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Employment Outcomes among People with Disabilities: Youth and Young Adult Employment Determinants

Selected Findings from NIDILRR-funded Disability Employment Research in the 21st Century

A systematic scoping review of research published between 2000 and 2020 on employment of people with disabilities, that was funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), was conducted by CeKTER (NIDILRR Grant #90DPEM0004, 2020–2025) researchers. All papers comparing people with disabilities to those without were excluded from the systematic scoping review. Among over 100 publications reviewed there was a wide and very disparate array of findings with numerous variables used and varying research questions. This result belies summative findings. There are numerous ways of organizing the disparate findings. This brief is part of a series of findings from the center's systematic scoping review. In this brief we report on findings about determinants impacting the employment outcomes among youth and young adults with disabilities. Please note that all comparisons are always about corresponding peers with disabilities.

Demographic Determinants

Education

- Greater educational attainment contributes to higher rates of employment among youth with disabilities.¹⁻³
- Youth with disabilities who attended a regular school were more likely to have higher rates of employment compared to their peers who attended other types of schools.⁴
- Youth with disabilities who graduated from high school were more likely to have higher rates of employment compared to their peers who did not graduate high school.⁴
- Youth with disabilities who had post-high school education were more likely to have higher employment rates compared to their peers who did not.⁴⁻⁵
- Youth with disabilities who did not have a high school diploma were more likely to have lower earnings.⁶

Gender

- Male youth are more likely to have higher rates of employment compared to female youth.^{1,7-8}
- When compared to female youth, male youth were more likely to have higher weekly earnings.⁷
- Female youth were more likely to be recipients of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services compared to male youth.⁹
- Male youth who are recipients of VR services were more likely than female youth recipients to have successful closure of services due to obtaining competitive employment.⁹

Age

- Young African American men who had substance use disorders and were between ages 20 and 25 had higher rates of employment than those who were between ages 16 and 18.²
- Youth with disabilities between the ages of 20 and 25 were more likely to receive VR services and to have successful closure of services compared to youth between the ages 14 and 18.⁹

Race

- Hispanic youth with visual impairments were more likely to have higher rates of employment when compared to their peers who were White.¹
- Youth with disabilities who were White were more likely to be enrolled in VR services and to have successful closure of services due to competitive employment.⁹

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Service-Related Determinants

- Youth with disabilities who applied to agencies that were either in order of selection (OOS), had higher proportions of youth applicants, or had higher costs of purchased services (provided by external vendors) were more likely to have a successful VR case closure.⁹
- Youth with traumatic brain injuries (TBI) receiving a greater number of VR services at higher expenditure levels were more likely to have successful VR case closure.³
- Youth with TBI who received VR services over shorter periods of time were more likely to have successful VR case closure.³
- African American youth who had a stronger working alliance with their VR counselor were more likely to be engaged in VR services when compared to their African American peers with a weaker working alliance with their VR counselor.¹⁰
- Youth with disabilities who applied to agencies that were in order of selection (OOS) were less likely to receive VR services compared to those who applied to agencies that were not in OOS.⁹
- Youth with disabilities were less likely to receive purchased VR services if their cost was higher.⁹
- Longer time between application for VR services and eligibility determination decreased the chances of youth with disabilities to start receiving services.⁹
- Longer time between determination of eligibility for VR services and the development of an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) increased the chances of youth with disabilities exiting from VR before receiving a signed IPE despite being eligible for services.⁹



Work-Related Determinants

Having Prior Work Experience

- Having a paid work experience during high school had a positive impact on the future employment outcomes of youth with disabilities.^{4-5, 7, 11-12}
- Having a prior paid work experience had a positive impact on the weekly earnings of youth with disabilities.⁷
- Youth with disabilities who were working when they applied for VR services were more likely to receive services and to have a successful VR case closure when compared to their peers who were not working at the time of applying for VR services.⁹
- Youth with disabilities who were working when applying for VR services had higher earnings when exiting VR services with employment compared to their peers who were not working at the time of applying for VR services.⁶
- Youth with visual impairments were more likely to have a successful VR case closure if they had a job since the onset of their disability. In addition, youth with visual impairments who had a higher number of jobs before applying for VR services were more likely to be employed at the time of their VR case closure.¹³

Facilitators of Employment

- Youth with TBI who had employment goals were more likely to become employed.¹⁴
- Accommodations and the use of assistive technology have a positive impact on the employment of youth with visual impairments.¹³

Psychosocial Determinants

Individual-Level Psychological Determinants

- Youth with visual impairments who had higher levels of independent travel skills and peer social skills were more likely to be employed.⁵
- Youth with visual impairments who had an internal locus of control and higher levels of self-determination were more likely to be employed.¹³

Interpersonal Determinants

- Parental expectations for post-high school employment have a positive impact on the employment of youth with disabilities.^{4, 11}
- Having support from family and friends contributes to greater number of work hours.¹⁵



Community-Related Determinants

- Youth with disabilities were more likely to have higher employment rates if they lived in suburban or rural areas when compared to their peers who lived in urban areas.⁸
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Health-Related Determinants

Severity of Disability and Related Symptoms

- Having a secondary disability or health condition contributed to lower rates of employment among youth with visual impairments.¹
- Greater severity of disability and related symptoms were associated with lower rates of employment among youth with visual impairments.¹

Functioning and Activity Limitations

- Youth with disabilities who were able to understand what is being said at the level of “no trouble” were more likely to work compared to their peers who had “a lot of trouble understanding” or “did not understand” what is being said.⁸
- Youth with visual impairments were more likely to work if they had independent travel skills.⁵
- Young with visual impairments were more likely to work a greater number of hours per week if they had higher scores on verbal and math assessments.¹⁵

Overall Health

- Youth with disabilities who reported having better overall physical health were more likely to be employed.⁸
- Youth with visual impairments who reported having better overall physical health were more likely to work greater number of hours per week.¹⁵

Type of Disability

- Youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities were more likely to obtain employment compared to youth with learning or cognitive disabilities.⁹
 - Youth with physical or sensory disabilities had lower rates of employment compared to youth with cognitive, learning or emotional disabilities.⁸
 - Youth with developmental, intellectual or physical disabilities were more likely to receive VR services than youth with cognitive or learning disabilities.⁹
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