

**Post High School Employment and Residential Status of Students with
Mental Retardation: A Review of Follow-up Studies**

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Introduction

In the last decade, many of the questions raised in special education research are concerned with students with disabilities who graduated from or had been enrolled in school programs. The problem involved their ability to integrate successfully in their community, which seems to be more complex because of their need for special service programs to support their participation (Madonnell et al . 1986).

However, since 1987 when the Division on Career Development of the Council of Exceptional Children published its first paper regarding transition from school to adult life for children with disabilities, substantial efforts have been made to develop transition aspects including relevant concepts, legislation, policies, and procedures (Halpern, 1994).

These efforts encouraged students with disabilities to participate more fully within the school and the community environment, which in turn tended to enhance the quality of programs and services presented by the school and community. This transition was not only considered as a movement from school to employment, but also included a residential and social/interpersonal component (Halpren, 1985).

The employment status of individuals with disabilities has been an important issue in the transition movement. It clearly is a major factor, which provides economic and residential independence (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). However, it is necessary to study the employment and residential status of individuals with disabilities to evaluate whether special education programs prepared adequately former students for adult life (Afflex et al, 1990).

A number of follow-up studies concerned with the postschool employment and residential status of individual with mental retardation (MR) provided some basis for evaluating the achievement in those areas. Some of them reported that between one-third and

one-half of individuals with MR were employed full-time with a greater percentage of males than females (Edgar, 1987; Frank et al, 1990; Hasazi et al, 1985).

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to review and analyze the data on general postsecondary outcomes and to make an in-depth study of the employment and residential status of individuals with MR. In addition the differences in employment rates between males and females will be explored.

Method

Definition of Data Base

The Database of ERIC and VICTOR were selected from 1983 to 1997 using the following descriptors: mental retardation, transition, secondary programs in special education, and adult adjustment. A manual-search was made of employment and residential status as discussed in some major journals in Special Education such as Exceptional Children, B.C Journal of Special Education, Journal of Learning Disabilities, Education and Training in Mental Retardation, The Journal of Special Education, Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, and Career Development for Exceptional Children.

Procedure

Each article identified from the search was evaluated. The articles chosen met the criteria of, (a) identifying MR as the disability area, (b) included studies reporting employment and/or residential status and (c) included adults who were graduates or nongraduates. Twelve studies were analyzed based on purpose, description of studies, and number of participants.

Review the Studies

As shown in table (1) a number of studies of the transition outcomes of students were reviewed based on purpose, description, and number of students to measure employment rates and residential status of individuals with MR. It was found that most of the studies recorded high employment rates of individuals with MD. For instance, Affleck, Edger, and Kortering (1990) conducted a study on a sampling of students identified as learning disabled, mildly mentally retarded, and normally developed children, to examine their post school status. Data were collected from 13 school districts on 2,655 former students who graduated or left school. Questions were focused on current employment status, job satisfaction, salary, and current living arrangement. Results showed that the employment rate of 200 individuals with MD was 50%; 57% males and 46.5 females. Also, normally developed and learning disabled individuals were more independent than individuals with mental retardation.

Blackorby and Wagner (1996) analyzed selected results from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) of special education students, conducted by SRI International. 1,990 youths who were of ages 13 to 21 and in special education in 1985 were included. Data were collected in 1987 and 1990 regarding trends in the employment, wages, postsecondary education, and residential status of individuals with disabilities. Results showed that employment rates rose 11 percentage points between the time they had been out of school up to 2 years and 3 years later. The rate of individuals with MR living independently was lower than the other categories of disabilities such as learning disabilities, serious emotional disturbance, and speech impairment.

Edgar (1987) studied what happened to Special Education students who graduated or dropped out of 11 public schools in the state of Washington. Parents of the former students were queried about employment status, salary, how jobs were obtained, and interaction with

related service agencies, school experience, and residential status. 60% of the study population were employed. The author concluded with a finding that a major change in the transition programs for Special Education students is required to achieve a high rate of employment.

Frank, Sitlington, Linda, and Cool (1990) investigated the adult adjustment of 318 individuals with MR one year after graduation. The protocol of this study was designed to provide background information of the students, information about high school programs, evaluation of their school experience, and their post and current employment. The results indicated that 66% of individuals with MR were employed in competitive jobs and 69.3% were living with their parents or relatives. This study found no significant relationship between current employment and previous enrollment in specials - designed vocational programs while in high school.

Haring and Lovett (1990) conducted a study of 129 special education high school graduates to investigate vocational and community adjustment. An interview instrument designed to assess a large number of variables such as school experience, work record, postsecondary training, residential status, social and recreational satisfactory and parental perception was conducted on participants, parents, and adult service providers. Results revealed that the employment rates of individuals with MR were 60%; 79% were employed competitively. Residential status did not differ from most of the follow-up studies; 70% were living with their parents. None of the subjects was being trained to live in a normal home environment.

