

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

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Overview

Employment is a key to community reintegration for both people with mental illness and those with justice involvement. At present, the empirical literature on employment services for justice-involved people with or without mental illness is meager. By contrast, an extensive evidence base documents the effectiveness of a specific employment model for people with severe mental illness: the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment. This brief (1) describes the IPS model and its evidence base, (2) identifies current trends in IPS services for justice-involved people, (3) summarizes studies of employment services for justice-involved people, and (4) suggests IPS adaptations for justice-involved people with mental illness.

IPS Model of Supported Employment

Developed by Deborah Becker and Robert Drake in the 1980s, IPS has been widely implemented in programs for people with severe mental illness and is now being adapted for other disability groups. Access to IPS is critical for people with severe mental illness because over two-thirds of this population identifies employment as a primary goal in their recovery process (Bond & Drake, 2012). IPS incorporates eight principles:

- eligibility based on consumer choice
 - focus on competitive employment (i.e., jobs in integrated work settings in the competitive job market at prevailing wages with supervision provided by personnel employed by the business)
 - integration of mental health and employment services
 - attention to individual preferences
 - work incentives planning
 - rapid job search
 - systematic job development
 - individualized job supports
- (Drake, Bond, & Becker, 2012)

IPS is manualized (Swanson & Becker, 2013). Programs scoring higher on a fidelity scale measuring its core elements have significantly better competitive employment outcomes (Bond, Peterson, Becker, & Drake, 2012).

For more than two decades, researchers have evaluated the effectiveness of IPS. A review of 15 randomized controlled trials comparing IPS to other vocational approaches conducted throughout the United States and internationally, in both urban and rural communities, found that all 15 studies reported significant differences—in most cases large differences—favoring IPS across employment indicators (Bond, Drake, & Becker, 2012). Overall, about two-thirds of IPS participants obtained competitive employment—more than twice the employment rate for those enrolled in comparison vocational programs—and accumulated triple the earnings from employment than controls did (Bond, Campbell, & Drake, 2012). After gaining employment, IPS participants typically work at least half-time, averaging over 10 months of job tenure in an initial job (Bond & Kukla, 2011). About half of those obtaining a job in IPS maintain steady employment over a 10-year period (Becker, Whitley, Bailey, & Drake, 2007). IPS participants who obtain competitive employment report improved income, self-esteem, quality of life, social inclusion, and control of symptoms (Drake et al., 2012).

IPS is a practical and flexible employment model, based on principles that are widely applicable across populations. IPS has been found effective regardless of psychiatric diagnosis, symptoms, co-occurring substance use, educational level, age group, ethno-racial background, or work experience (Campbell, Bond, & Drake, 2011). Extrapolating from these findings, a reasonable hypothesis is that IPS should also be effective for justice-involved people. However, no controlled studies of IPS targeting this population have been completed. One chart review study of people enrolled in IPS found that those who disclosed criminal justice history did not differ in competitive employment

outcomes from those who did not (Frounfelker, Teachout, Bond, & Drake, 2011).

Current Trends in IPS Services for Justice-Involved People

Until recently, vocational studies rarely reported any information on criminal justice history. One possible reason could be that few people receiving vocational services have had criminal justice histories, as suggested by a multi-site supported employment study, which reported that only 3 percent of people disclosed any recent arrests or police detentions (Anthony, 2006). But such low rates of justice involvement do not fit current realities in the public mental health system. IPS employment specialists are increasingly noting justice-involvement on their caseloads and they report that helping these people find jobs is one of their greatest challenges (Whitley, Kostick, & Bush, 2009).

In a retrospective chart review study at a large psychiatric rehabilitation agency, 53 percent of new admissions disclosed past or current justice involvement (Frounfelker, Glover, Teachout, Wilkniss, & Whitley, 2010). The significantly longer referral time to IPS services for justice-involved people at this agency was attributed by clinical staff and clients to four factors:

- legal barriers (e.g., restrictions enforced by the mental health court system)
- urgent service needs taking priority (e.g., housing)
- feelings of hopelessness (people did not think they could get help)
- lack of family support

(Frounfelker et al., 2010).

