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### Seeking Equity in Employment

Jessie Shepherd

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# **Seeking Equity in Employment**

by

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A Starred Paper

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St. Cloud State University

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for the Degree

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Participation in the workforce requires various skills. Some of these skills may be directly taught, while others are expected of individuals without ever being directly taught. Some of the skills required to be a successful member of the workforce are practiced for years and years in a variety of settings. There are many barriers that impede individuals with disabilities from successfully engaging in the workforce. Individuals with disabilities represent a high level of unemployment. The responsibility of changing the unemployment rate of individuals with disabilities has fallen on the education system. Since 1990, legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and following amendments, along with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, has required educational institutions to invite parents and students to participate in the creation of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which requires them to discuss post-secondary plans and provide support for the students reach those goals (Liu et al., 2018). The future-focused thinking of the IEP team may reduce these barriers and prepare special education students to participate in the workforce successfully.

The federal legal framework of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) sets requirements for the planning, educating, and treatment of students with disabilities, calling for them to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE). The reauthorization of IDEA in 2006 clarified that educating students with disabilities was to prepare them for life after high school (Gothberg et al., 2015). The National Longitudinal Transition Survey has been a driving force in understanding life after high school for

many individuals with educational disabilities (Gothberg et al., 2015). The current economic status demands more employable individuals with essential employability skills.

It has long been the responsibility of public education to prepare students for life after high school. Given the current legislation, public entities have substantial pressure to provide services to equip individuals with disabilities to succeed after high school. The IEP is created uniquely for each student and focuses on individualized goals, instruction, accommodations, and modifications to the grade-level curriculum. The IEP is developed in partnership with students with disabilities, guardians, teachers, case managers, and school administrators. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), special education aims to help students with disabilities further their education, gain employment, and live independently (Park & Bouck, 2018). At the age of 16 and continuing throughout high school, the IEP team must establish individualized goals for post-secondary employment, education/training, and independent living. Thus, the IEP drives individualized instruction into being future-focused.

Given federal legislation and state mandates, students with educational disabilities are often provided with courses and services to help prepare them for the post-secondary world (employment, independent living, post-secondary education). Students who received vocational instruction, job readiness, vocational assistance, instruction in looking for jobs, and placement support were likely to be employed after

high school (Park & Bouck, 2018). Regardless, there continues to be a disproportionate representation of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

### **Historical Background**

Throughout history, students with educational disabilities have been maltreated. The management of those inequalities is relatively new. Reforms to discrepancies in the treatment of students with disabilities began around the 1960s. It was not unique to IDEA but rather the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1975, which initially required all American children access to free and appropriate education (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).

For many centuries individuals with disabilities have received harsh treatment and hurdles from society. People with disabilities were viewed as less than human and qualitatively different (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). There are two paths to new regulations on the treatment and inclusion of students with a disability. The first path was gaining the recognition of the civil rights individuals with disabilities have. Congress accomplished this recognition in 1973 by passing the Rehabilitation Act, which includes section 504 (Freeman et al., 2019). The second path to bring students with disabilities equality in education was to provide funding to public schools to offset the cost of additional programming required for students with disabilities included in the EAHCA legislation.

EAHCA has been revised many times since its original passage in 1975 and is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Freeman et al., 2019). Historical events like the Industrial Revolution called for individuals with disabilities to

transition from consumers to active production members. Born was a new idea of vocational training instead of academics, emphasizing life beyond high school. The parameters of IDEA continue to ensure FAPE for eligible students and transition services to prepare them for postsecondary success. In the early 1990s, the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) provided the first national picture of the lives of high school youth with disabilities and their transition to early adulthood (Wagner & Davis, 2006). The data collected in this large national study provided a look into the effectiveness of IDEA and transition (Wagner & Davis, 2006).

### **Research Question**

Two questions guide this literature review:

1. How do we prepare students with disabilities to establish and maintain employment?
2. What are the barriers to employment for students with disabilities?

### **Focus of Paper**

I identified ten studies for inclusion in the Review of Literature in Chapter 2. My research included studies ranging from 2000 to 2021. Studies were included for review if the participants were transition-aged students, identified with an educational disability, and focused on life after secondary schooling. The study method included surveys, case studies, and observations resulting in quantitative and qualitative data.

Academic Search Premier, ERIC, EBSCO, Sage Premiere, and JSTOR databases were used to start my literature review of peer-reviewed studies related to transition-aged students, educational disabilities, and life after high school. I used



several keywords and combinations of keywords to locate relevant studies: *transition, vocational skills, special education, job skills, disabilities, employment, high school, work, career readiness, nonacademic skills, and post-high school.*

### **Importance of the Topic**

As a general and special education teacher and now a Career Pathways Specialist, I work with students preparing to participate in the workforce. Students with educational disabilities often face various barriers that inhibit their successful participation in the workforce. The obstacles presented to students with disabilities range from a lack of skills, knowledge, and physical limitations. Students with these barriers would benefit from transition-related IEP services to overcome the deficits.

During the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009, people with disabilities and without disabilities face labor cuts and the risk of unemployment. However, there was an imbalance in the unemployment rate between the two categories. Teen Persons with Disabilities (PWD) were about 1.5 times more likely to be unemployed than their Persons Without Disabilities (PWOD) counterparts. Still, among prime-age workers (25-54 years old), the unemployment rate of PWDs ranges from 2.0 to 2.3 times that of PWODs (Fogg et al., 2010). The unemployment rates between PWD and PWOD were disproportionate due to several factors. Among those factors for disproportionality are family responsibilities, health status, and lack of vocational rehabilitation intervention (Fogg et al., 2010).

Students with disabilities may need to work harder to gain the employable skills that their non-disabled peers may already have. Through goal-focused, individualized

instruction, students with disabilities may acquire the skills necessary to successfully participate in the workforce and therefore have a higher quality of life.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Transition Aged:* Under the most recent reauthorization of IDEA legislation, students receiving special education services are of transition age when they turn 16 years old. The transition age continues until they reach the age of 22 (Cimera et al., 2014).

*Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):* Students eligible to receive special education services are obligated to receive a free and appropriate public education. The underlying elements of FAPE include individualized instruction to meet the student's unique needs and further prepare that student for education, employment, and independent living (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d.).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):* The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is a federal law that demands FAPE for eligible children with a disability. IDEA drives how state and public entities provide early intervention, special education, and related services to qualified individuals. Qualifying individuals are protected from birth to 21 years of age (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d.).

*Individualized Education Plan (IEP):* A significant component of IDEA, the IEP is the proper documentation in which the entitled eligible student is outlining their free and appropriate public education. The IEP includes the student's present levels of achievement and functional performance and the impact the disability has on the

students' involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d.).

*Educational Disability:* Minnesota has 13 categorical disability areas recognized by the state's department of education and used in qualifying individuals for special education services within the public school systems. These categorical disabilities include severely multiply impaired, autism spectrum disorder, blind-visually impaired, deaf-blind, deaf and hard of hearing, developmental cognitive disabilities, developmental delay, emotional or behavioral disorder, other health disability, specific learning disability, speech or language impairments, and traumatic brain injury (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.).

*Secondary Transition:* The crafting of activities that include improved postsecondary education, employment, community participation, and independent living when necessary (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d.).

## **Summary of Chapter 2: Research to be Reviewed**

I located 11 studies that evaluated transition instruction and workforce participation for individuals with disabilities. Table 1 summarizes the findings of these studies, which are presented in chronological order from oldest to most recent see the end of Chapter 2.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the efficacy of vocational skills programming to increase post-secondary employment for high school students with an Individualized Education Plan. This chapter is organized into three sections, barriers to employment, supporting career development, and employment outcomes. A total of 11 studies are reviewed in Chapter 2. Conclusions are drawn, and recommendations are made in Chapter 3.

### **Employment Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities**

Since the mid-1980s, studies have consistently shown that young adults with disabilities find employment in entry-level work that pays minimum wage or only offers part-time work (Rojewski et al., 2014). The researchers understand that work-bound youth often experience prolonged periods of floundering after leaving high school. Understanding the experience of many work-bound youths, the researchers aimed to look at the employment outcomes of those with high-incidence disabilities (learning disability or emotional disability) to understand their experiences better. Using the risk-resilience framework, a selection and analysis of specific factors that might explain the short-term post-school-work-outcomes of youth with high-incidence disabilities. The risk-resilience framework helps reduce the effects of individual deficits to explain results. The driving force of the research centered around understanding the differences that exist in work outcomes and the factors that explain those differences for individuals with high-incidence disabilities.

Data from the Educational Longitudinal Study: 2002 was used in this study (Rojewski et al., 2014). This data set is nationally representative and contains a base-year sample of 15,362 tenth graders from 752 public and private school settings. Roughly 26 students were selected from each school. Various data collection methods were used, including phone interviews and web-based self-administered questionnaires. The final sample included 440 individuals with high-incidence disabilities and 1,650 without disabilities. Of the participants, 390 students were identified as having learning disabilities, and 50 students were identified as having an emotional and behavioral disorder. Most of the group with high-incidence disabilities were male, while males and females represented the nondisabled group equally. The researchers reported on student aspirations. Among the high-incidence disabilities group, two-thirds of the participants reported moderate or high-prestige occupation aspirations compared to about half of those without disabilities. Variable selection was made by placing 12 factors into four separate groups (individual, family, school and peer, and community). Using the codes from ELS:2002 12<sup>th</sup>-grade aspirations were categorized by high, medium, and low. Additionally, the researchers added an "I do not know" category for those who were undecided. Grade point average (GPA) was used to show academic achievement. Factors such as SES, family composition, parent-child conversations about employment, and level of education for parents were included in indicators of family influence. School and peer influences were also measured using a four-point scale (none, a few, some, and most/all) regarding how many of their friends had dropped out of high school and how many were going to college.

Ordered logit regression was utilized in this study to model the odds of work outcome categories as a covariant function. Odds ratios were also calculated to identify the effect of the factor. An odds ratio of greater than 1 indicates a positive effect, while an odds effect of less than 1 indicates a negative. Findings indicated that individuals with disabilities were slightly more likely to be unemployed (30.5%) and slightly less likely to be employed for 20 hours or more per week (63.2%) than persons without disabilities. Less than one quarter (21%) of men were unemployed, while two-thirds worked full time (64.6%). Almost one-third (30.9%) of women were unemployed, and less than one-half (46.5%) were employed full-time. The study concluded that women with high-incidence disabilities had the least favorable work outcomes. Further results indicated that the disability category did not significantly impact work outcomes. Overall, gender significantly influenced postsecondary work outcomes regardless of disability status. Individual standards and aspirations did appear to influence work outcomes. Individuals with disabilities who aspired to low-prestige occupations were 2.17 more likely to work more hours per week than those with high aspirations. As measured by GPA, the academic achievement did have a standard impact on employment outcomes across both groups. For every one-unit increase in GPA, students became 1.12 times more likely to work more hours. Family influence was also apparent, but only for those without disabilities. Individuals whose families communicated with them about employment after high school.

The researchers of this study aimed to identify the impact of various variables on employment outcomes for youth with and without disabilities, which they were able to

do. Final notes include the general understanding that the two years after high school are volatile, confusing, and complex and that youth with disabilities face greater challenges.

In response to the inequities in employment and postsecondary after high school for youth with disabilities, a wave of new postsecondary education (PSE) programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities has emerged across the United States in the last twenty years (Moore & Schelling, 2015). The researchers aim better to understand these programs and their impact on employment outcomes. To do so, individuals were identified and surveyed, and the results were compared to the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 data findings (Moore & Schelling, 2015).

Informal invitations were sent out to 32 schools that were prefiltered to meet the requirements of the study. Of those invited, two schools participated, with 34 students participating and two program directors. One school was an integrated program, the other a specialized program. Both programs had several similarities. The study utilized two instruments to collect their data. These instruments included a structured interview to collect information from program directors and yielded qualitative data. The second instrument was a web-based survey to collect information from individuals who had graduated from one of the programs. The survey given to individuals was broken into three sections and gathered information about their background, community experience, and employment status. There is a significant overlap between the survey used by the researchers in this study and the NLTS-2, which was used as a comparison group.

