

Disability and Current Population Survey (CPS) COVID-19 Supplemental Data

June 2022



OFFICE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Table of Contents

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS	3
INTRODUCTION	4
FIGURE 1. WEEKLY EXCESS MORTALITY FROM ALL CAUSES IN 2020 AND 2021	5
TELEWORK OR WORK-AT-HOME	6
FIGURE 2. TELEWORK OR WORK-AT-HOME, EMPLOYED	6
FIGURE 3. TELEWORK OR WORK-AT-HOME BY INDUSTRY, EMPLOYED	7
FIGURE 4. TELEWORK OR WORK-AT-HOME BY OCCUPATION, EMPLOYED.....	8
FIGURE 5. TELEWORK OR WORK-AT-HOME BY MSA SIZE, EMPLOYED.....	9
UNABLE TO WORK DUE TO BUSINESS CLOSURE	10
FIGURE 6. UNABLE TO WORK DUE TO BUSINESS CLOSURE, BY LABOR FORCE STATUS	10
FIGURE 7. UNABLE TO WORK DUE TO BUSINESS CLOSURE, IN THE LABOR FORCE.....	11
RECEIVED PAY FOR LOST HOURS	12
FIGURE 8. RECEIVED PAY FOR LOST HOURS, OF THOSE UNABLE TO WORK DUE TO BUSINESS CLOSURE.....	12
FIGURE 9. RECEIVED PAY FOR LOST HOURS BY INDUSTRY, OF THOSE UNABLE TO WORK DUE TO BUSINESS CLOSURE.....	13
UNABLE TO LOOK FOR WORK	14
FIGURE 10. UNABLE TO LOOK FOR WORK, NOT IN THE LABOR FORCE FOR UNSPECIFIED REASONS.....	14
FIGURE 11. UNABLE TO LOOK FOR WORK BY METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREA SIZE, NOT IN THE LABOR FORCE FOR UNSPECIFIED REASONS	15
UNABLE TO OBTAIN MEDICAL CARE	16
FIGURE 12. UNABLE TO OBTAIN MEDICAL CARE.....	16
CONCLUSION	17
AUTHORS	17
REFERENCES	17

Summary of Key Findings

Telework or Work-at-Home

- The proportion of the employed engaged in telework or work-at-home due to the Coronavirus pandemic in May 2020 was 35.8% for people without disabilities and 25.7% for people with disabilities, falling to 11.1% and 11.0%, respectively, in December 2021. It was consistently lower for people with disabilities.
- The information, finance, professional/business services, and public administration industries had much higher rates of telework or work-at-home than the average, over the period May 2020 through December 2021, of 19.2% for people without disabilities and 16.2% for people with disabilities. Rates were much lower than the average in the agriculture, construction, trade, transportation, and leisure/hospitality industries.
- Similarly, rates of telework or work-at-home were much higher in ‘white-collar’ management/business and professional occupations and much lower than the average in ‘blue-collar’ occupations, such as construction and production jobs.
- There was also a consistent relationship between population size of Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) and telework, with people residing in larger MSAs being more likely to engage in telework due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Unable to Work Due to Lost Business or Business Closure

- The proportion of those in the labor force (i.e., either employed or unemployed) unable to work because their employer lost business or had to close due to the Coronavirus pandemic reached 34% for people with disabilities and 27% for people without disabilities in May 2020. That percentage fell to 2.7% and 1.4%, respectively, in December 2021. These proportions were consistently higher for people with disabilities.
- Those working in the leisure and hospitality industry were the least likely to have received pay for hours lost due to these business closures for people without disabilities. In contrast, for people with disabilities, those working in the agriculture and mining industries were least likely to receive pay. For both people with and without disabilities, those working in the public administration industry were the most likely to have received pay.

Unable to Look for Work

- The proportion of those who were not in the labor force for unspecified reasons and were unable to look for work due to the Coronavirus pandemic in May 2020 stood at 54% for people with disabilities and 50% for people without disabilities, falling to 6.4% and 4.4%, respectively, in December 2021. The unspecified reasons category includes not in the labor force for a reason other than retirement, disability, education, and childcare/family-care.
- Those individuals unable to look for work were generally higher in larger MSAs for both people with and without disabilities, although the increase was not as consistent across size categories as for telework/work-at-home.

Introduction

The spread of COVID-19 and actions taken in response resulted in drastic changes to the economy, with widespread implementation of social-distancing measures, temporary shutdowns or reductions in business operations, and individual efforts to avoid contracting the virus. Governments in 42 states and territories issued mandatory stay-at-home orders, with another eight issuing non-mandatory advisories or recommendations.¹ These government mandates and voluntary actions had a disparate impact across industries and occupations, with some businesses deemed “essential” and permitted to continue operating more or less as usual, while others with greater risk of spreading COVID-19 or considered less essential being shut down for a considerable period. From February 2020 to April 2020, as shown by the Current Population Survey, the economy lost 25 million jobs (15.6%) and the unemployment rate rose from 3.8% to 14.4%.² This sudden, unprecedented downturn was followed by an improvement that has also been rapid by historical standards, although much slower than the two-month decline.

The Current Population Survey (CPS) is a joint production of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the agencies acted quickly to add a series of five supplemental questions to the regular monthly CPS.³ These five questions all ask about whether events occurred “at any time in the last four weeks” due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The CPS added the questions in May 2020, and four of the five are still included in the CPS as of March 2022, with the fifth question having been discontinued in November 2020.⁴ (The discontinued question inquired about inability to receive necessary medical care, while the remaining questions ask about (1) telework or work-at-home, (2) inability to work due to an employer closing or losing business, (3) receiving any pay for hours lost from the previous question, and (4) prevention from looking for work.) This brief examines how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted people with disabilities relative to people without disabilities, over time and by various characteristics.

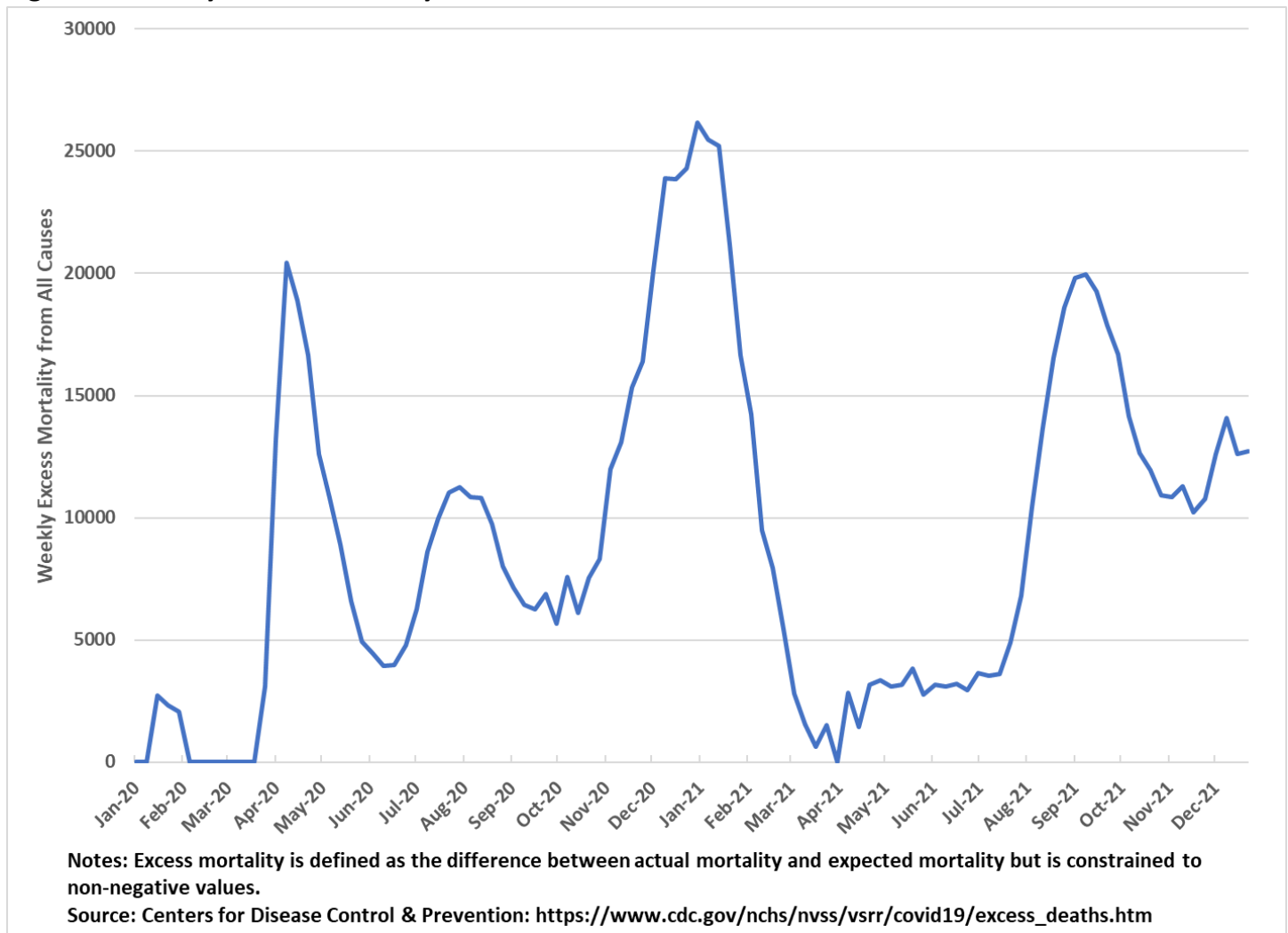
¹ See “Timing of State and Territorial COVID-19 Stay-at-Home Orders and Changes in Population Movement — United States, March 1–May 31, 2020,” <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6935a2.htm>

