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Multi-stakeholder Perspectives on Barriers to Finding a Job for Individuals with an Intellectual Disability: Applying Actor-Observer Theory

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Abstract

This research examined the perceived barriers to finding a job for individuals with an intellectual disability from the perspectives of three key stakeholders on an “actor-observer” (A-O) continuum: potential employees with an intellectual disability (actors), potential employers (observers) and employment specialists (in-between), who specialise in finding jobs for individuals with an intellectual disability. These participants made attributions for successful and unsuccessful job applications, exploring the possibility that dispositional attributions (e.g. lack of skills) by observers will be the predominant barrier to workplace inclusion.

Using Flanagan’s critical incident technique, successful employment and unsuccessful unemployment stories were collected from employees with an intellectual disability (n=30), employers (n=13) and employment specialists (n=22). When employees with an intellectual disability were unsuccessful in finding a job, these employees (actors) attributed situational factors such as negative attributions by the employer. Whilst employers (observers) tended more to blame dispositional factors, such as a lack of skills from employees with intellectual disabilities as the reason they did not hire. Employment specialists made both dispositional and situational but predominantly situational attributions. For successful employment, all three groups attributed support from the employment specialists, employers being flexible in the hiring process and employees with an intellectual disability being capable to do the job as the most important factors. As well as supporting A-O theory, these findings highlight the need for employees to be trained in job skills prior to job hunting and especially for employers to be trained in perspective taking, in order to remove the need for specialist support agencies.
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Finally I would like to dedicate this thesis to my Gran who taught me to tackle life with compassion and determination. This one’s for you, Gran.
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