

The Effect of Postsecondary Education on Employment, Income, and SSI for People with Intellectual Disabilities

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Students with intellectual disability have had poor outcomes after high school compared to their peers without ID (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Papay & Bambara, 2014). Individuals with ID may rely on government benefits, have extremely high unemployment rates, and experience difficulty becoming part of their local community (Migliore & Butterworth, 2008). Their unemployment rates are more than 70%, nearly 10 times the rate of their non-disabled peers (Winsor et al., 2018).

Opportunities for students with ID to access postsecondary education are growing (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). Research indicates that postsecondary education improves employment outcomes for people with ID, but a better understanding of the extent of its effectiveness is needed (Smith et al., 2012). The purpose of this study was to examine whether postsecondary education improved employment outcomes and earnings for individuals with intellectual disability.

METHOD

This study analyzed the Rehabilitation Services Administration's (RSA) 911 datasets from 2008 through 2013. The RSA-911 is a large national public access dataset containing information on every individual who applied for vocational rehabilitation services in the United States. The employment, earnings, and Supplemental Security Income outcomes for individuals with ID who had postsecondary education were compared to those individuals with ID who had no postsecondary education. The RSA-911 dataset includes information on the primary and secondary physical or mental impairment that causes or results in substantial impediment to employment. A primary or secondary disability of cognitive impairment caused by mental retardation (i.e., intellectual disability) was used to select the sample of individuals with intellectual disability for this study.

A comparison group was used to determine if postsecondary education improves employment and earnings and reduces reliance on Supplemental Security Income benefits.

Propensity score matching was used to create a comparison group of individuals with ID who were matched based on: (1) the level of education at time of application to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services, (2) whether or not they received special education services in secondary education, (3) whether or not they had a significant disability, and (4) whether or not they were employed at the time of application for vocational rehabilitation services (Sannicandro et al, 2018). The study used multilevel modeling to examine state differences that could affect the results.

KEY FINDINGS

- Individuals with ID who had postsecondary education were more than twice as likely to be employed than their counterparts who did not have postsecondary education.
- Individuals with ID who received postsecondary education had increased earnings; they earned \$406 more per month than their counterparts who did not receive postsecondary education. These findings support evidence from the general population, that postsecondary education improves employment and earnings (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2013).
- Individuals with ID who had postsecondary education required \$77 less per month in SSI benefits than their counterparts who did not have postsecondary education.
- The higher the proportion of individuals with ID served by the state VR agency, the better employment outcomes for individuals with ID.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Individuals with ID should be included in education beyond the present legal mandate of preschool through grade 12. IEP teams should give greater consideration to postsecondary education for students with ID. The mandatory transition planning required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education

Act (IDEA) should require preparation for postsecondary education as the default choice, barring significant mitigating factors. IEP teams should be required to emphasize postsecondary education in transition planning or provide justification when it is not. State education departments should instruct their state educational districts to encourage postsecondary education for individuals with ID and not to retain them within the K-12 system from ages 18 to 22, as is often the case.

- VR agencies should encourage and provide postsecondary educational opportunities for this population. The state VR agencies should ensure their policies are fully aligned with this approach, and individuals with ID are not discouraged or barred from receiving postsecondary education. In addition, VR agencies should provide job skill training, basic academic skill remediation, and training to prepare an individual for the world of work (e.g., appropriate work behaviors). (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).
- Policy makers should invest in educating individuals with ID in postsecondary education. There should be a greater emphasis on lifelong learning for this population. Supports should be put in place to ensure that individuals with ID have access to postsecondary education. Community programs should promote lifelong learning for adults ID.
- Public colleges and universities should develop postsecondary education programs to accommodate students with ID, which will require an infusion of financial support and, in many cases, expanded training and support to educate faculty and staff about their role in the provision of postsecondary education to this population.
- VR agencies should serve a larger percentage of the population of individuals with ID.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed RSA-911 datasets from 2008 through 2013 to understand the effect of postsecondary education on the employment, income, and SSI benefit amounts on individuals with ID. After controlling for a range of individual and state characteristics, this study found significantly increased employment and income, and significantly decreased SSI payments among individuals with ID who had participated in postsecondary education. This research supports policy and program changes that would make postsecondary education more widely available to individuals with ID across the United States.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please see this journal article: Sannicandro, T., Parish, S. L., Fournier, S., Mitra, M., & Paiewonsky, M. (2018). Employment, income, and SSI effects of postsecondary education for people with intellectual disability. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 123, 412-425.

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