

Help Wanted: An Investigation of Professionals' Approaches to and Perceptions Regarding Vocational Development When Working with Young Adults with Autism or Down Syndrome

By: Rachel Semel Advisor: Joan E. Furey, Ph.D.

Purpose

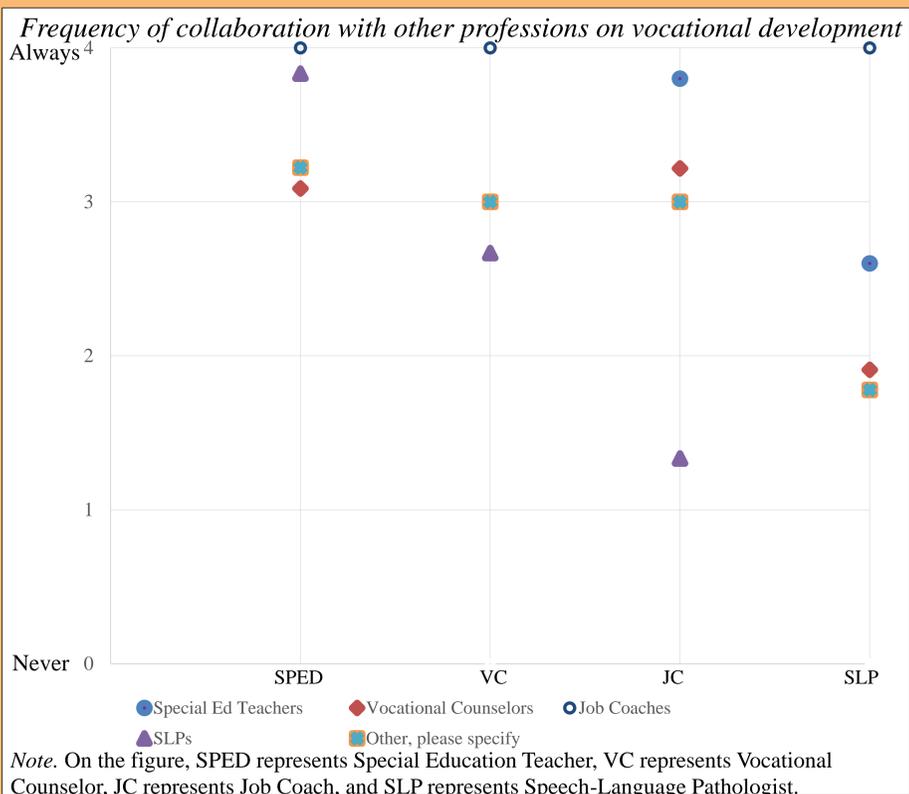
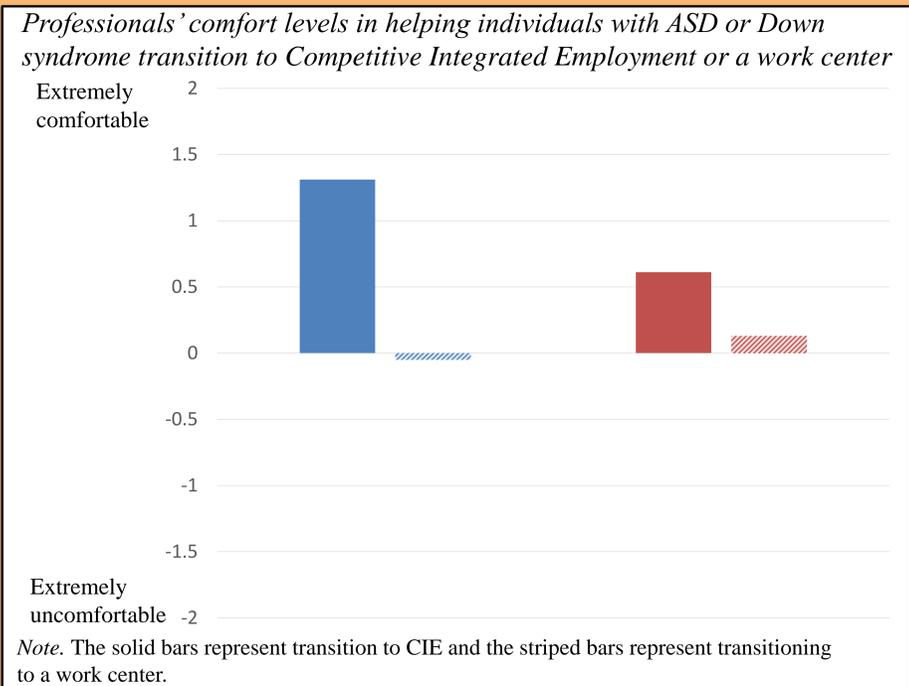
The purpose of this study was to explore vocational development for young adults, aged 18-22, with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDDs), focusing on individuals with autism or Down syndrome, as they transition from school to the workforce. More specifically, this study investigated special education teachers', vocational specialists', speech-language pathologists', and job coaches' approaches to vocational development as well as their perceptions of the aspects of workforce development they find to be most effective for this population.

Method

- This study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods through a 33-question survey and a 14-question optional follow-up interview.
- Questions addressed: general work experience, experience working with ASD or Down syndrome, experience on transition skill development, curriculum, and familiarity with and opinions of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of vocational rehabilitation.
- The survey had 123 responses and 6 individuals chose to participate in follow-up interviews.

Participants

- Of 123 participants: 64 were vocational rehabilitation counselors, 17 were special education teachers, 10 were SLPs, 6 were job coaches, and 26 were other professionals in the field of transition services.
- 45 professionals indicated working with individuals with ASD for 11 or more years.
- 43 indicated working with individuals with Down syndrome for 11 or more years.



Major Conclusions

- Individualizing vocational instruction is important. Professionals consistently indicated that instruction should be differentiated and should be based on the person, not the diagnosis.
- The biggest barrier to CIE, or competitive integrated employment, is transportation. Transportation prevents individuals from seeking out jobs and limits their options when they are searching for employment.
- Communication among the client, vocational rehabilitation counselor, job coach, employer, family, and various other professionals is essential to the success of the client.

Implications

- Professionals need more resources to be able to provide individualized supports to every individual they work with. Increasing these resources will encourage participants to pursue CIE.
- More transportation options need to be provided for individuals with ASD or Down syndrome in order to make employment achievable for more individuals.
- Professionals need to be given more time in their schedule to connect with other professionals. By doing this, professionals will be better able to collaborate, provide a wider variety of resources, and provide all supports that may be needed.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Obtaining responses from a wider variety of professionals and further specifying their profession in data.
- Researching vocational rehabilitation supports from the perspective of the client or student.
- Not just focusing on supports for transition-aged individuals, but looking at supports for older adults as well.