

**Career Development of Young Adults with Disabilities:
Role of Psychological Well-Being
And
Issues and Recommendations**

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>> DAVID STRAUSER: My name is David Strauser. I'm from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. Today I want to talk briefly about career development in young adults with disabilities and the role that psychological well-being plays related to the career development process.

So to do this I would like to first of all give you an idea of what I want to cover and start by first introducing the Illinois Work and Well-Being Model as a model that can help us understand career development and employment of people with disabilities. From there I'm going to talk about psychological well-being as it relates to career development and how psychological well-being relates to the overall career development process specifically as it relates to the three dimensions of career development that will be introduced in the model. And then I'll provide some basic recommendations for strengthening psychological well-being or the importance of addressing psychological well-being in the career development process.

So the Illinois Work and Well-Being Model is a model that has been developed at the University of Illinois to look at the career development of individuals with disabilities and specifically incorporating the ICF framework and using the fundamentals of the ICF and tying it into work as an outcome and specifically the career development process.

The framework has been starting to be commonly used in the area of cancer research related to the career development of young adult cancer survivors and some of the data that I'm going to be providing today will be based on that population.

One of the key parts of the ICF is functioning and how functioning relates to participation. The Illinois Work and Well-Being Model continue that and places an emphasis on how personal and environmental factors can impact functioning and how functioning impacts their career development process.

Core to the Illinois Work and Well-Being Model is the person environment interaction, people interacting with their environments which would imply that we have contextual factors that impact the career development process. We'll see in the Illinois model the domain of contextual which consists of both personal, environmental and functioning.

We also have the career domain which consists of three major domains or areas related to career development. People becoming aware of what they want to do and how they relate to the world of work, the acquisition process as it relates to acquiring necessary education or employment, and then the third part is maintaining connection or connectedness with work and employment both in school as well for some individuals.

Ultimately our end goal is to increase participation in four major areas, which are home, community, social and work. One area of functioning that has received some recent attention as a powerful and potent factor related to overall functioning is well-being specifically psychological well-being. Research has consistently shown that individuals who report higher levels of psychological well-being have better functioning in overall participation in major life areas.

Unfortunately there's been limited research related to well-being with young adults and adults with disabilities. I'm going to present to you today some limited research that we have done at the University of Illinois on looking at psychological well-being and career development. Specifically one thing that will be important to highlight as we move forward is that we find out that psychological well-being interacts with functioning and has a differential effect. I'll explain a little bit what a differential effect it on the career development process.

Moving on one thing we need to talk about is how do we conceptualize psychological well-being. One framework that has received attention and has been shown to be strong is the PERMA Model. PERMA is an acronym for five different components that relate to overall well-being. The first component is positive emotion; increasing levels of positive emotion related to better well-being.

Engagement - people who are more engaged in the activities that they participate in and overall society and activities in general. Positive relationships with others - so we have positive emotions in one area. We also have positive relationships with others as being critical. Meaningfulness -

individual's find meaning in what they do and meaning in their life and that's related to well-being. The final piece is a sense of achievement - individuals who have a sense of achievement for their life and that they are achieving goals and objectives that are important to them.

With this again we look at the Illinois Work and Well-Being Model as a framework for us to bring this all together. As you are looking at the screen here on your far left will be the contextual domain which will consist of the personal, environmental and limitations or functioning. In the middle we have the career domain which consists of the three factors related to career that I mentioned, both awareness, acquisition and maintenance. And then on the final domain there is our participation domain which consists of our four outcomes.

Now real quickly moving on a key part of this framework as with the ICF is this is an interactive framework and that domains and factors impact each other both within the domains and across the domains. That's why as you look at this chart in this figure here you will see bidirectional arrows indicating that we impact one area, we're going to have a reciprocal impact in other areas of the framework as well. So this is a slide that will be important for us to understand kind of to bring everything together.

One thing that moving forward I'll talk to you about research related to this that we're finding on psychological well-being and employment in career development with young adults specifically this data that I'm presenting is on young adult cancer survivors. What I want to highlight to you through these next three slides is the differential affect that well-being and functioning have on the career development domains.

