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Strategies and Barriers to Work Behavior Changes: Perceptions of Prevocational Rehabilitation Professionals

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Adequate work behavior can increase job retention and job satisfaction for employees with disabilities. Employment modification strategies are practicable tools to address challenging work behavior negatively affecting employment of individuals with disabilities in rural areas. The purpose of this study was to conduct a phenomenological qualitative study of prevocational rehabilitation professionals in a focus group concerning rehabilitation services and training needs for rural vocational services for people with disabilities. Three themes emerged: (a) strategies to improve employment retention; (b) strategies to develop employment skills; and (c) barriers to the implementation of strategies provided. Results also suggested that training rehabilitation programs emphasize employment interventions to support employment opportunities and to understand characteristics of rural areas. Implications for vocational rehabilitation in rural areas included effective implementation using a person with a disability environment fit perspective, inclusion of identified themes in vocational rehabilitation curricula, and improvement of employment services.

Keywords: employment interventions; vocational strategies; rehabilitation services; work adjustment; person–environment fit; rural employment

The world of work offers opportunities for integration, participation, and involvement for people with disabilities in rural areas. For people with disabilities, the ability to work represents a valuable contributing role to society that offers not only economic benefits but personal ones (Beyer et al., 2016; Rusch et al., 2009; Yosef et al., 2019).

For instance, gainful employment provides social status, vocational identity, and earnings (Degeneffe et al., 2008) as well as facilitates finding a purpose for life, and increasing the promotion of participation and social interaction with others (Ellenkamp et al., 2016) for people with disabilities. Work also promotes positive health by enhancing quality of life, a sense of control over one's life (Beyer et al., 2010), and opportunities for learning new skills and positive self-esteem (Verberg et al., 2019; Irvine & Lupart, 2008). Therefore, work enhances well-being while endorsing social integration and participation in society. Because of the value of work, understanding barriers and strategies in the vocational rehabilitation process in rural areas as well as the importance of a person–environment perspective are crucial in identifying potential behavior strategies.

In service delivery, rehabilitation professionals need to recognize the unique characteristics of employment markets in rural areas. People with disabilities face paucity of accessible transportation, long waits for services, fewer training resources, and highly competitive markets for low-paying and reparative jobs in rural areas (Adams et al., 2019; Collins & Ludlow, 2018; Griffin, 1999; Ipsen & Swicegood, 2017). In addition, rural counties have fewer full-time jobs, especially in skilled labor and have higher numbers in blue collar and resource-based occupations than urban areas, which could limit placeability for clients with physical disabilities (Klobuchar, 2014; Young, 2013). Potential work places are also limited in rural areas with higher percentage of very small firms with less than 50 employees (Knoder, 2011). In accordance with small employers, a study on demand-side is recognized these employers. Similarly, opportunities for employment for individuals in rural areas may also be limited due to individuals' lack of education and transferable skills (Evans-Thompson et al., 2016). When evaluating a potential match between individual and work environment, rehabilitation professionals can utilize the Person-Environment Correspondence Counseling theory.

THE PERSON–ENVIRONMENT CORRESPONDENCE COUNSELING THEORY

Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) describes work as a process between the individual and the work environment recognizing their reciprocal relationship (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). TWA has an enduring history in vocational rehabilitation (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2017; Clur et al., 2017; Dawis, 2005; Lofquist & Dawis 1969; Velez & Moradi, 2012; Wang & Wanberg, 2017). In order to incorporate the person–environment model in vocational psychology, the Person–Environment–Correspondence Counseling (PEC) theory expands the basic concepts of TWA, and emphasizes the potential role of counseling in the rehabilitation process when providing vocational services (Eggerth, 2008). The PEC theory states that a harmonious relationship between the person and his or her environment can help an individual to receive satisfaction from his or her career (Lofquist & Dawis, 1991). Moreover, the PEC theory explains how early career decisions and the possession of certain skills have a major impact on career and satisfaction in later life (Gander et al., 2020; Lindstrom et al., 2013).

Within the PEC approach, correspondence, which may be used to predict job satisfaction, refers to a match between worker needs and work environment (Lofquist & Dawis, 1991). Dawis and Lofquist (1984) explained that correspondence describes the degree to which worker and work environment fulfill the other's expectations. Flexibility, a key component of employee satisfaction and employer satisfactoriness when working with people with disabilities, would mean accommodations and positive adjustment within the environment in order to be successful (Colella, 2001). Flexibility of a person or environment supports

tolerance for any lack of correspondence between expectations and abilities (Dawis, 1994). Anand and Sevak (2017) determined that workplace accommodations play a significant role in the employment of people with disabilities. One third of people with disabilities reported barriers to employment that could be ameliorated by employers with proper job modifications. Potential accommodations include a flexible work schedule, help with transportation, modifying the job environment and coworker assistance. Advocacy and engaging employers and local governments can help in addressing employment access and understanding of accommodations (Griffin, 1999).

