

Book Review

Title: *The Decline in Employment of People With Disabilities: A Policy Puzzle*

Editor: David C. Stapleton & Richard V. Burkhauser

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Reviewer: Mark F. Romoser

This volume comes from the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research in Michigan, while the editors are experts in disability policy from Cornell University. Thus, this is an attempt to explain the startling decline in employment of people with disabilities from both the labor market and the disability studies perspectives. It will make interesting, and certainly thought-provoking, reading for those in the fields of vocational rehabilitation and rehabilitation counseling, and anyone else interested in the employment picture for people with disabilities.

One chapter is devoted to the provocative thesis that the culprit is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) itself. Supposedly the ADA's protections cause business to be more wary of hiring workers with disabilities, who would be entitled to rights under the ADA and might then be difficult to fire at will. Author Thomas DeLeire took leave from the University of Chicago to serve on President George W. Bush's Council on Economic Advisers, a fact not mentioned in the book. Another chapter restates this sentiment right in the title, "Is It Time to Declare the ADA A Failed Law?" Its conclusion: probably not.

Still another chapter focuses on increases in benefit entitlement programs, specifically Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). It does not, however, discuss the implications of people who are marginally employable choosing SSDI, and especially SSI, over low-wage employment with limited benefits. This is not a good situation either for people with disabilities or for society at large. In general, the editors could have included more discussion of changes in the American labor market that might be hurting workers with disabilities. A good starting point would have been the gender gap: essentially all of the decline in employment has been among men with disabilities. It could be that women with disabilities are more likely to be employed in low-paying, part-time, but readily available, positions in the retail and food service industries.

The subtitle "A Policy Puzzle," is particularly apt. The book offers more in the way of thoughtful, if sometimes controversial, discussion about this perplexing decline in employment than it does in terms of proposing workable solutions. One hopes these will come in another volume in the not-too-distant future. In the meantime, this book should serve as a starting point for a debate that is long overdue.