² Note that all data presented in this brief is **not** seasonally adjusted; BLS does not currently provide seasonally adjusted labor market statistics by disability status.

³ The Current Population Survey is the source of official government statistics on the unemployment rate, employment-population ratio, and labor force participation rate. It is conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, with a sample size of approximately sixty-thousand households each month. Data is collected on all individuals within each household, aiming to capture labor market statistics for the civilian, non-institutionalized, adult population. The CPS began tracking disability status in June 2008 via six questions, also found in the American Community Survey and various other federal surveys, with anyone answering affirmatively to at least one question classified as having a disability. These six questions ask whether a person 1) is deaf or has serious difficulty hearing, 2) is blind or has serious difficulty seeing (even with the assistance of corrective lenses), 3) has serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions, 4) has serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs, 5) has difficulty dressing or bathing, and 6) has difficulty doing errands alone. In 2021, people with disabilities formed 11.9% of the civilian, non-institutionalized population aged 16 and older and also formed 3.9% of the employed.

⁴ See “Current Population Survey COVID-19 Items Extract Files – Technical Documentation”, https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/Covid19_TechDoc.pdf

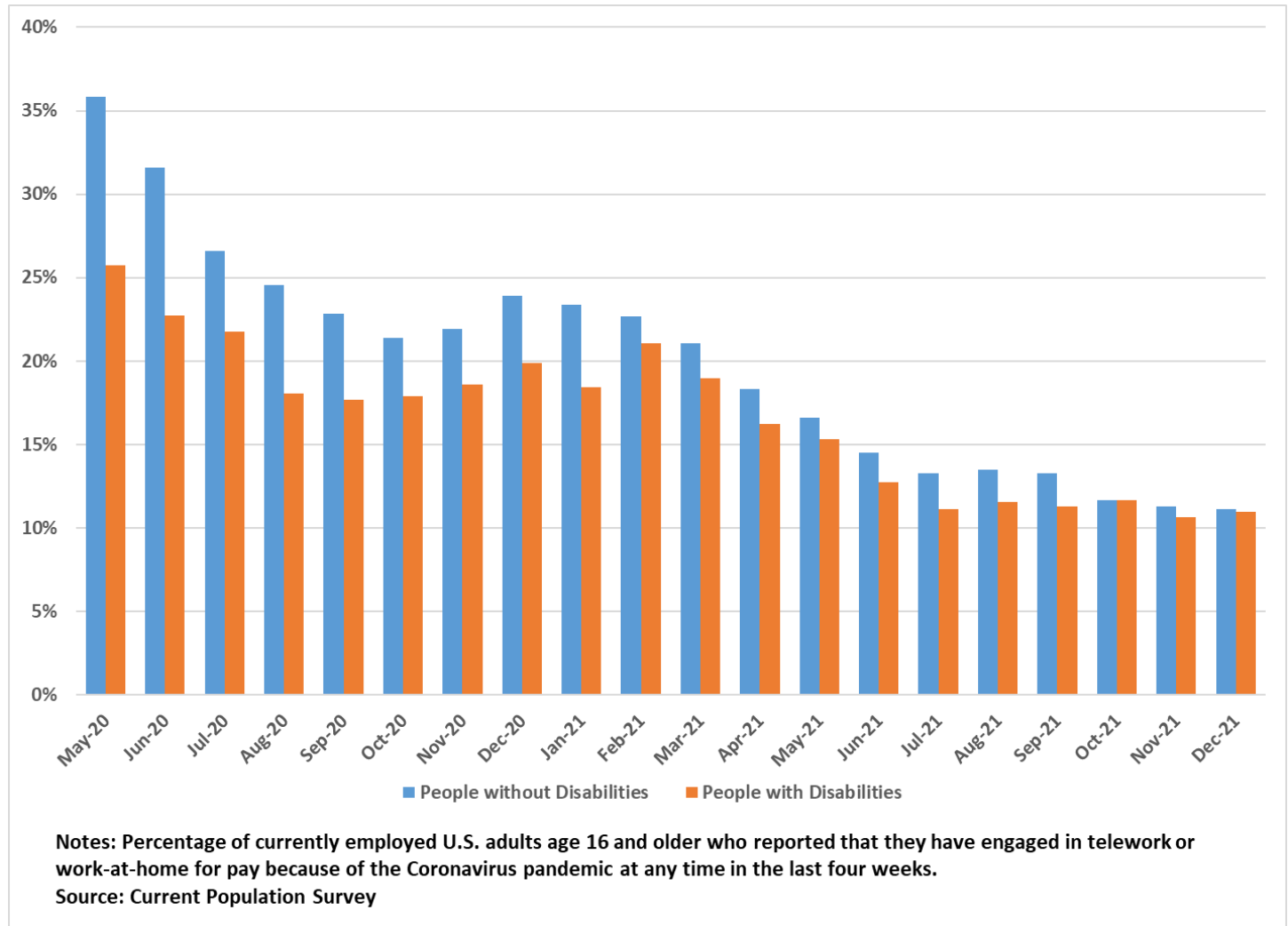
Figure 1. Weekly Excess Mortality from All Causes in 2020 and 2021



- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintain and update national mortality statistics on a weekly basis, including estimated excess mortality from all causes.
- Figure 1 displays weekly excess mortality from all causes from January 2020 through December 2021. These numbers do not ascribe any specific portion of excess mortality to COVID-19 and therefore should not be affected by any revisions to the number of deaths attributed to COVID-19.
- The chart is included in this presentation for the purpose of illustrating the timing of later waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown by responses to the five questions in the CPS supplemental data, tended to diminish over time, the data may not have captured the waves noted here (November 2020 to February 2021 and a second starting in August 2021). It should also be noted that mortality is a lagging indicator of COVID-19 prevalence by about two or three weeks.