A positive match, between client and environment, with employer involvement indicates the significance of congruency between the employee with a disability and work (Lindstrom et al., 2013). A worker's career satisfaction results from the person's values and the reinforcers from the environment meeting the employees' needs while the person's abilities matches the requirements of the job then the employer receives satisfactoriness (Zunker, 2012). This means that the PEC theory's success depends on the employer and the employee having specific requirements leading to a successful career. The more an environment is suited, to an individual with a disability, or accommodated in a helpful way, the more likely the client would receive higher pay, experience better social integration with coworkers, and enjoy natural support systems (Banks et al., 2001). Accordingly, PEC theory can help vocational service providers to properly assist client to find a positive match between skills and rural work environments.

VOCATIONAL SERVICES IN RURAL CONTEXTS

Due to a variety of environmental and financial barriers, access and delivery of services are also insufficient in rural areas (Test & Fowler, 2018). Because of geographic isolation of rural communities, people with disabilities have inadequate number of facilities creating challenges for coordination of vocational services (Castillo & Cartwright, 2018). In addition, fewer support services, less public transportation, and limited job opportunities (Ipsen & RIIC, 2012) as well as stereotypes of people with disabilities are also challenges to employment in rural communities (Griffin, 1999). Reduction of resource-based industries, factories closing, less agricultural employment, declining hospitality, and reduced construction industries also diminish employment options for rural clients (Evans-Thompson et al., 2016).

Similarly, service provider agencies in rural areas face critical issues in recruitment and retention of quality staff. Underpaid and overworked front-line Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) staffs represent a challenge for vocational services in rural areas (Griffin, 1999). Moreover, vocational professionals may lack proper understanding of local labor market conditions leading to unrealistic job goals for local economies (Rigles et al., 2011). Furthermore, a lack of support and substantial services (e.g., no physical therapy, interpreter services, or mental health) combined with struggles securing employment resources, are challenges for professionals in vocational agencies in rural areas (Evans-Thompson et al., 2016).

Additionally, clients may leave vocational services prematurely due to discrepancies between services provided and services desired, counselor expectations, client health issues, limited job opportunities, and slow service speed (Rigles et al., 2011). Specifically, in this study clients reported that wanting more job seeking assistance and opportunities to receive training or education as reasons for premature exit from vocational services. In addition, students reported frustration with difference in services depending on individual and financial needs after talking to other vocational clients. Therefore, clients can benefit from an

explanation of the nature of vocational services in a plain language to improve services retention in rural areas.

Considering that misconceptions about hiring and accommodating a person with a disability among employers, inaccessible work spaces or equipment, a deficiency in transportation, and bias are challenges in employment for individuals with disabilities (Anand & Sevak, 2017); vocational services need to intentionally use approaches to develop employability and readiness among clients, specifically how and when to talk about their disability. Clients with disabilities struggle with adjustment to work due to social barriers to employment, unsuccessful work culture, and a lack of effective strategies used by rehabilitation professionals providing vocational services (Lindsay, 2011). In order to improve the development of policy and implementation of effective practices for successful employment, future rehabilitation professionals need to possess knowledge and skills to facilitate the employment outcomes of clients in rural settings.

EMPLOYMENT MODIFICATIONS STRATEGIES

In the development of employment strategies for behavioral changes, when working with people with disabilities, rehabilitation professionals need to consider work satisfaction and success in the work environment. A positive match between employee's skills and abilities for the work environment can support employment success (Kirsh et al., 2009). Behavioral interventions can help reduce attitudinal barriers for competitive employment and present opportunities to utilize valid behavioral strategies in work environments (Schall, 2010). In addition, interventions can address problematic work behavior, which decrease job retention and employability for people with disabilities, such as being disrespectful toward others, tardiness, noncompliance, touching inappropriately, negative attitude, property destruction, and safety concerns.

Transitional services, for instance, have effectively utilized strategies to improve work success among students (Test & Fowler, 2018). Lindstrom et al. (2013) believe that it is critical to focus on the periods of transition in the early career years because many individuals with disabilities, without adequate planning and support, end up in low-paying and unsatisfactory jobs with little hope for career advancement. Using behavioral strategies for successful employment, transition students can learn skills useful in work settings. Problem-solving, goal setting, time management, prioritization, positive relationships with peers, and the ability to adapt to situations and environments have been linked to successful employment, career satisfaction, and positive environment choice (Lindstrom et al., 2013; Ghali et al., 2018).

