

SOCIAL WORK CAREER COUNSELING AND THE PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract: *Finding a job is a real challenge for people with disabilities. Regardless of the type of disability (physical, psychological or cognitive) they face opposition from employers or discriminatory attitudes from colleagues and business managers. The authors aim to contribute to an easier professional integration of people with disabilities through social work and career counseling. Also, the pursuit of the degree of professional satisfaction obtained by the persons with disabilities employed following the counseling was taken into account. For this purpose, a group of 30 people with various disabilities was studied. People were included in a counseling program that lasted 3 weeks. At 6 months after employment, the subjects of the group were asked to answer some questions asked by the counselor regarding work satisfaction, relationship with colleagues and the superior staff and about the quality of services offered by the social worker. The results show that the vast majority of subjects positively appreciate the professional counseling program and consider that without it they would continue to be among the unemployed.*

Key words: people with disabilities (PWD); social work career counseling; employment; employers' attitude; discrimination.

1. Theoretical framework

Since 2002 WHO defines disability as a term, covering impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. Impairment is a problem in the body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action while participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Therefore, disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person body and features of the society in which he/she lives. A disability may occur during a person's lifetime or may be present from birth (WHO, 2002).

The same organization claims in 2011 that more than one billion people in the world live with some form of disability, of whom nearly 200 million experience considerable difficulties in functioning. In the years ahead, disability will be an even greater concern because its prevalence is on the rise. This is due to ageing populations and the higher risk of disability in older people as well as the global increase in chronic health conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and mental health disorders. Across the world, PWD have poorer health outcomes, lower education achievements, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities. This is partly because people with disabilities experience barriers in accessing services that many of us have long taken for granted, including health, education, employment, and transport as well as information. These difficulties are exacerbated in less advantaged communities (WHO, 2011).

PWD and their inclusion in the workplace are no longer absent from the business agenda. Disability inclusion now features in many policies and is fast gaining momentum in business strategies. Including PWD and accommodating their disability-related needs are important moves for companies in terms of talent resourcing and social responsibility as well as compliance with national legislation.

Thus Dispenza (2019) presents a narrative literature review conducted with the intention of providing practitioners with foundational knowledge regarding the career development trajectory of PWD. In his article, the author provides an overview of career development barriers and facilitators for persons with disabilities, provides a review of self-determination theory as a framework that can be used alongside other career development interventions with PWD, discusses career development interventions that have been identified as effective with these people within vocational rehabilitation, and lastly, provides recommendations for career intervention outcomes and research.

Tansey et al. (2018) argue that individuals with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty, have more health issues, and be less likely to be employed than their same-aged peers. Their purpose was to develop and test an integrated self-determined work motivation model for PWD. Findings from this study support the integrated self-determined work motivation model in vocational rehabilitation as a useful framework for understanding the relationship among functioning levels, self-determination and self-efficacy factors, vocational rehabilitation engagement, and readiness for employment.

On the other hand Vornholt et al. (2018) claim that due to the expected decline in the working-age population, especially in European countries, PWD are now more often recognized as a valuable resource in the workforce and research into disability and employment is more important than ever. Their paper outlines the state of affairs of research on disability and employment. They discuss key issues, including the complexity of defining disability, the legal situation in Europe and North America concerning disability at work, and barriers and enablers to employment.

People with an intellectual disability value work as a significant part of their lives, and many of them want to participate in regular paid employment. Current estimates show that the number of people with ID who have some form of paid employment are very low, ranging from 9 to 40% across different countries, despite legislation. Despite on-going legislation to promote participation of people with intellectual disabilities in the paid workforce, research in this area is still extremely scarce. In the past 20 years, very few studies have focused on work environment-related factors that can enhance competitive work for people with intellectual disabilities. Their review of the literature show that relevant work environment-related factors for obtaining and maintaining work in competitive employment include supporting the employers by paying specific attention to: employer's decisions, job content, integration and work culture and job coaches (Ellenkamp et al. 2016).

Simplican et al (2015) said that social inclusion is an important goal for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, families, service providers, and policymakers; however, the *concept* of social inclusion remains unclear, largely due to multiple and conflicting definitions in research and policy. They define social inclusion as the interaction between two major life domains: interpersonal relationships and community participation and propose an ecological model of social inclusion that includes individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and sociopolitical factors. They identified four areas of research that our ecological model of social inclusion can move forward: organizational implementation of social inclusion; social inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities living with their families, social inclusion of people along a broader spectrum of disability, and the potential role of self-advocacy organizations in promoting social inclusion.