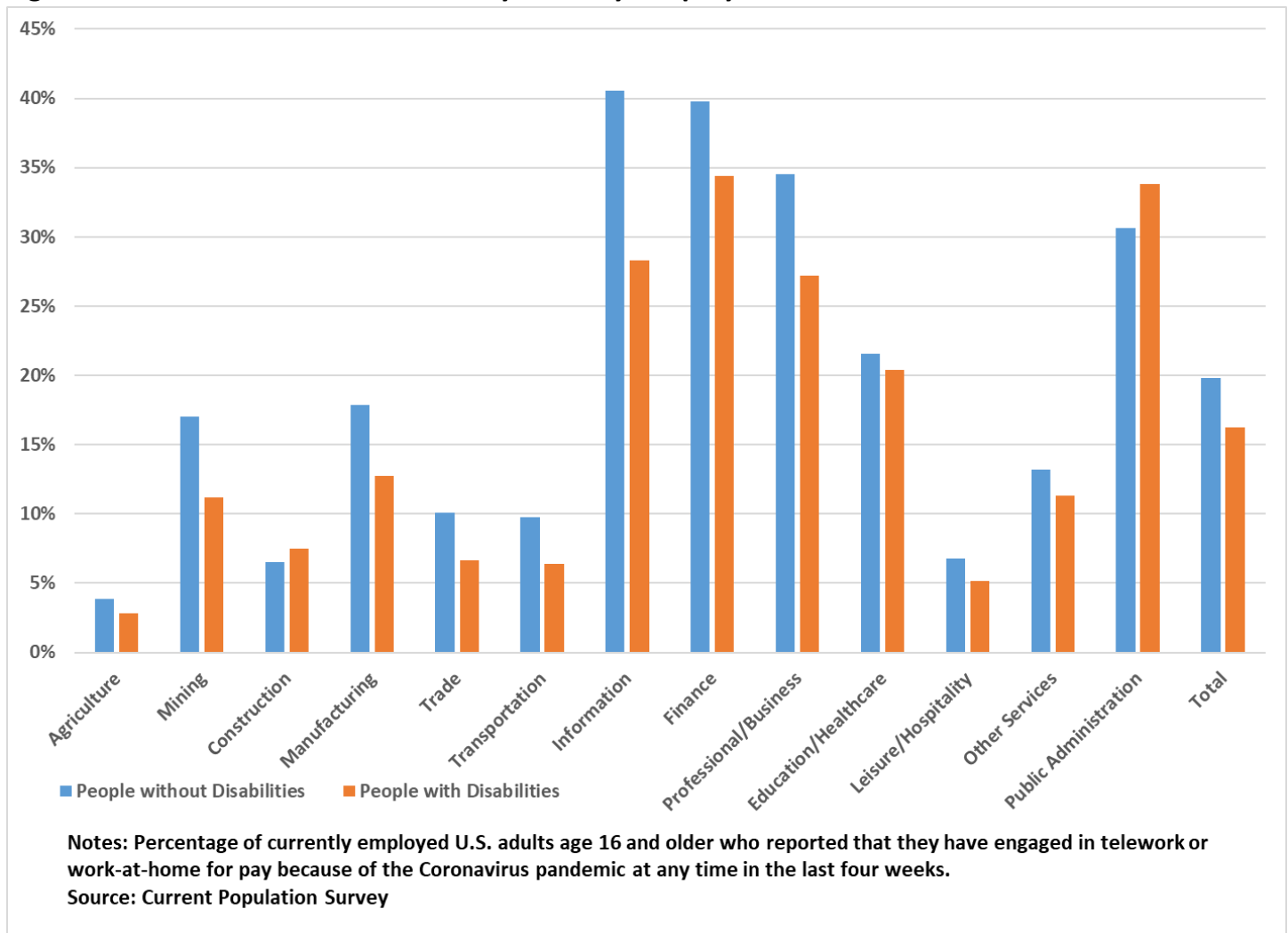
Telework or Work-at-Home

Figure 2. Telework or Work-at-Home, Employed



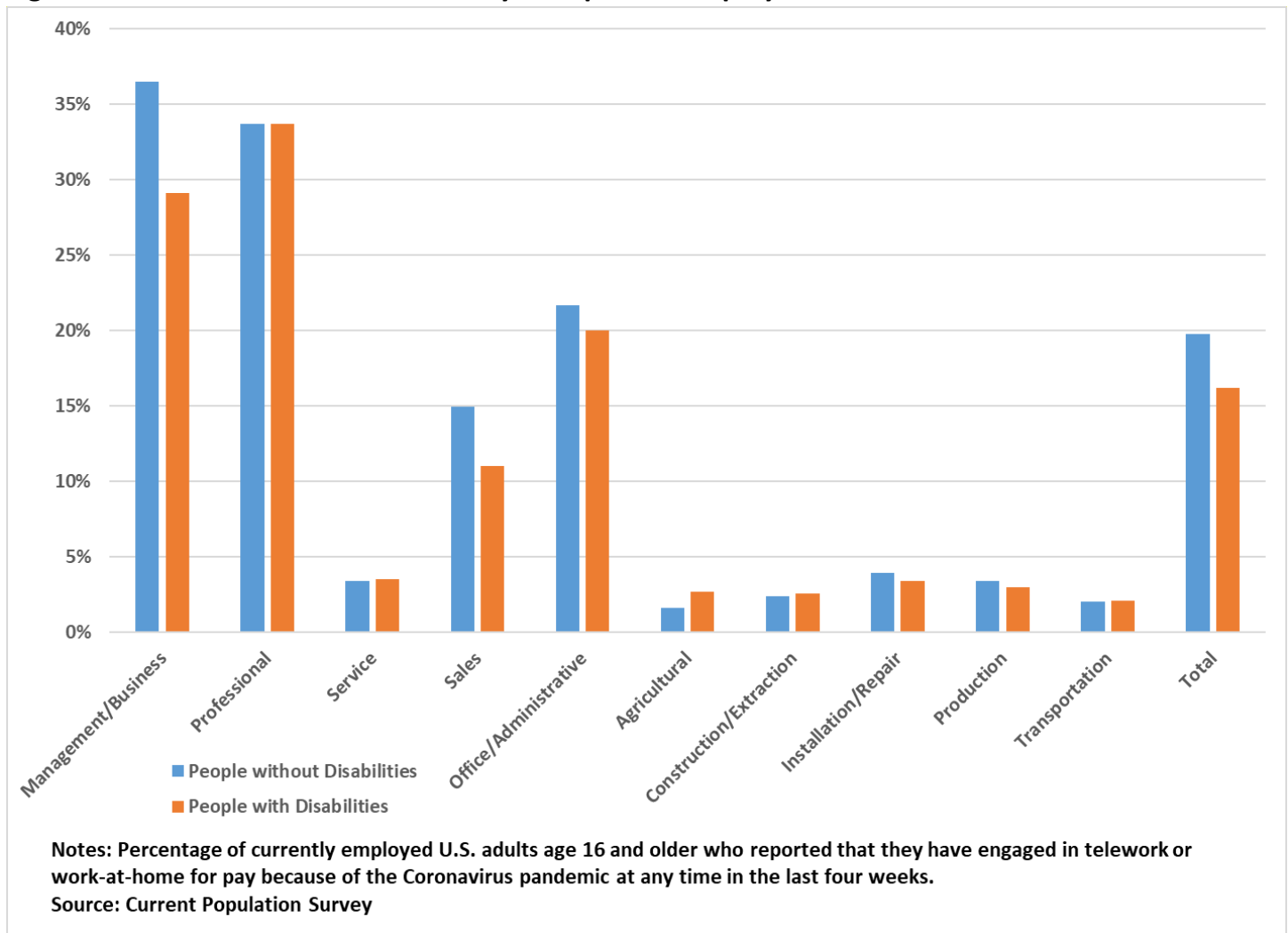
- Employers generally responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by maximizing flexibility for employees to telework or work-at-home, often extending to full-time telework for jobs when possible. The first question included in the COVID-19 supplemental data asks, for those currently employed, whether they have, at any time in the last four weeks, engaged in telework or work-at-home for pay, specifically because of the Coronavirus pandemic rather than for other reasons.
- Figure 2 displays the percentage of affirmative responses to this question, by disability status, for each month from May 2020 through December 2021, for adults 16 and older. In May 2020, the proportion of the individuals employed teleworking or working-at-home due to the COVID-19 pandemic stood at 35.8% for people without disabilities and 25.7% for people with disabilities, falling to 11.1% and 11.0%, respectively, in December 2021.
- The decline was not consistent over this entire period, with contrary upward trends coinciding with later waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, as illustrated in Figure 1. (Note: Monthly CPS data generally references the calendar week that includes the twelfth day of that month.)

