

FACTORS AFFECTING LOW RATE OF EMPLOYMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Abstract

This paper takes the method of literature review, from perspectives of personal attributes and social influence, addresses five factors: vocational expectation and satisfaction, vocational personality, vocational ability, services delivery, and prejudice of social mainstream perceptions. Research findings suggest that the low rate of employment of individuals with special needs is influenced by various factors, in which personal attributes and social perceptions are crucial.

Keywords

Employment, individuals with special needs, vocational expectation and satisfaction, vocational personality, vocational ability, services delivery, prejudice of social mainstream perceptions.

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that about 10 % of the world population encountered some physical or mental disability. The number of disabled people was approximately 650 million. Moreover, it was increasing due to population growth (WHO, 2005). Among the general population, the labor force participation rate for individuals with disabilities was disappointingly low, from 28 % to 31 %, compared to a rate of 79 % among those without disabilities (National Organization on Disability (NOD), 1999). Individuals with disabilities had a much higher rate of unemployment than people without disabilities (Burkhauser & Houtenville, 2003; Taylor, 1994). These individuals with disabilities usually experienced a large number of problems in their attempt to gain and maintain employment. Many people with disabilities would like to work but cannot find congruent employment

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(NOD, 2004), for example, a recent U.S. Census Bureau report pointed that only 34.6 % of working age individuals with disabilities were employed, compared to 79.8 % of those without disabilities (Stone & Colella, 1996). A research found that as few as 8 % of people with significant disabilities were employed, only a small percentage of them were actually employed (LaPlante et al., 1996). For finding a job, some people with disabilities struggled to retain their position (Gibbs, 1990; Mueser et al., 2001).

Many nations were encountered with same problems: people with disabilities cannot obtain some opportunities to be employed, though a part of them gained employment, but lost it soon, due to the lack of competence or the comprehension of employers. From the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), 12.4 % of the total Canadian population reported being disabled (11.5 % males, 13.3c% females). It had shown that disability was associated with a 30 percentage point reduction in labor force participation (Brown & Emery, 2010). The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) published statistics from the Labor Force Survey (UK) that showed 6.8 million disabled people of working age with only 50.1 % in work, this compared with 80.5 % of the intact population in work in 2005 (DRC, 2006). Numerous employed people with disability were in an unstable situation in China, this phenomenon “employment today, unemployment tomorrow” often appeared in some enterprises which provided posts for the individuals with disabilities (Shi, 2008). More than half of the disabled people were looked at negatively by society in Bangladesh, 79.7 % reported that disability had some negative consequence on their employment, 27.5 % who were employed could not earn as much as did people who were not disabled (Hosain et al., 2002).

The social and economic status of people was largely determined by access to the labor market and their earning potential. Disability decreased the probability of labor force participation, the number of hours worked, and annual employment earnings. Braddock and Bachelder (1994) pointed individuals with disabilities had been primarily employed in part-time, low-status jobs. Charles (2003) found disabled men experienced sharp drops in expected annual earnings, caused mainly by hour reductions rather than changes in wages, around the measured date of onset. Hum and Simpson (1996) investigated the effect of disability on labor market and found individuals with a disability had earnings of \$10,282 in 1989 which was 37 percent less than the \$16,348 average earnings of the intact individuals. These employment

problems suggested that many disabled individuals did not have the opportunity to experience a satisfying employment or attain their full potential. Moreover, it had become increasingly evident that employers have not fully utilized the valuable talents and skills that people with disabilities bring to the workforce (Braddock & Bachelder, 1994).