Along with strategies to teach work skills, interventions, and feedback can increase vocational skills. In a study by Chuang et al. (2015), clients completed workshops on cognitive behavioral techniques for the transition to employment, job readiness, independent living, and work hardening for some clients. In this study, cognitive behavioral techniques and interventions helped to provide on the job training, feedback, coping skills for barriers and negative thoughts about self, and specific education needed to prepare for a career search. Moreover, work mentorship programs are another cognitive behavioral intervention that can be implemented for clients to be able to express concerns, receive feedback on performance, and feel confident about any vocational challenges and barriers (Race & Skees, 2010; Test & Fowler, 2018). Mentorship programs also provide the client with a safe outlet for voicing questions or concerns about navigating the workplace.

Another valuable strategy to change challenging behaviors in a variety of settings, including school and work, is self-management (Ghali et al., 2018). With self-management, individuals

are encouraged to observe, assess, and modify their own behavior using a range of procedures (Schulze, 2016). Several components are used in self-management including self-monitoring, goal setting, self-instruction, self-graphing, and self-evaluation (Briesch & Chafouleas, 2009; Schulze, 2016). As reported in a literature review, self-management strategies supported the goal to promote self-determination while helping individuals with disabilities to manage affairs related to employment (Rusch & Dattilo, 2012). Since self-management is dependent on self-awareness (Briesch & Chafouleas, 2009), rehabilitation professionals need to enhance individuals' capacity to effectively evaluate and modify personal behaviors or self-awareness.

Preparation of Future Professionals

Future rehabilitation professionals need training on vocational strategies to assist clients in changing and developing behaviors needed in the workplace to meet work demands and increase job satisfaction. Students, who plan to become rehabilitation services professionals and Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, are expected to have a course in career development theories, job development and placement techniques (CRCC, 2019). Even though rehabilitation counselor professionals are expected to use a dual customer approach—working with clients and employers—, training curriculum focuses on client and counseling and minimally on business development, job development, and specific labor markets (Wehman, 2017). Therefore, prevocational rehabilitation students may have limited understanding of vocational strategies to enhance employability of clients with disabilities.

Although some studies have examined the rehabilitation provider's perspective on facing employment barriers and change work behaviors, additional research can aim to increase the understanding of preparation of future rehabilitation professionals. This article reports how future vocational rehabilitation professionals envision working with individuals to modify problematic work behaviors and anticipated concerns in addressing person–environment fit. Specifically, the purpose of this study was a qualitative analysis of future rehabilitation professionals' responses related to their perceptions of training needs focused on the strategies for changing and developing work behaviors as well as perceived barriers for implementation of strategies in rural communities.

METHODS

For the purposes of this study, a phenomenological approach of qualitative explorative study using focus group (Creswell, 2013), was found to be the most appropriate. This research design was similar to other established investigations in rural vocational rehabilitation (Rigles et al, 2011). The purpose was to gather in-depth perceptions of future rehabilitation practitioners in relation to training needs, barriers, and relevant vocational rehabilitation services strategies for rural clients with disabilities. Focus groups facilitate gathering of opinions, explorations of topics, and discussion of experiences (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Participants

Participants were recruited from vocational rehabilitation classes using purposive sampling and voluntarily attended a focus group at a Southwestern University. Participants obtained an informed consent before partaking in a focus group and did not receive compensation for participation outside of potential points for class participation based on instructors' discretion. There were 10 rehabilitation services students in the study, two males and eight females,

who attended a state university in a rural area (see Table 1). Six of the students were part of the graduate program in clinical rehabilitation counseling while four were obtaining an undergraduate degree in rehabilitative services. The undergraduate students planned to pursue graduate students in clinical rehabilitation counseling. Five participants identified as White, three as African American, and two as Hispanic. The age of participants ranged between 21 to 41 years old. Participants grew up in rural and urban communities across the same state.

Regarding experience in working with people with disabilities, six students expressed holding employment while one had volunteered in agencies providing disability-related services. The rest of students had no work or volunteer background in services for clients with disabilities. Students described job settings in field placement, independent living programs, services for specific populations, and educational locations. Finally, students explained that they chose rehabilitation studies as their majors due to exposure to the field in previous courses, a clear understanding of the rehabilitation field, and personal experiences with rehabilitation services.

Students participated in focus group to provide information for this study. Concerning students' exposure and identification of strategies to address behavior in the workplace, the responses suggested that students infused class material with personal experiences. All students explained that their strategies were based on learned material related to behavioral change and personal exposure to interventions. In the majority of the responses, class material was referenced as the foundation for the training needs of rehabilitation professionals concerning the strategies to change or develop work behavior. Only two strategies were identified specifically to originate from a work setting. Lastly, students mentioned a need to receive formal lecture or learning specific strategies to address problematic work behavior.