Figure 3. Telework or Work-at-Home by Industry, Employed



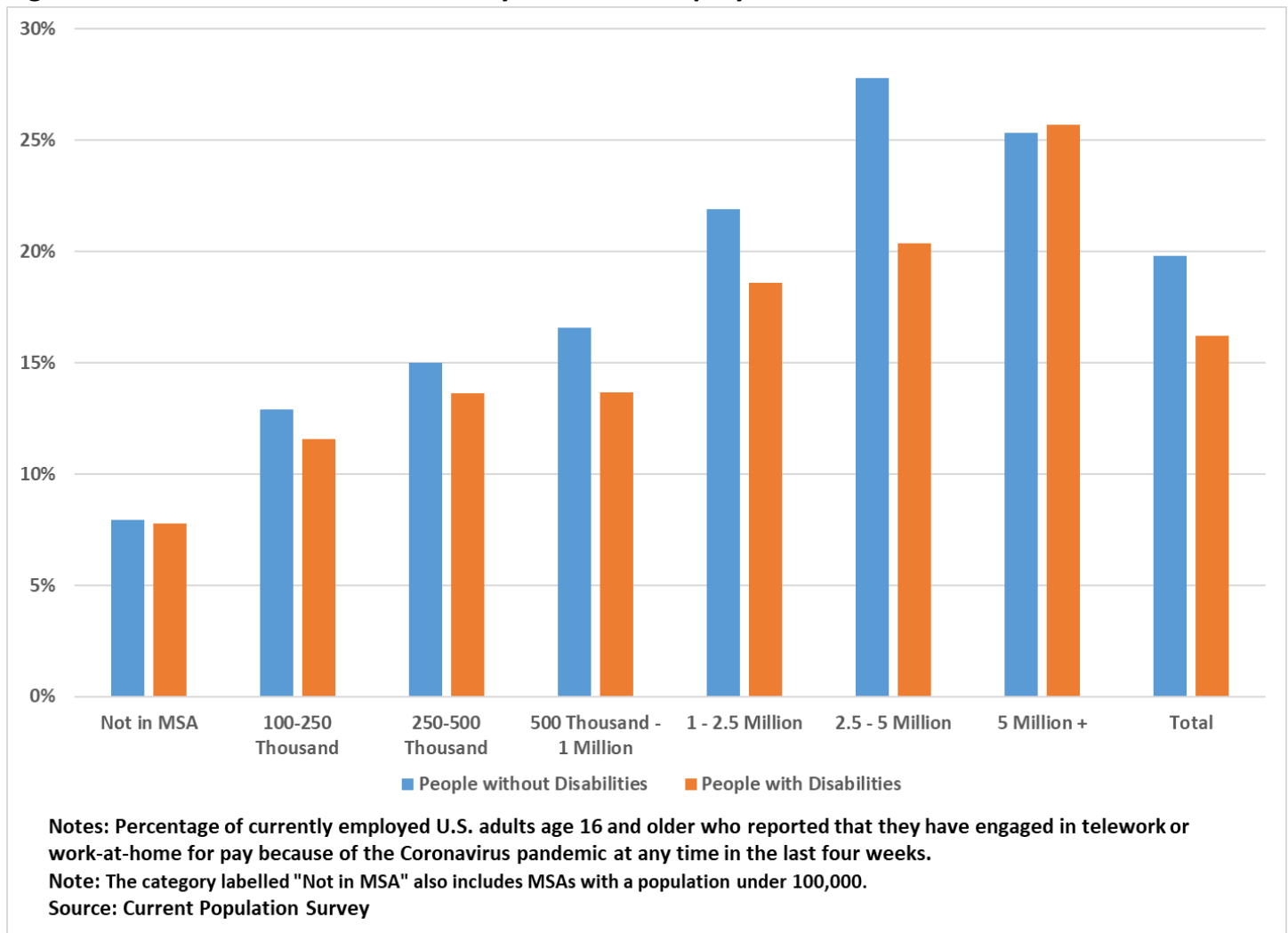
- The ease of teleworking varies greatly across specific jobs, with certain industries or occupations generally consisting of jobs tasks that can be more easily performed at home while others are more likely to require physical contact with other people or with capital goods used in production processes. Figure 3 illustrates the proportion of the employed engaged in telework or work-at-home due to COVID-19 by industry over the entire period from May 2020 through December 2021.
- Overall, 19.2% of people without disabilities engaged in telework or work-at-home versus 16.2% of people with disabilities. The proportion of people without disabilities teleworking was higher in every industry category except construction and public administration.
- Within each industry, the proportion of individuals teleworking varied widely. Approximately two-fifths of those employed in the information and finance industries engaged in telework or work-at-home, over one-third of those in professional or business services, and three-tenths of those in public administration. At the other extreme, approximately one-tenth or less of those in the agriculture, construction, trade, transportation, and leisure or hospitality industries engaged in telework or work-at-home. These distinctions between industries held true for both people with and without a disability.

Figure 4. Telework or Work-at-Home by Occupation, Employed



- Examination by occupational categories revealed similar patterns for people with and without disabilities with regards to telework or work-at-home, as observed in Figure 4, over the entire period from May 2020 through December 2021.
- The generally higher-skilled management/business and professional occupational categories had rates of telework or work-at-home due to COVID-19 of 37% for people without disabilities and 29% for people with disabilities. By contrast, rates of telework or work-at-home were below four percent in the generally lower-skilled occupational categories of service, agricultural, construction/extraction, installation/repair, production, and transportation, where physical presence of employees is generally a necessity.

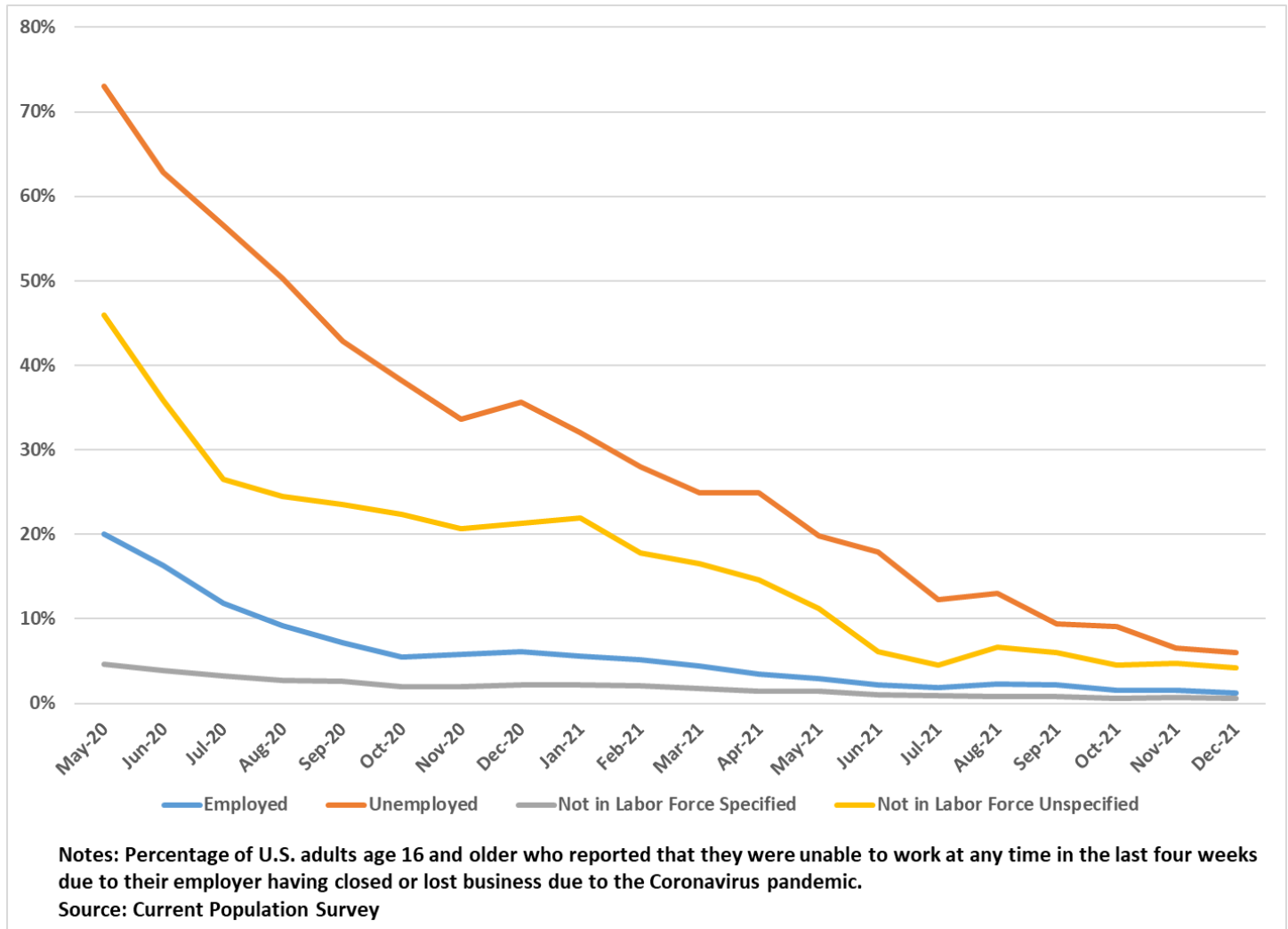
Figure 5. Telework or Work-at-Home by MSA Size, Employed



