

Quality of Life Responses of Students with Intellectual Disabilities Entering an Inclusive, Residential Post-Secondary Program

Authors : Mary A. Lindell

Abstract : Adults with intellectual disabilities (ID) are increasingly attending postsecondary institutions, including inclusive residential programs at four-year universities. The legislation, national organizations, and researchers support developing postsecondary education (PSE) options for this historically underserved population. Simultaneously, researchers are assessing the quality of life indicators (QOL) for people with ID. This study explores the quality of life characteristics for individuals with ID entering a two-year PSE program. A survey aligned with the PSE program was developed and administered to participants before they began their college program (in future studies, the same survey will be administered 6 months and 1 year after graduating). Employment, income, and housing are frequently cited QOL measures. People with disabilities, and especially people with ID, are more likely to experience unemployment and low wages than people without disabilities. PSE improves adult outcomes (e.g., employment, income, housing) for people with and without disabilities. Similarly, adults with ID who attend PSE are more likely to be employed than their peers who do not attend PSE; however, adults with ID are least likely among their typical peers and other students with disabilities to attend PSE. There is increased attention to providing individuals with ID access to PSE and more research is needed regarding the characteristics of students attending PSE. This study focuses on the participants of a fully residential two-year program for individuals with ID. Students earn an Applied Skills Certificate while focusing on five benchmarks: self-care, home care, relationships, academics, and employment. To create a QOL measure, the goals of the PSE program were identified, and possible assessment items were initially selected from the National Core Indicators (NCI) and the National Transition Longitudinal Survey 2 (NTLS2) that aligned with the five program goals. Program staff and advisory committee members offered input on potential item alignment with program goals and expected value to students with ID in the program. National experts in researching QOL outcomes of people with ID were consulted and concurred that the items selected would be useful in measuring the outcomes of postsecondary students with ID. The measure was piloted, modified, and administered to incoming students with ID. Research questions: (1) In what ways are students with ID entering a two-year PSE program similar to individuals with ID who complete the NCI and NTLS2 surveys? (2) In what ways are students with ID entering a two-year PSE program different than individuals with ID who completed the NCI and NTLS2 surveys? The process of developing a QOL measure specific to a PSE program for individuals with ID revealed that many of the items in comprehensive national QOL measures are not relevant to stake-holders of this two-year residential inclusive PSE program. Specific responses of students with ID entering an inclusive PSE program will be presented as well as a comparison to similar items on national QOL measures. This study explores the characteristics of students with ID entering a residential, inclusive PSE program. This information is valuable for, researchers, educators, and policy makers as PSE programs become more accessible for individuals with ID.

Keywords : intellectual disabilities, inclusion, post-secondary education, quality of life

Conference Title : ICISE 2019 : International Conference on Inclusive and Special Education

Conference Location : Vancouver, Canada

Conference Dates : August 07-08, 2019