Students agreed that they had received training on informal and formal vocational approaches to utilize in vocational services. Students stated familiarity with job placement, job coaching, and work adjustment services in classes. In addition, students identified networking, informal relationships, and positive connections in rural settings as informal vocational approaches. Students utilized educational training to support ideas for strategies in vocational services.

TABLE 1. Student Demographics

Student	Gender	Level of Education	Cultural Group Identification	Age	Background Urban Rural	Employment
Student #1	Male	Undergraduate	Latino	41	Rural	No
Student #2	Female	Undergraduate	White	31	Rural	No
Student #3	Female	Undergraduate	African American	21	Urban	Volunteer
Student #4	Female	Undergraduate	African American	23	Urban	No
Student #5	Female	Graduate	White	24	Rural	Vocational Services
Student #6	Female	Graduate	White	25	Urban	Transition Teacher
Student #7	Female	Graduate	African American	39	Rural	Independent Living
Student #8	Male	Graduate	White	23	Urban	Camp recreational counselor
Student #9	Female	Graduate	White	24	Rural	Deaf services
Student #10	Female	Graduate	Latina	23	Urban	Camp recreational counselor

Interview Protocol

Before completing the focus group, the university Internal Review Board (IRB) approved the research. For this investigation, the protocol included: an introduction about the nature of the investigation and a potential audience for results, an approved consent form, and a questionnaire with demographic items and open-ended questions asked in a focus group led by a volunteer rehabilitation counseling faculty, with no involvement in this research project. The focus group was an hour long and participants' training needs were recorded for transcription. Accordingly, after an overview of the research project, participants were presented with a demographic questionnaire and a case of a client receiving vocational services in a rural area. Then, participants were asked to identify training needs about three strategies to modify problematic behaviors in the workplace and three strategies to develop positive work behaviors as well as potential perceived barriers for implementation of strategies. Member checking was completed by summarizing information and checking with students for accuracy. Participants were thanked for their participation and received an explanation about data analysis and protection of data.

Materials

The demographic questionnaire requested included gender identification, age, ethnicity, student level, place of upbringing, experience working with people with disabilities, nature of the job, motivations for a rehabilitation degree, and exposure to vocational approaches. The open-ended questions developed for the focus group were developed after a review of relevant vocational rehabilitation literature (Anand & Sevak, 2017; Banks et al., 2001; Degeneffe et al, 2008; Ipsen & Rural Institute Inclusive Communities, 2012; Lysaght et al., 2012; Morgan & Openshaw, 2011; Sundar et al, 2018). To validate the questions used in the study, they were evaluated by three experts in vocational services for comprehension and credibility. These experts suggested removing two questions to increase relevance. After finalizing the revisions, one of the researchers completed the questions with two volunteer students who reported quick completion and comprehension of the instrument.

Coding, Categorizing, and Identifying Themes

In this study, a conventional content analysis approach was used to classify training needs in strategies and barriers for developing and changing behaviors needed in the workplace. Conventional content analysis provides a technique to identify coding categories directly from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Frequencies and descriptive statistics were used to examine the demographic variables while qualitative content analysis was used to identify patterns across responses (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

A constant comparative method (Krueger & Casey, 2009) among researchers was used to code the data and interpret the frequency of comments. After responses were transcribed in a complete list in a spreadsheet, responses were labeled into groups. More specifically, using a classic analysis of responses (Krueger & Casey, 2009), the responses were organized with bullet points and colored highlights related to categories. Three researchers, who had experienced in vocational rehabilitation services, independently analyzed the data and provided codes, categories, and themes. After the independent analysis, and an independent review by a faculty member, the team members developed a shared coding system. The researchers built consensus through review and discussion of each researchers work and excluded any outliers themes. During discussion, any discrepancies were addressed and modifications to categories

helped to create slightly more inclusive groups. The themes that emerged were agreed upon by all researchers.

THEMES IDENTIFIED

Analysis of data gathered from the focus group resulted in the identification of rehabilitation training needs related to three major themes: strategies to improve employment retention, strategies to develop employment skills, and barriers to the implementation of strategies (Figure 1). Despite the recognizable need to learn specific strategies and recognize barriers for behavior modification, students expressed a desire for class training on specific methods to address work adjustment, job modification, behavior modification, and person fit measurements. Students explained receiving information on different vocational approaches to provide career services in rural areas.

Strategies to Improve Employment Retention

This theme captured perceived potential training needs in strategies to change clients’ behavior needed in a rural workplace. For this question, students explained strategies to modify problematic behaviors happening in the workplace. In this study, students evaluated strategies related to changing a previously acquired work-related behavior. Students envisioned techniques to improve already possessed skills and behaviors useful in work settings. These strategies could be used as part of job coaching and on the job training programs. Related to the first research question, four subthemes transpired: cognitive behavioral techniques, person-centered methods, modeling, and assessments.