Another follow-up study was conducted by Hasazi, Gorden, Rose, Finck, Hill, and Sateembier (1985). The study covered 145 males and 95 females ranging from 14 to 23 years

old, who were labeled mentally retarded and graduated during the period 1981-1983. The survey items were designed to collect data about student conditions such as current occupation, employment, post-secondary education, vocational training experience, and residential status.

The study revealed that not only was the employment rate for individuals with MR very low (43%), but also they had difficulty finding work, were less likely to obtain full-time jobs and were paid less than employees without disabilities. Regarding the living arrangements, the study indicated that 76% of the participants lived with their parents or relatives.

Hasazi, Johnson, Hasazi, Gordon, & Hull. (1989) investigated the employment status of students with and without disabilities in a sample of 133 youth; 67 individuals with disabilities and 66 without disabilities. The study examined the post - high - school employment experience of both groups 2 years after exiting school. Two sets of interviews were conducted, one in 1986 and the other in 1987. Information was collected regarding individual employment history, current employment, and residential status. Results showed low employment rates of individuals with MR as compared to the other group. In both groups, males were more likely to obtain jobs than females. Both groups showed high percentages of living dependently during the first and the second years.

Horrocks (1991) conducted a study of 46 parents of individuals with MD in respect to the current employment and residential status of their children. This study used both questionnaire and interview methods with parents who agreed to participate. Although 82% of the participants were employed, the result revealed negative parental views regarding any help that the transition program gave for their disabled children. This explains the high

percentage (71%) of individuals living with their parents in this study.

Levine and Edgar (1994) analyzed gender differences in postschool outcomes for youth with LD, MR, and no disabilities. Data were collected in 1985 and 1990. Comparisons were made based on employment, postsecondary education attendance and graduation, engagement, living arrangement, marital status, and parental views. The authors used p value of .01 and .05 in their analysis to determine differences. Results showed that there were no significant differences between males and females within the same disability groupings.

Mithaug, Horiuchi, & Fanning (1985), did a follow-up survey in which data were collected by special education teachers, vocational teachers, directors of special education, work experience coordinators, and parents of students who graduated from special education school in 45 administrative units in Colorado. The authors indicated that the special education programs had been relatively effective in preparing students with disabilities for post school. 69% of the participants were employed, and 61% were living with their parents..

Scuccimarra and Speece (1990) examined employment outcomes and the social adjustment of mildly handicapped students who left high school in 1984. Current employment data such as income, employment history, and social service were obtained by personal and telephone interviews. 78.5% of the group were employed, 80.4% were working full-time, and the majority of the participants were active and engaged in activities with same-age friends. Over 83% of the were living with their parents; 71%.4 of them gave the reason for living with parents in the high expenses of living alone.

Sitlington, Frank, and Carson. (1992) investigated the adult adjustment of a group of 938 former education students: 737 individuals with LD, 59 BD, and 142 MR. Information was collected from school records and interviews to obtain: background, nature of the high

school program, and information about the current situation of participants. Results revealed that 62% of individuals with MR were employed and 60% were living with parents or relatives. 20% of individuals with MR stated that they paid none of their living expenses.

Percentage of Participants Employed

The responses regard employment rates of individuals with MR and by gender are summarized in Table (2). The highest percentage employed was 82% (Horrocks, 1991). This high rate is most likely because of the school work training which provided much more extensive variety of work experiences.

The low total percentage of employed in the twelve studies were 43% (Hasazi et al., 1985). Hasazi et al, (1985), stated that due to limited abilities, persons with mental retardation have greater difficulty finding work and are less likely to obtain full-time jobs.

Regardless of the number of years since graduation, the employment rates of individuals with MR in these studies were high. The average of the total percentage was approximately 65% and most of them were working full-time.

Overall, all the studies revealed a high percentage of employment rates of individuals with MR except the study of Hasazi (1985). These studies found a large percentage of individuals with MR who had made satisfactory adjustments in competitive employment although they were working at unskilled or semiskilled occupations.

Gender

Gender differences were the problem in many of the studies of employment status. In the two studies conducted Hasazi and her colleagues (1985, 1989) results showed significant differences of the employment rates between males and females. The first one conducted on individuals with MR, while the other one combined MR, LD, and no disabilities. Frank et al, (1990) found that the experience of females with MR differ significantly from that of their male counterparts during high school. Although the differences of Frank et al (1990) study were 81% versus 66% males to females which seems high, the employment rate rose in succimarra and Speece (1990) to reach 91% versus 52%.

