

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES IN
RURAL REHABILITATION

By

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A Research Paper

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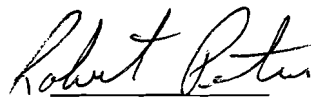
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A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Robert Peters".

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ABSTRACT

Individuals with disabilities face a variety of barriers when seeking to obtain, maintain and secure employment. Numerous factors need to be taken into account in addition to the obvious diagnosed functional limitations. When assisting individuals with disabilities in rural areas, vocational rehabilitation professionals must explore potential factors that could prevent these individuals from successful employment. This paper will focus on only one of those factors.

Transportation to and from an individual's employment is essential to that individual's ability to maintain employment. In these rural communities, competition may be more competitive than in urban areas. Due to this elevated competition, individuals having significant functional limitations have less chance of being selected for hire and hence, working up to their abilities.

Difficulties could be a result of unreliable transportation, long commutes due to poor local job markets, lack of a driver's license, and lack of personal or public transportation for individuals in

rural communities. Numerous articles in professional journals state this is a serious problem affecting a high percentage of individuals. This paper will focus on how large a role transportation plays when persons with disabilities who live in rural areas attempt to return to employment and transportation that could assist these individuals.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Even with current technology trends allowing some individuals to work in remote locations and out of their homes, transportation is still an aspect of employment that affects most individuals seeking to obtain or currently maintaining employment. Aside from the many other factors involved in employment, transportation has become a major barrier to individuals with disabilities. In 2003, the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA 21) re-authorization is referenced by the Research and Training Center for Rural Rehabilitation (RTC) by stating,

The lack of public transportation is one of the most serious, persistent problems reported by people with disabilities who live in rural areas. Compared to the resources allocated to rural areas, those allocated for rural public transportation are significantly inequitable. Statistically, 25% of the U.S. population lives in rural areas, but only 6% of federal transit service dollars are allocated to serve them (p.4).

Besides the functional limitations that must be overcome or accommodated related to a disability, transportation is another issue that must be addressed for persons with disabilities as well. There are a number of transportation problems that individuals face in urban settings, but these problems are multiplied in rural locations.

In rural communities, many times individuals face difficulties due to a number of reasons including lack of solid local economy and job market. This forces employees to travel greater distances to and from work. Employees in outlying communities are forced to focus on areas

within larger cities for employment. This makes the reliability of transportation a much more crucial issue for those within these rural areas. In one Fitzgerald (1992) study, individuals with disabilities in rural areas... “usually have to rely on family for their transportation needs, and most families have ready access to only a single functioning vehicle” (p.3). This will truly limit employment outcomes for some individuals in rural areas.

These people need to maintain their vehicles at a higher standard as well as accounting for more wear and tear on their vehicles. This leads to increased repair and maintenance costs for these individuals compared to those in urban localities. These costs combined with the cost of fuel increases the need for individuals to earn higher wages to make the travel cost-efficient and worthwhile. In an article that referenced survey results from vocational rehabilitation counselors throughout the United States, it was noted by Thomas & Jinter (1993) that out of 98 counselors surveyed regarding their type of caseload, they described caseloads, “...20 as predominantly rural” (p. 130). This indicates that there is a sizable population of individuals being served in rural areas. In addition, there were a high percentage of counselors that indicated they, “Arrange and Pay for Job Related Transportation (59%)”(p.130)... due to its importance in the rehabilitation process. This indicates to some extent the role that transportation plays in the outcome of clients attempts at employment.

One example by Fitzgerald (1992) illustrates an individual who is capable of working, but still experiences some difficulties in relation to transportation. It was noted in this instance that, “He owned an old car, but it was constantly breaking down..” and because his community, “does not have public transportation, travel to the employment centers was difficult and frequently impossible”(p.2). For this individual, transportation appears to be a larger barrier to him/her going

to work than his actual disability issue. From this, it is clear that transportation is a key factor in employment.

The extent of this lack of transportation in some areas can be a true concern. It was noted that by Lustig (1999), “Forty percent of rural residents live in counties with no public transportation (RTC Rural, 1999)” (p.1). If this is the case, then there must be a number of individuals who would utilize public transportation if available.

Going further, it is apparent that individuals in some rural areas are having difficulties obtaining services essential to their success. There are numerous instances where this is apparent. It is clear by Rojewski (1992) that...

Geographic differences between rural rehabilitation clients and required services are a problem not often encountered by people in metropolitan areas. This problem is compounded by a lack of appropriate services (e.g., public transportation). When services are available, they are often provided by itinerant professionals; this results in fragmented and infrequent service (p.2).

This affects the ability of people with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment directly and is only one of the consequences of inadequate transportation. Other factors that have been affected by a lack of transportation are availability of health services and mental health services. Overall, these factors can indirectly lead to individuals with disabilities not being able to continue their employment.

Additionally, other factors that are associated with poor access issues in rural areas are community resources. Supporting information from Rojewski (1992) indicates limited community services as a challenge facing rural rehabilitation.