Cognitive Behavioral Techniques. This subtheme detailed the possible application of cognitive behavioral principles to change behaviors needed in a rural workplace. Seven students expressed that class material helped in defining strategies to adjust behaviors in the work place. Five specific strategies were identified under this subtheme: cognitive restructuring, discovery activities, instrumental conditioning, recollection tools, and functional behavior analysis.

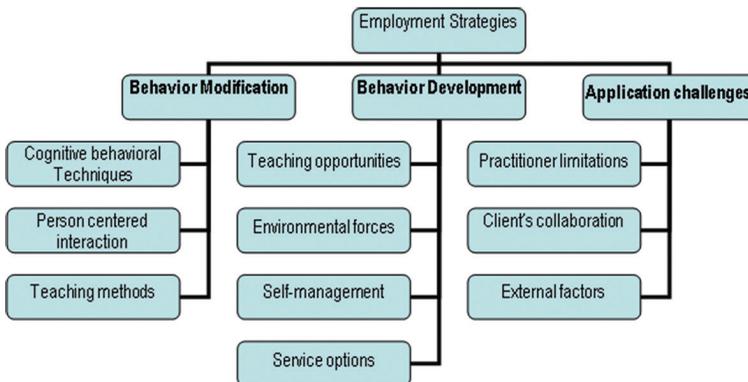


Figure 1. Overview of themes and subthemes of employment behavior modification strategies.

Cognitive Restructuring. One participant explained that cognitive restructuring can help to change negative thoughts and inaccurate views of the workplace leading to potential positive work behaviors as well as create a clear mind to facilitate “rational decision making when encountering a challenge learning a new skill.” Depending on the cognitive ability of the individuals, two students explained that rehabilitation professionals can challenge irrational views or negative distortions about the workplace to “build confidence and change views into positive ones.”

Discovery Activities. Another strategy to help clients identify mental or physical barriers affecting their learning process was journaling. A student stated that this technique could help create a “written awareness” to modify behaviors and recognize client’s contribution to problematic behaviors or learning struggles. Two students explained that journaling can also help to discover personal ways to modify behaviors at work. Similarly, relaxation techniques were recommended to ease anxiety, depression, or emotional distress due to work-related experiences. As with journaling, relaxation was described as a strategy to increase awareness about behaviors and barriers in the workplace. Students also stated that mindfulness techniques and relaxation can help to “clear a client’s mind to facilitate rational decision making when encountering a problem.” These strategies, students explained, can give clients a better understanding of their actions and how these actions may contribute to problems leading to the discovery of ways to change.

Instrumental Conditioning. Two students also expressed applying reinforcement principles in behavior modification interventions. Students explained that employers could be involved in implementing these reinforcers. A participant emphasized that employers need to understand learning principles and reward systems. For example, one participant explained “every time the undesired behavior occurs, the boss can administer a consequence of some form” to decrease behavior repetition.

Recollection Tools. Students also mentioned techniques to correct work behaviors using memory triggers or verbal cues. Employers or rehabilitation professional can use redirection to change a behavior and direct the person to an appropriate behavior explained two students. Students emphasized that clients could utilize notes (e.g., posting notes or wanting notes) as reminders to change the behavior or adhere to specific work expectations. Likewise, students recommended using smart phones, computers, or similar electronic devices to remind clients of proper behaviors, instructions, or job expectations.

Functional Behavior Analysis. Another potential strategy identified by students was a functional behavior analysis to identify the function of unwanted behavior. One participant expounded that depending on the reason for the behavior “the environment can be adjusted, or the individual can be taught new ways to approach the situation” where their behavior is questionable.

Person-Centered Interaction. This subtheme focused on the relationship between client and rehabilitation professional. Five students expressed that class material introduced them to person-centered principles in counseling. Three type of strategies were documented under this subtheme: Rogerian principles, communication codes, and strength-based focus.

Rogerian Principles. Two students emphasized the value of maintaining a positive working alliance with clients to foster a positive attitude and strong initiative for clients. A participant, who reflected on personal experiences, described that unconditional positive regard, can “encourage clients to excel in their efforts.” Similarly, four students stressed the role of effective use of helping skills in work adjustment. Students explained that clients can benefit from providers using empathy, active listening, respect, and positive regard in training. One

participant described how active listening can help to develop “independent thinking and decision making among clients.”

Communication Codes. Three students pointed out that providers should be clear, congruent, and honest in their communication with one stating “rehab professionals must pinpoint specific issues in collaboration with employers.” Another participant detailed that rehabilitation providers need to build genuine rapport with clients and adjust to clients’ needs. Therefore, clear communication can facilitate relationship building with all type of clients (e.g., clients, employers, and community agencies) benefitting from work adjustment.