Only the results of Levine and Edgar (1994) differ from the other studies. The others claimed that no significant differences were found between males and females with disabilities. They stated that the gender differences might be more mythical than real and the important source of difference may be the disabilities category.

Residential Status

Information regarding residential status of persons with mental retardation did not cover all the studies. Only 11 of 12 reported a relevant information. The percentage of individuals with MR living dependently (with parents, relatives, group home, and friends) varies from a high of 83% to a low of 60%. The high was (83%) reported by Hasazi, et al. (1987); no significant differences were found between individuals with and without disabilities in the residential status. The low (60%) was from Sitlington. et al. (1992). They stated that schools need to include instruction in functioning to increase independence.

The average of all studies reported concerning about the high rate of living dependently was 72%, which means that the goal of independent living had not been fully met.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate general outcomes relating to employment and residential status of individuals with MR, with some focus on the differences of employment rates between males and females. Initial results concerning employment rate of individuals with MR situation appeared to be positive, and most of the studies revealed a high employment rate among individuals with MR.

One of the important findings reported by Hasazi et al (1985). This study indicated that students who participated in part - time real jobs during the high school were more likely to find jobs after graduation, whereas students who participated in work experience programs in high school were not more likely to find jobs than those who did not. This also revealed that part - time real jobs during high school or summer jobs was related to higher wages after high school, while participation in work experience programs actually related to lower wages after graduation. This may a good message to educators of students with MR to integrate high school students in the community by providing real jobs or part time jobs during high school in order to prepare them for the community leaving.

Many studies (Edgar, 1987; Frank et al,1990; Hasazi et al,1989; Horrocks,1991) revealed the inability of service agencies to find jobs for individuals with MR, and claimed that family- friend networks made successful efforts to help individuals with MR find jobs. 83% of individuals with MR in these studies found jobs through family- friend networks, while the rest were found jobs with the assistance of related service agencies. Hasazi (1985) to explain this problem cited two reasons; Students might not know have to gain access to these agencies, or they were able to call on these agencies but had not found jobs. However, Hasazi (1985) indicated that the importance of family- friend networks should included in the high school

curriculum by teaching job seekers how to use and benefit from the family- friend network.

Affleck et al, (1990) suggested that the school curriculum must include teaching some skills such as goal setting, planning, independent learning, self-evaluation, and adjustment to adult life. In this study there was no significant relation between high school experience and current employment status. The authors stated that the types of specific training obtained might not have related to the individuals current employment.

Also, Hasazi et, al. (1985) indicated that school curricula are unrelated to employment for students with mental retardation, and strongly suggested that the school system needs to improve educational technology to reduce the differences in employment rate between the students with and without disabilities.

Several differences were noted relative to gender in some studies. (Frank et al, 1990; Haring et al, 1990; Hasazi et al, 1985; Hasazi et al, 1989; Scuccimarra & Speece, 1990; Sitlington et al, 1992) revealed in their studies that males with MR were more likely to be employed and to earn more money than females. In addition to the fact that males received higher wages than females, females were employed in less desirable jobs and more often employed part time (Sitlington et al, 1992). This raised questions about the expectations and the vocational experience that young woman with disabilities received.

Edgar (1987) devised set of questions to investigate whether the existing education programs prevent females from locating jobs, whether employers hire disabled young women, and whether families of females with disabilities discourage them from seeking jobs.

Residential status

Living independently may relate to personal income, which means people with minimum wage or less could face difficulty in being independent. Therefore, the results of the

studies of individuals with MR were not surprising. All ten studies which include residential status indicated that most individuals with MR were living with their parents or relatives. This lack of independence indicates that schools need to place more emphasis on living arrangements as a major component of transition planning (Sitlington et al, 1992).

To briefly sum up the findings of this review, most of the studies revealed a high percentage of employment among individuals with MR. The family-friend network was an important source of finding jobs for individuals with MR, and needs to be considered in high school curricula. Most of individuals with MR. were living with parents or relatives, and therefore had not met the goal of being independent (Sitlington et al, 1992).

The limitations of this paper must be addressed. Most of the studies did not contain a control group. Therefore, comparison with the general population was not addressed. Several of the sample numbers in studies were small, making generalization about students difficult.

Implications for research need to be noted. The importance of high school job experience needs more investigation and needs to be included in high school programs. Further research to determine the reasons for the low employment rate of females with MR. is necessary. The nonexistence of related service agencies for helping individuals with MR. find jobs needs to be explored (Neel et al, 1992). Finally, Future follow-up studies are needed to evaluate service programs, and determine the size and opportunities of service needs for student with disabilities.

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