

Practical Issues in Implementing Supported Employment with Young Adults: The perspective of Employment Specialists

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Employment and Young Adults: Goals

- Supported Employment (SE) developed to provide employment for chronically mentally ill people, often subsequent to long-term state hospital stays
 - typically episodic, part-time, and entry level
- Many young adults with Mental Illness (MI) seek full-time, significant employment careers. Our services should encourage those goals.



Questions the Study Addresses

How does the employment market for young adults differ from the employment market for older people with a history of chronic mental health conditions?

What are the barriers to full-time employment in career advancing jobs for young adults with serious mental health conditions (SMHCs)?

How might employment programs be improved to facilitate young adult careers?



IPS and Young Adult Careers

The Evidence-based Practice in employment for people with MI is Individual Placement and Support (IPS).

Key Features are **(will discuss)**:

1. Open to anyone who wants to work
2. Focus on competitive employment
3. **Rapid job search**
4. **Systematic job development**
5. Client preferences guide decisions
6. **Individualized long-term supports**
7. Integrated with treatment
8. **Benefits counseling included**



Methods

Intensive semi-structured interviews with:

- 10 employers who have employed people with MI
- 10 employment specialists (became 12)
- 10 people with MI who have gained full- time employment and gave up Social Security Insurance or Social Security Disability Insurance payments
 - Up to one hour long
 - In person/telephone

This report focuses on employment specialist interviews.



SOME FINDINGS:

INCLUDING QUOTES FROM THE EMPLOYMENT SPECIALISTS



Young Adult Goals

I: *“Do you feel they want careers more? Do they express that they want more of a career than just”*

P: *“They want something that is meaningful.”*

ES11

“And yeah, they do think that they can...go on to college. They can get the career. They can live the “normal” life. So yeah, I mean a lot of them do say I think right now I can only work at a grocery store but I do want to go to college and I do want to get a career ,which is like yay!”

ES10



Barriers: Stigma

“I’ll be honest, I don’t necessarily market it as a program that helps people with mental illness. I market it as, okay we’re a program that market’s people with disabilities with employment. ... I say well-they have some cognitive challenges or I’ll say mental health challenges.”

ES5

“Instead of phrasing it that I work for somebody with a disability, I say of varying abilities...because if I say disabilities, oh...so you say varying abilities ‘cause then it’s- there’s people like oh well what does that mean? And so I have people who can do everything and everything under the sun and then there’s other people who well they might have an injury or you know something like that. You kind of make it sound more normal so that way it doesn’t quite sound as negative.”

ES10



Barriers: Mental Health System Scheduling

*“They [clients] do have really full schedules at the [Service], a lot of it is not mandatory but you better be there (laughs) kind of thing. So you start getting into okay IMR is in the middle of Wednesday and the transportation ends at 7 and you know they have DBT group on Thursday and they have therapy once... a week. They have psychiatry once a month. **They start really having some availability problems.**”*

ES9



Barriers: Advice “Don’t Risk Benefits”

I: “So what barriers do you see to people moving off of disability into full-time work?”

*P: The biggest barrier is the **support system**... it is such a fear base thing. It is the Department of Mental Health. Parents. It starts in the adolescence. It’s docs and therapists and benefits, **don’t risk your benefits**.... They go home and hear what their parents are saying, be careful before you take that you’re going to lose your SSI.” ES1*

*“The pressure that’s being put on young adults by their family, **we see therapists, we see social workers, really telling them don’t risk your benefits**, don’t – you’re too young to do this or start that. Or you’re applying to work at the pizza place, you’re gonna lose your benefits, don’t work there! Wait ‘til you graduate from school.” ES3*



Employment Advantages of Young Adults

*“Most employers are more open to working with young adults than adults, because they can be a sponge, **they haven’t picked up a lot of bad habits, they’re still learning**, so that’s actually a plus! I mean...we’ll submit...young adults and adult candidates and somehow some employers, they always pick the young adult.” ES12*

*“I think there are some things that are a huge plus. Technology, you know **young adults can run circles around older people with technology** and you know that can be a huge plus.” ES3*



Challenges of Young Adults as Employees

“Lack of skills. I have one young adult right now...only finished the eighth grade. Came from a family with significant substance abuse issues. His brother was killed in a gang related incident. Lack of education. Drug use. Substance abuse.” ES5