Friedman (2018) analyzes the relationship between direct support professionals and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities' quality of life. He found

that direct support professionals continuity is central to quality of life of people, including human security, community, relationships, choice, and goals.

The same meaning for jobs for PWD manifest Bonaccio et al (2020). They say that despite legislation on diversity in the workplace, people with disabilities still do not experience the same access to work opportunities as do their counterparts without disabilities. Many employers have been shown to harbor sincere yet ill-founded views about the work-related abilities of people with disabilities; these negative views are often a result of interrelated concerns that permeate the entire employment cycle. They provide recommendations for organizations committed to creating more effective, equitable, and inclusive workplaces for all individuals.

Workers with disabilities form one of the largest diversity groups in the workplace. Because of the high level of unemployment among PWD, many have argued that they are insufficiently utilized as a labour pool and that employers will want to recruit from this pool to address the labour shortage caused by demographic shifts as the baby boomers retire and are replaced by fewer new entrants to the workforce. Yet, despite advances in diversity and inclusion practices in the workplace, the entry and progression of PWD in the workforce remain problematic. Most employers hold stereotypical beliefs not supported by research evidence, which are often fueled by a lack of information.

Tuan et al. (2020) found that regardless of their disabilities, employees with disabilities can contribute to the performance of public organizations. Our research purpose is to investigate how and when disability-inclusive human resource (HR) practices nurture the well-being of employees with disabilities in the public sector. Their results demonstrated that the effect of job resources on employee well-being was stronger for employees low in public service motivation than for those high in public service motivation.

Filgueiras, Vilar, Rebelo (2015) show that successful cases of professional reintegration were achieved when adequate conditions were created for the adaptation of the worker with disability to the working environment and to the professional activity, is allowing them to carry out all their functions without any restriction. In this sense, their paper presents a methodology for professional integration of PWD in service companies and industry. As a result it was developed an evaluation tool to match the individuals' capabilities and the job requirements. This methodology together with the support tool demonstrated to be a quite inclusive tool, are essential in making a link between the capacities of the individuals and the real necessities of the workplaces.

There are numerous articles that also analyze the attitude of employers towards PWD (Heera, Devi, 2016). They made a review of literature over the past 25 years with an attempt to assess the employers' perspective and specifically, the factors influencing their perspective towards inclusion of PWD in employment. The literature indicates that employers' perspective plays an important role in providing and maintaining employment opportunities for PWD. A number of factors including type of disability and demographic variables affecting employers' perspective have been identified and discussed.

Burke et al. (2017) made a selective review which provides an overview of salient research findings related to employers' attitudes towards disability and prospective influences on employers to improve employment outcomes of people with disabilities. Research studies included for review are mainly those which investigated employer attitudes towards disability as predispositions to hiring people with disability. Employer affective reactions and behavioural intentions of employers towards

disability in the work setting were less positive and negatively impact hiring decisions, provision of accommodations and work performance appraisals. Employer attitudes represent an important demand-side factor impacting full participation in competitive employment for individuals with disabilities. While employers report generally positive attitudes toward disability, hiring practices may still be discriminatory. Use by rehabilitation professionals of demand-side strategies with employers would likely result in higher rates of work participation by people with disabilities.

Studies also analyze the quality of care that can be provided to PWD. Lawthers et al. (2003) make a review of the current health services literature related to quality of care for persons with disabilities and highlight the need for a unique framework for conceptualizing quality and patient safety issues for this population. They conclude that health care providers need to embrace a multi-disciplinary approach to quality to meet the needs of PWD. Funders and purchasers need to provide flexibility in funding to enable a comprehensive primary care approach, while health service researchers need to adopt a broad view of quality to capture issues of importance for persons with disabilities.

Rotarou and Sakellariou (2018) studied depressive symptoms in PWD. Various types of disabilities, such as learning, sensory, and neurodegenerative, have been associated with a higher prevalence of depression or depressive symptoms, compared to the general population. There are indications of a complex bidirectional causal pathway, especially between physical disability and depressive symptoms: depressive symptoms can lead to functional limitations, with people with depression reporting greater problems in carrying out activities of daily living. Physical disability can also lead to the emergence or increase of depressive symptoms. A similar bidirectional relationship exists between depressive symptoms and pain in people with physical disabilities: increased levels of depressive symptoms can lead to worse pain, and worse pain can lead to more severe depressive symptoms.

Rezai et al (2020) intend to study the measurement properties and the quality of the evidence for measures of inclusion or exclusion at work. They reviewed 151 full-text articles from the literature and found that the quality of the evidence for content validity was low for 30% of studies and very low for 70% of studies. Future research should focus on comprehensive evaluations of the psychometric properties of existing measures, with an emphasis on content validity, measurement error, reliability and responsiveness.