The program director's survey results provided context for the individual's responses. Findings suggested that both schools shared common objectives to prioritize career development and social skills. Among the most significant differences between the two participating programs was the integrative experiences. Natural inclusion and structured program inclusion were utilized. Students spent about 75% of their time with non-disabled peers within the integrated program. It became clear that the program's goal was to provide inclusion opportunities as frequently as possible. Data were collected regarding the goals and outcomes of individuals in the programs. A large portion of the participants (between 75% and 87%) aspired to hold a "competitive job" after leaving the program. Additionally, individuals identified goals such as improving social skills (100%/87%), gaining more independence (92%/100%), making new friends (100%/93%), and improving basic academic skills (66%/87%). When asked about their preparedness for life after their post-secondary program, 92% of the participants in the integrated program and 100% of participants from the specialized program felt "quite a bit more prepared" or "much better prepared." Employment outcomes were also identified and compared to the NTL-2 data. The two programs indicated higher levels than the NTL-2 in all of the following areas, employment since high school, employment in the past two years, employment in the past two years (outside home or former school), and current employment. Additionally, the participants indicated that they were earning a higher hourly wage when compared to the NTL-2 data. The study also identified the most common occupation categories. Among the most common occupations for students from the integrated program were office support



(58%), sales (17%), and teaching/training/library services (17%). From the specialized program, the most common occupations were food preparation (47%), janitorial/custodial (33%), and teaching/training/library services (13%). When comparing this data to the NTLS-2, there were fewer variabilities in occupations. The NTLS-2 has representation from all occupation categories with a fairly even distribution.

This study has several limitations, including variables in time related to the minimum wage and a significantly smaller sample size. Above all, there is valuable information regarding the effectiveness of post-secondary education opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to prepare them for future employment.

### **Barriers to Employment**

Benz et al., 2000, explored the barriers to employment outcomes for students with disabilities. In their report, they studied two factors of employment outcomes. The researchers investigated the student and program factors that predicted employment outcomes in the first study. The researchers analyzed the participants' perceptions of the programming and staff in the second study.

Participants in both studies were in the Youth Transition Program (YTP) in Oregon, which the Oregon Department of Education supported, the Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Division, the University of Oregon, and local schools throughout Oregon. Individuals served in the program required additional support beyond what the general and special education could provide for students with educational disabilities to achieve their secondary and post-secondary education and training goals. In the first study, individuals from the program who had exited high school up to the 1997/1998 school

year were included, totaling a population size of 1,106 individuals. A final sample size of 709 students was identified and included individuals ages 15-21. In the final sample size, 62% of the participants were males, while 38% were females, a proportionally accurate representation of the state population. The majority of the sample size was Caucasian (87%), while there was minority representation from the Hispanic, African American, Asian Pacific, and Native American ethnicities. In the second study, the researchers used a purposive sampling procedure. They were able to identify six communities using three criteria. The criteria included selecting cities that provided YTP services for at least 4 years. Participants were considered to operate successful programs and represented the diversity of geographic regions and rural/nonrural communities. Within the six communities, individuals were selected from within those communities. The final sample size was made up of individuals meeting the criteria aged 17-26. Of the participants, 60% were male, while 40% were female. Most participants were Caucasian (85%), with the minority identified as either Hispanic, Asian, or Native American.

Understanding the relationship between education and transition outcomes for students with disabilities was the driving force behind study 1. A list of suggested interventions and programming has been available through previous research and logistical regression analysis. Researchers were able to look at how these items predict outcomes for students (standard diploma and post-secondary education or employment). Throughout much of history, a standard diploma correlates with higher-paying jobs and additional benefits and is accessible throughout the country, which was

why it was used. Analysis of the data identified outcome and predictor variables. The outcome variables were graduation with a standard diploma, and postsecondary education or employment were the outcome variables. Fundamental demographic and student barriers (independent living, social skills needs, transportation, history of school problems) were identified as student predictor variables. Program predictor variables included the program's location, length of the program, and various program services. The researchers created an at-risk scale based on prior research to understand the barriers to a standard diploma and employment or postsecondary education. Identification of emotional disorders as a primary disability, history of missing school, high school dropout, unstable living, criminal history, substance abuse, pregnancy, and/or parenting responsibilities were all identified on the at-risk scale, thus included in the data analysis.

The researchers' goal was to determine how independent variables may predict the probability of the outcome variables. In addition, odds ratios were used to conclude how likely the outcome variable maybe when the predictor variable is present.

Findings from the analysis suggest a strong relationship between graduation with a standard diploma and three program factors (length of the program, job while in the program, and reaching transition goals while in the program). Students who experienced one or more of the at-risk factors were three times less likely to graduate with a standard diploma. Students who had at-risk factors could reduce their likelihood of not graduating with a standard diploma by meeting transition goals while in the program. Understanding the value of employment for all individuals, including those with

disabilities, program-related factors predict success in this area. There is a strong correlation between students who held two or more jobs in the YTP and postsecondary employment or education outcomes. Students meeting this program factor were almost twice as likely to be engaged in work or continuing their education. While the significance and magnitude of the relations between predictor and outcome variables were examined, the results yield interest for researchers. Still, they may not provide enough information for administrators, teachers, and other professionals. What might interest educators more is the cumulative impact. The research in this study shows that support is needed, the length of the program matters, work while in the program and meeting specific transition goals all lead to an increase in achieving the standard high school completion document.

Youth across the nation strive to meet their future goal of graduating from high school and eventually living independently (Wagner et al., 2017). Youth with disabilities generally lag behind their peers in achieving these goals. An additional impact on the ability to reach their postsecondary goals is socioeconomic status (SES). Individuals from low SES backgrounds are less likely to experience positive outcomes than those from higher SES backgrounds (Wagner et al., 2017). To better understand the significance of a family's SES, researchers attempt to untangle the variety of factors compounded by SES (Wagner et al., 2017). The goal was to identify how SES predicts academic and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities and how other factors could mediate academic and employment effects.