What we're finding very importantly and now we're starting to replicate this multiple times is that there are different aspects of functioning have different impacts on the career development process. We'll see here going through the next three slides that based on whether we're talking about awareness, acquisition or maintenance we will see different aspects of psychological well-being and different aspects of functioning impact those respective factors.

So the slide that we're looking at right now is looking at what is the relationship between well-being and job awareness, the first part of the career development process. What we find initially is that the psychological well-being as

operationalized by the PERMA framework has a significant relationship with job awareness. People who have higher levels of psychological well-being are also reporting higher levels of job awareness which is consistent with prior research.

In addition, we then added functioning, people's perceived physical functioning and people's perception of their mental health functioning. So that question is how well do these individuals perceive that they're able to manage their physical conditions or their physical limitations and how well they're able to manage their mental health aspects or functioning. What we find when we add that to the model is that the impact of psychological well-being is mediated through mental health functioning to job awareness. What that means is psychological well-being increases people's perception of their ability to function and manage their mental health situation which then relates to job awareness.

What we see here on the top part of the diagram is that physical health functioning is not implicated. What this would suggest is that people's perception of their physical health functioning does not impact the job awareness component to the degree that mental health functioning does. So this is a finding that we have now consistently shown multiple times that when you talk about helping people become aware of their jobs, what they want to do, how they relate to the world of work that it's really focusing on their mental health aspects is a critical component.

Now moving on to job acquisition we see a little bit different story. We see that PERMA or psychological well-being is directly related to job acquisition like it was in the first model but what we see here is both physical and mental health functioning being related to job acquisition. What this suggests is that psychological well-being is impacting job acquisition through both physical and mental health functioning. As a result what this suggests to us is that if we want to increase people's job acquisition or the process of finding a job we have to address both well-being but also their physical and mental health functioning, strengthening their abilities to manage their physical and mental health will have implications for job acquisition.

Finally moving on to the last phase of the career development is job maintenance. What we see here is that PERMA is related to job maintenance but then also PERMA is related to job maintenance through physical health functioning. Now an

important piece here is that physical health functioning impacts job maintenance and PERMA continues to impact job maintenance independent of physical functioning. So what this means in practical terms is when we talk about people maintaining a job we need to talk about helping them increase their physical functioning but we also need to address the PERMA aspect or their psychological well-being as psychological well-being also has a direct and indirect effect on job maintenance.

So in summary, what we found is that there is a differential effect on well-being and functioning on the career development process, specifically addressing the emotional factors, PERMA and mental health functioning directly is related to job awareness. If we want to talk about helping people acquire a job we need to address both well-being but also their physical and mental health functioning. If we want to address job maintenance we need to address PERMA or well-being as well as the physical functioning. Mental health functioning does not have as much of an implication for job maintenance as it does for example job awareness.

So this is what I refer to as the differential affect. Based on the career development domain or factor that we're working with, we may want to address specific things or specific aspects of the individual to maximize outcomes. So overall the implications of this study would suggest several things. One, psychological well-being is an important factor for career development so anything that we can do to strengthen well-being whether it is increasing the positive emotions, positive relationships, engagement, meaningfulness or achievement will pay dividends as it relates to the career development process.

Along those lines, we need to talk about specific aspects of functioning as it relates to what area of career development we are going to work on. We're talking about helping people become aware of what they may be interested in or how they fit into the labor market. Addressing issues related to mental health functioning then PERMA would be important. We've talked about again this is the differential affect.

So what we have overall is that addressing psychological well-being and address physical and mental health functioning has implications for the career development process. And based on what area of the career development process we are choosing to work with, we may want to be emphasizing certain aspects of the psychological well-being and physical and mental health functioning.

Issues and Recommendations

>> DAVID STRAUSER: I'm David Strauser from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. Today I want to talk a little bit about some issues that are impacting the career development and employment of individuals with disabilities and have the potential to impact career development and employment research related to individuals with disabilities.

To start off with, I think it's important to put this research into a framework for us to understand how these issues may impact the career development process. One model that has been used and is starting to get attention as a model to conceptualize career issues is the Illinois Work and Well-Being Model. The Illinois Work and Well-Being Model consists of three interrelated domains that are interrelated and impact the overall career development process.

I'm going to introduce that model and talk to you about that model and then talk about three issues that I think are extremely relevant. The Illinois Work and Well-Being Model is based on the ICF framework and uses components of the ICF to conceptualize functioning and how personal environmental factors impact functioning in the overall career development process.

