

Introduction

Intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) consist of a wide range of conditions that occur in childhood and continue throughout one's life, requiring special services and support from a multitude of individuals (Falvo, 2014). Extant within the context of IDD, as well as other disability categories, is the idea of garnering independence and individual control. One way that this may be accomplished is through employment. Paid employment contributes to important elements of adulthood, including: self-sufficiency, choice in activities, and preservation of health (Batavia & Richard, 2001). According to Caldwell and Heller (2007), employment may potentially help individuals with IDD to achieve a higher level of independence and social inclusion. One of the challenges is working with the each individual's strengths, interests, and abilities rather than attempting to treat all individuals with similar conditions the same way (Olney, 2000). Considering this, it is not reasonable to assume that all individuals with IDD would choose the same type of employment – job choice would be more individualized and based on the one's specific interests and desires. If the person-centered approach, which is utilized in most state vocational rehabilitation (VR) and community rehabilitation programs (CRP), is to prove successful, the result should yield a wider variety of jobs than have been seen in the past (Moran, McDermott, & Butkus, 2001).

It is understood that through the application of set practices, job seekers will be afforded the opportunity to find employment that matches their skills, strengths, and preferences (Callahan, Shumpert, & Condon, 2009). Considering this, it is not reasonable that *all* individuals with IDD would choose to enter into fast food or janitorial work. Each person has different abilities and aptitudes with which to seek gainful employment. In an attempt to garner increased independence and overall quality of life, one would benefit from having a job that pays them a reasonable “living wage”, which would likely afford more opportunities in these areas.

Methods

The data for this evaluation was obtained from ExploreVR, which is a research, policy, and practice web application providing state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies easy and convenient access to a range of VR and related data for planning, evaluation, and decision-making. The raw data obtained was narrowed down to focus on the state of Kentucky for 2012. Additionally, the raw data was compared to results from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the same period. The data for this project were extracted and analyzed using both descriptive statistics and SPSS. Thorough analysis of the data resulted in the following research questions: (1) Are individuals with MR being disproportionately placed into certain occupational categories? (2) How do these values compare to the national figures (BLS Data, 2013)? (3) What are the earnings associated with these occupations and do they constitute a reasonable living wage?

Successful closures reported in 2012 from Kentucky were selected for this analysis. The data included information on 1,489 consumers, closed into 10 different occupational titles. To address these questions, percentages were calculated to determine the proportion of individuals with MR who obtained various occupational titles, how those figures compared to national statistics, and corresponding earnings associated with each job title.

Results

The data demonstrates that individuals with MR are disproportionately being placed into one of two occupational titles (e.g., Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations or Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations). *Table 1* shows the breakdown of total case closures across all major occupational categories, the percentage of MR consumers closed in each job category, and mean weekly earnings of associated SOC codes in Kentucky in 2012. It also shows the percentage of individuals with *all* disabilities placed into the various categories on a national level.

Table 1

MAJOR OCC CODE	Total KY CLOSURES (n)	KY % MR	US % ALL	SOC CODE	KY WEEKLY EARNING S PER SOC CODE (MEAN)
Education, Training, and Library Occupations	37	1.9	5.0	Teacher Assistants	\$312.05
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	73	3.6	3.6	Registered Nurses	\$795.37
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	217	16.8	5.2	1. Dining Room and Cafeteria Attendants and Bartender Helpers 2. Dishwashers 3. Food Preparation Workers. 4. Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers.	1. \$141.63 2. \$175.00 3. \$222.80 4. \$222.65
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	238	15.5	6.1	1. Janitors and Cleaners, except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners 2. Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	1. \$230.06 2. \$249.31
Personal Care and Service	49	1.61	4.1	Childcare Workers	\$217.14

Occupations					
Sales and Related Occupations	181	6.2	10.4	1. Cashiers 2. Retail Salespersons	1. \$238.51 2. \$287.94
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	391	7.6	13.1	1. Customer Service Representatives 2. Receptionists and Information Clerks 3. Stock Clerks and Order Fillers 4. Office Clerk - General	1. \$329.16 2. \$254.08 3. \$251.15 4. \$313.11
Production Occupations	169	4.8	7.7	1. Team Assemblers 2. Helpers – Production Workers 2. Production Workers, All Others	1. \$373.57 2. \$414.66
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	98	3.5	7.8	1. Light Truck or Delivery Service Drivers. 2. Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers.	1. \$428.47 2. \$328.45
Protective Service Occupations	36	2.4	2.2	Security Guard	\$357.69

Discussion

As evidenced by the data, the majority of consumers with MR are being placed into two categories at significantly higher rates than is being reported nationally. Furthermore, these two occupations result in weekly earnings that are well below average, which brings into question whether a living wage is actually being earned – it appears not. As a result of the difficulty in deriving national statistics specific to individuals with ID due to the variation in the way that disability is defined, data regarding this population are sparse (Taylor, Krane, & Orkis, 2010). The current findings are corroborated by the

research by Siperstein, Parker, and Drascher (2013) who reported that 16% of employed individuals with ID were working in a restaurant setting and no data were reported for building and cleaning occupations. There are numerous questions that stem from this analysis, which could be addressed in future studies: (1) Why are individuals with MR being disproportionately placed into these jobs? (2) How does the severity of disability affect type of job placement? (3) Were any of these individuals actively working with an employment consultant from a CRP? Unfortunately, for individuals with ID, meaningful employment earning a reasonable living wage continues to be elusive. The results of this analysis are troubling and deserve to be examined further.

References

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