The statistical evidence showed the extent of the problem, and some other studies indicated the factors of influence it could be categorized from different perspectives. From the perspective of negative influence, Loprest and Maag (2001) suggested the factors were identified: (a) lack of appropriate jobs available, (b) family responsibilities, (c) lack of transportation, (d) lack of information about jobs, (e) inadequate training, (f) fear of losing health insurance or Medicaid, and (g) discouragement to work from family and friends. From the perspective of vocational adaptability assessment, Liu et al. (2008) suggested factors of vocational adaptability should be categorized into these aspects: (a) physical function, such as fitness, perception, self-care ability, limb function; (b) professional ability, such as accuracy and velocity of perception, digital capability, word knowledge, speech applications, reasoning, space, understand graphics; (c) vocational personality, such as adherence, rigor, emotional stability, confidence, responsibility, management, communicative competence, frustration tolerance; and (d) career interest, such as reality, arts, research, society, enterprise, tradition.

From the perspective of impacting with quality of life, Young and Murphy (2002) indicated: (a) a person's employment status had been demonstrated to be intrinsically related to the individual's sense of well-being, (b) self-reported health status, (c) health service usage, (d) be related to higher levels of life satisfaction, as well as superior adjustment, self-efficacy, and physical health; (e) with such benefits associated with employment, the role of vocational rehabilitation was most definitely an important one. At their broadest level these can be categorized into those related to (a) individuals' psychosocial characteristics, (b) their wider social environment, (c) their physical environment, and (d) their economic environment. To date, identified factors included the injured person's age, sex, preinjury employment, level of education, socioeconomic background, marital status, and social networks (Murphy & Athanasou, 1994; Ville & Ravaud, 1996).

From the perspective of perceiving and treating disabled individuals, Stone and Colella (1996) thought depending on a number of characteristics

of the disabled person included (a) previous performance level, (b) attractiveness, (c) gender, (d) race, (e) interpersonal style, and (f) status. Most studies on diversity in organizations had been concerned primarily with race, gender, cultural, educational, service issues and had devoted relatively limited attention to the unique issues associated with including disabled individuals in the workforce (e.g. Oliver, 1980; Imrie, 1997). An article addressed impacting factors of economic activity to a disabled worker (Thornton, 2005), and some studies discussed the relationship and mutual recognition of employers or coworker and an employee with disabilities (Millington et al., 1994; Nichols, 2008).

This paper reviews relevant literature from dimensions of inside influential factor and outside influential factor, focus on personal attributes and social perceptions, and addresses five main influential factors.

Vocational expectation and satisfaction

Currently, a large number of employed people with disabilities were in an unstable situation, most of them did not feel happy with their employment status. Ville and Ravaud (1996) found that 73 % of those were not entirely satisfied with their employment status, in the case of those not employed, 75% were not entirely satisfactory with their status. Uppal (2005) found that with the exception of the speech impaired, individuals with disabilities were likely to be less satisfactory with their jobs as compared to the intact. In fact, a follow up study of 302 supported employees showed that only 29.8 % had stayed in the initial job for two years, while 19.2 % had moved on to other jobs, 31.8 % were out of work and had returned to referral status, 15 % had been discharged as unemployed and inappropriate for supported employment, and 4.2 % were unemployed but no longer needed support (Shafer et al., 1991). Young and Murphy (2002) revealed that 74 % of disabled people not employed were unhappy; this indicated that there was a significant potential to improve further the outcomes, the majority of these people expressing a desire to be working is even more heartening. However, circumstances associated with disability may make it difficult for individuals to move from less to more satisfying jobs (Szymanski et al., 1995).

The most important thing for disabled individuals was to obtain employment in the labor market and avoid inactivity or unemployment. There was some empirical support for the contention that when a person was actively

seeking to gain employment, they were more likely to become employed (Ghatit & Hanson, 1978; Chapin & Kewman, 2001). Similarly, it can be discussed that those actively seeking to improve an unsatisfactory employment status were more likely to achieve their goal. So a person actively seeking to improve their unsatisfactory employment status may be argued to be successful. Young and Murphy (2002) considered that changing aspects of vocational unsatisfactory status may include active job seeking behavior, returning to vocationally-orientated study, participating in voluntary work in order to gain confidence and work experience, or seeking to improve current employment circumstances. (a) Active job seeking behaviors such as attending job interviews, door knocking, approaching employers, exploring social networks, or (b) activities aimed at preparing for reentry to paid employment such as undertaking vocationally orientated training or undertaking voluntary work so as to gain relevant experience (Young & Murphy, 2002).

