

# Documenting valuable contributions of employees with intellectual, developmental disabilities

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Employees with intellectual and developmental disabilities were adversely affected in some ways by the global pandemic and economic

shutdown, but most demonstrated their value as essential workers during the crisis, according to a study by researchers at the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, which is affiliated with the VCU School of Education.

The study, "The Resiliency of Employees with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Economic Shutdown: A Retrospective Review of Employment Files," explores the impact of the pandemic and recession on individuals with intellectual and developmental [disabilities](#) who received on-the-job support from Business Connections at VCU, an employment services provider for individuals with disabilities.

Carol M. Schall, Ph.D., director of technical assistance at the VCU Autism Center for Excellence, and lead author of the study, said the study also dispelled the myth that people with disabilities are limited in their ability to contribute to the labor force.

"The pandemic made us all more aware of the term 'essential worker,' and in fact, it broadened the definition," Schall said. "But most of our study participants were only out of work for part of March, April and part of May 2020. So it's clear from our research that people with disabilities are essential to our economy, and employers who hire them are doing all of us a service by employing highly qualified, reliable workers who provide goods and services that we all need."



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Schall and co-authors also learned that people with disabilities did not take full advantage of unemployment benefits during the pandemic.

"It may be because the [safety net](#) is not fully extended to people with disabilities, or it may be due to the problems employees have had in Virginia when attempting to access unemployment benefits," she said. "Whatever the reason, people with disabilities ought to be accessing the same support systems that all of us do when we encounter a work stoppage or become unemployed."

The study included several key findings in the study group that point out



the adverse implications of the pandemic and recession to employees with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Some were in line with general trends of the overall workforce, and some were not. They included:

- The wages of employees with intellectual and [developmental disabilities](#) were not affected by the [pandemic](#).
- Employees in food service, retail and entertainment were more affected.
- Employees in [health care](#), distribution and supplies were less affected.
- Employees from various racial and ethnic backgrounds worked more hours than their white peers.

Schall said the final bullet point would require more research. She has reached out to other [faculty members](#) in the hope of finding a [graduate student](#) to assist with an upcoming study.

**More information:** Carol Schall et al, The resiliency of employees with intellectual and developmental disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and economic shutdown: A retrospective review of employment files, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* (2020). [DOI: 10.3233/JVR-201113](#)

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