- Geography may also play a role in telework due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with higher-population metro areas impacted by more severe lockdowns and related policies intended to combat the spread of COVID-19, distributions of industries and occupations more conducive to telework, and better availability of technologies making telework possible. Figure 5 shows the proportion of the employed engaging in telework or work-at-home due to the Coronavirus pandemic by population size category of the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The first category indicates that the individual is not located in an MSA (or is located in an extremely small MSA with a population below 100,000).
- For people with disabilities, the proportion increases with each size category, and similarly for people without disabilities, the proportion rises with each size category except for the largest (5 million and over) having a lower proportion than the second largest (2.5 to 5 million).
- The largest size category (5 million and over) is the only one in which the proportion of telework for people with disabilities was higher than for people without disabilities.

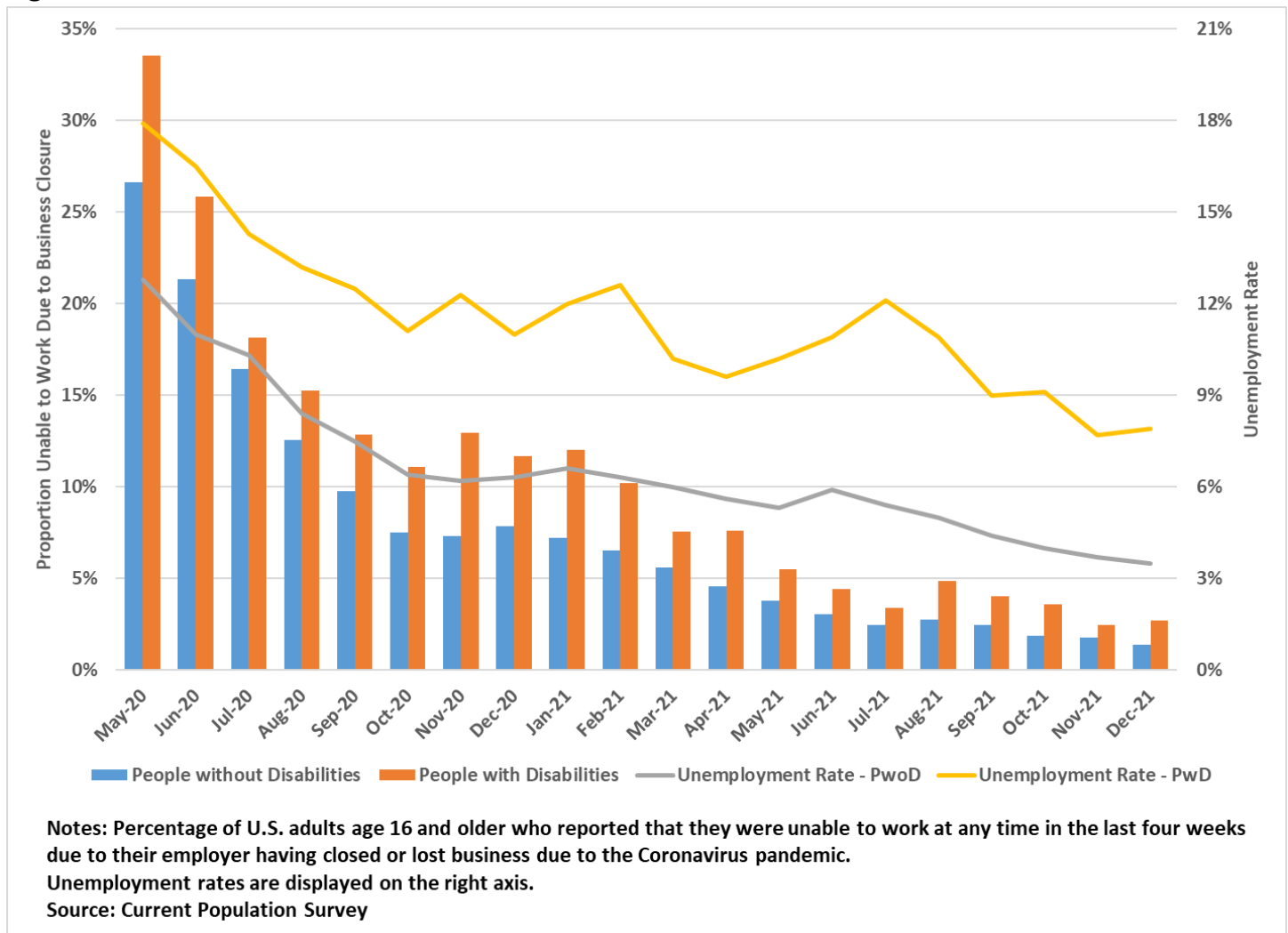
Unable to Work Due to Lost Business or Business Closure

Figure 6. Unable to Work Due to Lost Business or Business Closure, by Labor Force Status



- As mentioned in the introduction, a common response to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was for state governments to issue stay-at-home orders, and many types of businesses were ordered to close temporarily while measures were formulated to limit the spread of COVID-19. This, in turn, meant that numerous employees of these businesses were temporarily unable to work due to a downturn or a closure of the business. The second question of the COVID-19 supplemental data explored this issue, and it is not limited in response to the employed or even those in the labor force.
- Rates of affirmative response vary drastically by labor force status as demonstrated in Figure 6. For the employed, the proportion unable to work at some time in the last four weeks stood at 20% in May 2020 before falling to 1.3% in December 2021. For the unemployed, this proportion was far larger at 73% in May 2020 falling to 6.0% in December 2021.
- For those not in the labor force, these proportions were smaller than for the employed. However, there is a subset of those not in the labor force for which the reason is unspecified (i.e., other than retirement, disability, education, or childcare/family-care). The group not in the labor force for unspecified reasons had a proportion unable to work due to COVID-19 of 46% in May 2020 that fell to 4.2% in December 2021.

