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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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