Pagán and Malo (2009) analysed the relationship between job satisfaction and disability from the point of gender, age, married/cohabiting, educational level, health status, log (real hourly net wages), hours of work, job tenure, occupation, industry, region, private sector, job responsibility, type of contract, job matching, overqualified, non-wages subsidies, previously unemployed etc., and proposed two different hypotheses about the effect of disability on job satisfaction: a positive effect explained by lower expectations with respect to what they can obtain in the labor market with respect to intact workers and a negative one in line with results linking worse health status to lower job satisfaction levels. Furthermore, negative factors usually led to unattractive performance. Individuals with unattractive disabilities may be (a) less likely to be assigned to jobs involving teamwork or interaction with customers, (b) more likely to be excluded from workgroup activities, (c) less likely to be mentored, and (d) less likely to be offered opportunities for promotion than employees with disabilities that do not diminish their attractiveness (Stone and Colella, 1996).

Vocational personality

Liu et al. (2008) thought influential factors of vocational personality for employment should be included: adherence (patience and concentration on work, the ability of resisting the temptation or invention from the outside world); rigor (well organized, the ability to note, check and correct a mistake);

emotional stability (the ability of emotional self-adjustment); confidence (security, confidence in the future); responsibility (serious and responsible work, the ability of regulatory compliance); management (planned work, the ability of stimulating active work of others); communicative competence (the ability of communication and expression); frustration tolerance (calm performance when encountering difficulties, the ability to resolve the problem). Some researchers would like to divide it into six specific dimensions: (a) social or interpersonal competence (for example shy, quiet, aloof and distant), (b) task competence (for example helpless, dependent and noncompetitive), (c) concern for others (for example non-egotistical and benevolent), (d) integrity (for example saint-like and honest), (e) emotional adjustment (for example bitter, unhappy, nervous and hypersensitive), and (f) potency or strength (for example unaggressive and submissive) (Stone and Colella, 1996). At the same time, it was thought many of these (for example social and task competence, emotional adjustment and potency) were likely to be perceived as relevant to job performance, it followed that stereotypes may have a profound effect on observers' expectancies about a disabled person's capacity to perform a job (Stone and Colella, 1996).

Some studies addressed "Inappropriate behaviors", "negative attitudes", "habits", "beliefs" (Jones, 1991; Carlstrom, 1992; Larew et al., 1992:93; Szymanski & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996; Hosain et al., 2002). A view indicated weakly developed sense of autonomy, low self-esteem, low frustration levels, lack of impulse control, and over-protective parents or guardians were factors which contributed to these inappropriate behaviors (Carlstrom, 1992). Underdeveloped work attitudes, work habits were experienced by these individuals. In the procedure of researching a deaf psychologist, Jones (1991) found professionals working with the deaf, reflecting "their negative attitudes about what is possible for deaf people," and suspicions, "probably due to fear, that a deaf person had managed to work his way up to their level". Occupational development was mediated by individual beliefs. Mora and Cheryl (1996) had proposed that individual beliefs about career development (for example self-efficacy, self-concept, culturally based beliefs about work and work roles) were important contributors to the outcome in the general population. Interestingly, work situations may be related to individual beliefs. It was reasonable to hypothesize that such beliefs were important in the lives of people with developmental disabilities. In fact, people with developmental

disabilities may be at risk for lowered beliefs about their abilities. Negative attitudes resulted from the commonly-held belief that some disabilities, such as mental retardation, cerebral palsy, etc., were the result of divine punishment, and they blamed their fate. This fear and lack of understanding about disease processes exposed them to social segregation, leading to considerable emotional distress. As a result, they lost interest and became more isolated; these negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities were a significant obstacle to their successful integration in society (Hosain et al., 2002).

