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Principle and Co-Investigators

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Exploring the Impact of Income Security: Strength-Based Employment for People with Intellectual Disabilities

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Objectives: Traditional employment services have resulted in employers hiring people with intellectual disabilities (ID) for charitable reasons, with the intent of 'doing the right thing', or as a corporate-social responsibility, which devalues the contribution of these employees. As such, innovative strategies for meaningful incorporation into the labor force are necessary to improve the employment outlook for people with ID. One such approach is strength-based employment services, where job seekers are marketed for their ability to contribute to the workplace. Therefore, the objective of this study was to evaluate these services in terms of obtaining income security among people with ID.

Methods: Income security was operationally defined by three dependent variables: (1) duration of employment, (2) hours worked per week, and (3) hourly wage. Data for each variable were collected from participants receiving support from developmental service agencies that offer strength-based employment services (experimental group; $n = 101$; males = 62, females = 38, unidentified gender = 1) or traditional employment services (control group; $n = 101$; males = 62, females = 35, unidentified gender = 4); which represented the independent variable. A MANOVA was performed to determine if participants receiving support from strength-based or traditional employment services differed in terms of income security. Outliers were removed from the dataset, and appropriate multivariate statistical assumptions were assessed. Significant results yielded from the MANOVA were further examined using discriminant analysis.

Results: Using Pillai's trace, there was a significant difference between type of employment service on the three dependent variables of income security, $V = 0.156$, $F_{(3, 198)} = 12.188$, $p < 0.001$, $\omega^2 = 0.151$. The discriminant analysis identified that the discriminant function, income security, accounted for 15.6% of the variance associated with employment service type, and significantly differentiated between strength-based and traditional employment services, $\Lambda = 0.844$, $\chi^2_{(3)} = 33.638$, $p < 0.001$. The correlations between the discriminating variables and the discriminant function revealed that hourly wage was highly related to income security ($r = 0.884$), which corresponded to the standardized canonical discriminant function coefficient, as hourly wage was given a weight of 0.785. Descriptive statistics evidenced the direction of this finding, as participants supported by strength-based employment services reported a higher hourly wage ($M = \$12.28/\text{hour}$, $SD = \$1.73/\text{hr}$) when compared to participants supported by traditional employment services ($M = \$11.35/\text{hour}$, $SD = \$0.10/\text{hour}$). The remaining discriminating variables did not reveal noteworthy weights or correlations on the discriminant function, and therefore duration of employment, and hours worked per week did not differ between types of employment services.

Discussion/Conclusion: People with ID who obtained strength-based employment experienced increased income security, by means of receiving a higher hourly wage when compared to individuals with ID who obtained work through traditional employment services. Differences in hourly wage corresponded to an 8% pay increase, which supports attainment of financial well-being. However, further investigation is necessary to understand the impact of additional employment characteristics (i.e., hours worked per week, duration of employment) in relation to achieving income security.

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