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) was used as the basis of the study (Wagner et al., 2017). A stratified random sample of school districts was first selected, followed by a random selection of students from each district in all disability areas, according to the study. The final sample included participants who had at least one wave of parent/youth interview data after high school. Of the 5,630 youth selected, 65.6% were white, 59.7% belonged to a home where the head of household (HOH) had a high school education or less, and 33.2% lived in households with a 2001 annual income of less than \$25,000. The study aimed to measure SES, which was done so by articulating two dichotomous variables, revenues less than \$25,000 and those with incomes of \$25,001 to \$50,000. Youth outcomes were measured based on obtaining a regular diploma, attending college, and post-high school employment. Understanding there are various factors associated with variations in SES and youth outcomes, mediators were identified as parent involvement in and expectation for the education of their youth.

Linear and logistic regression were used, followed by a Wald Test. The Wald Test showed whether the SES variable could jointly predict outcomes. All outcomes were significantly predicted by SES and were retained in the analyses. Next, it was determined whether or not potential mediators were statistically significantly predicted by SES and only those kept in the study. Bootstrapping was used to understand whether a set of mediators were jointly statistically significant. The bootstrapping iterations were reduced by the “total  $R^2$ ,” which indicated an attribution to SES in regression without mediators. “Direct  $R^2$ ” was also calculated and marked attributions to

SES with the presence of the mediators. The analysis results showed that SES is a statically significant predictor of all four postsecondary outcomes (high school graduation  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , attending college  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and finding competitive employment  $R^2 = .16$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). A breakdown of the SES groups indicates that the lower SES group significantly predicts all postsecondary outcomes. In contrast, the second SES group only significantly predicts high school graduation (OR = 0.68,  $p < 0.001$ ) and college enrollment (OR = 0.57,  $p < 0.01$ ). HOH education significantly predicted the postsecondary enrollment outcome (OR = 0.52,  $p < 0.001$ ). A regression analysis using SES variables and covariates was conducted to determine the relationship between SES and mediators. The results indicated that the joint  $R^2$  was statistically significant for all mediators and ranged from 0.06 for youth having paid jobs in high school to 0.26 for parental expectations.

Although the research gives nationally representative data on the relationship between SES and employment outcomes, they are subject to limitations. First, there are unknown factors when researching human behavior. Also, the results focus only on individual outcomes instead of group outcomes. Lastly, the findings used in the study are based on self-reported data, which leaves room for error and miscalculations.

Active parent involvement has been associated with successful postsecondary employment outcomes and therefore increased quality of life for transition-aged youth (Young et al., 2016). Their work to identify parent knowledge's impact on transition outcomes developed two research questions. The first question is regarding the degree of mastery a parent has using pretest and posttest data. The second question

addresses the resulting actions of parents who gain a better understanding of transition services and supports.

The participants in this study were parents of 15 to 18-year-old students receiving special education services. All the participants' eligible children were from the same school district in the Western United States. Participants were identified through the special education teachers in the district. Not all the special education teachers provided the opportunity for eligible participants to participate. All participants spoke English. Out of the 70 eligible participants, 36 volunteered to participate in the study. Women (23) and men (6) were included in the study. Of the participants, 27 identified as Caucasian, and 2 of the participants identified as Hispanic. The participants represented a variety of disability categories (72% had children with high-incidence disabilities, and 28% had children with low-incidence disabilities). The participants' socioeconomic status ranged from low- to middle-class, living in a suburban community.

Two groups were created to conduct this study. Two measures were used in the study, including a knowledge test and a follow-up phone call. Ten questions related to the district's and community's transition supports were asked on the pretest. The services provided by the agency, how to contact the agency, and how to qualify for services were among the questions asked. The posttest was identical to the pretest, but the questions were presented in random order. All test content was included in the brochure. The participants were given a printed brochure with transition information. In one group, the brochure was the only item offered, while in the other group, they were given the brochure and a 60-minute training. Thirty days after the information was

provided to participants, a phone call was made to see if the participants had contacted one or more of the agencies and/or supports described in the brochure.

Pre and post-test scores indicate statistically significant findings. Through regression analysis, posttest scores were identified as the dependent variable and group membership and pretest scores as the independent covariates. Although not statistically significant, the mean pretest scores from the brochure-only group were slightly higher than the mean scores of the brochure with the training group. Regression analysis used the pretest as the covariant to identify the variability in outcomes due to group membership. Pretest scores were not statistically significant, but there was a statistically significant difference between the effective measures. Nearly 50% of the increased knowledge outcome was due to group membership. The results indicate that changes to the post-test knowledge were likely due to the additional training received by the brochure plus training group. In the follow-up phone calls, 0 participants out of the nine who could be reached had made contact with the supports and/or agencies in the brochure. Nine of the 14 participants in the brochure plus training group indicated they could contact one or more of the supports and/or agencies presented in the brochure and training.

This study provides increased knowledge about two types of training opportunities. Although both groups had access to the same information, those in the brochure plus training outperformed the brochure only group. While this does provide insight, there are limitations to the study. The small number of participants should be considered as they are representative of a small population with specific demographics.



Secondly, this study only included eligible participants of children 15-18 and did not include those individuals who may be older than that and still in the transition process. Despite the limitations, the outcomes provide information about how you may consider presenting information to parents.

### **Career Development and Programing**

In the article “Exploring Employment Preparations and Postschool Outcomes for Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities,” use the findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 in their secondary analysis of the data (Joshi et al., 2012). The research was driven by four questions related to the following topics: transition activities in high school, the impact of school demographics on transition programming participation, employment outcomes, and the relationship between employment outcomes and transition participation. The researchers identified relevant variables to answer their four research questions.

As a secondary analysis, the researchers wanted to narrow their focus to a particular population, those with mild intellectual disabilities. The participants in this research were selected based on predefined criteria: mild intellectual disability as their primary disability received special education services while in high school and attended school in waves 1, 2, or 3 of the NLTS2. Based on the participant standards, 62,513 students were included in this research. A slight majority of participants were male, identifying themselves as Caucasian (70.2%), African American (24%), or Hispanic (5.2%). In addition, those who were included in the secondary analysis came from a variety of school settings, including suburban schools (52.1%), urban areas (33.5%),

and rural areas (14.3%). A database was created based on relevant variables and the condensing of the original variables to answer the researcher's questions.

