Summary of the Issue

The differences between people with disabilities and those without disabilities persist into the employment arena (Benz, Doren, & Yovanoff, 1998; National Center on Secondary Education and Transition for Youth with Disabilities, 2000). Therefore, students with disabilities at a college level planning to pursue a career are a minority population that is often overlooked. In order to successfully guide people with disabilities into a career path, postsecondary support services, transition support services, and workplace support services need to be in place to encourage career exploration and adaptation. This study was designed to explore the transition of supports from postsecondary education not only to the workplace, but also to a career.

1. Research Questions

   1. What types of postsecondary, transition, and workplace supports are offered to assist transition from postsecondary education to the workplace? Who offers the supports?
2. How satisfied are the individuals who are utilizing the supports, with the type of supports offered and the agencies offering and coordinating/managing the supports?

3. What are the biggest barriers to securing employment for individuals with disabilities?

2. Method

This study utilized a quantitative research method that consisted of a survey of 25 people with disabilities across the nation. Disabilities ranged in type (sensory (45%), physical (45%), mental (30%), emotional (10%)) and level (mild (25%), moderate (55%), severe (25%)). The survey was designed to review the entire transition process from beginning to end, and was piloted and revised based on feedback from 3 experts with disabilities in the area of disability research. The survey targeted individuals with disabilities who are currently working or have had some work experience utilizing their postsecondary educational skills, and asks questions about the supports they were given. Specifically, participants were asked about their preparatory postsecondary supports, transition supports, and their workplace supports. Postsecondary education includes vocational certificates, associates, bachelors, and graduate degree programs. Participants’ satisfaction with supports and the agencies that provided and managed/coordinated those supports were also assessed. Finally, the participants were asked to indicate their biggest barrier to securing employment. Participants were surveyed via mail, email and the Internet and were recruited using a “snowballing” technique.

There is need for further research in this area. This is a pilot study, and therefore utilized small numbers that covered a wide variety of disability types. Its purpose is to get a sense of the issues as defined by individuals with disabilities. These issues will be explored further in a follow-up study that utilizes a qualitative approach to address the essence of these issues.

3. Findings

Postsecondary disabled support personnel, youth with disabilities, family members, researchers, postsecondary student services personnel, transition and employment placement personnel, and/or employers.

4. Significant Findings

Postsecondary Supports

- Postsecondary supports are supports that participants received while attending their postsecondary institution (i.e., transportation supports).
- Educational supports were most frequently utilized by 70% of the participants, followed by personal supports (35%), transportation supports (35%), career
related supports (30%), health related supports (10%), and no supports (10%).

• On a Likert scale of 1-5 measuring satisfaction, with 5 very satisfied, participants rated preparatory postsecondary supports a 3.3.

• College Disabilities Support Services was the agency responsible for providing the majority of postsecondary supports to participants, servicing 70%, followed by vocational rehabilitation (60%), natural supports (60%), social security allowance, insurance and/or disability insurance (30%), and human services organization (10%).

• Participants rated their satisfaction with the agencies that offered the supports a 3.4.

• 55% of participants indicated that they were responsible for the coordination and/or management of the supports they requested and/or received, followed by family or friends (35%), college counselor (30%), disability support coordinator (25%), vocational rehabilitation counselor (20%), transition coordinator (10%), and a health related professional (5%).

• Participants rated their satisfaction with the coordination/management of their supports a 3.1.

**Transition Supports**

• Transition supports are supports that were in place specifically to assist individuals with disabilities during the period from after postsecondary education to being hired for employment.

• 45% of participants indicated that they did not request and/or receive any type of transition supports. Of the participants that requested and/or received transition supports 25% received job placement supports, followed by time related supports (20%), assistive technology (15%), transportation supports (15%), health related accommodations (10%), essential function accommodations (10%), physical supports (10%), and other supports (i.e., co-workers help, testing) (10%).

• On a Likert scale measuring satisfaction from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), participants rated their satisfaction with transition supports a 2.15.

• Vocational rehabilitation provided 40% of the transition supports for participants, followed by Social Security allowance, insurance, and/or disability insurance (25%), postsecondary program (10%), and transition program (5%).

• The participants rated their satisfaction with the agencies that offered the supports a 1.05.

• Similar to postsecondary supports, 40% of participants indicated that they coordinated their own transition supports followed by a vocational rehabilitation counselor (25%), family or friends (20%), social worker (10%), disability support coordinator (5%), social security administration counselor (5%), and department of veteran’s affairs (5%).

• Participants rated their satisfaction with the coordination/management of their supports a 1.55.
Employment Supports

- Employment supports are supports offered to individuals with disabilities to enable them to perform work functions at their place of employment.
- 35% of participants utilized assistive technology followed by time related supports (30%), no supports (25%), physical supports (25%), essential function supports (15%), and other (i.e., transportation, interpreting service, job coach) (15%).
- On a Likert scale measuring satisfaction from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), participants rated their satisfaction with employment supports a 2.5.
- Employer’s provided 65% of the employment supports followed by vocational rehabilitation (15%), and an interpreter referral service (5%).
- The participants rated their satisfaction with the agencies that offered the supports a 2.3.
- Similar to both postsecondary and transition supports, 50% of participants indicated that they coordinated their own employment supports, followed by an ombudsman (20%), vocational rehabilitation counselor (10%), family or friends (10%), and employer human resources office (10%).
- Participants rated their satisfaction with the coordination/management of their supports a 2.4.