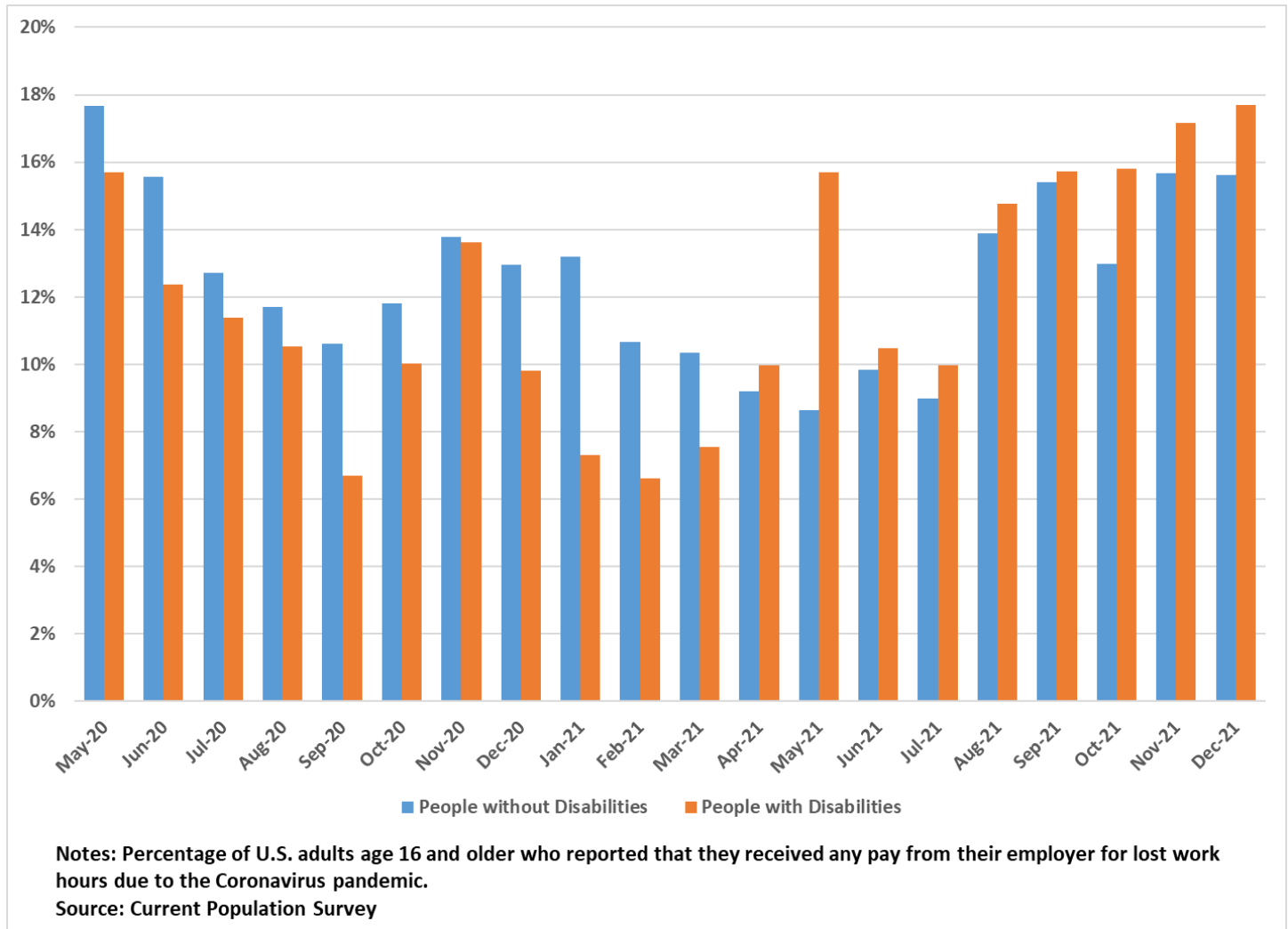
Figure 7. Unable to Work Due to Lost Business or Business Closure, in the Labor Force



- Figure 7 displays the proportion of respondents, by disability status, who were unable to work due to lost business or business closure from COVID-19, from May 2020 through December 2021. People with disabilities not in the labor force were far more likely to be in not in the labor force due to retirement or disability than people without disabilities (73% for people with disabilities versus 16% for people without disabilities, over the entire period from 2009 through 2021), and this group has extremely low rates of affirmative response to this question, as shown in Figure 6 above. Including the entire population, rather than limiting it to those in the labor force, would therefore greatly skew the comparison by disability status.
- For those in the labor force, the overall affirmative response to this question was 10.1% for people with disabilities, falling from 34% in May 2020 to 2.7% in December 2021, and was 7.6% for people without disabilities, falling from 27% in May 2020 to 1.4% in December 2021.
- The proportion of those unable to work due to business closure was higher for people with disabilities in every month. As with the question on telework or work-at-home, there was not a consistent downward trend over this period, but instead there were contrary upward trends or stability during later waves of the COVID-19 pandemic after the initial onset.

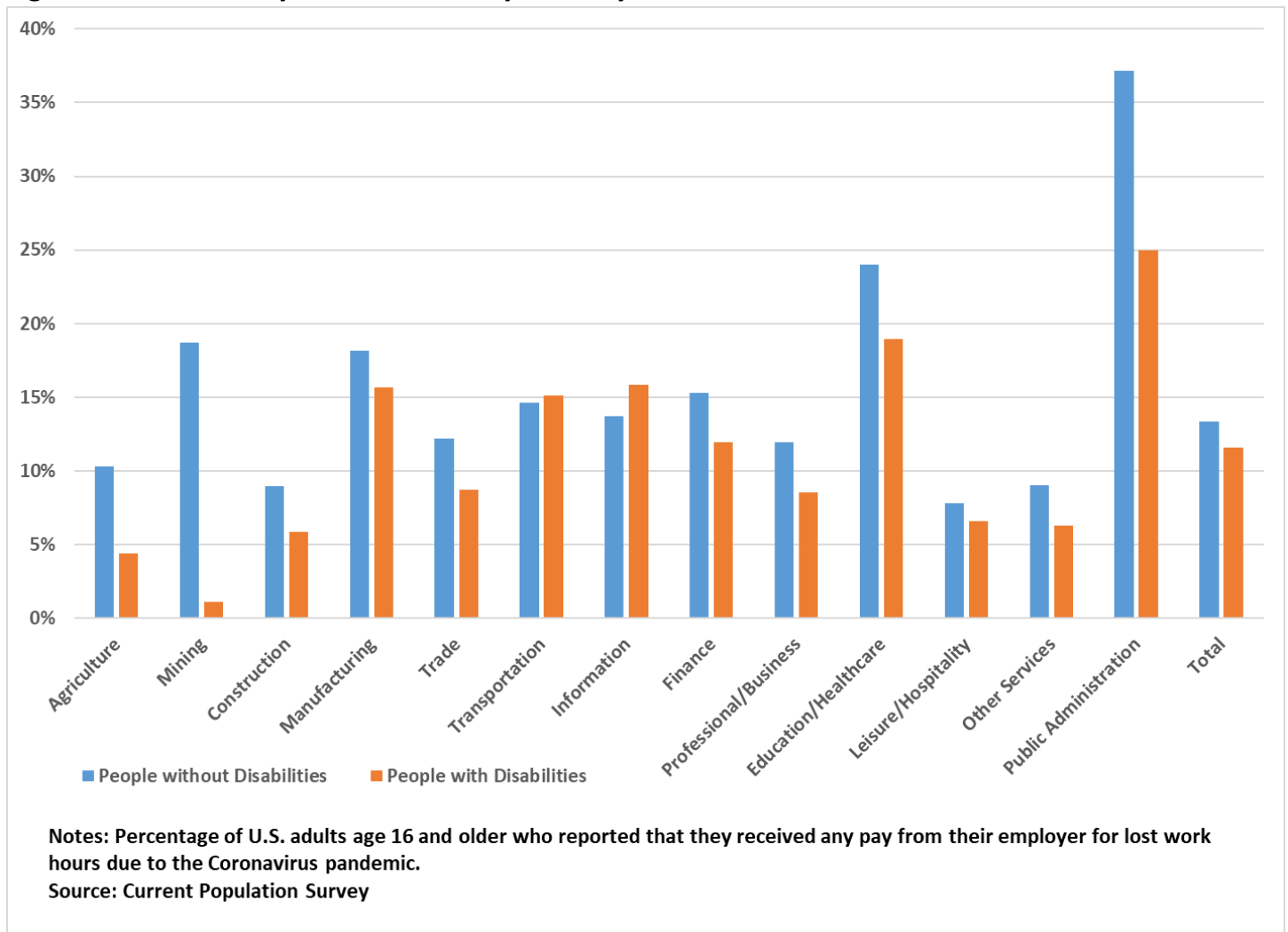
Received Pay for Lost Hours

Figure 8. Received Pay for Lost Hours, of Those Unable to Work Due to Business Closure



- The third question of the COVID-19 supplemental data asks whether the respondents received any pay for lost hours. CPS directed the question to those respondents who answered the previous question affirmatively (i.e., being unable to work due to their employers having either lost business or closed entirely). Figure 8 shows the response to this question by month from May 2020 through December 2021.
- The overall proportion (not shown in Figure 8) of employees who received pay for lost hours was lower for people with disabilities at 11.6% than for people without disabilities at 13.4%. Unlike the first two questions, there is no consistent trend over time for receiving pay for lost hours. It should be noted that the relevant population of people who were unable to work due to business closure shrank greatly over this period, as shown in Figures 6 and 7 above and discussed in the previous two sections.