Using the database, researchers determined frequency counts of transition activity participation and student employment outcomes, drew relationships between school demographics and transition activities and conducted a logistic regression analysis of the transition activity and employment outcomes. The most frequently reported employment-related transition activity was instruction on finding a job, followed by prevocational education, prevocational training, and occupational/vocational education. In total, 8 out of the 12 transition activities were accessed by the majority of the students with mild intellectual disabilities. Using multiple regression analysis, the researchers found that a school's geographical location was significantly related to students' participation in employment activities. The suburban setting was substantially different from the urban setting, while the rural setting was not entirely different. The suburban setting received more employment activities than the other two settings. The suburban schools were approximately six times more likely to have experienced paid employment than rural schools. While the geographic location was a statistically significant factor, school size and percentage of students receiving special education services were not statistically significant factors in students' participation in employment-related activities. While the data provides a closer look at employment preparation for individuals with mild disabilities, the portion of the research is focused on employment outcomes. The research found that most (75.9%) of students included in the study reported they engaged in employment sometime after leaving high school.

However, it should be noted that the number does not represent current employment. There were roughly 12% fewer individuals currently employed. The employment data was broken down into full-time jobs and part-time employment. The overall findings indicate that employment activities caused individuals in the study to be 1.2 times more likely to be currently employed. The research determined that having paid employment in high school had the most significant impact on current work, 5.7 times more likely. Students who had the opportunity to gain employment experience through a school job were 3.5 times more likely to be currently employed.

While the NLTS2 study provided data and information for the secondary analysis, there are some limitations to the data. The study's authors are aware that outside factors were not considered. Items such as annual income were not included in the variables. Educators may be challenged to embed the knowledge and outcomes-based services to support students' career-related goals.

Understanding the importance of employment for all individuals, even those with disabilities, is essential. In their research, Lindstrom et al. (2011) acknowledge the barriers to reaching this monumental milestone. According to the researchers, employment is a critical marker of adult success in our society. Through employment, individuals can be self-sufficient and contribute to an overall sense of self-esteem and personal satisfaction. When considering employment rates for individuals with disabilities, it is apparent that employment rates for individuals with disabilities fall behind those without disabilities. When left without employment, individuals with disabilities face challenges including poverty, lack of financial stability, and lack of

personal satisfaction. In recent years, the unemployment rates of individuals with disabilities have fallen but continue to lag.

Career development is an essential process for individuals with disabilities. Continued work in identifying and refining goals is ongoing. "For individuals with disabilities, career development is often complex, nonlinear, and chaotic" (Lindstrom et al., 2011). Employment choices and opportunities are presented over time and are often influenced by multiple factors. In their study on career development, the researchers used an in-depth review of factors that influence career advancement and opportunities. Case studies using a triangulation strategy were used to provide reliable information.

Participants in the study were found from a larger scale study. Criteria was determined for selecting individuals for this study which included a diagnosis of a disability and receiving special education services, participating in a school-to-work transition program for a minimum of one year, and having left high school between 1996 and 2001. A total of eight participants were selected, all of whom were making \$20,000 or more annually. Participants represented both genders equally and ranged from ages 25 to 28. All but one participant had obtained a standard high school diploma. In addition, the participants represented a variety of communities and family socioeconomic statuses. Through interviews and family background questionnaires, job history forms, and file reviews from special education and/or vocational rehabilitation records were conducted to inform the researchers.

Analysis of the information was conducted. The data collected were coded and entered into a qualitative database, then used to summarize and compare data from

multiple sources for participants. In the final analysis of the data, the team used explanatory methods to critically understand patterns that influence career development and post-school employment patterns. Additionally, cross-case data summaries were created, and exploratory tables were constructed to determine which factors influenced employment outcomes.

The results of the case studies provided information and insight into career development for young adults with disabilities. Influences on initial post-school placements, career advancement, and living-wage employment were common in the data. Factors that affected initial postsecondary placements identified work experiences, transitions services or support, and family support and expectations. All participants were engaged in work experience during high school. What was learned in these experiences goes beyond the technical skills and was more about the opportunities to develop, practice, and refine critical working skills and behaviors. Secondly, it was noted that the support offered through transition programming was seen positively. Advocating and supporting students in the program was tremendously important. In addition, these services helped the skills needed to obtain employment. Gender played a role in the family factor of post-secondary placements. Males in the study had belonged to uninvolved families. Alternatively, the females in the study had families actively involved in their lives. Their involvement at an early age encouraged independent decision-making and self-reliance. Regarding career advancement and living wage employment, the data suggested that those who completed a formal higher education led directly to opportunities for higher-wage jobs. Of the eight participants, all

but two were engaged in postsecondary education or training. Through the postsecondary education and training process, the individuals in the study learned additional self-reliance skills, self-advocacy skills, and overall independence. Data also suggested that males in the study were more likely to have continued employment and a gradual wage increase. The opposing gender reports having more irregular employment patterns with more periods of unemployment. Lastly, personal attributes such as self-efficacy, motivation, and coping skills played a role in obtaining and maintaining living wage employment. All participants in the study were highly motivated and had experienced positive interactions within the workplace. Women in the study did show higher levels of persistence regardless of their lack of continuous employment. Much of this persistence was evident in personal, family, or job-related challenges.

Although the case studies provide information and insight into career development, there are some limitations. Self-reporting is one of the most significant limitations of this study. Self-reporting is each individual's interpretation and may not accurately capture reality. A second limitation includes the sampling procedure. The sample included a variety of disabilities which all require a combination of support and levels of support. Regardless of the restrictions, the findings of this study do provide insight into the complexity of career development.

Poppen et al., 2017, continues to support the need for career development for youth with disabilities. National efforts have been underway to help youth with disabilities through transition efforts to boost post-school outcomes. State vocational rehabilitation agencies were leveraged through federal legislation to help youth with

disabilities prepare for employment. The study addressed how individual characteristics, in-school experiences, post-school experiences, and contextual factors predict vocational rehabilitation success for youth with disabilities.