“Most rural areas offer few community services and may experience situations such as a lack of appropriate education (especially specialized services), poor or nonexistent public transportation systems, few social-welfare agencies, and severe shortages of adequate health care and other resources that are usually available in metropolitan areas” (p.4).

This leads to the thought that individuals who are not receiving the services that they require to return to employment, could possibly obtain successful employment outcomes if they were in these metropolitan areas that Rojewski mentions.

Many times, individuals in rural areas who do not have their own vehicles are forced to seek public transportation or other means to convey themselves to and from employment. In most rural areas, public transit is very limited or not even available. There are programs, some funded through grant programs, which are attempting to coordinate services and assist individuals in rural areas. For instance Smith (1998) notes, “The Federal Transit Administration (FTA), which is a sub-entity of the U.S. Department of Transportation, provides capital and operating assistance to both urban and non-urban transit providers” (p.104). Their success is varied and these programs are not available or working effectively in most areas.

In numerous rural areas, private companies do provide some type of transportation that may be feasible for some individuals. The dilemma with this option is related to the exceptional costs involved, when available. Most of these private companies charge fees that are higher than what would be considered reasonable for many individuals in rural areas, which creates a dilemma. The actual costs can be found by contacting these companies via phone. This is due to sometimes-low average starting wage and the minimum wage at \$5.15/hr. If an individual works an eight-hour shift and earns just above forty dollars a day, it is difficult to justify transit that costs

comparable to the wage earned. When taxes and a high transportation cost are considered, the individual may not find it beneficial to work. In some situations, an individual may actually earn more money for normal spending by working part-time close to home instead of working full time outside of the area.

Licensing

Another issue that plagues individuals in rural areas is lack of a driver's license or lack of ability to secure a driver's license. Many individuals due to disability issues find themselves unable to obtain this. In addition, some individuals with psychological or psychiatric disabilities have had previous criminal records that may limit their ability to obtain a driver's license. Some examples include driving under the influence and overdue fines that prohibit their ability to obtain these licenses. These individuals could suffer from a secondary disability issue related to substance abuse as the cause of such legal difficulties. If some of these same individuals, who are unable to find employment in a rural area, were in an urban area with public transportation accessibility, they may be able to work.

Resource Access

While reliable transportation is a major problem in the vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, there are additional factors that may affect the ability to return to employment. Having the ability to access retail, department and grocery stores is essential for an individual to be successful. In addition, some individuals find other related problems that eliminate opportunities for successful employment. These may relate to social involvement within a community as well as other essentials. Individuals with disabilities in rural areas may need medications, psychological, or psychiatric care as well. As indicated by a case example by Dunlap (1990) with one woman being ...”non-compliant with medication because the family lacked financial resources for travel”... as well as unable to access the psychiatric hospital (p.2). These types of barriers are compounded by the individuals’ abilities to merely maintain their employment. In addition to job related difficulties, they find themselves unable to access services that may assist them in the employment effort.

This population sometimes underutilizes assistive technology as well. Bauer & Piazza (1999) noted “Often times people with disabilities in rural areas face significant barriers when approaching local government and community organization services or funds for access to assistive technology” (p.1). Therefore, individuals with disabilities in rural communities are not accessing services that should be available to them. Even if they are able to acquire these services Bauer & Piazza (1999) continued, “People with disabilities in rural areas have a sparse understanding of what assistive technology is and its applications are relatively unknown in most of America and more so in the rural parts of America” (p.1). These individuals are not always aware of what may be available to assist them and what options may improve their opportunities.

With new developments in rehabilitation technology, individuals with disabilities are able to access a variety of information as well as the ability to access services. Smith (1998) notes “Internet use can now make library information (and much, much more) accessible, can enable people to telecommunicate to work, and can enable people to buy and sell products on-line” (p.152). This leaves many previously untouchable services and options readily available where there were previously no options.

There are rehabilitation professionals that are able to assist these individuals in accessing these services and exposing them to options, but there are still problems that exist. In addition to the transportation issues with employment, some individuals are not able to meet with rehabilitation counselors to discuss these concerns and actively participate in a state rehabilitation program. More options are being considered to remedy this, including utilization of technology in rehabilitation to accommodate long commutes to appointments and inconsistency in services. Further Riemer-Reiss (2000) note “Advantage of distance rehabilitation counseling include increased resources, cost-effectiveness, convenience, and efficiency. Although telecounseling will not replace the conventional mode of service delivery, it could become an essential component to improve the caliber of vocational rehabilitation counseling” (p.11). So there are options that need to be considered for the future, some of which have begun in some areas. There are some companies that actually take technology to new levels, such as teleconferencing assessments and evaluations. ARTSCO’s Rehab Anywhere is one example of such services that can be found on their website. This service can actually utilize technology with other rehabilitation professionals to evaluate or serve individuals that may not otherwise be assisted. Some individuals may not be able, due to cost and disability, to attend evaluations out of town. This is just one example of an option that exists for rehabilitation professionals and individuals with disabilities.

