

Research Highlights

Topic: Self-Determination

Wehmeyer, M. L. & Bolding, N. (1999). Self-determination across living and working environments: A matched-samples study of adults with mental retardation. *Mental Retardation*, 37, 353-363.

BOTTOM LINE

One way to promote self-determination is to support people with disabilities to live, work, play, and learn within their communities. Self-determination emerges from having the experience and opportunity to make choices and be in control of some aspects of one's own life. When individuals with disabilities are supported to make choices, participate in decisions, set goals, and experience a measure of control in their lives, they will more likely assume greater control, make more choices, hone their skills, and have a greater belief in their capacity to influence their lives; they will become more self-determined. The results of this study provide further information about the relationship between where one lives or works and the opportunity for self-determination.

TIPS

- Enable people with disabilities to make their own choices and decisions, and to begin setting goals in some aspect of their lives.
- Support people with disabilities to live in your community by welcoming them into your neighborhood or church group, and by greeting and getting to know people with disabilities in and around your community.

KEY FINDINGS

- Results of this study back the need for continued commitment to support people to live and work in their communities.
- People who gave more positive answers on the self-determination measures were also more likely to show more positive results on quality of life measures.

KEY FINDINGS

cont.

- People in this study who lived or worked in community-based settings were more self-determined, displayed greater autonomy, were able to make more choices, and were generally more satisfied than their peers who were matched on intelligence level and age, and who were living or working in community-based congregate settings or non-community-based congregate settings.
- The lack of opportunity to make choices and decisions, express preferences, set goals, and generally take control over one's life directly impacts the environment where one lives and works.
- This study supports an earlier study by Wehmeyer, Kelchner and Richards (1995) which found that
 - ◆ respondents who lived independently or with family members were more self-determined than respondents living in group homes.
 - ◆ respondents who lived in the largest congregate settings were the least self-determined.

METHOD

- This study used a matched-samples design.
- Participants were recruited based on their current living or work environment as well as their IQ, age, and gender. This process resulted in 91 matched groups (total of 273 people; 153 men and 120 women with a mean age of 39 years and mean IQ of 61.48), who were grouped into one of three settings:
 - ◆ Community-based group: in supported or independent living or supported or competitive employment
 - ◆ Community-based congregate: in a group home or sheltered workshop; or,
 - ◆ Noncommunity-based congregate: in an institution or nursing home, day program setting.
- Self-report measures of self-determination, life satisfaction, and autonomy were used which limited the sample to people who could reliably complete such measures.
- The self-report instruments were: The Arc's Self-Determination Scale: Adult Version (1995); the Autonomous Functioning Checklist: Self-Report Version (1988), the Life Choices Survey (1988), and the Lifestyle Satisfaction Scale (1993).

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Ferleger, D. (1994). The place of "choice." In C. J. Sundstrum (Ed.). *Choice and responsibility: Legal and ethical dilemmas in services for persons with mental disabilities* (pp. 69-97). Albany: New York State Commission on Quality of Care for the Mentally Disabled.

RELATED
PUBLICATIONS
cont.

- Nerney, T. & Shumway, D. (1996). *Beyond managed care: Self-determination for people with disabilities*. Durham: University of New Hampshire.
- Stancliffe, R. (1997). Community living-unit size, staff presence, and residents' choice-making. *Mental Retardation*, 35, 1-9.
- Stancliffe, R., & Wehmeyer, M.L. (1995). Variability in the availability of choice to adults with mental retardation. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 5, 319-328.
- Tossebro, J. (1995). Impact of size revisited: Relation of number of residents to self-determination and deprivatization. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 100, 59-67.

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