Strength-Based Focus. Finally, two students emphasized that providers need to recognize client’s strength in a genuine manner. A participant explained that complimenting clients on progress and encouraging clients to outdo in their efforts can help with behavioral changes. Clients may not realize that they “have the ability and potential to modify behaviors.” Therefore, rehabilitation professionals can be “the fuel needed for behavioral change at work.”

Teaching Methods. This category described different teaching or training methods that can be used to modify behaviors. Almost all students ($n = 9$) explained that using effective teaching methods was imperative to modify behavior in the workplace. Two strategies emerged from responses: integrated learning and learning tools.

Integrated Learning. Three students specifically described using an integrated learning process as part of a vocational training program. They elaborated on using work-based learning (WBL) in real work environments to provide opportunities to modify behaviors. Another participant believed that a specific college education program or personalized training services targeting a desired job setting could help with preparation for employment.

Learning Tools. Students described that modeling was helpful to demonstrate appropriate work behaviors by supervisors and coworkers. Likewise, homework can help to reinforce learning by practicing and doing related assignments at home, as explained by two students. Outside homework extends “behavioral changes beyond meeting time with clients in different settings.”

Strategies to Develop Employment Skills

This category consisted of the perceived potential training needs of strategies to develop work behaviors. For this question, students proposed mechanism to teach valuable work behaviors to clients to increase employability and job performance. Students explained that these strategies could work during job placement and job coaching services. Four subthemes emerged: teaching opportunities, environment, self-management, and service options.

Teaching Opportunities. For clients to learn positive work behavior, eight students identified training to teach specific topics. Clients can benefit from learning “proper work behaviors including being on time, communication skills, and personal boundaries.” Work training enables clients to attend workshops “for the line of work, to mingle with future coworkers, and to model behaviors.” Two students explained that depending on the type of disability and limitations, one-on-one training with client may be more effective than group learning methods. Using principles of operant conditioning (e.g., positive reinforcement), rehabilitation professionals can also facilitate learning of work behaviors. As explained by a participant, feedback can function as a motivator then “it is important to provide clients with constructive feedback when they do something well.”

Environmental Forces. For this subtheme, four students recommended assessing the potential work environment. One participant stressed rehabilitation professionals scrutinize biases, negative attitudes, and refusal of inclusion in job setting. Additionally, students

recommended that rehabilitation professionals need to incorporate environmental modification and provide/advocate for accommodations in the work place. Participating in a mentor program, as identified by students, is another strategy that is beneficial for clients to develop the behaviors necessary for the workplace. A mentor can show clients “the ins and outs of a job including appropriate behaviors.” Into the bargain, mentors embody a source of information, a positive role model, and immediate feedback. This feedback can “help clients become aware of good and bad behaviors” plus mentors can “guide clients by teaching how to succeed in the workplace.”

Self-Management. Three students explicated that clients can benefit from increased self-awareness and enhanced self-management skills. One participant explained that clients need to “pay attention to nonverbal and communication styles with coworkers, employers and even rehabilitation counselors.” With self-management, clients can work on “positive vibes and state of mind” increasing their understanding of valuable behaviors.

Services Options. Rehabilitation professionals can utilize rehabilitation services to teach clients proper work behaviors. Four students explained how job coaching and job placement are feasible services for developing work behaviors as well as work place simulations as potential strategy for behavior learning behaviors. One student exclaimed that “field experience is a great way to develop behaviors needed in the workplace” because clients “can get a real working experience and determine the appropriate ways to behave in their occupation of choice.” For this group of future rehabilitation professionals learning about vocational services in their courses enhanced their knowledge and preparation for services. Equally, two students added how goals, which are “clear and aim for mastering work behaviors,” can support the development of proper work behaviors.

Barriers for Implementation of Strategies

Students detailed anticipated barriers in using strategies to change or develop behaviors needed in a rural workplace. Training needs under this theme involved expected barriers for rehabilitation professionals in utilizing strategies for behavioral changes. Students described probable obstacles in using behavior modification strategies before or during employment for rural clients including: practitioner limitations, client’s collaboration, and external factors.

Practitioner Limitations. Students shared concerns that they have about their personal abilities, knowledge, and understanding of strategies to modify behaviors. First, students expressed doubts to come up with “creative solutions for barriers to utilize strategies” and “methods to teach or develop a work related behavior.” Second, students explained possibly experiencing feelings of frustration or disappointment if clients do not want to participate or “multiple efforts do not work to modify behaviors.” Third, students described being distressed with misjudgments and unrealistic expectations affecting service delivery.