Rural Idaho

The State of Idaho is a good example of a state that has many rural areas and an overall low population. The individuals in this state are spread out over a large area. Idaho occupies 82,747 square miles of land area housing an average of 15.6 people per square mile. In comparison with the United States having 3,537,438 square miles with an average of 79.6 people per square mile (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This means that in overall area, Idaho represents 2.34% of the United States land area with only about .005% of the population. This equates to an average population per square mile throughout the United States, as five times more than the population of Idaho.

Individuals with disabilities in this state may apply for vocational rehabilitation services through the Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation under the State Board of Education. There are twenty-five sub-offices in addition to the eight regional offices located throughout the state. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors serve all areas of Idaho and are available to assist individuals with disabilities to return to employment. There is a wide array of services that counselors use to integrate their clients into independent employment within the community. Despite the services that are provided, there are still some individuals that are not served due to lack of transportation. In fact, this is a reason for closing an individual's file as well as not determining someone eligible for IDVR services.

Perceptions

The perception of this problem is clear. Individuals in rural areas do not feel they have adequate transportation options available. As Denson (2000) notes:

The message is clear. The system which many seniors and people with disabilities depend on for their basic mobility, one faced with both rising demands and costs, was perceived by many to be unreliable, lacking clear direction on key issues of service, and in dire need of reform (p.2).

Individuals with disabilities who lack transportation are not being assisted enough to maximize their abilities. Individuals with limitations have many challenges ahead of them when seeking employment and the current transportation options are not working in all rural areas.

It is clear that there is a problem, but it may not be clear how many people this is affecting as well as the severity of the problem. It is valuable to gain more knowledge regarding the actual problems and limitations related to transportation, methods of transportation that are working in rural areas, as well as how many people this problem truly affects. This information will be valuable in many states and specific information regarding Idaho will be investigated. It is clear from the perspective of rehabilitation professionals in rural areas that this is a primary problem and it is important to consider.

Statement of the Problem

In some cases, people who have disabilities in rural areas are not benefiting from Vocational Rehabilitation programs in their attempts to return to work due to their lack of transportation. The purpose of this study is to gain more specific information about how much transportation problems actually affect individuals with disabilities in rural areas. It is apparent that this is a concern for

many individuals. The question is: how many people and what type of impact do these issues have for individuals with disabilities? For this paper, the information presented will be from individuals in one state, Idaho.

It is apparent that there are transportation issues for some individuals with disabilities. Information in this paper will investigate exactly how much of a concern it is to the residents of rural Idaho with disabilities. It is expected that transportation difficulties account for a significant lack of employment for individuals with disabilities in these low-density population areas.

The research questions for this study are as follows: 1) Determine the significance of transportation as an issue for rural Idahoans with Disabilities. 2) Determine the number of individuals who have worked with the Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation who have had their file closed or determined ineligible for services due to inadequate transportation in rural areas. 3) Determine the specific types of transportation that rural Idahoans with disabilities need to become gainfully employed and to participate in Rehabilitation Services. 4) Determine what options are currently working for individuals with disabilities in these rural areas.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Assistive Technology: For purposes of this paper, this refers to the Americans with Disabilities Act definition regarding auxiliary aids and services including A) qualified interpreters or other effective methods of making aurally delivered materials available to individuals with hearing impairments; B) qualified readers, taped texts, or other effective methods of making visually delivered materials available to individuals with visual impairments; C) acquisition or modification of equipment or devices, and D) other similar services and actions (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, SEC. 3 (1)).

Disability: As determined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, a disability exists if he or she meets at least any one of the following tests: 1. He or she is substantially impaired with respect to a major life activity. 2. He or she has a record of such impairment. 3. He or she is regarded as having an impairment (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, SEC.3 (2)).

Employee: As defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, this is protected under Title I. An employee is employed by an employer. (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, SEC. 101. (4))

Employer: Defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, in general this term refers to, "...a person engaged in an industry affecting commerce who has 15 or more employees for each working day in each of 20 or more calendar weeks in the current or preceding calendar weeks in the current or preceding year, and any agent of such person." (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, SEC. 101. (5))

Employment: For purposes of this paper, this refers to the Rehabilitation Act's definition of employment outcome with an individual, "A) entering or retaining full time or, if appropriate, part-time competitive employment in the integrated labor market; B) satisfying the vocational

outcome of supported employment; or C) satisfying any other vocational outcome the Secretary may determine to be appropriate (including satisfying the vocational outcome of self-employment, telecommuting, or business ownership), in a manner consistent with the Act” (Rehabilitation Act Re-authorization of 1998, SEC. 7 (9)).