Focusing on individual traits, school experiences, post-secondary experiences, and contextual factors, 4,443 young adults were included in the sample. All these individuals were receiving vocational rehabilitation services from the state of Oregon. While the slight majority of participants were male (63.4%), there was representation from multiple races and disability categories. In addition, models and data were collected from individuals on their eligibility to receive social security income. The state sets the essential eligibility criteria for receiving social security income, and at the time of the research, was earning less than \$721 per month.

School experiences included participation in a transition program and high school completion status. The number of VR services received, the number of days the VR case had been closed, and participation in post-secondary education was identified as post-secondary experiences. Contextual factors were identified as the community type and federal fiscal year of closure. These independent variables were analyzed against the dependent variable, VR case closure. Criteria for VR case closure represented two options. Either the case was closed due to rehabilitation or the individual obtaining full-time or part-time employment; therefore, meeting vocational rehabilitation outcomes or other vocation outcomes has been determined. Statistical models were built using seven logistic regression models.

The study's result suggests that all variables were statistically significant predictors of VR closure. Additional steps indicated that age, race, and five of the seven impediments to employment in the multivariate model were not statistically significant predictors of VR closure. In a later step, the interaction between post-secondary transition support and having earned a high school diploma may provide meaning to the model. The analysis yielded individual characteristics associated with significantly lower odds of closing VR due to rehabilitation in the final multivariate model. These unique characteristics include being female, having a primary disability of mental illness or traumatic brain injury, multiple disabilities, having an interpersonal or self-care impediment to employment, and being eligible for social security income. School experiences were identified as providing significantly greater odds of closing VR as rehabilitated. Individuals who participated in transition services were 2.43 times more likely to close the VR case due to rehabilitation than those who did not receive the support. Individuals who earned a high school completion certificate were 2.03 times more likely to close the VR case than those who had not. Lastly, post-secondary experiences related to the individual support received by VR were identified as improving the chances of VR rehabilitated closure by 1.29 times per service.

While the outcomes of the study provided confirmation and greater insight into the characteristics and experiences that produced VR case closure for youth with disabilities, thus strengthening their career development. The data supports the work and purpose of VR, especially for those with extending barriers to employment.



Vocational rehabilitation is a specific service that is federally funded and widely available; there are other interventions appropriate for youth with disabilities in addressing their career and employment needs (Tucker et al., 2019). The researchers explored interventions targeted at youth receiving Supplemental Security Income. This study investigated several career interventions and the associations between services and personal, contextual characteristics of the youth. The six career-related interventions identified employment preparation activities, career-related training and education, volunteer work, unpaid work experience, paid work experience, and employment as the six career-related interventions. Identifying intervention opportunities based on individual characters, differences in intervention opportunities based on parent employment and/or education, and differences in intervention opportunities based on parent/guardian work and college expectations were the focus of the research.

The study included 1,646 individuals ages 14-16. Each participant had qualifying factors, including eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and participation in California's CaPromise program. This program began in 2014 and concluded in 2016, in which the interventions were available. The youth in the study were assigned to a treatment group. Participants in the study were comprised of 1,118 males and 528 females. There was representation from various disability categories, with 36.5% of the participants being identified as having a primary disability categorized as cognitive/intellectual, 28.3% affective/emotional, 23.1% classified as mobility /health, and 5% having multiple disabilities.

The investigation was completed by analyzing data from the participants and their parents. Findings in the study included the interventions most frequently used related to career training and education. Employment preparation activities were the most commonly utilized intervention, followed by career-related training and education, volunteer work, unpaid work experience, paid work experience, and employment. Also, results indicated the difference, if any, between individual characteristics. ANOVA analysis identified no significant differences in gender, age, or disability type in the interventions. The effects of parent employment status and education were explored, yielding essential findings. A two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was utilized. There was an indication that parent/guardian employment status affected the volunteer intervention. Youth in the study who had unemployed parents were less likely to engage in the volunteer intervention than those employed part-time or full-time. Similar findings were discovered for the unpaid work intervention. The level of parent education was associated with career-related training and education intervention. Youth whose parents did not graduate high school had significantly lower participation in career-related training and education than those whose parents earned a high school diploma, an associate's degree, and a bachelor's degree. Lastly, the impact of interventions based on job and college expectations was established. Data on postsecondary outcomes were collected upon enrollment in the CaPromise program. A factorial multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to determine the differences in career and work-based learning interventions by youth and parent/guardian. The number of work experience interventions for students who

identified that they expected to attend college was significantly greater than for youth who did not want to attend college. Similar is the outcome for youth who identified they anticipated having a job after high school. Individuals who indicated that they expected to get a job had a significantly higher mean number of employment interventions than those who did not wish to have a job after high school. Parents' expectations of youth significantly impacted the number of interventions utilized. Youth of parents/guardians that expect their youth to work after completing high school accessed a significantly greater mean number of interventions ( $M = 19.71$ ) than the youth of parents/guardians who did not expect their youth to work after high school ( $M = 11.38$ ).

There should be considerations when reviewing the findings of the study. Beyond the potential for human error in entering data, the researchers also suggested caution in the degree to which the intervention was delivered. There was variation in the time, energy, effort, and parties involved in implementing the interventions. Lastly, at the time of the study, there was no clear goal for work outcomes in the programming of CaPromise.

Evidence suggests that the sources of poor employment and post-school outcomes can be additionally challenged by those who are culturally, linguistically, racially, and ethnically diverse (Hartman et al., 2021). In their study on the effects of individual demographics on employment outcomes, focus on the relationship between demographics, transition services, and employment (Hartman et al., 2021).

Participants in this study came from Wisconsin and were members of the PROMISE program. This program was funded through the United States Department of

Education and was one of six research projects funded. The goal of the PROMISE program was to assist youth between the ages of 14 and 16 who were receiving SSI in their career and education goals. The final sample size for the study was 2,017 youth from the PROMISE program. Of the participants, 33% were female, and 67% were male. Seven participants did not indicate their gender. In the study, 49% of participants reported they were African American, 36% white, 10% Hispanic, and 5% other. As a part of the data set, the primary disability was also reported. Thirty-four percent of the participants self-reported a primary disability of a psychiatric disability, 30% Intellectual and Developmental Disability (IDD), and 36% other. Predictor and outcome variables were identified for the study. The predictor variables were the demographic characteristics of students and the transition services. Age, race/ethnicity, gender, and primary disability were self-reported demographic characteristics on the intake form for the PROMISE program. While attending the program, youth were eligible for up to three transition services: PROMISE, school, and Vocational Rehabilitation. The outcome variable was employment rates. The Wisconsin Unemployment Insurance calculated the employment rates. Statistical analysis was used to determine what variables significantly predicted employment outcomes and all predictor variables and all outcome variables.