Similarly, students explained having doubts on being able to stay motivated due to failures with strategies implementation, structure barriers, and employers’ demands. In addition, students uttered concerns with lack of ability to manage a large caseload with these behavioral strategies as well and with being disrespected or perceived as inexperienced by employers or clients. One participant commented that “scarce resources in a rural area can hinder the vocational services process.” Finally, clients may revert back to old behaviors after behavior modifications due to natural tendency or personal preferences or refuse to practice learned behaviors.

Client’s Collaboration. Students described a variety of situation that negatively impacted behavioral changes due to client’s response to services. Students identified clients’ lack of motivation, one exclaimed: “what if the client doesn’t want to try to better him or herself!”

For instance, clients can forget to monitor behaviors during a specific time period as required by self-management. Similarly, a lack of self-awareness can also be problematic since clients “may not see their behavior as a problem, and thus will lack the motivation to change.” Two students explained that clients could be distressed with current situation or disability, distrust the rehabilitation professional due to previous negative experiences, or hesitate keeping a job to avoid losing secondary gains (e.g., benefits, family support). Another concerned pointed out was how clients might not respect the rehabilitation professional or take services seriously.

External Factors. This subtheme captured the perceived environmental forces that can represent a challenge to effectively carry out strategies in a rural work environment. Two students explained that agencies, where rehabilitation professionals work, may suddenly change guidelines, protocols, or directions as well as limit funding available for work adjustment. Since some strategies may require employers’ involvement, students voiced concerns with unwillingness from clients’ managers or coworkers to participate in strategies. Two students pointed out stereotypical views of disabilities in a rural community. Finally, rehabilitation professionals may lack time, motivation, and funds due to work demands in a rural agency. Students explained that work conditions (e.g., long distances, scarce services, and limited transportation) in a rural agency can affect proper implementation to address challenging behaviors.

DISCUSSION

This research intended to add to the understanding of the preparation of future rehabilitation professionals to improve employability of clients with disabilities. This study aimed to identify potential training needs of rehabilitation professional students regarding strategies and perceived barriers to successful employment modifications among prevocational rehabilitation professionals in rural environment. The findings from this study could help to identify strategies, improve training, and educate stakeholders involved in rural employment services.

Relevance to Research and Practices

Rehabilitation students need to understand the basics of behavior modification and how positive reinforcement can assist a client in modifying work behaviors. The PEC Counseling theory emphasizes an integration of reinforcers or rewards in correspondence between a person’s abilities and requirements of the job (Dawis, 1994). Similarly, these reinforcers need to support the person’s work values increasing the chances of job satisfaction. In order to increase exposure to behavior modification related to work behavior in curricula, rehabilitation training programs could incorporate specific topics, activities, and assignments on work adjustment, job placement, and employment services. For example, classroom projects can include team projects where students assist their team member in modifying student behaviors such as class absences, tardiness, cell phone use, team work skills, and effective communication.

Behavior modification alone is not always successful and must often be combined with cognitive behavioral approaches. Strategies that may assist with issues related to training are cognitive behavioral techniques that improve self-esteem and resiliency, vocational training and education, and mentoring programs in the workplace (Lindstrom et al., 2013). “If I understand you correctly, you want to keep your job, and you want to come in late 4 days out of 5. Do you see any problems with this?” Certainly the cognitive behavioral approach as well as the language must be geared to client. Moreover, rehabilitation professionals can

infuse person-centered principles in their service delivery providing unconditional positive regard, utilizing active listening, and establishing equal relationships (Rogers, 1956; See & Kamnetz, 2015).

WBL is an opportunity for individuals to develop practical and conceptual skills related to work settings (Sodiechowska & Maisch, 2006). Although this strategy can be beneficial in work adjustment, only three students reported the utilization of WBL to modify behaviors in workplace. WBL can enable clients to learn in real work environments through participating in daily job activities and interactions (Sodiechowska & Maisch, 2006). It is important to increase the awareness of WBL among vocational future professionals to favor the success of clients in vocational settings. There are different types of WBL including apprenticeships/traineeships, simulation, and placements for consideration among service providers. These types of WBL can easily support job development, job coaching, and on-the-job training services.

Additionally, self-management strategies can be very beneficial, especially when clients work independently, lack proper transportation, and work in a distant location from rehabilitation professionals. Practitioners can consider self-monitoring strategies, including assistive devices, to increase on-task behavior despite of disability level (Boswell et al., 2013) that can help to improve work behaviors. Similarly, rehabilitation professionals can incorporate self-monitoring interventions using cell phones to increase acceptability and efficiency of these types of interventions (Bedesem & Dieker, 2014). Rehabilitation programs in rural areas can expose students to self-management strategies to increase on-task behaviors in job settings while integrating technological devices in service delivery.