Public Transportation: As defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, this refers to transportation by bus, rail or any other conveyance (other than aircraft) that provides the general public with general or special services (including charter service) on a regular and continuing basis. (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, SEC.221. (2))

Qualified individual with a disability: For purposes of this paper, this “...means an individual with a disability who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the employment position that such individual holds or desires” (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, SEC.101 (B)).

Rural: For purposes of this paper, rural refers to “...The U.S. Census defines rural as ‘open country’ or towns with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants” (Rojewski, 1992, p.2).

Chapter II

Literature Review

The Americans with Disabilities Act denotes transportation as a main factor to be addressed with individuals with disabilities. Title II of the ADA (1990) indicates:

Public entities that operate fixed-route systems that purchase or lease new or used vehicles must ensure that the vehicles are readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities. When vehicles are not accessible, the entity must assure that special transportation services are available to individuals with disabilities that are of a comparable level and comparable response time to the services provided to individuals without disabilities, unless the provision of Para transit and other special transportation services imposes an undue financial burden on the public entity. In the case of intercity rail transportation, the service must have one car per train that is accessible. (SEC 223. (a)).

This indicates that transportation accessibility is and should be considered important to individuals with disabilities. The mention of financial burden indicates that in smaller or rural communities, this transportation requirement will most likely not be apparent. To remedy this, states like Idaho have grant funding available for such reasons.

Idaho Department of Transportation

The Idaho Department of Transportation (2005) breaks down costs per district that make funding available through such grants. There are certain requirements for qualifications to include statements of goals, methods of measure, and community involvement.

The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) announces the availability of Section 5311 Rural Bus Transportation funds to be used for transportation services. The funds are available through the Idaho Transportation Department, Division of Public Transportation (herein referred to as the Division), from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) under 49 USC § 5300. The funding level is subject to change based on the final federal allocation. The time limit for expending the grant amount is limited to no more than three (3) years from the date of award for Section 5311 grants as long as the applicant remains compliant with the grant agreement (p.3).

More specific information can be obtained from the actual website. These types of grant funding are essential to the success or opportunities for transportation options in some rural areas.

Examples

There are some rural communities that have deemed public transportation and accessible transportation important, although these communities may experience a financial burden because of it. One example is in McCall, Idaho. Located in Valley County, populated by an average of 2.1 individuals per square mile, McCall residents deemed public transportation appropriate in some areas. McCall Transit is a free service and is being paid for by a Federal Grant due to the acceptance and successful use of a pilot program that went on for six months. There is no long term funding available for this transportation and this allows anyone to travel within the city at no cost.

Numerous articles, books and websites have been cited in this paper. They have addressed the concerns listed, specifically, related to difficulties individuals with disabilities in

rural areas have with the importance and lack of transportation. To sum up this issue, Fitzgerald (1992) indicates “Transportation is one of the most pervasive challenges confronting clients living in rural communities”(p.3). The difficulty with transportation is clear.

Models of Theory

The literature review will discuss three models of theory and their relevance to difficulties that individuals with disabilities have in relation to transportation in rural areas. Theories that will be included are Krumboltz’s Social Learning Theory, Adlerian, and Gestalt. Their relevance will be addressed in the following.

Krumboltz

Krumboltz’s Social Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of behavior and cognition in career choice, focuses on teaching clients career decision-making techniques and has four general factors. They are endowment, environmental conditions and events, learning experiences and task approach skills. The area in relation to transportation in rural areas applies directly to the environmental conditions and events factor.

Specifically, these include factors that are by Sharf (2002), “...generally outside the control of the individual...” and that, “...geography also affects an individual in significant ways” (p.337). In turn, transportation is merely one factor that is addressed. In relation to social factors within this context, positive and negative influences both have affects. Mentioned by Sharf (2002), “For example, technological developments such as improved medicine and changes in transportation (e.g., faster cars and planes) create new jobs”...(p.337)... while the lack of newer or any transportation would decrease jobs that are available to individuals with no transportation. In addition jobs that are, “...limited by geographical considerations, such as

logging or fishing; or may be affected by changing economic conditions” (p.339), will change an individuals’ ability to access or work within those occupations. Therefore, individuals with disabilities who do not have transportation are restricted as well by the types of work that they are capable of obtaining and would enjoy doing.

The fact that this eliminates options for individuals with disabilities to employment options goes further in explaining why individuals with disabilities in rural areas without transportation may not have long retention of that employment. Fitzgerald (1992) notes This can be in part due to, “rural communities generally provide limited wage-labor employment opportunities”(p.4). If an individual does not enjoy or want to do his/her particular job, retention must not be as high. This is crucial from a counseling standpoint because it eliminates options and puts employment in terms of what is available instead of what is really sought after. Going further Corey (2001) notes, “We need to recognize that social, environmental, cultural, and biological realities limit our freedom of choice”(p.4). This puts the reality of the local job market more significant than the individual’s choice, when transportation and disabilities are concerned.

