Supported Employment Outcomes Across a Decade: Is there Evidence of Improvement in the Quality of Implementation?

Article Summary

Mank, Cioffi, & Yovanoff (2003) examine features of natural supports and their relationship to outcomes. The purpose of the Mank et al. investigation "was to look for evidence that the outcomes of supported employment may be better in more recent years of performance as compared to supported employment outcomes during early years of implementation. More specifically, our aim was to compare the outcomes of supported employment in the early 1990's with the outcomes in the later 1990's." Mank et al. (2003) collected data from supported employment programs considered to be "developing or using "natural supports" to improve the quality, stability, and integration of community employment for people with disabilities."

Thirteen vocational programs in eight states (Oregon, California, Colorado, Missouri, New York, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Virginia) contributed data that included demographic, disability, and employment information. The sample was specifically chosen because Mank et al. wished to examine "outcomes for individuals and organizations believed to be implementing best practices and producing high quality outcomes." Mank et al. found that overall, the data showed little or no increase in wages or hours outcomes for individuals in jobs acquired in the late 1990s compared to earlier in the 1990's. However, there were improvements in the typical features of job acquisition, job roles, and job orientation. Jobs that were acquired later in the 1990's were also considered to have more positive work rate and work quality. Also, they were considered to have more positive relationship with their coworkers.

There was little improvement in worksite integration. Results also indicated that individuals hired in later years received more direct and indirect support. Mank et al. conclude, "Supported employment now benefits tens of thousands of people world wide. Future improvements in the career outcomes for people with significant disabilities will not simply be a matter of what practitioners do in the next 10 years; it may be more of a matter of what we are able to do with the policy, funding, and systematic issues that can be improved to support the work of people in local communities."