Overall Significant Barriers to Securing Employment

- 40% of participants stated that lack of opportunities was a significant barrier to securing employment, followed by disability-related reasons (35%), other (i.e., anti-disability bias, lack of knowledge about disability) (25%), continuing education (20%), lack of transportation (15%), financial disincentives (15%), lack of job-seeking skills (10%), and health insurance conflicts/disincentives (10%).
- 10% of participants indicated that they felt there were no significant barriers to securing employment.

5. Implications

Postsecondary Supports

- Participants are most satisfied with postsecondary supports. With a satisfaction score of slightly over neutral, postsecondary supports are still not doing an effective job of preparing individuals for their transition to the workplace. These findings may not be specific to individuals with disabilities, but may be reflected in the general population. Further research is needed.
- 55% of participants indicated that they are in charge of coordinating their own preparatory supports, as mandated by ADA. However, 45% of participants rely on agencies to coordinate their supports. This may be the reason why many individuals with disabilities have difficulty with transition.
Postsecondary disability support personnel, and postsecondary student services personnel need to be aware that youth are coordinating their own supports and encourage more self-advocacy.

- Since youth are often reticent to use college disability support services, they should be aware that the most frequent source of support in the postsecondary arena is the college disability support services. Vocational Rehabilitation is also a frequently used source of support.
- The frequent use of natural supports indicates that family, and especially peers are important in preparing youth for employment. Furthermore, over 1/3 of the participants indicated that their family was still coordinating their supports in postsecondary education. Family and friends continue to have a significant support role throughout postsecondary education.
- Only 30% of the participants indicated that they utilized the Social Security Administration, and 60% indicated that they utilized Vocational Rehabilitation. Non-professionals did 85% of the coordination of postsecondary supports. These programs, a major source of federal funding, are not being utilized by postsecondary students. These findings have implications for policy researchers, specifically those involved with ADA.

**Transition Supports**

- Approximately 45% of individuals with disabilities are receiving no transition supports. Therefore, agencies need to offer more quality transition support services, as well as improved coordination and management of transition services. There is a gap in services during this transition process that may create obstacles for individuals with disabilities pursuing employment.
- Postsecondary personnel need to develop the delivery and coordination of transition services, as well as make students aware of the scarce transition services that are available.
- Of the 55% of students that received transition supports, 40% of them coordinated their own services. More advocacy skills and better coordination of transition services is needed.
- The coordination of transition services is very poor and participants were very dissatisfied with them. Coordinating a multitude of agencies after postsecondary education is an overwhelming job that is not being done well.
- Agencies and postsecondary educational structures need to have coordination and alignment on an agency level to facilitate transition to the workplace for individuals with disabilities.
- Family members and participants are coordinating 60% of their own transition supports. They should be made more aware of the mechanisms through which to receive transition support.
Employment Supports

- ¼ of employed participants were not receiving supports. This could be a function of choice. Individuals may not want supports, or may not receive them when they are requested. However, some individuals may look for employment settings where supports are not needed.
- A wide variety of employment support is being requested and received by individuals with disabilities. They are making use of the ADA, and it is being implemented effectively.
- Employers are delivering the majority of employment supports. Participants are not using large federally funded programs (i.e., WIA, Ticket to Work).
- The large federally funded agencies (i.e., Vocational Rehabilitation) are also not coordinating employment supports. The participants and their family and friends are mostly responsible for coordination.
- Federal programs such as WIA, Ticket to Work, and Vocational Rehabilitation are not active in the delivery and coordination of employment supports. Therefore, many individuals with disabilities are laden with undue burden.

Significant Barriers to Securing Employment

- 40% of participants indicated that a lack of opportunities was a barrier to securing employment. The lack of opportunities may be a result of the economic recession following the September 11 World Trade Center terrorist attack.
- Anti-disability bias and discrimination is still a factor in securing employment. ¼ of the participants indicated that they faced attitudinal barriers. Youth should be aware that they have the law on their side, and that discrimination is not acceptable.
- Employment service providers need to find opportunities that are appealing for individuals with disabilities, as well as educate employers about hiring individuals with disabilities.
- Policy researchers should investigate the health insurance disincentives that were a barrier to 10% of participants.
- Although improvements in support services need to be made, 10% of participants felt that there were no significant barriers to securing employment.

Overall

- Satisfaction with preparatory, transition, and employment supports is at best neutral. Therefore, improvements need to be made in all areas, quality, agency support, and coordination and management.
- Because the self was indicated as coordinator/manager of support services most often with low satisfaction, indicating a need for skill improvement by individuals with disabilities in such areas as self-advocacy, self-determination, requesting accommodations, and study/time management/organization.
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