There are many difficulties that counselors may face when working with individuals with disabilities in rural areas. Just some of them are mentioned in one study by Fitzgerald (1992):

Participants noted that the isolation of rural communities and the distances between residential areas present problems for the counselor, such as excessive travel time and poor communications. These are the kinds of obstacles that can be particularly challenging to effective service delivery (p.4).

This has significant implications for individuals in these rural areas. Poor communication previously mentioned can have negative impacts on the rehabilitation process as well. There are other issues that impede the process as well.

Counselors may also be limited by other circumstances including priorities in the client's life. If a client is more concerned about whether or not he will be evicted or have gasoline money to get to and from work, he/she may not be concerned as much as he/she would if those factors were not evident. He/she may want to focus on other issues, such as interests and aptitudes and personality characteristics. Corey (2001) goes further, "There are likely to be some difficulties in applying a psychoanalytical approach with low-income clients" (p.103). It only makes sense that if an individual has other basic needs that are not met, the secondary needs will not be considered. This also relates to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

If a person's basic needs are not resolved, the other concerns will not seem as important. If an individual cannot take care of his/her physiological needs, other needs such as need for belongingness or love will not rise to the level of importance to gain awareness and hence, be taken care of, or placed at a priority. In a rural area, if an individual does not have the means to obtain better employment because of lack of transportation, she/he will insure that these needs are accounted for first. In other words, she/he will find employment that will attempt to cover those essential needs prior to finding work that she/he may find rewarding or want to maintain. This may also include employment outside of she/he known functional limitations or abilities. These needs will precede all others.

Adlerian

Adlerian therapy by Corey (2001), "...stresses taking responsibility, creating one's own destiny, and finding meaning and goals to give life direction"... (p.8). This supports the notion that individuals are restricted by environmental factors and are not able to avoid or ignore them. Further Corey (2001), Adlerians recognize that biological and environmental conditions limit our capacity to choose and create" (p.109). Adlerians also emphasize that an individual's perception is more crucial than the actual truth.

In addition, Adlerians focus on the fact that a person's true success centers on he/she competency to be accepted within the community. In that, an individual who is not working is probably not accepted into the community. This may be due to lack of ability to get to and from work. This can affect an individual's outlook and perception of his/her role in society. Boyle (1978) indicated unfortunately in rural areas public transportation is often, "...inadequate and expensive.", as well as, "too expensive for rural, sparsely populated areas"(p.38). This eliminates opportunities for many individuals, who might otherwise flourish.

Gestalt

Gestalt therapy Corey (2001) notes, "An experiential therapy stressing awareness and integration, it grew as a reaction against analytic therapy. It integrates the functioning of body and mind" (p.8). This is particularly important to individuals in rural settings where the environment related to the employment market is an integral factor in determining an appropriate vocational goal. This is crucial because, "...individuals must be understood in the context of their ongoing relationship in the environment" (p.195). In other terms this may be more in depth in the individual's feelings and emotions, but it does play an integral role in

his/her actual physical environment as well as his/her feelings surrounding possibly a helpless attitude when transportation is not available or feasible to him/her.

In addition by Parker (2002), if an individual can not fully understand the deeper meaning of the, "...figure-ground relationships" (p.240), this will affect his/her vocational choices. Going further, "The figure constitutes the immediate need and the activities associated with meeting these needs; the ground refers to the physical and psychological surrounds" (p.240). Individuals who do not have any transportation and are seeking employment in rural area will have his/her perception of this figure-ground relationship changed accordingly. This can further hamper the rehabilitation process for that particular individual.

In summary, the contrasted ideas presented all have in common one thing. This is that individuals are negatively affected by not only his/her feelings and inner emotions related to returning to employment, but also that of his/her actual physical surroundings in which he/she inhabits. This is particularly true for those individuals with disabilities in rural areas with ineffectual or no transportation options. Other factors play a role in the rehabilitation of individuals more so than for others who are not in rural areas having difficulty with transportation.

Factors include the individual's perception of himself or herself and to what purpose he/she fits into his/her own reality as well as his/her understanding of such. If an individual does not have the self-awareness of the effect that the environment has, this can also negatively affect his/her progress toward an appropriate vocational goal. Individuals who feel hopeless or helpless due to these concerns can have rehabilitation affected in more of a substantial way than merely the transportation barrier presents in itself.

In some rural areas, the depressed economy and poor employment markets make employment options limited by nature. When other governing factors add to the mix to include disability issues and related functional limitations, this narrows the field even further. Then eliminate more options by placing barriers like lack of transportation to an individual in these locales. For many individuals, this may seem like an insurmountable venture to obtain appropriate employment as well as employment within his/her established functional limitations. These concerns extend further to the effect this has in relation to the counselor and how this professional deals with individuals facing such challenges.

Specific information on the reality of how much lack of transportation affects these individuals may be utilized in the future to further research, fund grants, or other assistance to allow these individuals more options. Not unlike other federal and state programs, information showing cost benefit may prove effective for governmental entities as well as the individuals. If funding was set up to assist in this effort, possible revenue from taxpayer dollars and increased spending in the community by these individuals may prove a worthwhile venture.

