



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

A prospective examination of the impact of a supported employment program and employment on health-related quality of life, handicap, and disability among Veterans with SCI

Ottomanelli, Lisa, Scott D. Barnett, and Lance L. Goetz

Quick Takeaways

- There were no significant differences between veterans who participated in SE compared to those who received TAU.
- Among the 157 participants, 33 participants (21.0 %) accounted for 88 total jobs, twenty-four participants in the SE group accounted for 68.2 % of the jobs.
- Compared to TAU participants, SE participants worked significantly more hours per week, averaged significantly fewer wages, and missed fewer hours per week.

Summary

This study used a randomized, controlled, and multi-site trial of supported employment (SE) versus treatment as usual (TAU) for vocational issues. The study consisted of veterans with spinal cord injury aged 18-65 years who received health care services in the SCI Centers at one of six participating Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMC). Only veterans who were not employed or were employed but not at a substantial income level (defined as earning less than Social Security's definition of substantial gainful activity) were eligible to participate in the study. Veterans who had gainful employment at the time of study enrollment were excluded from the study. The primary endpoint was competitive employment (CE), defined as a paying job earning at least minimum wage in the community. Volunteer work and sheltered employment did not qualify as employment for the purposes of the study.

Two of the primary outcomes investigated were health-related quality of life (HRQOL), which specifically refers to how an individual's disease or disability impacts aspects of well-being and shows a demonstrated association with being employed following spinal cord injury, and disability as measured by the functional independence measure (FIM). Subjects were assessed at baseline and at 3, 6, 9, and 12 months.

The Craig Handicap Assessment and Reporting Technique (CHART) measures six domains of handicap as described by the World Health Organization and is also used in the report. Some of CHART's measures directly relate to employment, such as the occupation domain, which describes time spent in usual roles (including student, worker, and homemaker). Other domains may be indirectly related to employment, such as social integration.

Findings

There were no significant differences between veterans who participated in SE compared to those who received TAU. Participants obtaining competitive employment demonstrated significantly higher scores on the Social Integration, Mobility, and Occupation dimensions of the CHART.

Among the 157 participants, 33 participants (21.0 %) accounted for 88 total jobs. Twenty-four participants in the SE group accounted for 68.2 % of the jobs. The rate of employment for SE participants was significantly greater than the TAU group. When employment was restricted to competitive employment only, SE participants accounted for 69.4 % of the jobs and were significantly more likely to achieve employment compared to TAU participants. Compared to TAU participants, SE participants worked significantly more hours per week, averaged significantly fewer wages, and missed fewer hours per week.

Conclusion

This study suggests that employment has a positive effect on an individual's ability to participate in social relationships, move about their home and community, and spend time in productive and usual roles. However, several of the authors' hypotheses were not supported by the findings and the report discusses possible reasons for these findings. Explanations offered include the level and intensity of employment, insufficient follow-up period, and measurement limitations.