

GRADUATE EXIT SEMINAR

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Spatial Inequalities in Disabled Livelihoods: An Empirical Study of U.S. Counties

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Since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employment outcomes among people with disabilities have not improved. In my dissertation I address subnational factors that relate to differences in disability prevalence, employment, and provision of governmental services across 3,066 U.S. counties. While disability research typically approaches prevalence by examining health behaviors, I find that socioeconomic composition of counties is an overlooked factor that is significant in explaining prevalence of specific types of disability across counties. A troubling relationship exists where places with economic hardship have higher rates of disability, while also providing the worst employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Given high rates of disability prevalence and poor employment outcomes, I consider the degree to which governmental programs are responsive to the needs of people with disabilities. I examine the provision of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) across U.S. counties and find that the degree to which people with self-reported disabilities are receiving assistance is not linked to employment rates of the disabled, but is instead connected to sociopolitical factors that shape welfare distribution.