A research pointed vocational personality and vocational competencies were formed in a crucial period. Szymanski and Hanley-Maxwell (1996) stated vocational personality was formed in the pre-school years and was influenced by early school experiences. Similarly, vocational competencies, which were skills and habits associated with work, were formed during the school years. Play and chores can contribute to the development of work personality and work competencies. Because developmental disabilities were often present during critical times of development, they may present risk factors. For example, opportunities for play with peers without disabilities might be restricted, or children might not be held responsible for chores.

Vocational ability

Disabled individuals were more likely to be working in low skill occupations due to having lower qualifications than the intact. Schur (2003) found that workers with disabilities were about twice as likely as intact workers to be in contingent and part-time jobs. The high unemployment rate of people with disabilities had sometimes been attributed to characteristics of the job applicant, such as poor search skills, poor work histories or poor work habits (Johnson et al., 1988).

Liu et al. (2008) thought influential factors of professional ability for employment should be included: accuracy and velocity of perception (accuracy and velocity of basic information processing); digital capability (master the basic mathematical laws, simple addition and subtraction, multiplication and division); word knowledge (identify the pronunciation, orthographic); speech applications (master simple grammar); reasoning (the ability of simple verbal reasoning); space (the operation of a plane figure, understand the relationship between a plane figure and three-dimensional graphics); understand graphics (understand plane structure pictures). Wang (2005) thought

influential factors of professional ability for employment should include the residual function (weight load, lifting, alertness, trunk action, low action, hand and finger action, perception, hearing, vision), intelligence examination, vocational aptitude test (interest, experience, personality), professional operating capacity.

Some studies thought that it should undertake functional curriculum and offer vocational skills training. "Functional curriculum, a cornerstone of special education," prepared students for adult living and includes independent living, leisure, health and grooming, social skills, communication skills, vocational preparation and skill training, and general skills as well as community involvement through the age appropriate content (Boyer-Stephens & Kearns, 1988). Furthermore, a study recommended expanding curricular attention to include task approach and problem solving skills, self-efficacy skills (e.g. self-monitoring), and social skills as critical fundamental skills for all students (Szymanski & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996).

Services delivery

Many nations had established the vocational rehabilitation services delivery system in order to help people with disabilities overcome barriers and adapt to employment. Moreover, in order to improve the occupational status of disabled individuals, a large number of nations established special laws or implemented a relevant act. For example the U.S. Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 as a means of increasing access for disabled individuals and providing them equal opportunities for employment. In UK, the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) was addressed to "service providers". In Australia, the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) required employers to provide services or facilities to enable a suitably qualified person with a disability to meet the "inherent requirements of the particular employment" as long as such provision would not impose an "unjustifiable hardship" on the employer (Woodhams, 2001). In China, the establishment of the Law on Protection of Disabled Persons (LPDP, 1990), with the China's disability employment has been shifting from concentration toward dispersion as a result of socioeconomic development and the transformation of disability policy (Hampton, 2001).

Services delivery problems were perpetual for all people receiving services; it was important to note the specific service delivery issues that seemed

to impact the most of the disabled population (Scruggs, 2003). Services involved such as geographical location, available transportation, personal level of functioning, quality of interpreters, and professional experience of service providers. A key issue that was often missing among service providers was the special knowledge needed to work with people who were low functioning (Scruggs, 2003). However, the ability of public vocational rehabilitation agencies and their community rehabilitation provider partners to maintain a high level of successful closures was challenged when individuals presented a need for unique and intensive job search and retention strategies. Thus, rehabilitation professionals often were in a position to serve individuals who cannot easily apply for “off the shelf” jobs. These individuals may not have the skills, training, experience, stamina, or life circumstances that allowed them to present themselves as viable candidates for positions as listed by prospective employers (Martin, 2005). In order for successful employment to occur, these persons with disabilities often required individualized processes for assisting them to determine potential employment options, a targeted job search strategy, and a customized job with specific and negotiated tasks, taking into account individual accommodation and extended support needs (Fesko et al., 2005). In supported employment, West and Parent (1992) had highlighted the importance of the consumer’s role in choosing an occupation, agency and training staff, training and support methods, and whether to remain in a particular job.