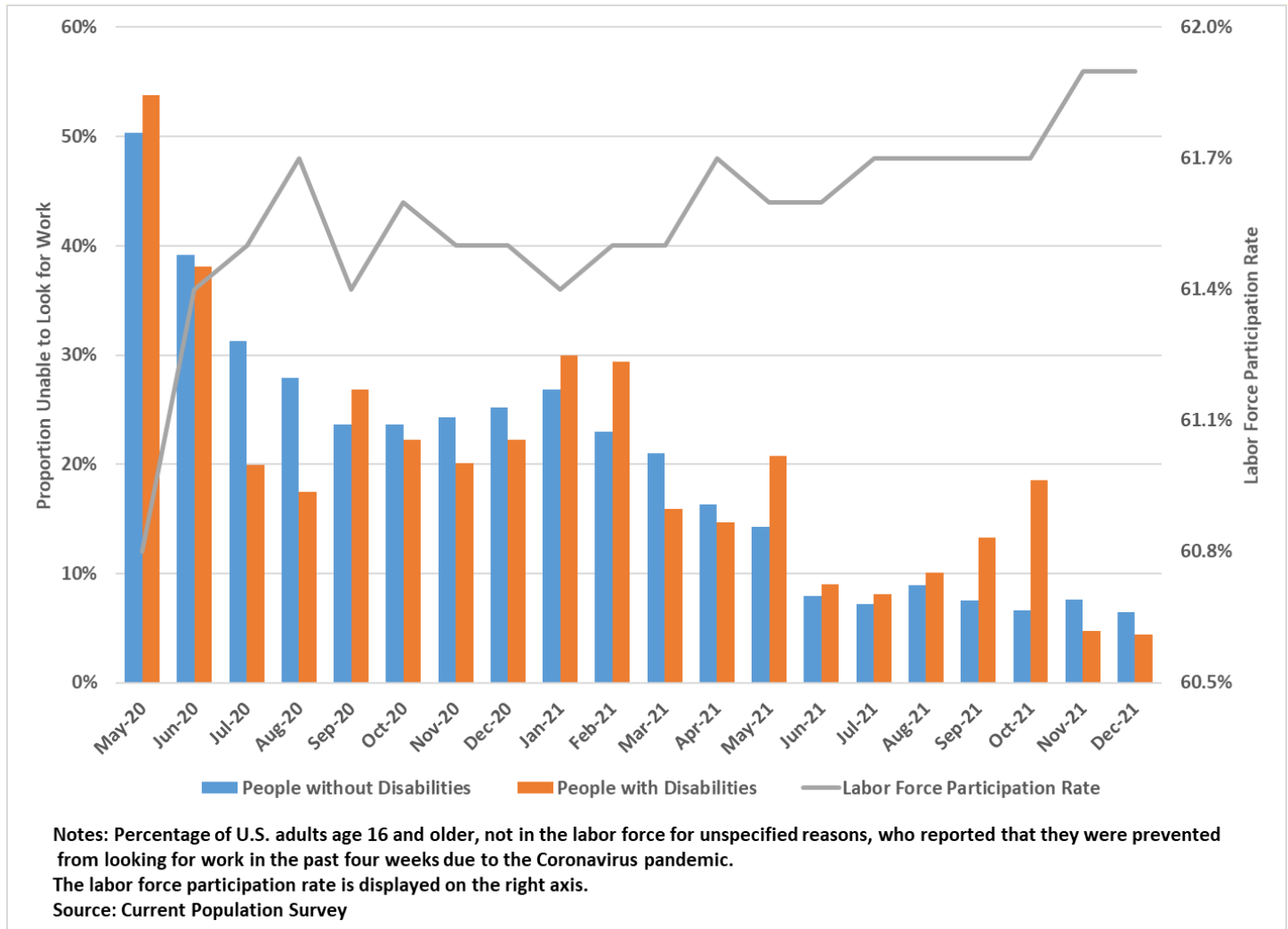
Figure 9. Received Pay for Lost Hours by Industry, of Those Unable to Work Due to Business Closure



- Although there were no consistent trends over time for the question about receiving pay for lost hours, there was great variation by industry of employer. Figure 9 illustrates the proportion of affirmative response by industry listed in the survey, either because they are currently employed or because they had a recent separation from an employer even though they are now unemployed or not in the labor force.
- Public administration had the highest rates of receiving pay for lost hours, at 25% for people with disabilities and 37% for people without disabilities. By contrast, the industries of construction, leisure & hospitality, and other services had rates of receiving pay for lost hours below 10%. People with disabilities had lower rates of receiving pay for lost hours in every industry except transportation and information.

Unable to Look for Work

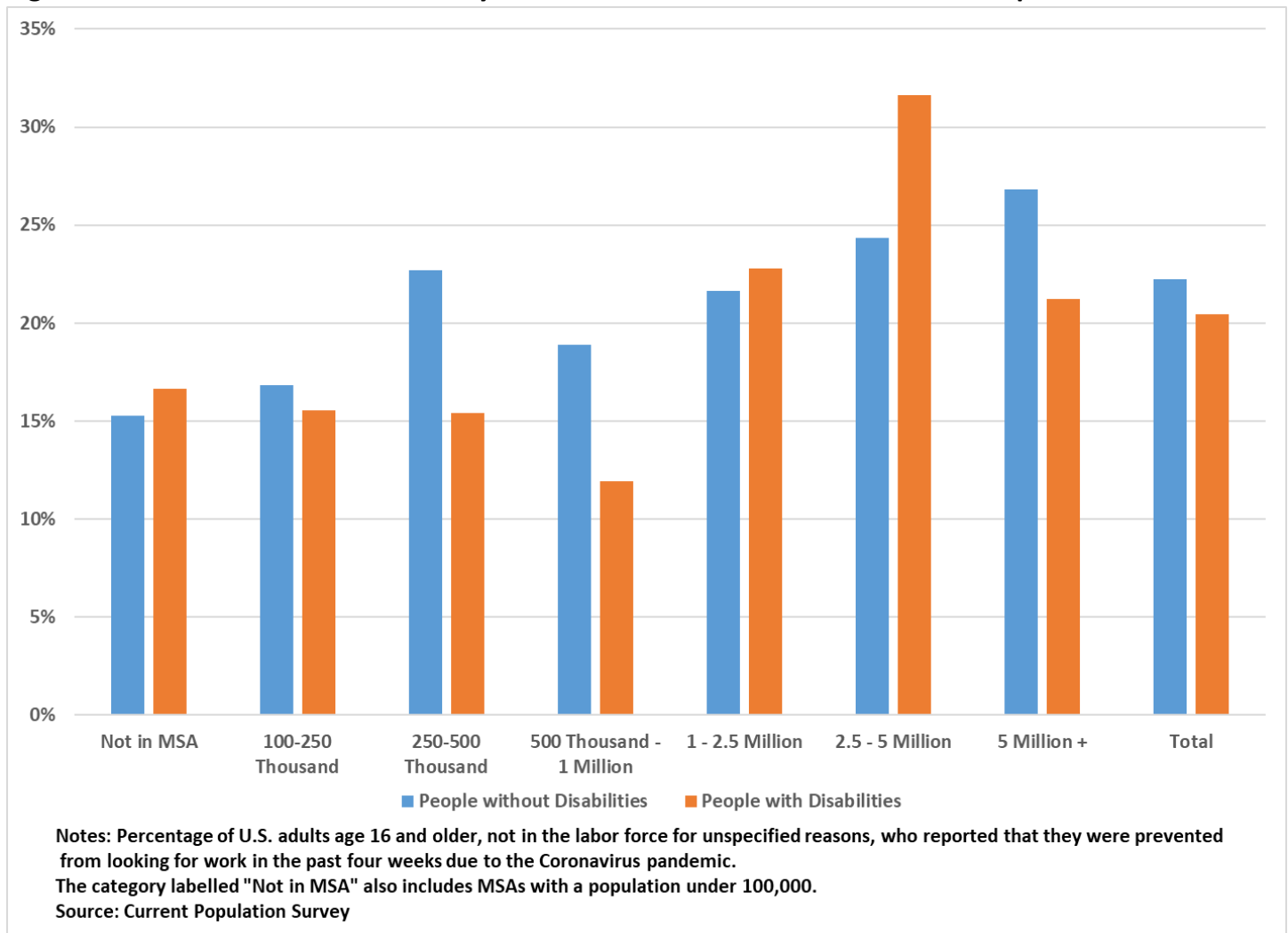
Figure 10. Unable to Look for Work, Not in the Labor Force for Unspecified Reasons



- The fourth question of the COVID-19 supplemental data asks whether the respondents were prevented from looking for work by the Coronavirus pandemic. By definition, this question can be asked only of those not in the labor force (i.e., neither employed nor unemployed, but looking for work). Figure 10 illustrates the results for those not in the labor force for unspecified reasons (i.e., not retirement, disability, education, or childcare/family-care).⁵
- As seen in Figure 10, in May 2020 over half of those not in the labor force for unspecified reasons were unable to look for work due to the Coronavirus pandemic, for both people with and without disabilities. This proportion fell greatly over time, reaching 6.4% by December 2021 for people without disabilities and 4.4% for people with disabilities. Over the entire period, 20.4% of people with disabilities were unable to look for work due to the Coronavirus pandemic compared with 22.2% of people without disabilities.