Chapter III

Transportation in rural areas for some individuals with disabilities can affect his/her ability to return to or become employed. Finding out specific information in regard to how much this affects individuals is important. Individuals with disabilities face many factors in their attempts to obtain and maintain meaningful and long-term employment.

Methodology

Transportation is a major factor in the ability of some individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment. It is important and valuable to find out what percentage of individuals are affected and why it is a factor to them. Finding out specific information about whom this issue may be affecting could create awareness and assist in improving current situations.

Subjects

The objective of this study is to identify what impact lack of transportation has for individuals with disabilities in a rural setting. Those individuals being surveyed are current or past Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation clients that are participating in an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) to get back into employment. The sizes of communities in which surveyed individuals live vary. These individuals are selected from counties in Idaho that have fewer than 10 people per square mile on the average.

There are other individuals that may be able to participate, but due to confidentiality this information was not pursued. Some individuals with disabilities may not be seeking employment currently and this may affect the results of the survey. This is a strictly voluntary survey and confidentiality will be explained. The individuals being surveyed are anticipated to be actively seeking employment or seeking training to obtain a vocational outcome in the future. The following information is included in the survey. This is nominal data that will be analyzed to find

out any correlations that may exist. In general, this information will be gathered on participant perceptions in the community. In addition, these will be correlated to specific age ranges, employment and means of transportation. This information will be useful in determining if further investigation is necessary on potential problems in rural areas. This could be used to improve current situations as well as improve public awareness.

Instrumentation

The survey, developed by this researcher, was completed to address specific information used to obtain results and information needed. The information is as follows in paragraphs below.

Age may be important to determine if certain individuals are being affected more than others. This information may not be a factor, but it should be recorded to determine if any differences exist. Information about current mode of transportation or lack of transportation is essential to this study. Specific information is helpful for this study to determine specific needs or areas of transportation that may already be working. Employment status is crucial to determining the real issues related to whether transportation prevents employment. Whether an individual is an SSI/SSDI recipient may determine the severity of disability and may be useful for cost effective alternatives for governmental entities. The actual county of residence in Idaho is necessary to verify that the participants do indeed live in a rural county. Whether or not the individual has a driver's license could narrow the focus of the problem further.

This information will assist in determining if valid options for transportation in rural areas should be considered. This information will assist in determining if other options would be more cost

effective. The information was gathered with the intent of improving knowledge about the difficulties that some individuals face in rural areas.

Survey follows:

This survey is voluntary. Please check one for each answer.

1. What age group do you fit into? Please check one.

- 18-25 years old
- 26-35 years old
- 36-45 years old
- 45-65 years old
- 65 years old or older

2. What county do you live in? _____.

3. Are you currently an SSI or SSDI recipient? Y/N

4. Have you been diagnosed with some type of disability? Y/N

5. Do you think your disability affects your ability to work or find work? Y/N

6. Do you have any of the following transportation problems in looking for work or getting to work? Please circle one.

- No personal vehicle
- No reliable vehicle
- No bus system/rail/Ride Share
- Fuel costs
- Other _____

7. Do you have a current Driver's license? Y/N If not, are you able to obtain one? Y/N

7A. Is there a legal reason you can not obtain a license? Y/N

8. What types of transportation options do you have? Circle all that apply.

- Personal vehicle-car/truck
- Public bus system/Rail
- Ride share
- Friend/family
- Other _____

9. Is there some type of public transportation available in your area? Please circle all that apply.

Bus
Rail car
Ride Share
Other _____

10. Are you currently working now? Y/N If yes, how many hours do you work per week?
_____/week

11. Do you have your own transportation to work? If yes, what type? Please circle one.

Personal vehicle
Public Transportation
Someone else drives you to work
Bicycle
Other-please describe _____

12. If you currently do not have transportation to work, do you think that you would be able to work if you did have transportation available? Y/N

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

The information gathered will represent information obtained from this population only and will have limitations identified. These individuals may be SSI or SSDI recipients intending to achieve an employment outcome. They may also be individuals who have disabilities who do not qualify for SSA assistance.

Thirteen counselors were asked to participate in this survey, due to their rural caseloads, and eleven responded that they would do so. They will be asking their clients to complete these confidential surveys if they so chose. These counselors were asked to participate due the rural nature of their caseloads. These counselors represent various different rural areas through the entire state of Idaho. The feedback received was very positive from these individuals in that they felt their client might be willing to participate.

Procedures

The counselors selected as having rural caseloads were contacted to move forward and seek out clients who would be willing to complete the survey previously discussed. Each individual was given the website address to contact and complete the survey. At the time of accessing the website, the individuals who completed the survey viewed a Human Subjects Consent form and were allowed to voluntarily participate or refuse to participate without coercion. Information was obtained and processed.

