

The Quality of Life in Employees with IDD

Research Study Two examines how competitive integrated employment (CIE) affects the quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). While previous research has focused on helping people with IDD obtain jobs, there is very little research showing why employment matters and how it changes people's lives over time.

Why This Study Matters

The study seeks to understand how working in a community job that pays at least minimum wage influences four key areas of quality of life:

- Employment satisfaction
- Physical well-being
- Psychological well-being
- Social and community participation



For years, employment professionals have observed benefits such as increased confidence, independence, social connections, and community involvement. This study aims to find out from employees themselves what benefits they experience. The results may also help families and others who are hesitant about competitive integrated employment better understand its positive impact, using data reported directly by people with disabilities rather than only provider observations.

Program Components

The study includes several key elements:

- Participants are individuals with IDD who have recently started a new competitive integrated job.

Program Components continued

- Participants complete four surveys and participate in interviews that explore their health, self-perception, social inclusion, community involvement, job satisfaction, and workplace experiences.
- With participants' permission, employers are interviewed six months after hire to provide their perspective on the employee's growth, workplace inclusion, and performance.
- The research team intentionally includes people with lived experience throughout the project. Individuals with disabilities helped develop interview questions and advised on recruitment methods, ensuring the study reflects participants' perspectives and experiences.

Research Goals

The study aims to:

- Determine how competitive integrated employment affects quality of life for people with IDD.
- Gather first-hand accounts from employees with disabilities rather than relying solely on providers or family members.
- Build evidence supporting competitive integrated employment as the optimal employment outcome.
- Share findings that can inform employment services, policy, and future research.

Study Design

The researchers will use a mixed-methods design, combining:

- Quantitative data: standardized surveys measuring multiple aspects of quality of life.
- Qualitative data: interviews that provide detailed personal experiences and context.

Study Design continued

Participants are assessed at four time points:

1. Baseline (within the first month of employment)
2. Six months after starting work
3. Twelve months after starting work
4. Two years after starting work



Recruitment occurs through VCU's employment program, Business Connections, where job coaches introduce newly hired employees to the study and interested individuals receive additional information before deciding whether to participate.

The study focuses on a wide variety of jobs—including retail, healthcare, office settings, and federal positions—rather than limiting participants to traditional entry-level roles often associated with people with IDD.

Overall, the study is an opportunity to transform years of anecdotal observations into rigorous evidence demonstrating how meaningful employment can improve the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

<https://idd.vcurrtrc.org/research/rs2.cfm>

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