

Research Highlights

Topic: Self-Determination

Wehmeyer, M. L., & Bolding, N. (2001). Enhanced self-determination of adults with mental retardation as an outcome of moving to community-based work or living environments. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 45*, 1-13.

BOTTOM LINE

Individuals with intellectual disability who were moving from a more restrictive to a less restrictive work or living environment (e.g., from an institution to an apartment in the community) completed measures of self-determination, autonomous functioning, and opportunities for choice before and after their move. Results showed that individuals, on the average, scored higher on the measures after moving. This suggests moving from a more restrictive living or working environment to a less restrictive one is related to gains in self-determination, autonomous functioning, and choice of opportunities.

TIPS

- Recognize that self-determination is more than just making choices. It involves a number of behaviors that include problem solving, decision-making, self-advocacy, and a number of other things.
- Support people with intellectual disabilities, who often need encouragement in order to be able to start the process of using abilities related to self-determination.

KEY FINDINGS

- Self-determination is associated with being a causal agent in one's life, and being able to make choices without undue influence from others.
- Researchers believe that experiencing self-determination can positively impact the lives of people with disabilities. The environment and individual lives in, including their living and working environments, influences the degree to which they demonstrate self-determination.

KEY FINDINGS cont.

- Individuals scored lower on self-report measures of self-determination, autonomous functioning, and opportunity for choice, prior to their move.
- Individuals, on the average, showed gains in self-determination, autonomous functioning and opportunity for choice after living or working in a less restrictive environment for six months or more.
- This research suggests that community-based living and working environments can enhance opportunities for individuals to experience self-determination.

METHOD

- 31 adults with an average age of 41 years, were asked to participate.
- The researchers identified the type of environment the individuals with intellectual disability lived or worked in at the beginning of the study, and the type of environment they were going to move to: 1) Community -based living or working environments included competitive jobs in the community for minimum wage or better, or a shared apartment/house in the community, where the person may or may not receive supported living services, 2) Community-based congregate living or working environments included sheltered employment settings or group homes with an average of 4 to 6 individuals, and 3) Non-community based congregate environments included a congregate program teaching daily living or vocational skills or an institution or nursing home.
- Individuals completed The Arc's Self-Determination Scale, which measured the autonomy, self-regulation and psychological empowerment of the participants. The Autonomous Functioning Checklist asked about the degree to which individuals participated in activities such as personal care and social and recreational activities. The Life Choices Survey asked about the degree to which participants feel they have the opportunity to make choices in their lives.
- The researchers looked at the differences in individuals' responses approximately six months before and six months after their move.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

- Wehmeyer, M. L. (2001). Self-determination and mental retardation In L.M. Glidden (Ed.), *International review of research in mental retardation*, pp., 1-48. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Wehmeyer, M.L., & Bolding, N. (1999). Self-determination across living and working environments: A matched-samples study of adults with mental retardation.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Kelchner, K., & Richards, S. (1996) Essential characteristics of self-determined behaviors of adults with mental retardation and developmental disabilities. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 100, 632-642.

RELATED
PUBLICATIONS
cont.

Wehmeyer, M. L., & Schwartz, M. (1998). The relationship between self-determination, quality of life, and life satisfaction for adults with mental retardation. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 33, 3-12

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