

Barriers and Facilitators to Employment as Reported by People with Physical Disabilities: An Across Disability Type Analysis

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A quick look: ■

When individuals with disabilities are pursuing or sustaining employment, there are several factors that either help or impede their progress. Previous research provided insight as to what these barriers and facilitators are for people with disabilities. But are these factors the same for all disabilities? Is something that's an obstacle for someone with cerebral palsy (CP) also an obstacle for someone with multiple sclerosis (MS) or spinal cord injuries (SCI)? To find out the answers to these questions and to compare the employment experiences of people with these different disabilities, the authors of this article conducted 18 focus groups with people with CP, MS, and SCI and analyzed the data from each disability types.

Key Findings: ■

The authors discovered two common themes among the participants of the study: (1) health and (2) barriers to overcome. Here are some of the key findings of their research:

- ▶ Participants with MS considered employment situations and decisions based on their future declining function in health.
- ▶ Participants with CP and SCI focused more on how to maintain stability in their health as opposed to impending decline.
- ▶ There were three common concepts in the discussion of barriers to employment, they were:
 - **Accommodations** -- The accommodations needed were different across the different disability types (ex. laptops, trackballs, e-books, Dragon Naturally Speaking software, special keyboards, SIRI, note-taking software, etc.).
 - **Discrimination** -- Across the disability types, the participants discussed ways that they overcame this barrier (ex. educating employers, persistence, not-disclosing their disability [for participants with MS]).
 - **Transportation** -- Participants with CP and SCI considered the location of the job as it needed to fit within routes used by public transportation. Participants with MS were concerned with the amount of time they must travel to a job.

Putting It into Practice: ■

- ▶ Knowledge of the similarities and differences of experiences of people with these various disabilities can assist counselors in providing supports for their clients based on their specific disability-related support needs.
- ▶ Employers and professionals who create resources for individuals with physical disabilities can use the data from this research to provide support and information on barriers and facilitators to employment.
- ▶ The unique needs of these individuals with different physical disabilities should not be taken in a "one size fits all" approach, but addressed specifically based on the type of disability experience.

More about this Article (What did they say?) ■

- ▶ When talking about asking employers for accommodations, one participant with CP said, "It's like a double-edged sword. They're not supposed to discriminate. But at the same time, if you tell them that you need special accommodations, chances are they're not going to hire you."
- ▶ One participant discussed discrimination saying, "I had a great job offer, and when they found out I had MS, they didn't let me have the job."
- ▶ Another participant with CP explained how they handled discrimination, "Often at times I explain what accommodations I use, and how I use them to help me do my work in whatever office setting."
- ▶ For transportation issues, one participant with CP said, "Mine had to be in an area that had paratransit available and wasn't too far from my house to make for a long ride."

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