The three domains have three elements that are important to understand. They are developmental in nature, meaning that this process is based on that individuals develop over the course of time and that through their development they can acquire skills, abilities that allow them to interact with the domains differently as they mature or as they experience different life events or as different things happen to them within their life that may change their perspectives and their overall developmental trajectory. So developmental model in perspective is important.

Second, this model is based on the concept of relationships. Individuals have relationships with both other individuals as well as the broader environment and that these relationships are powerful forces that impact individuals overall developmental process. It might be impacting their individual choices and how they choose to express themselves or interact with the broader world.

The third component that's related to the domains that's important to understand is that this model implies that there's

a dynamic nature in that things are changing and this is consistent with the developmental model. Things are changing as people move along, as people progress, as things in the environment change and therefore we always need to look at what components of the model might be impacted and how the changes in the model might be impacting other areas, other domains, other factors.

One final thing related to the model that's important is that our ultimate focus in this model is on overall participation. Participation in four major areas that we'll see; community, home, social/personal and also work. We want to look at how we impact those four major areas and what this model implies is that career development impacts those four major areas.

So here I've got listed the three major domains and the factors that make up each domain. We'll see the model in a minute. But the contextual factor is the first factor that deals with personal, environmental and functioning so personal factors belonging to the individual, environmental factors belonging to the contextual environment which the individual interacts with and then functioning or sometimes we refer to this as limitations. How is a person functioning from a physical and mental health perspective?

The career domain consists of three major components or three major factors related to the career development process. The process of becoming aware both of education and career opportunities that might be available to the individual or may be appropriate for the individual. Acquisition, how does an individual go about acquiring both educational and work opportunities. And then the third domain is maintenance. How do people go about maintaining connection, connectivity to both work and education again all to impact the outcome of participation in our four areas; community, home, work and social.

So here's a slide related to the Illinois Work and Well-Being Model. We see here on the far left as you're looking at it the contextual domains with the three factors there; personal, environmental and limitations or also referred to as functioning. The middle domain we see individual awareness, acquisition and maintenance. And then on the far right we see participation.

We see a little hash box between the contextual and the career development domain because we're putting interventions

there. When we talk about interventions or intervening whether it's something like supportive employment or career counseling we are intervening to increase the congruence between the contextual domain and the career development domain. Those factors or those interventions have both affects that impact both the contextual and the career domain but also have an indirect affect themselves on the participation domain.

Now again I don't want to talk more about the model right now. I want to address three issues that I think are important related to functioning but I think it's important to understand that when I talk about these issues this model provides a framework for helping us understand these issues and why they're important.

The first issue that I want to talk about and let me back up for just a minute and say this. These three issues that I'm going to talk about I feel are very interconnected with each other and fit the dimensions that I talked about before in that they're dynamic, in that they're developmental and in that they're based on relationship. These three issues are interrelated to each other and meet those criteria.

The first issue that I think is relevant that is going to impact vocational rehabilitation services and impact participation in employment and education is economic distress. Now sometimes people might refer to that as poverty. I'm referring to economic distress to imply a broader context of economic impact. Poverty is a very defined term by the United States government to define people below a certain income level, to be living in poverty but research has consistently shown that people who are well above the poverty level, two to three times above the poverty level, still experience significant distress that impacts them and impacts their functioning.

So I think it's really important as rehabilitation counselors, rehabilitation professionals, people working within the rehab context and people with disabilities is that the broader economic distress that's within an individual's contextual environment in the broader environment themselves whether it's in their community or within their family has direct and indirect impact on their overall career development process.

We know for example wages are relatively stagnant. People have not experienced increases in earning capacity. We are seeing people despite the relatively low unemployment rate we're

still seeing people drop out of the labor market overall. We're seeing people who are injured on the job being unable to continue to work and experiencing lost wages. These are just three examples of things that create stress economically on individuals that impact their overall functioning and impacts their overall physical and mental health functioning.

So when we talk about economic distress we're talking about a broad term that is going to be related to people's economic situation both as individuals and families and how that potentially impacts their functioning both physically and mental health. Again, research suggests that people who experience more economic distress or live in families with more economic distress do not have as high a physical and mental health functioning as people who live with less economic distress so this is an area that we need to be aware of when we work with individuals.