Participants' employment rates based on demographics included higher rates based on age, similar rates based on gender, higher employment rates for African American youth than Hispanic youth, and higher employment rates for individuals with a psychological disability. Employment rates also varied based on the transition service.

Employment rates were highest among individuals who received Vocational Rehabilitation services, followed by those who had services through the PROMISE program and school IEP transition services. The researchers found that youth who participated in the PROMISE program had higher employment rates and had reduced differences in employment rates across all demographics. Using hierarchical logistic regression analysis indicated that all predictor variables were statistically significant in determining the employment rate. Chi-squared analysis of VR services and the race was conducted to understand the relationship between the two better. The finding indicated statistically significant higher employment rates for African American (72%) students than white (60%) students when the VR services were controlled.

This study looked at several predicting factors. Among these factors that proved to be the most significant was VR. The research in the study is consistent with prior research on the impact of VR. A complete understanding of the services and priorities of VR is important to understanding its effectiveness. The emphasis on paid work experience as a part of VR has a consistent relationship with higher employment rates. In Wisconsin, the relationship between VR services and higher employment rates may have been influenced even greater by the PROMISE services within the VR system. School IEP transition services had statistically significantly lower employment rates. Fifteen percent of participants in the study did not have an IEP. The IEP serves as evidence that the student needs support in their academic setting, thus indicating that they may also face additional barriers to employment that others without the need for additional services may not. While this significantly clarifies the relationship between

demographics, support, and employment outcomes, it is crucial to understand that all participants were in their early stages of employment. The long-term impact of the predictor variables on the effects may be more meaningful.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Chapter 2 Findings*

Authors	Study Design	Participants	Procedure	Findings
Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff (2000)	Quantitative	Study 1: 709 Students with disabilities  Study 2: 45 Students with disabilities	Study 1: Logistic regression was used to examine student and program factors that predicted obtainment of a standard diploma and placement in employment or continuing education. Study 2: Written interview guide to collect data on; barriers to school/transition success, meaningful experiences in YTP participation, and significant accomplishments.	Students who participated in a Youth Transition Program (YTP) for 12 or more months were almost two times more likely to graduate with a standard diploma. The positive relationship between student-centered planning, student self-determination, and improved secondary and post-secondary outcomes.
Lindstrom, Doren, & Miesch (2011)	Qualitative	8 individuals with educational disabilities	Data was collected to examine the process of career development for young adults with disabilities. Target information included individual characteristics, family support and expectations, high school and post-school services and supports, workplace experiences, and other training or education.	A standard set of themes was identified that influenced employment. Importance of ongoing education and/or training. The importance of work experience was highlighted, and the necessary support.
Joshi, Bouck, & Maeda (2012)	Quantitative	62,513 students with mild intellectual disabilities.	The study used the NLTS2 data to determine the effectiveness of employment-related transition activities. Student demographics and access to transition activities were analyzed.	Most common transition activities were identified. The location of a school is significantly related to participation in transition activities. Statistically significant findings support the need for transition-related activities.

Table 1 (continued)

Moore & Schelling (2015)	Qualitative	34 individuals with an educational disability and data from the NLTS2 study.	A comparative case report was conducted to identify the impact of postsecondary programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities on employment outcomes.	The research findings in this study include an understanding that a high percentage of graduates have good intentions of securing and maintaining employment. Data suggests improvements in employment outcomes compared to the NLTS2 study.
Rojewski, Lee, & Gregg (2014)	Quantitative	440 individuals with high incidence disabilities and 1,650 without disabilities.	Data from a national longitudinal study was used to research the odds of work outcomes as a function of covariates.	Findings indicate the variables' influence on employment for youth with and without disabilities. These findings indicate that youth with disabilities face more significant challenges than youth without disabilities.
Young, Morgan, Callow-Heusser, & Lindstrom (2016)	Qualitative	36 parents of 15-18-year-old students with an educational disability	Two measures were used in the study, which included a knowledge test and follow-up phone call. The participants were given a printed brochure with transition information. In one group, the brochure was the only item given, while in the other group, they were given the brochure and a 60-minute training.	A regression post-test was evaluated using data collected from the study. Pre and post-test scores were used to identify the learning outcomes of the participants. The findings indicate statistically significant relations between the training and the post-test score outcomes.
Wagner, Newman, & Javitz (2017)	Quantitative	350 individuals were selected from the National Longitudinal Transition Study—2. These individuals were 13-16 years of age, receiving special education services, and attended school regularly.	Propensity Score Method (PSM) was used to address the hypothesis of correlation between Career & Technical Education (CTE) course-taking and post-secondary employment outcomes. In addition, a quasi-experimental analysis was	The study demonstrates a positive correlation between CTE course completion and post-secondary employment outcomes for students with disabilities.

Table 1 (continued)

Poppen, Lindstrom, Khurana, & Bullis (2017)	Quantitative	4,443 young adults with disabilities (21 or younger) who had applied for Vocational Rehabilitation services.	Logistic regression was applied to explore the effects of individual, in-school, post-school, and contextual factors on VR.	Factors were identified that predict transition success. Specific barriers are identified which make it difficult for individuals with disabilities to become employed. Some services will help reduce the barriers to employment.
Tucker, Guillermo, & Corona (2019)	Quantitative	1,646 participants between 14 and 16 who were receiving SSI	The investigation was completed by analyzing case service data from recipients in California. ANOVA analysis was used to determine the interactions between the independent variables. MANOVA was used to identify significant differences in career and work-based learning interventions.	Findings in the study included the interventions most frequently used related to career training and education. Also, results indicated the difference, if any, between individual characteristics. The effects of parent employment status and education were explored, yielding significant findings. Lastly, the impact of interventions based on job and college expectations was established.
Hartman, Jones, Kesselmayer, Brinck, Trainor, Reinhard, & Anderson (2021)	Quantitative	2,017 youth aged 14-16. A hierarchical logistic regression analysis was used on those enrolled in the PROMISE program.	An analysis of Wisconsin's PROMISE program was conducted. The Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) was used. To understand the relationship between the predictor variable and employment.	The analysis of the PROMISE program was to identify the relationship between youth demographics, transitions services, and employment. The results indicate a difference in employment based on transition services and demographics.