Limitations

Limitations for this research will be considered for an accurate representation of information to be utilized in the future. These limitations include the reality of the following: individuals surveyed are current Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation clients who are actively seeking employment or individuals who have worked with IDVR in the past. Individuals surveyed may currently be SSI recipients, SSDI recipients and those receiving other public aid as well as individuals who do not receive any public assistance. This survey will be limited from information about individuals who have not had contact with the Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation at all. The individuals surveyed are those that have made an attempt to apply for services, or at least showed interest in services from IDVR.

The rural nature of Idaho may affect the actual results of the survey and be a limitation. This is not a nation wide survey, but information regarding only one relatively rural state's information. Some limitations may exist with the actual counselor and his/her role in rural communities. Counselors from IDVR who are more involved in the community may have more contacts and

potential contacts for this survey than other counselors that do not. In addition, some counselors may not be an active participant in this study. Some counselors may not cooperate in distributing this type of survey due to their own personal schedules or other reasons. While this is a limitation, it is the most accurate means that was found for this study.

Clarification of details in the actual survey tool may be able to be improved upon, as details and questions are raised in the return of the completed surveys. Issues or questions related to specific employment hours worked and pay may arise as well.

Another limitation should be noted in that there was no specific timeline set up to return the surveys. Whether or not this may have an effect, remains to be seen.

Chapter IV

Results and Discussion

Results

Participation was noted in this study and only 30.5% of individuals asked to participate, completed and returned surveys in the time provided. There were a total of 95 surveys sent out and 29 were returned completed.

Ages for individuals varied in this study and all age groups were represented. The highest amount of participation was from those individuals' ages 46 to 65 years old at 35.7%(n=10). Ages 36 through 45 included 28.6% (n=8) individuals. Lastly, individuals grouped in ages 26 through 35 constituted 17.9%(n=5). Those grouped 18 through 25 constituted 17.9% n=5 each for this study.

It was determined that all individuals who returned surveys completed were living in rural areas. This was questioned to insure that accurate information was obtained. The total was 100% (n=29).

There were only 32.1%(n=9) of individuals surveyed who currently receive SSA benefits of some kind.

Of those individuals surveyed, only a small percentage of 3.6%(n=1) did not identify as having a disability at all. This individual did not identify as having a disability even though he/she had already identified he/she as such previously.

There were 75%(n=21) of individuals surveyed that indicated that their disability affects their ability to work in some manner.

When questioned about transportation issues, individuals surveyed indicated that the highest difficulty in transportation was 53.6%(n=15) having high fuel costs. There were 25%(n=7) of individuals felt that there were other reasons than listed. Lack of a reliable vehicle constituted 10.7%(n=3) of individuals. In addition, 7.1%(n=2) of people indicated no vehicle as a main concern and 3.6%(n=1) indicated that lack of a bus was the biggest issue they faced.

Only 89.3%(n=25) of individuals surveyed had a driver's license, indicating that 10.7%(n=3) did not have a legal driver's license. In addition, 7.1%(n=2) of individuals had legal reasons for why they are not able to have a license.

Individuals were asked about their options in regard to transportation. The results indicated that most people, 82.1%(n=23) of individuals surveyed feel that their personal vehicle is the only option available. No one indicated that public transportation or rideshare was an option. In addition, 10.7%(n=3) of people indicated other means as an option and 7.1%(n=2) indicated a family member or friend is their main option.

Individuals were then asked about what public transportation options they had available in their area, opposed to what might work for them. A majority of people at 71.4%(n=20) indicated that there is no public transportation they are aware of. Of those surveyed, 17.9%(n=5) indicated other options, 7.1%(n=2) of people indicated the bus being available and 3.6%(n=1) indicated rideshare as an option. No one indicated any type of railcar or related transportation as available.

Of those individuals surveyed, 64.3% indicated that they worked at least part time in some capacity. A majority of these individuals were not pleased with this income or amount of hours

and were seeking more work. There were 35.7%(n=10) who indicated that they did not work in any capacity.

Transportation used for those who did work includes other information. Most individuals, 75%(n=21) indicated that they use a personal vehicle for their main transportation going to and from work. Individuals used bicycles only 3.6%(n=1). No one surveyed used public transportation or someone else to get to work. There were 10.7%(n=3) who had other means of getting to and from work and 10.7%(n=3) did not specify.

Of all individuals surveyed, when asked if they felt that they would be able to work if they had some form of effective transportation, 28.6%(n=8) indicated yes. There were 71.4%(n=20) that this did not apply to or was not answered.

Evidence

The most powerful statement that supports this study is in the last question asked. This is in regard to individuals who felt they could work if they only had transportation. This was in the amount of 28.6%(n=8). It was anticipated that this number would actually be much higher, but this still shows a need and that these individuals have the perception that they are being held back from work due to this reason.