Related to that is trauma and trauma symptoms. So many times we talk about trauma. People might think about post-traumatic stress disorder, which is certainly based on trauma but we also know that people who may not meet the full diagnosis or the diagnostic criteria for PTSD still have adverse effects to trauma. People experience traumatic events and trauma symptoms from family issues, environmental issues that they might be exposed to, incidents that happen at work, incidents that happen in their school or their broader community, but it's important for us to understand trauma as more of a continuum versus a discreet outcome.

So people who experience trauma are more likely to experience traumatic events that are related to economic distress. People who live in more economically distressed environments, communities and families may be more likely to experience traumatic events or trauma symptoms and trauma symptoms negatively impact the overall career development process.

We know for example that increased trauma symptoms impacts people's relatedness to awareness, how aware they are of the different career options that are available to them. Higher levels of trauma symptoms are related to lower levels of awareness. Again we know that people who live in economically distressed environments or families are more likely to experience traumatic events. These traumatic events impacts people's motivation, desire to participate in work, their perception regarding the importance of work and their overall engagement in society.

So as rehabilitation professionals we need to be aware that trauma symptoms impact us and that the individuals that we work with in the rehabilitation context are highly likely to have experienced some type of trauma symptoms or have elevated trauma symptoms which may be negatively impacting their overall career development process and overall employment.

The third issue related to this is the family and we know that the family involvement in the rehab process specifically when young adults if we have a family that views it is important that individuals work and engage in work related activities, value work, they're going to have better rehabilitation outcomes. That research especially in the area of special ed and transition school, the work have documented that getting the family involved is critically important.

Building on our first two issues of economic distress and trauma, this may be more challenging than just we may initially think because families that we're working with may be in economic distress. Parents, guardians, they themselves might be experiencing traumatic events or victims of traumatic events or experiencing increased trauma symptoms [sounds like] [00:11:51] mythology that may be impacting their overall ability to support their children, support their young adults and support individuals with disabilities. So the family unit in and of itself many times is impacted by economic distress and trauma symptoms and therefore themselves may negatively impact outcomes related to rehabilitation and rehabilitation counseling outcomes.

So with that, what can we do as rehabilitation counselors or rehabilitation professionals to address these issues? One, we need to be aware of the economic distress that individuals and communities are experiencing. When we work with individuals, it's important to understand that people's motivation, desire to work, overall attachment to work may be implicated by the economic distress that they are experiencing both as an individual, as a family and as a community.

So when we talk about people's connectedness to work, their desire to work, wanting to work, their importance of work, we need to understand that their economic environment, their economic distress is going to directly impact that. We need to try to understand how the individual is functioning in that area.

Two, we need to be keenly aware of the impact of trauma and we need to become aware of the trauma symptoms so we can make referrals to appropriate mental health professionals to get a more in-depth trauma assessment. Again as rehabilitation counselors in a role invoke rehab service provision we are not there to diagnose or treat trauma but we need to be keenly aware of the core trauma symptoms so that we can identify if individuals are currently impacted by or struggling with issues related to trauma that might be negatively impacting their employment outcomes.

In my experience in dealing with state VR counselors across the country many times counselors may inaccurately perceive somebody as being lacking motivation, not engaged, not able to follow through with activities and may be overlooking the impact that trauma and trauma symptoms might have on those individuals.

The third component is family involvement. As research has shown, getting the family involved is important and can increase outcomes. But with this we also need to understand the first two issues; economic distress and trauma as it relates to the family. We need to understand that these issues can impact the family which in turn impacts the individual that we're working with.

So understanding from a broader contextual perspective the economic distress that individual family units might be under, particular people within the family unit might be under and the trauma symptoms that might be going through the family impacting the family are going to be critically important if we want to understand our client's motivations, our ability to work with individuals to maximize their employment outcomes and to really maximize their desire to participate in work related activities we need to understand these three issues; economic distress, trauma and the family unit.

So moving forward, I would highly encourage you to look at those three units or those three issues and how they might be determining and impacting your work with the clients that you serve or the consumers that you work with. I think as researchers and educators, we need to be more aware of how these three factors might be impacting vocational rehabilitation outcomes.