### **Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations**

This review examined post-secondary employment outcomes, barriers to employment, and career development for individuals with disabilities. Chapter 1 provided a foundation for the topic and established the mechanisms used to cultivate research articles. Chapter 2 provided research on interventions and strategies that can improve employment outcomes, barriers to employment, and the impact of career development. In this chapter, conclusions are drawn, recommendations for future research are made, and an explanation of how the information will impact my professional role.

#### **Conclusion**

The transition between youthhood and adulthood can bring challenges for anyone, and it can be increasingly difficult for individuals with disabilities. Youth with disabilities experience poor post-school outcomes compared to their peers without disabilities. Individuals with disabilities are more likely to drop out of high school, be unemployed or underemployed, less likely to seek secondary education and live independently (Prince et al., 2018). While success markers of adulthood go beyond these items, things like having a job are instrumental for further adult success. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2018, the employment-population ratio was 19% among persons with disabilities compared to 66% among persons without disabilities (Hartman et al., 2021). These disparities between individuals with disabilities and those without disabilities go beyond the workforce. Youth with disabilities lag behind

their peers without disabilities in achieving postsecondary goals like graduating from high school, enrolling in college, and living independently (Wagner & Davis, 2006).

The challenges individuals with disabilities face after high school are their families' socioeconomic status, parent education and knowledge, access to services, and their own cultural, racial, and ethnic background. African American and Hispanic youth with disabilities in the United States are among the most vulnerable and continue to tell the story of historical discrimination in our country (Hartman et al., 2021). While our nation has made progress, we are still far from an equitable society in the workforce.

To overcome the challenges many individuals with disabilities face, research suggests that attaining postsecondary education and training likely improves outcomes for youth (Prince et al., 2018). Many schools offer transition services to support students' employment needs to help students continue their education and prepare them for adulthood. Furthermore, research indicates the vital importance of steady work experience, personal attributes, and continued education and/or training (Lindstrom et al., 2011). Additionally, services outside the school are available to help individuals with disabilities plan and prepare for post-school employment.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While the research gathered is valuable and relevant, understanding the limitations and complexity of the study participants is foremost. A wide range of disabilities within the research samples represents various abilities and cognitive functioning. Future research might consider a sample size of individuals with similar

functioning and abilities to better understand the impact of the variables being measured. Additionally, while transition services were often researched, there are various ways in which they can be taught. Creating standards or following a direct set of curricula and basing the research on that may yield more reliable results. Lastly, future research may want to measure outcomes beyond employment outcomes, such as benefits, working hours, and schedules may be beneficial. For individuals with intellectual disabilities, future research may consider the impact of grade retention. Time spent in general education as a factor in employment outcomes may shine a light on educational services (Prince et al., 2018).

Future research may consider looking specifically at specific racial/ethnic groups (Wagner et al., 2017). A more significant, more representative sample should be used when researching the effects of parent knowledge and access to transition services and may consider monitoring over time.

Lastly, a continued commitment to longitudinal studies is imperative. "Given the accelerating rate of change in our society and our education environments, it is important to commit resources to bring new data to bear on the most important issue confronting children and youth with disabilities and the families, educators, service providers, researchers, and policymakers who work on their behalf" (Wagner et al., 2017).

### **Implications for Practice**

As an educator and citizen of our world, I am compelled to call out the inequities among us. For centuries what makes us unique has also limited us. If the gateway to

adulthood is to obtain and maintain a job, barriers must be removed to have equal access to this significant milestone.

In my classroom, I aim to embed more basic job skills. I will consider utilizing more opportunities to problem solve, think critically, work with others, foster independence and promote motivation. Paired with the opportunity to work on these skills, I will provide instruction and expectations for these skills. My goal would be to develop proficiency scales on job-based behaviors so that students can measure their growth in these skills. Beyond building some of these opportunities into my classroom, I want to call up the skills we are working on and state why we are working on them. Frequently students do not understand the importance of accessing these opportunities.

As a member of an education system, I would like to work with Special Education staff to develop a list of employability skills that are needed for 21<sup>st</sup>-century students. This collaboration can then be embedded into multiple environments throughout the school building. I hope to implement these skills beyond the high school building and see them being taught and applied in the entire K-12 system.

What makes disabilities unique is that we cannot always see them. As a human, I hope to provide encouragement and acknowledgment to those I see working hard, regardless of a visible disability or not. Additionally, my family and I will continue to support businesses whose goals are to be inclusive employers.

## **Summary**

“Employment is an important adult life outcome for all students, including students with disabilities” (Joshi et al., 2012). Individuals with disabilities, educational

disabilities and disabilities identified by society, face the harsh reality of lower employment rates than their non-disabled peers. Research indicates that several variables interfere with individuals with disabilities when entering the workforce. However, there is also research that identifies ways to counteract these barriers. Engaging in post-school education and/or training, having work experience, and access to transition services in high school or transition support programs contribute to better employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

While barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities can be battled, it is the responsibility of families, schools, public agencies, and employers to invest in career development opportunities. According to four studies reviewed, work experience for individuals with disabilities is one of the best ways to break barriers to post-school employment outcomes. Furthermore, families play an essential role in preparing young adults for post-school placements. The family's involvement and expectations positively impacted post-school employment outcomes for youth with disabilities.

Gainful employment is associated with increases in an individual's sense of self-esteem, fulfillment, quality of life, and sense of worth (Joshi et al., 2012). With low employment rates, in a culture that places value on employment, we must strive to remove the barriers to seeking equitable employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

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