Predictors of Supported Employment for Transitioning Youth with Developmental Disabilities

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What is Supported Employment?

Although the term “Supported Employment” has been used inconsistently in research, policy, and practice, there is agreement that Supported Employment refers to paid work in the community. There are many types of paid work in the community. For this study, the individuals were identified as having one of three outcomes:

- **Individual Supported Employment**
  Subject works in community-based job with typical peers and is paid at least minimum wage by employer.

- **Other Supported Work**
  Subject works in a paid community job alongside other peers with disabilities (enclave/crew) and/or makes less than minimum wage.

- **Unpaid/Sheltered/Non-Work Activities**
  Subject participates in unpaid community-based job or any facility-based work/non-work activities.

Supported Employment

“How can we best prepare transitioning youth for supported employment?”

The Issue

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 requires school systems to plan systematically for the transition from school to post-secondary education and/or employment and include measurable post-school goals in students' IEPs. Schools are required to coordinate activities, such as work experiences, to assist students in meeting their post-school goals. In addition, IDEA 2004 outlines a requirement for states to evaluate their performance on priority indicators including the percent of youth who had IEPs who are working in the community within the first year after exiting school (Indicator 14, IDEA 2004). Although youth with developmental disabilities (DD) typically stay in school longer than their peers and often receive costly long-term funded supports as adults, these students continue to transition to sheltered post-school employment rather than supported employment (paid work in the community). Studies examining the employment outcomes for youth with disabilities and predictors for favorable post-school outcomes proliferate in the field yet little is known about the types of employment outcomes for transitioning youth with developmental disabilities who receive long-term funded supports from community rehabilitation provider agencies (CRPs) or the variables that best predict supported employment outcomes.

The essential question is not, "How busy are you?" but "What are you busy at?"

-Oprah Winfrey
The Study

Staff members (respondents) from 59 CRPs across Maryland completed surveys about 338 youth with developmental disabilities. The youth (subjects) were 1.5 years out of school and were receiving long-term DD agency funded supports from their respective CRPs. Respondents documented the subjects’ current employment status and provided information about the following empirically-based predictor variables for favorable employment outcomes:

1. Race/ethnicity (Caucasian/non-Hispanic)
2. Male Gender
3. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipient status
4. Self-Management Skills
5. Self-Determination Skills
6. Community Mobility Skills
7. Lives with Family
8. Family Expressed Preference for Paid Community Work
9. Family Involvement
10. Setting- Typical High School
11. Setting- Post-Secondary Education
12. Work Experience- Unpaid
13. Work Experience- Stipend
14. Work Experience- Paid

The findings were analyzed using multinomial logistic regression. By accounting for other relevant predictors, I was able to develop a model that best predicted Supported Employment outcomes.

Study Findings

5 variables were found to have unique significant effects on predicting whether an individual was in supported employment:

- Family Member who Expressed a Preference for Paid Employment in the Community (OR=24.03, p<.001)
- Paid Work Experience During School (OR=9.68, p=.008)
- Community Mobility Skills (OR=6.03, p=.049)
- Self-Management Skills (OR=6.16, p=.046)
- Race/Ethnicity* (OR=6.26, p=.044)

Most Salient Predictors of Supported Employment Outcomes

Subjects whose families expressed a preference for paid employment in the community were:

- 6.48 times more likely to be in Individual Supported Employment
- 2.71 times more likely to be in Other Supported Work

Subjects who had paid work experience were:

- 4.53 times more likely to be in Individual Supported Employment

Implications

Individuals and Families should:
- Advocate for paid employment in the community during and after high school
- Support the development of self-management and community mobility skills

Educators and Transition Specialists should:
- Ensure transition goals in the IEP are directly linked to post-school outcomes
- Facilitate paid work experience for students with DD
- Consider emphasizing instruction in self-management & community mobility

CRPs/Policy Makers/Researchers should:
- Clarify definitions for targeted outcomes
- Focus on data collection! Replicate the method (CRP survey) and analysis (multinomial logistic regression). Education and DD policy makers should consider collaborating to collect data.
- Work with schools to facilitate paid work experiences during school!

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