The other information that was apparent was that in regard to individuals' perceptions. It was apparent that individuals surveyed in these areas felt that having their own vehicle is the only option that they really have. This is apparent in the percentage of individuals who use their own

vehicle, 75%(n=21), and also in those individuals who indicated that there is no public transportation available at 71.4%(n=20). In addition, when looking at options for transportation, 82.1%(n=23) of individuals identified a personal vehicle as the only realistic option to get to and from work.

All individuals surveyed indicated that they experienced some transportation issues, even if they were working. This was apparent in having fuel costs, other, no reliable vehicle, no vehicle and no bus/public transportation were shown as having affects on their ability to work.

There were 32.1%(n=9) of individuals who indicated that they currently receive SSA benefits of some kind. This shows the affect of severity of disability in rural areas as well.

Unanticipated Findings

Unanticipated findings for this survey include that there were individuals who did feel that lack of transportation affected their ability to work. This constituted 28.6%(n=8), but it was expected that this statistic would be much higher. One reason for this could be in the definition or presentation of employment in this survey. The survey asked about whether the individual worked, but did not note whether this was up to the person's abilities and whether it met the individual's financial needs as well as others. For those individuals who worked minimal hours or who received some other form of transportation other than a personal vehicle, these other forms may meet the needs. In some circumstances where the individual would work in an occupation up to their potential, these other forms of transportation may or may not work.

Unanticipated findings for this survey included lack of clarity in the actual survey document/tool. In entering data, the researcher noted that there seemed to be some confusion

with some of the questions. Clarification of the survey tool would be more helpful in obtaining clear and concise results.

Another finding was that few completed surveys were actually returned. Due to the nature of how the surveys were being presented and that they were being handed out by actual rehabilitation professionals, it was not anticipated that so few would actually be returned, at only 30.5%. If another means of sending out the surveys were being utilized, this may have been more acceptable. Whether this is due to lack of knowledge about community resources or actually a lack of transportation options is not clear.

It was not anticipated that some individuals who completed this survey did not identify themselves as having an actual disability. Given the nature of this study and noting that vocational rehabilitation counselors identified these individuals as having a disability, some individuals still did not identify as having a disability issue.

Summary of Findings

Due to the extremely low response rate and relatively low overall returns, it does not appear that any real conclusions can be drawn to clarify how rural transportation issues affect individuals with disabilities. It is clear that some individuals with disabilities in rural areas are affected by their lack of transportation options or the perception of such, but no assumptions can be made about general populations from this study. The individuals who returned completed surveys did span an array of rural areas in the State of Idaho. Should a follow up study be conducted, a more substantial study base is necessary in order to draw any true conclusions to apply to the state as a whole, much less rural areas in other states.

Summary and Conclusions

Statement of the Problem

The study had a goal of finding out more specific information on how individuals in rural areas are affected by difficulty with some type of transportation or lack of transportation. The goal was to find out if further information should be obtained to investigate on a higher level.

Methods and Procedures

Vocational rehabilitation counselors from the State of Idaho who work in rural areas sent out a survey to obtain this information. These counselors identified the individuals as having a disability of some type and living in a rural area. Surveys included a self addressed stamped envelope and individuals were asked to complete the survey and mail back to the researcher. Surveys were obtained and information was gathered and processed.

Findings and Conclusions

Based on the foregoing study, there is not enough evidence to support or deny any information about individuals with disabilities in rural areas related to transportation. Only 29 surveys were returned and this does not constitute enough of a sample to justify any conclusions. Possibly web based surveys may have had a higher return rate than a traditional mail return as such in this study. It is recommended that this be used in the future, should additional research be attempted.

The study conducted did not constitute a high enough number of respondents to the survey to draw any true conclusions. No information from this survey can be generalized toward the general population of the state of Idaho nor any other state or region. The number of surveys successfully returned did not validate any information that was originally sought out. While there

is not enough information to determine statistically valid, there are some correlations noted in the results of the survey and previous literature.

Transportation costs were noted as the highest difficulty in the survey (n=15). Smith (1998) notes an example in Alaska where, "The cost of transportation also affects the successful application..." in terms of technology and general transportation (p. 337). Going further Smith (1998), it was noted that a personal vehicle is perceived as many individuals only option (n=23) in the survey. To support this, it was noted that, "Indeed, public transportation is not always an option for rural America" (p.99).

Awareness of options for transportation is also an issue. It was found in the survey that many people are not aware of any public transportation options (n=20). To support this, it was noted by Smith (1998), "...rural areas typically have inadequate housing, severe shortages of health personnel, absence of necessary health care facilities, poor or non-existent public transportation systems..." (p.26). This indicates that individuals' lack of awareness may actually be due to lack of public transportation as an actual option.

Recommendations

It is recommended that any further study conducted related to this topic be more specific in its survey base. It is also recommended that a larger sample pool of individuals to be surveyed be utilized. Obtaining feedback from counselors or others to possibly identify individuals in the community on a larger scale is necessary in order to generalize any conclusions to a larger population.

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