

Research In Focus: A Weekly Digest of New Research from the NIDILRR Community

People with Disabilities Face Barriers to Employment, But Accommodations May Help

People with disabilities have lower employment rates than people without disabilities. According to the 2015 Disability Statistics Annual Report, only 34% of working-age Americans with disabilities were employed in 2014, compared with 75% of working-age Americans without disabilities. People with disabilities may face multiple barriers that make it harder to find or keep jobs. Some of these barriers include employers' misconceptions about hiring and accommodating a person with a disability, inaccessible work spaces or equipment, or a lack of transportation to get to a work site. Job accommodations such as a flexible work schedule, help with transportation, or personal assistance services may allow people with disabilities to overcome these barriers and remain employed. However, past research has found that many workers with disabilities do not receive accommodations, especially workers who have recently developed a disability. In a recent NIDILRR-funded study, researchers looked at data from individuals who were applying for vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. These individuals were either currently employed, or were nonworking, meaning not currently working but had been employed in the past. The researchers wanted to find out what barriers the nonworking individuals reported facing during their job search. The researchers also want to find out what accommodations any of the individuals received at their current or most recent job, which accommodations were most closely linked with being employed, and which groups of individuals were most or least likely to receive needed accommodations.

Researchers at the [Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Individual-Level Characteristics Related to Employment Among Individuals with Disabilities](#) analyzed data from the 2015 Survey of Disability and Employment (SDE), collected from individuals who were applying for VR services between August and December of 2014. The researchers looked at data from 2,282 individuals who lived in Ohio, Mississippi, or New Jersey. All of the individuals had disabilities and had worked in the past. They were an average of 43 years old (range: 25-60 years) and had their disability for an average of 16 years.

The SDE included questions about what type of disability the individual had, their educational background, how they rated their health status, and whether or not the individual was currently employed. In addition, the individuals who were not employed were asked whether or not they had experienced barriers to employment. These included barriers related to individual circumstances (such as the disability itself, lack of transportation, or a lack of skills or training), work-related barriers (such as inability to find a job, negative experiences in job seeking, or inaccessible workplace), and societal barriers (such as concerns about losing disability benefits). Finally, all of the individuals

were asked whether or not they received accommodations, either at their current job if they were employed, or at their most recent job if they were currently not working. Examples of accommodations included a flexible work schedule, modified job duties, or a job coach.

The researchers found that the currently nonworking individuals reported experiencing an average of 4 employment barriers during their job search. The most commonly reported barriers were the disability itself (67%), inability to find a job (59%), and feeling discouraged by previous difficulty finding a job (48%). In addition, about a third of nonworking individuals reported that an inaccessible workplace or a lack of reliable transportation was a barrier to being employed.

When the researchers looked at accommodations that all individuals -- currently employed or not employed -- may have received in their current or most recent job, they found that about three-fourths of the individuals received at least one accommodation. The most common accommodations were a flexible work schedule (50%), job coaching or training (41%), and assistance from coworkers (32%). About 19% of the individuals received help with transportation, and 9% of the individuals received on-the-job assistance from a personal care attendant or personal assistant. The researchers found that the individuals who received at least one accommodation during their work history were more likely to be currently employed. Thirty-seven percent of the individuals who received at least one accommodation were employed at the time of the survey compared to 26% of the individuals who received no accommodations. When the researchers looked at specific accommodations, they found that the individuals who received a flexible schedule, help with transportation, or a personal care attendant or assistant had employment rates about 8 percentage points higher than the individuals who did not receive these accommodations.

When the researchers looked at to the characteristics of those who had received any job accommodations compared to those that had not, they found that the individuals who received accommodations were more likely to have had their disability since birth or for an average of two years longer than those who did not receive accommodations. The individuals who received accommodations were more likely to have multiple disabilities and less likely to have physical disabilities than those who did not receive accommodations. The individuals who received any accommodations were more likely to rate their health as excellent or very good compared to those who did not receive accommodations. The nonworking individuals who reported that an inaccessible workplace was a barrier to their employment were more likely to have physical disabilities or be in poor health compared to those that did not report an inaccessible workplace as a barrier to their employment.

The authors noted that although the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires employers to provide accommodations when requested, some individuals may choose not to request accommodations, or may not know what accommodations are available. In addition, some employers may not be knowledgeable about the relative low

cost and convenience of most accommodations. Education and outreach to employers may be useful in improving access to and use of accommodations for workers with disabilities. VR is another resource which can connect potential workers with disabilities to appropriate accommodations. In this study, people with physical disabilities or health concerns reported facing the most accessibility barriers and were also least likely to receive accommodations at work. Rehabilitation professionals may wish to specifically target outreach to these groups in order to educate them on the types of accommodations that could help them retain satisfying employment.

To Learn More

The Diversity Partners Intervention: Moving the Disability Employment Needle Through Value Added Relationships Between Talent Acquisition Providers and the Business Community offers tools, training, and support to bridge the gap between VR professionals and employers to improve employment outcomes for job seekers with disabilities: <http://www.buildingdiversitypartners.org/>

The Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employment of Individuals with Disabilities has an Accommodations Corner, which highlights real-life examples of workplace accommodations: <https://pd.vcurrctc.org/resources/accommodations/>

The Job Accommodation Network assists employers and job seekers with disabilities to understand and implement accommodations in the workplace: <http://www.askjan.org>

To Learn More About This Study

Anand, P., and Sevak, P. (2017) [The role of workplace accommodations in the employment of people with disabilities](#). IZA Journal of Labor Policy, 6(12). This article is available from the NARIC collection under Accession Number J77467.

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