With the growing global emphasis on welfare-to-work policies, an increasing number of people PWD have entered the workforce. However, studies on PWD have focused primarily on company practices to accommodate PWD, with a limited understanding of factors affecting psychological integration of PWD into the workplace. Zhu, Law and Yang (2019) made a study on 485 employees, and their results suggest that high workplace inclusion can buffer potential negative effects of disability at the individual level, strengthened further by a high team-learning climate. Their results demonstrate the importance of inclusion and team-learning climate to foster employee thriving in a diverse workforce.

Hergenrather et al. (2018) explore the employment as a social determinant of health through examining the relationship between neurocognitive function and employment status. They claim that the acknowledgment of the relationship between neurocognitive function and employment status can assist service providers in assessing and developing strategies to enhance and maintain employment outcomes.

2. Hypothesis and objectives

In our research, which is a constational type, we started from the following hypothesis: *we assumed that finding a job and job satisfaction is a function of the skills and competencies of the social worker's professional counseling.*

The formulation of this hypothesis required the establishment of the following research objectives:

- providing adequate counseling;
- finding a concordance between the requirements of the job and the possibilities of the subject;
- ease of finding a job;
- improving the adaptation to the new job;
- appreciation of the quality of counseling performed by the social worker.

3. Lot studied

We studied a group of 30 people with various forms of disability looking for a job. The distribution of our lot according to the forms of disability is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Lot distribution by type of disability

Type of disability	Subjects
Physical handicap	9
Somatic Handicap	11
Visual handicap	6
Mental handicap	4

Most of our subjects were with somatic disabilities (11 subjects), followed by those with physical disabilities (9 subjects), visually impaired (6 subjects) and mentally disabled (4 subjects).

3. Working Methodology

Subjects were selected from those who submitted to the County Agency for Employment (AJOFM, Arad), but in their inclusion in our research the selection condition was the presence of a certain type of disability (see Table 1). After selecting them, the subjects were introduced into a career counseling program (with a duration of 3 weeks), which was done by the social assistants of the institution. The counseling focused on finding a compatibility between the person's disability and the job requirements, developing a positive way of thinking, improving the ability to adapt to new conditions. After the counseling and hiring of the subjects at 6 months, the subjects were searched again and asked to respond to a questionnaire we made about work satisfaction, integrity and quality of service offered by the social worker.

4. Results and discussions

A first aspect to be presented is the situation of hiring the subjects that were counseled by us, ie the answers to question 1. In Table 2 and Figure 2 is illustrated the situation of hiring our subjects.

Table 2. Employee status

Employee status	subjects
employed	28
unemployed	2

It can be seen from the table that most of the subjects counseled by us after 6 months were employed - 28 subjects employed by only 2 subjects who had not found a job after 6 months.

The fact that two of the subjects are not yet employed, even after six months of counseling, is evidence at first glance that in these cases the counseling did not give the expected results. But if we look at the situation more deeply, we find that one of the subjects - mentally handicapped - suffered a relapse and was retired second grade for a period of two years, so he did not even try to look for a job. The second case was a subject with somatic disabilities who suffered serious surgery, which made him unable to work for a certain period of time.

Thus, we can say that the failure of the counseling is the cause of not engaging the two subjects, but the problems of physical, somatic or psychological decompensation that led to a temporary incapacity to work.

The responses of the employed subjects (N = 28) to the second question - job satisfaction - are illustrated in Table 3

Table 3: Satisfaction at work

Degree of satisfaction	subjects
yes	17
no	7
I don't know yet	4

Most of the employees are satisfied with the work they have - 17 subjects. We have a total of 7 subjects who are not happy with the job. Of these, 4 subjects occupy a job under their professional training and in a completely different field than their initial training (they are college graduates and have not found a job but as bartenders and waiters). The other three subjects are not satisfied with other reasons - one because their salary and the other two do not suit their team.

Four of our subjects do not know yet whether they are happy or not at work. These are four subjects who have been engaged for a little while - less than a whole day - and who cannot yet say about the degree of contentment because their integration into the collective and the workplace is not yet completed.

For question 3, how long did it take to find a job after counseling, the answers are summarized in Table 4

Table 4: The time elapsed between counseling and employment

Time elapsed	subjects
under a month	19
1-3 months	5
over 3 months	4

Most subjects (19) manage to engage within one month of counseling. It is a positive point in favor of the counselor, demonstrating that his career counseling mode has yielded favorable results since nearly 90% of the subjects find their job less than a month after counseling sessions.