“Many of the individuals haven’t gone to a traditional school or ...had a traditional upbringing so they don’t have a lot of the... soft skills that are necessary to have a job. Many of our guys are terrible with scheduling. They have impulse problems ...learning disabilities, educational deficits. They don’t have the role models. They don’t know what it’s like to work.” ES7



Supported Employment for Young Adults – Job Development 1

“...that’s extremely important with my employment staff, one of their primary things, they spend 70% of their time in the community talking to employers and advocating for the youth that we serve.” ES12 (supervisor)

“I work mostly with individuals helping...them try to find their own jobs.” ES3

“...in the time I’ve been here...at least two jobs that people have gotten [was] because of development and that’s probably about it. So, and unfortunately, neither of them ended well so there’s not like the chance of plugging in another person or building on that.” ES9



Supported Employment for Young Adults – Job Development 2

“So yeah and sometimes the places where we go, even the management, the turnover is high...so even every time I go in and meet someone I may have to start over. ES8

“Part of the problem is that it’s all online and a lot of the kind of discretionary decisions are taken away from managers.... They could think I’m great and love [our service] and think this is fantastic work but okay, hope they get through the assessment. So, that’s a big problem. So that’s why I get apply online over and over and over again. ES9



Job Development – Developing the Employer Relationship

“The businesses are our customers too and I don’t want to put someone in a business that’s not going to be able to do the job because we want to maintain the relationship with them and give them employees because they need quality employees too. They need people with skills.” ES5

“When we bring her someone it has to be the best person if you want the first impression to be the best. Rather than starting off with an oops that one didn’t work.” ES8



Job Development – Job type

*“It’s been challenging to find people work. Like the **entry level things are easier** and Dunkin Donuts and those things are easier but to find something that’s more career oriented or put them on a path that’s been challenging.” E11*

*“I don’t think even like **when they hire people for entry level, I don’t think that there’s a whole lot of intention for growth...** People are kind of stuck in the same dead end job and just being grateful for what they have, which is good, but like the growth is not the same.” ES6*



Job Supports in Interviews

*“She presents herself very very well....but...her self-confidence is very very low. One of the things is she wanted me to go on an interview with her...I respected her request and went in with her. And the employer was okay with that and so I’m calling to follow up later with the employer and they basically said they didn’t feel that she had the confidence to do this job. And I came back and I said to her... ‘I think **I actually did you a disservice by coming in on the interview** with you.’” ES5*



Employers and Job Supports

I: *“Do employers ever call you and want to problem solve with you?”*

P: *“Not yet, the closest I’ve had happen like that was an employer called me to inform me of the job openings that were available. Generally, **they don’t outreach me.**”* ES6

I: *“Have you had a young adult in a job where the employer actually used you as a support person?”*

P: *“Me, personally? No I haven’t had an employer...Once someone’s working, I’ve helped the individual but **I haven’t had the employer like call me and say there’s an issue.**”* ES8



Strengths of Supported Employment- Immediacy

“There’s a goal planning, I try not to focus on that right away. Sometimes it can be- ‘oh I got to do this first, I thought you were going to help me find a job now you’re telling me I got to do a goal plan?’” ES3

*“Maybe I have time today, maybe I can clear the afternoon and we can go looks for jobs today... Rather than just talk about it, let’s go! You know where you want to apply? That’s great let’s go there now. Versus, oh well...can you come next week, next week I’ll take you, but be a little bit more spontaneous with it, **let it happen now.**” ES3*



Weakness of Supported Employment- Immediacy

*“I’d like to see something developed **where people wouldn’t feel like they were going into a job blindly**. Something kind of educational, maybe involving worksheets, but not being condescending, like something that people can actually learn from?” ES6*

*“(training) It’s not part of our model. I’m not sure cause we try to focus on employment but with the economy, **I will lead them to a training.**” ES8*



Conclusions

Traditional Job development is largely irrelevant career development for youth due to:

- Online application process
- Centralization of hiring policy
- The jobs that can be developed are entry level only

Many young adults want careers, but need more training and education (Supported Education?)

Rapid placement is particularly important for young adults (perhaps in paid internships or education)



Conclusions 2

Social Security Benefits should not be encouraged although preserved for those who need them.

New methods of job development are essential.

