

The perspective of persons with disabilities related to employment versus benefits

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Introduction: People with disabilities face numerous employment barriers. Disability benefits systems do not always meet beneficiary's needs for financial stability, nor do they support pursuit of employment as one of the criteria for benefits is "unemployable".

Objective: This study investigates whether an 8-month Employment Mentorship Support Program (EMSP) reduces barriers and increases the potential for employment for people with disabilities. The research question addressed in this paper is: What is the perspective on employment of persons with disabilities prior to participating in the program?

Methods: Pre EMSP intervention interviews with 16 people with physical disabilities were conducted and included questions related to disability benefits, goals for the program, and any concerns they might have. The thematic analysis of this interview data was guided by interpretive description where the researcher used their disciplinary lens and knowledge to understand the phenomenon and to interpret its usefulness.

Results: This presentation provides the results of the thematic analysis. Themes identified are barriers related to poor self-confidence about ability to perform job expectations, insufficient support programs, and disablist attitudes. Additional themes are aspirations around inclusion, contribution, choice of occupation, and feelings of self-worth.

Conclusion: In order for change to occur in the employment sector, it is essential that an attitudinal shift, valuing of occupational talents and appropriate supports are in place. This research will inform future programs about the perspective of and issues faced by people with disabilities considering employment, and provide decision makers with systematic evidence to better shape the disability benefits system.