EXPLORING BIASES:
How Our Beliefs about Poverty and Disability Shape Our Practice

APSE Conference, June 21, 2016

Derek Nord, Ph.D.
Kelly Nye-Lengerman, Ph.D.
Jolene Thibedeau Boyd, M.S., CESP
Today’s Objectives

- Learn about the disability, poverty, and employment connection: Using data to frame the issue
- Explore the effects of poverty and disability
- Recognize the role the disability service system plays in perpetuating oppression and economic system dependence: Challenging our assumptions
- Become more reflexive in practice to avoid perpetuating counterproductive activities and beliefs: Discussion and application

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Disability, Poverty, and Employment: USING DATA TO FRAME THE ISSUE
What Is Poverty?

- Earnings *below $11,945* (single person)
- Earnings *below $23,288* (family of four)

Poverty threshold depends upon:
- Size of the family
- Age of the householder
- Number of related children under the age of 18

U.S. Census Bureau (2013a, 2013b)
Poverty Rate in the U.S.

- No Disability: 12.4%
- Any Disability: 28.4%
- Cognitive Disability: 34.4%

Disability, Poverty and Employment

- Workers with disabilities are paid $0.64 to every $1.00
- Inequity is greatest for those with advanced degrees
  
  Yin et al. (2014)

- Differences emerge by age 24
- May be linked to disparities later in life

Mann and Wittenburg (2015)
Labor Force Participation Rate: Disability and Poverty

Individuals with a disability, living in poverty, ARE in the labor force.
Employment Rate: Disability and Poverty

Individuals with a disability, living in poverty, ARE working.
THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY AND DISABILITY
Cycles of Poverty

Department for International Development (2000)

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Dimensions of Poverty

- Poor health outcomes
  - Life expectancy
  - Child mortality
  - Chronic disease

- Social and economic isolation
  - Social/emotional development
  - Unemployment

- Education access

- Safe housing

- Malnutrition and hunger
Layers of Inequity

Even when we address the challenges of disability in employment, the issues of poverty remain.
Conversations that Matter:

AWARENESS

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Personal and Professional Beliefs

- What are your beliefs about people who receive benefits and services?
- What have you heard others within disability services say?
- How does our language perpetuate bias?
Systemic Attitudes and Practices

Self

- Should the receipt of benefits or supports decrease an individual's pursuit of self determination?
- Do recipients have to be worthy of supports? Resources?

Others

- Which activities and attitudes have you observed in your practice that reinforce bias?
- What are the systemic barriers that perpetuate the cycle of poverty and dependence?
Systemic Perpetuation of Oppression and Economic Dependence: CHALLENGING OUR ASSUMPTIONS
Effects of Systemic Beliefs

• Subconscious beliefs can influence action
• Biases, stereotypes and professional blind spots must be unpacked
• Hidden bias can create barriers to full employment, perpetuate poverty
What’s Next?

Breaking the cycle of poverty requires:

- Equal and fair earnings
- Early education
- Investment
- Promotion and expectation of employment.
Conversations that Matter:

CREATING MOMENTUM

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Creating Momentum

- What additional tools do you need?
- How can we use benefits to facilitate employment rather than to “protect” beneficiaries?
Avoiding the Perpetuation of Counterproductive Activities and Beliefs:

BECOMING MORE REFLEXIVE
Reflexivity: Reflection in Action

Source: Alasuutari & Andreotti (2015)
Conversations that Matter:

TAKING ACTION
Taking Action

- What can you do across levels?
  - Individual
  - Professional
  - System

- How can we advance this?
Advocating for a New Message

- Supports should work to end poverty
- No silver bullet program or investment
- “Scaffolding” support
- Investments look at the whole person
  - Social, emotional, cognitive
- Focus on value, not cost

Modified from the Heckman Equation by James Heckman (2015)
Employment First Across the Nation: Progress on the Policy Front

Employment First (EF) “...is the vision of making employment the first priority and preferred outcome of people with disabilities” (MN Employment First Coalition, 2007 p. 4). A number of EF policy strategies have been implemented throughout the country in response to the critically low labor force participation and employment rates for people with disabilities. Investigate the various Employment First policy approaches states implemented over the last decade by interacting with this brief. You can also follow embedded links to read the text the formal policy actions developed and passed.

Action by State  (hover over each state for more information)

Employment First continues to spread across the nation and, today, nearly all states and the District of Columbia have some EF activity occurring. These activities are aimed at changing the employment systems many people with disabilities rely on for support.

Systems change comes through a variety of mechanisms, including policy changes and advancements. As the data show, policy is shifting nationally as more state recognize the importance of making employment the preferred outcome for people with disabilities receiving services and supports. These have come by way the formal legislative process as well as through executive orders made by governors instructing their administrations to change and agency specific policy directives.

The data also show that states approach EF policy initiatives differently by targeting different groups. Many states have taken a cross disability focus. The intention of these policy actions are to respond to the needs of the broadest group, all people with disabilities, whereas a number of other actions focus primarily on people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

Having a policy does not guarantee that people with disabilities will obtain employment or the employment systems will perform more effectively. Wider systems change must also occur to include changes to practices and expectations. Policy changes, however, are a critical component to comprehensive change. As EF advocacy efforts continue to advance policy, the states that have led the way can be a useful resource.

http://rtc.umn.edu/prb/214/

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Additional Resources


References


U.S. Census Bureau. (2013a). Table B23024: Poverty status in the past 12 months by disability status by employment status for the population 20-64 years, 2008-1012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.


Contact Information

Derek Nord
Indiana University
nord0364@umn.edu

Kelly Nye-Lengerman
University of Minnesota
knye@umn.edu

Jolene Thibedeau Boyd
Community Involvement Programs
jolenet@cipmn.org

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