

The Elephant in the Room: Poverty, Disability, and Employment

At-a-Glance: Research has shown that adults with even severe disabilities are often able to have successful careers and be self-sufficient. But, many of these people are un- or under-employed and living in poverty. This study explains some of the reasons for this and offers solutions for change.

Key Findings

- Poverty and disability are often interrelated and cyclical. Poor living conditions and lack of insurance can cause disabilities. Medical and adaptive equipment expenses related to disability can cause poverty. Stressors of poverty survival often compound the obstacles presented by the disability itself.
- The federal definition of poverty is outdated and does not include expenses such as child care, health insurance, transportation, and disability treatment, to name a few.
- Students with disabilities in high-poverty schools spend less time getting job training, in general education classes, and receiving community-based instruction than students in other schools. This puts them at a disadvantage.
- Minorities are especially at risk due to the intersection of racial bias, disability, and poverty. These children have fewer opportunities to engage with their communities, gain job skills, and can lead to unemployment, underemployment, dropping out, substance abuse, and incarceration.

Putting It into Practice

Practitioners who work closely with people with disabilities living in poverty can use their knowledge and experience to create change. They can both advocate for consumers and work toward public policy changes that empower people with disabilities who want to work.

Raise Public Awareness

Talk about the relationship between poverty and disability, and how they feed into one another. Create awareness of the complex inter-relationship between the two.

Share Information with Other Professionals

Cross-disciplinary sharing between poverty and disability studies would strengthen the advocacy power of both, and would help provide a research basis for changes to policy and legislation.

Empower and Hold Schools Accountable

Give schools the the means to provide job training - and even job placement - before graduation for students with disabilities. Hold schools accountable for post-school outcomes of students with disabilities.

More about this Research

The authors ask readers to be aware that a universal definition of severe disabilities does not currently exist, and that similar terminology across studies may not indicate similar populations. In this study, the authors sought to clarify definitions of the populations addressed across studies. They caution against having a restricted view of the interconnections between disability and poverty, arguing that there are many contemporary issues relevant to both populations.

Learn More

Access this research and many more by visiting the [Project E3 Research Database](#)
Hughes, C., & Avoke, S. K. (2010). The elephant in the room: Poverty, disability, and employment. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 35(1-2), 5-14.

Questions? Feedback?

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