing processes that control children’s false memory reports. Two cognitive operations are probable key factors: recollection rejection and phantom recollection. A new experimental paradigm—conjoint recognition—makes it possible to separate and quantify the operations in children of different ages. This paradigm will be used to secure data on how recollection rejection and phantom recollection contribute to false-memory reports, on how these operations change with age, and on how they react to forensically significant variables.

Outcomes from this study have implications for public policy in training for civilian and military prosecutors and defense attorneys. Dissemination of results is intended not only for researchers in experimental and clinical psychology, but also for child protective services workers, clinical psychologists, defense attorneys, elementary and secondary teachers, general medical practitioners, journalists, judges, nurses, police investigators, prosecutors, and psychiatrists.

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## **Development of Anti-Obesity Initiatives\***

A Smith-Lever grant from USDA is funding a needs assessment in New York State to inform the development of anti-obesity initiatives. Obesity is recognized as a serious concern throughout the United States and in many other countries across the world. The share of overweight children in the U.S. has more than tripled since 1970, and New York State residents are concerned.

To determine areas of public policy that New York residents consider important for anti-obesity initiatives, the study developed questions about childhood obesity that were included in the 2006 Empire State Poll, a survey of New York residents that is conducted annually by Cornell's Survey Research Institute. The results of the survey, "New York State Residents' Support for Policies to Reduce Childhood Obesity," indicate 63 percent think that the government should ban the sale of candy, soda and chips from schools. At the same time, 56 percent oppose policies to raise taxes on candy and sweets and 36 percent oppose paying higher taxes to reduce childhood obesity—compared to 16 percent who would pay more than \$200 per year in additional taxes for such a cause.

Overall, the results suggest that state policies for addressing childhood obesity would receive the most support if they focused on high-calorie foods sold in New York State schools. Reports based on the results will be disseminated statewide to county extension educators, nutrition, health, and other community professionals, and policymakers.

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## **Family and Welfare Policy**

From a public policy perspective, there is perhaps no more contentious question than how best to fight poverty. The 1996 overhaul of the welfare system (the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act) has helped refocus attention on America's poor and welfare-dependent population. Welfare caseloads and poverty rates have dropped dramatically, but many Americans continue to suffer material hardships.

Why is this the case and what can be done about it? The answer often depends on whether poverty is viewed mostly as an individual failing or as a result of larger structural forces, including economic restructuring, racial and gender discrimination, and social injustice.

Research at Cornell is considering family and welfare policy, including studies of marriage promotion initiatives, child support and fatherhood, cohabitation and marriage among unwed mothers, and racial and ethnic disparities in poverty. One outcome of these studies is presentation to policy makers and practitioners at the National Institutes of Health, National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, Brookings Institution, Association of Public Policy and Management, and National Association for Welfare Research and Statistics.

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