Millington et al. (2003) asserted that rehabilitation counselors must improve their ability to understand employer’s needs and more clearly recognize how employers manage their personnel systems. They concluded that rehabilitation counselors must develop the skills necessary to partner with employers during the entire personnel process, and not just focus on the specific hiring event. Gilbride et al. (2003) found that many employers were fond of thoughtful, timely, effective support in meeting their personnel needs and dealing with disability related issues. They found that employers who received ongoing support and assistance from rehabilitation professionals appreciated that assistance and believed that it increased their ability to successfully hire and accommodate people with disabilities. Employers also indicated that they would like “one point of contact” for all their disability related questions. Employers often struggled with understanding the differences between agencies and found the inconsistency of procedures and lacked of responsiveness

of some providers wearisome. Much studies had been conducted over the past few decades (Gilbride & Stensrud, 1992) documenting the importance of developing effective relationships with employers to improve employment opportunities for consumers. While most argue that partnerships with employers were necessary, in practice only minimal resources were committed to developing and maintaining these relationships (Gilbride, 2000). Most rehabilitation agencies felt that they were understaffed and underfunded, and while they would like to commit more time to developing and maintaining employer partnerships, the ongoing and compelling needs of the current caseload consumed their time (Gilbride, 2000).

Prejudice of social mainstream perceptions

In the context of professional practice, however, disabled people tended to be portrayed as “clients” to be “looked after” or “cared for”, rather than as fully functional citizens who contributed to caring as qualified and trained health and social care professionals (Brothers et al., 2002). Prevailing mainstream perceptions of disabled people as being individually deficient because of their impairments, an individualist model which had both let members of the mainstream “off the hook” in terms of not being made to feel obliged to adapt their existing policies, practices and behaviors to make them more inclusive, and at the same time seemed to offer disabled people no hope of ever achieving full social inclusion whilst their impairments remained (Tregaskis, 2000). Some studies found that the individuals with disabilities encountered typically the result of a social environment that stereotyped them as damaged goods, second-class citizens, inferior, dependent and little or no value who were unable to make competent decisions or perform most job duties in a cost-effective manner (Boyle, 1997; Imrie, 1997).

A large number of individuals with disabilities thought encountering unfair treatment. 39.2 % of persons with disabilities felt that they were treated noticeably differently from intact people, 24.4 % reported that they felt embarrassed by unnecessary sympathy shown to them, 16.3 % stated that they were frequently addressed in derogatory terms, and 16.3 % replied more strongly that society simply hated them (Hosain et al., 2002). The females (44.1 %) were 1.47 times more likely to suffer from negative attitudes than their male counterparts (34.8 %) (Hosain et al., 2002). With regards to the job characteristics, it was noteworthy that disabled individuals received lower

hourly wages than intact workers, which was related to wage discrimination, through their relatively higher participation in low-skilled occupations in jobs with a lower level of responsibility, and with less non-wages subsidies (Pagán & Malo, 2009).