Because of the IPS principle of zero exclusion (i.e., not excluding people based on background characteristics), justice-involved people who express a desire to work should have equal access to services. The larger issue regarding access is inadequate funding for employment services found throughout the United States, which has restricted supported employment services to 2 percent of people with mental illness receiving community mental health treatment (Bond & Drake, 2012).

Vocational Programs for Ex-Offenders

The criminal justice literature offers little help identifying employment strategies that might enhance services for

justice-involved people. Most published studies of employment services for ex-offenders are limited to descriptive reports. A variety of programs have been developed to assist the general ex-offender population to secure employment upon release from prison. The U.S. Department of Labor has funded several demonstrations of such employment services, including an uncontrolled study of a national program offering counseling and traditional job club services (Bellotti, Derr, & Paxton, 2008). Another project offered vocational training and apprenticeships to justice-involved youth to prepare them for careers in construction and other trades (Hamilton & McKinney, 1999). A recent controlled trial evaluating a training and apprenticeship program in the construction industry suggests this approach may be effective for juvenile offenders (Schaeffer et al., in press). The importance of professional assistance in the job search process is suggested by a quasi-experimental study of justice-involved veterans that found higher competitive employment rates for a staff-assisted job search compared to self-directed job search (LePage, Lewis, Washington, Davis, & Glasgow, 2013).

In contrast to IPS, employment services for ex-offenders often include pre-vocational job readiness training, self-directed job searches, time-limited follow-along supports, and noncompetitive employment options. For decades, experts endorsed similar strategies in programs for people with severe mental illness before controlled research documented their ineffectiveness (Bond, 1992). For example, for people with severe mental illness, research has clearly demonstrated that a rapid competitive job search is a more effective approach than creating set-aside jobs, which lead to segregation from mainstream society (Bond et al., 2012).

Adaptations of IPS for Justice-Involved People

Given the lack of effective employment models for justice-involved people, IPS is recommended as a model on which to base employment services, incorporating model adaptations responsive to the specific barriers to employment for this population. Before making any wholesale adaptations, however, the first recommendation would be to follow to IPS model principles. A focus on individual preferences and strengths, skillful and persistent job development, and close coordination with the mental health treatment team are examples of IPS principles that are likely helpful ingredients in IPS services for justice-involved people.

Employment specialist competencies, especially in engaging people and instilling hope, also contribute to better outcomes (Glover & Frounfelker, 2011). Motivational interventions are critical in working with justice-involved people, many of whom despair of ever finding a decent job (Baron, Draine, & Salzer, 2013). Creative, optimistic, employment specialists who win over employers are also needed (Swanson, Becker, & Bond, 2013). Potentially useful enhancements to the IPS model for this population include the following:

- **Develop IPS specialty teams devoted exclusively to justice-involved people.** Clinical program leaders often organize specialty treatment teams, recognizing that this frees up the team to develop an expertise with a specific target population. The same reasoning may apply to IPS. An IPS specialty team may be better positioned to integrate with treatment teams serving justice-involved people and to coordinate employment and treatment plans with the legal and correctional systems. Employment specialists who understand the criminal justice system and take common-sense steps, such as reviewing background checks and correcting errors, can help people accurately appraise and overcome hiring barriers.
- **Provide integrated dual disorders treatment when needed.** Substance use is very common among justice-involved people. Provision of evidence-based treatments is a key ingredient in an employment plan. Fortunately, IPS is effective for people with co-occurring substance use disorders (Mueser, Campbell, & Drake, 2011).
- **Follow employers' advice to job applicants.** A pervasive self-defeating belief among justice-involved people looking for work is that employers never hire anyone with a record. In fact, a national survey of 128 employers found that 63 percent had hired at least one applicant with a felony conviction (Swanson, Langfitt-Reese, & Bond, 2012). How job seekers present themselves to employers does matter, however. Employers recommend that justice-involved applicants acknowledge their past misdeeds, express remorse, describe how they have changed, and identify reasons they would make a good employee (Swanson et al., 2012; Tschopp, Perkins, Hart-Katuin, Born, & Holt, 2007). Especially when legal problems occurred years ago, job seekers should emphasize that they should be judged on the basis of recent behavior (Blumstein & Nakamura, 2010). Employment

specialists should assist people in preparing statements that include the above elements and rehearsing how they will explain their legal problems (Swanson & Becker, 2013).

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