⁵ Persons are defined as being *unemployed* if they fall into one of two categories: (1) Not employed and had made specific efforts to find employment during the four-week reference period, or (2) On layoff, meaning a temporary separation from a job. In addition, individuals not in the labor force are further categorized by reason, such as retirement, disability, education, or childcare/family-care. Excluding not only those not in the labor force due to retirement or disability but also those not in the labor force due to education or childcare/family-care leaves the residual category of those not in the labor force for reasons that are unspecified in the publicly available CPS datasets. See Current Population Survey Technical Paper 77, October 2019, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/technical-documentation/complete.html>

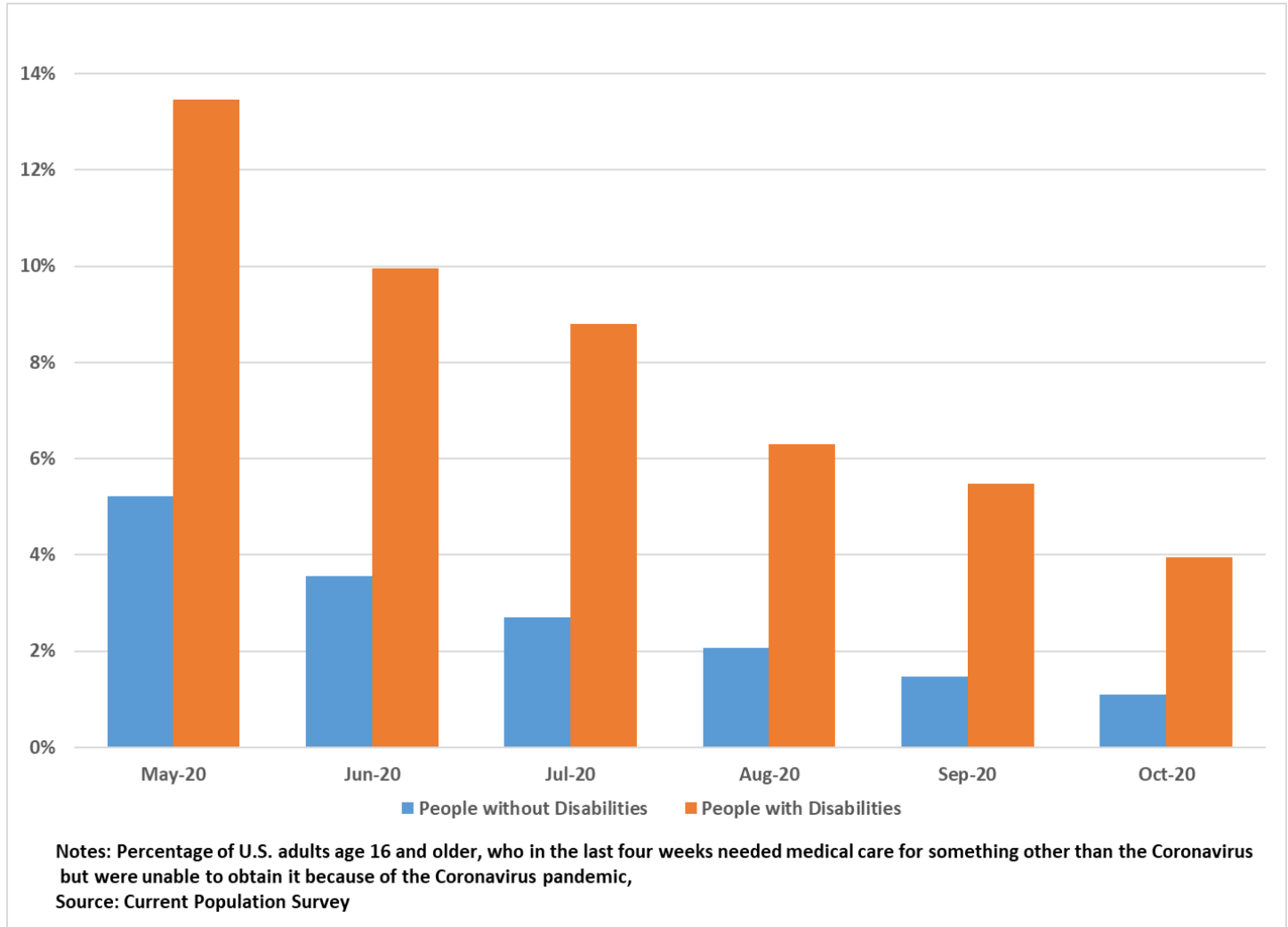
Figure 11. Unable to Look for Work by MSA Size, Not in the Labor Force for Unspecified Reasons



- Figure 11 shows how this proportion varies across population size categories of the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) in which the household resides, with the first category indicating either not being located in an MSA or being located in an extremely small MSA with a population below 100,000. Generally, those in larger MSAs (population 1 million or more) were more likely to have been unable to look for work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, for both people with and without disabilities, although the increase is not consistent across size categories.

Unable to Obtain Medical Care

Figure 12. Unable to Obtain Medical Care



- The final question of the CPS COVID-19 supplemental data asked whether the respondent needed medical care for something other than the Coronavirus but was unable to obtain it due to the pandemic. Unlike the other four questions, this one was discontinued in November 2020, meaning that data exists for only six months from May through October 2020. Moreover, CPS asked everyone in the survey this question, without any additional information regarding whether respondents needed medical care during the previous four weeks.
- When examining disparities by disability status, it is therefore impossible to differentiate between the pre-existing greater need for medical care on the part of people with disabilities versus a possible disparate impact on those seeking medical care. Figure 12 shows that in May 2020, 13.5% of people with disabilities were unable to obtain medical care versus 5.2% of people without disabilities. These monthly rates fell rapidly to reach in October 2020 3.9% of people with disabilities and 1.1% of people without disabilities.

Conclusion

Over the past two years, the United States has experienced historically unprecedented labor market changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to impede its spread. The CPS added five supplemental questions to provide more information about these impacts on the labor force, in terms of telework, having been unable to work due to business closures, having received pay for lost hours, having been unable to look for work, and having been unable to receive medical care. Although the effects gradually dissipated from May 2020 to December 2021, there have been pronounced differences across industries, occupations, and geographies. In particular, engagement in telework or work-at-home varied greatly across these characteristics, particularly for people with disabilities. Significantly, telework permitted social distancing and helped mitigate other barriers to workplace accessibility and employment that some individuals with disabilities may face.

Authors

This research brief was prepared by staff in the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) in the U.S. Department of Labor, including David Rosenblum, Senior Economist; and Savi Swick, Director of Research and Evaluation. The Current Population Survey (CPS) office from the DOL Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the DOL Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) provided independent expert review. For further information, please email Rosenblum.David.B@dol.gov or call (202) 693-7840.

References

- Moreland A, Herlihy C, Tynan MA, et al. Timing of State and Territorial COVID-19 Stay-at-Home Orders and Changes in Population Movement – United States, March 1 – May 31, 2020. *MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Rep* 2020; 69: 1198-1203. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6935a2>.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/> and <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/cps/cps-basic.html>
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census Bureau, Current Population Survey COVID-19 Items Extract Files – Technical Documentation”, https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/Covid19_TechDoc.pdf

About ODEP

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) promotes policies and coordinates with employers and all levels of government to increase workplace success for people with disabilities. ODEP's mission is to develop and influence policies and practices that increase the number and quality of employment opportunities for people with disabilities. For more information please visit: dol.gov/agencies/odep.