Employers and coworkers had given some stereotypical and negative perceptions to disabled people. Negative reactions of employers, supervisors and coworkers constituted attitudinal barriers that people with disabilities faced in the workplace (Punch et al., 2004). Negative employer expectations, biases, or attitudes toward the employment of individuals with disabilities had been identified as potential barriers to employment (Millington et al., 1994). Employers were reluctant to hire people with disabilities because of the perceived risk associated with hiring an individual who may require costly supports or lag behind in productivity (Bricout & Bentley, 2000). Stereotypes were used in combination with category membership as a basis for generating expectancies about persons with disabilities (Higgins & Bargh, 1987). When categorizing a person as an individual with disabilities, the employer derived expectancies about the concept from stereotype-based assumptions made about disabled people as a group. As a result of these expectations, the disabled person may encounter a number of treatment-related problems, including a decreased likelihood of being selected for a job, recommended for promotion, or receiving rewards or special mentoring in organizations.

Many people with impairments were excluded from contributing their labor to the means of production, due to a number of factors including limited educational opportunities, environmental access barriers, and employers' negative attitudes towards employing them; and at another level because the impaired body may not conform to conventional notions of aesthetic acceptability, and may also be an unwelcome reminder to intact people of the inevitability of their own mortality (Tregaskis, 2000). Boyle (1997) categorized negative stereotypes into four dimensions: (a) a negative social image, which resulted in the disabled individuals avoiding contact with members of the intact population; (b) a rehabilitation system that exerted considerable control over the career options available to its clients by assessing their potential job categories with little regard for their idiosyncratic needs and aspirations; (c) established job completion methodologies that did not allow disabled individuals' access to most occupations because the jobs were designed for the physical requirements of members of the intact population;

and (d) a powerful image campaign by many organizations that made the organizations appear more responsive than they really were to the needs of members of the disabled population.

Braddock and Bachelder (1994) indicated that employers' stereotypes and attitudinal biases may be an important source of the problem. Employers often stuck to "unfounded" concerns about persons with disabilities, including "false" assumptions about their job-related abilities, performance levels, absenteeism, turnover rates, and the high costs of accommodation. It merited emphasis that expectancies were extremely important elements because they were thought to bias personnel-related decisions about, and subsequent treatment of, persons with disabilities. For example, based on existing stereotypes, it was likely that employers will bias expectations regarding the ability levels, social competence, or emotional adjustment of disabled individuals (Fichten & Amsel, 1986).

People's attitudes toward work and toward their jobs were strongly influenced by their perceptions of procedural justice (Colquitt et al., 2001). Justice perceptions arose from an internal process whereby people compared the fairness of how they thought they were treated to how they thought others were treated (Colquitt et al., 2001), and justice perceptions were influenced by whether the behavior of others was understood to be fair or unfair. A study explored the roots of stigma toward employees with disabilities, McLaughlin et al. (2004) found that participants' perceptions of the "performance impact" of disability on job performance was the most significant factor related to coworkers' acceptance of employees with disabilities. Other factors impacting coworkers' perceptions included discomfort in being around people with disabilities (e.g. negative affect), strain caused by communication impairments (e.g. speech impediments, hearing loss), personality factors (e.g. prejudice, limited tolerance), and lack of prior contact with people with disabilities (Colella, 2001; Schur, 2003).

Conclusions

This literature review showed that there were many studies which had revealed prevalent factors of influence, such as personal attributes: vocational ability, vocational interest, vocational value, vocational expectation, vocational satisfaction, gender, race, level of education, physical conditions, intelligence, etc; social conditions: policy, act, workplace, education, services,

family, socio-economic, etc; others: ecological views, mental views, comprehensive views and so on. However, most of these just simply mentioned some related influential factors, did not discuss in some depth, merely limited researches were systematic in one of the factors. From two dimensions, this paper reviewed relevant important factors: vocational expectation and satisfaction, vocational personality, vocational ability, services delivery, and prejudice of social mainstream perceptions. Personal attributes and social perceptions were closely related, deeply impacted perceptions of choosing and treating employment for individuals with disabilities, also impacted the evaluation of satisfaction and adaptation. Therefore, further studies may be focused on what relationships are among those factors? What factors directly impact vocational adaptation of individuals with disabilities? How to overcome these negative factors? How to improve the vocational adaptation of individuals with disabilities?

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