Five subjects (5) found a job in a timeframe of one month and three months. These were those who, although they had job offers, did not commit themselves immediately, waiting for something better and more convenient. However, after two and a half months, they also managed to work in a job to meet their expectations.

Finally, the last four subjects (4) found employment only after 5 months. These are the ones who answered the previous question with I do not know. The long time elapsed between the termination of counseling and the finding of a job can not be attributed solely to external factors (illnesses or objective causes that prevented them from looking for a job, but also due to internal factors that concern the personality of the subjects concerned).

The marked failure, the inability to make a firm decision, the oscillation between the advantages and disadvantages of each job have prevented these subjects from setting on a job and making the necessary decision for the job. Probably these subjects will still need counseling in the future, but this time psychological counseling in order to overcome the decision difficulties.

For the last question in our questionnaire, the role of the social assistant, the answers of our subjects are summarized in Table 5

Table 5: The role of social assistance counseling

The role of counseling	subjects
finding a job	28
knowing his own possibilities / capabilities	26
targeting to a suitable domain	24
no role	3

This question was answered again by all 30 subjects I had in the initial batch. In many cases, the subjects even gave two or three answers, so the number of answers, as a whole, is different from the number of subjects.

The number of responses that consider that the role of social worker counseling was that they find a job is 28. They appreciate that without the help of the social assistant, the counselor would still not have been able to find a job and integrate socioprofessional.

An almost equal number of responses (26) consider that the role of counseling was to make them aware of their own possibilities and capacities and therefore to know what they can give and what they can expect from others. Proper self-evaluation is a key factor in employment. When the subject is properly assessed in terms of its potential and capabilities, it knows exactly what it is worth on the labor market and it makes it easier to negotiate a salary or job. Knowing their own value has opened up a wide variety of possibilities that they will be able to use according to the priorities of their time

A total of 24 replies states that the social worker counselor has directed him towards a field of activity that suits them. This response is in fact complementary to the previous one. Knowing their abilities and skills is easier for subjects to choose a field that suits them. Working in a field that suits you is essential to work satisfaction. This is because the work itself and its tasks are made of pleasure and not of obligation, giving implicitly a better return and producing greater personal satisfaction for the work done.

Finally, we have a number of 3 subjects who claim that for them the counseling of the social worker was of no use. Of these three subjects, two are those who have entered the category of non-employed. For them the counseling of the assistant was useless since they cannot work. But the conversation with them has convinced us that they will again call the services of a social counselor when the period of temporary incapacity for work ends.

The third subject is what we called the disaffected cheerleader, who was not satisfied with salary or conditions, and who would like to change his job. He believes that he has found his current job without any help from outside and that the social worker's counseling has not helped him in any way. We can include these statements in the category mentioned above, namely the mentality of the people. In some environments being helped from outside is a sign of weakness and then it is better not to admit that you have been helped and to say that you have done it yourself. In addition, there are also extremely stubborn people who do not accept any point of view other than their own, even if they take the assistant's assistant's assertions and present them as their own.

On the whole, we can say that the social assistant counselor helped the subjects to find a job, to know their own abilities and possibilities and to direct them to areas that fit them. The social worker's counseling activity is appreciated by most of our subjects and this appreciation is materialized in the satisfaction that the subjects have at the workplace and the way they perform their job duties.

In conclusion, our research has validated in practice the hypothesis from which we have gone, namely that finding a job and job satisfaction is a function of the skills and competencies of the social worker's professional counseling.

5. Conclusions

The attitude of the team and the appreciation of the products of their work makes them feel useful and determines the disappearance of the sense of futility and inferiority that dominated them during the unemployment. This not only improves working-class relationships, but also improves family relationships. If, during the period of unemployment, many of the family relationships were damaged by continuous quarrels and the feeling of guilt that they can not contribute to family maintenance, now that they have a decent and steady salary, family relationships have become calmer and more affectionate, și au scapat

Man is a bio-psycho-socio-cultural being, whose personality is reflected in the activity and its products. No man feels at ease when forced into inactivity for a longer period of time. This also impresses the personality of the subjects who become more brutal, jerkier, dominated by feelings of futility and guilt, more depressed that they cannot support their family properly. The role of the social assistant is to avoid precisely this kind of situation, and to explain to people that in any situation (apparently without exits) there is a wide range of solutions from which they can choose without resorting to irreversible radical solutions.

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In conclusion, our research has validated in practice the hypothesis from which we have gone, namely that finding a job and job satisfaction is a function of the skills and competencies of the social worker's professional counseling.

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