Rehabilitation professionals ought to consider potential barriers in a rural workplace before using a specific strategy. As described in this study, perceived practitioner limitation, clients' collaboration, and external factors can possibly affect the implementation of strategies. Rehabilitation professionals need to engage in self-awareness to recognize limitations as well as venues to identify professional support to boost confidence, knowledge, and effectiveness in services. Although students recommended discovery activities as strategies for clients, prevocational rehabilitation professionals could also enhance their ability to process emotions, identify limitations, and process stress by using expressive writing and relaxation methods (Castillo & Fischer, 2017). By increasing self-awareness, rehabilitation professionals can recognize impact of own misconceptions on service delivery and relationship with clients.

Connecting with other social service agencies or community partners in rural areas can help to assist clients in developing community linkages and identifying work opportunities (Ipsen & RIIC, 2012). Correspondingly, rehabilitation professionals can learn to value close working relationships with employers and educational entities to increase vocational training and education opportunities to diminish the impact of lack of career experience among clients. Additionally, vocational rehabilitation service delivery can utilize telerehabilitation as a cost-saving alternative to face-to-face services (Castillo & Cartwright, 2018; Ipsen et al., 2012). Finally, workshops can assist clients with disabilities to learn new work skills and behaviors as well as to reduce the need for repeated job loss and recycling through vocational rehabilitation services (Chuang et al., 2015).

Additionally, future rehabilitation professionals can evaluate client's investment in services and environmental factors that affect the person-environment fit. Counselors need to advocate for clients at the exosystem level before services can result in individual employment outcomes in rural communities (Landon et al., 2019). Lack of support for disability and fear of disclosure, due to fear of stigma and small town attitudes (Ipsen & RIIC, 2012), can affect job training and work integration in rural settings. With discrimination, prejudice, and

lack of support from others in the workplace, clients can have a hard time finding and keeping satisfactory careers and career options. Rehabilitation professionals can engage in active adjustment to change work environment, in collaboration with employers (Dawis, 1994; Lindsay, 2011), to decrease the effect of external factors on work adjustment success and job satisfaction.

While work adjustment training can be helpful to consumers in changing behavior, the student and professional need to be aware that even with the most effective strategies, consumers sometimes revert to old behaviors particularly when there is a lot of stress. Important considerations need to be given to ecological characteristics of the job, home system, and personal struggles discussed by the client. The ecological model of career development (Hershenson & Szymanski, 1992) emphasizes the importance of context, environmental and individual factors that influence work behaviors. Rehabilitation professionals could utilize a variety of assessment tools prior services to measure personality, career readiness, adaptation to change, collaborative skills, and family dynamics to address any identified areas in an individualized employment plan. Such as, self-attitude could increase one's ability to find and engage in work and physical self-concept can reduce numbers of job placement services prior to employment (Becton et al., 2016). Similarly, social network assessment can help establish open communication and identify social support available to facilitate job placement (Morgan & Openshaw, 2011). Therefore, rehabilitation professionals should use a person–environment fit perspective when considering not only strategies for behavior modification but feasible placement opportunities.

According to researchers, identifying the strategies and resources required to help sustain workers with disabilities in paid employment is the first step toward increasing the participation of people with disabilities in the workforce (Sundar et al., 2018). Because of the importance of evidence-based practices in services, the training needs identified in this study have the potential to assist in the employment of people with disabilities. Rural vocational services require a tailored approach to match client skills and abilities to employment demands creatively in these communities (Ipsen & RIIC, 2012). Accordingly, rehabilitation students and professionals could consider cognitive behavioral techniques, person-centered interactions, and teaching methods to improve a match between job expectations and clients' skills. Comparably, rehabilitation professionals in training can enhance needed work-related behavior via utilizing teaching opportunities, integrating environmental forces, acquiring self-management skills, and using service options available. The strategies identified by the students in this study, when incorporated into education and training, can support the purpose of vocational services to increase representation of people with disabilities in rural employment.

Limitation of the Study

There are strengths and limitations to this study. A strength of this study is information gathered from a focus group about what training students need in strategies and barriers in work adjustment in a rural area. These findings provide valued information about training needs of prevocational rehabilitation professionals related to rural employment services. This information also assists in developing and addressing training material that prepares future rehabilitation providers in meeting the employment needs of clients and employers' expectations. Additionally, this information can also provide a foundational instrument for evaluating strategies to address behavioral issues to increase job satisfaction and job retention among clients. Limitations must also be considered when interpreting the findings and suggestions

of this study. Participants offered responses using perceived needs but at the moment of data collection, they were being trained to become rehabilitation professionals. Participants were still students in graduate and undergraduate programs with some of them having work experience with people with disabilities. Because of the variance in training and previous work experiences, participants could envision different training needs for rehabilitation professionals. Researchers could have also misinterpreted participants' responses considering that member checking occurred after completion of focus group. Finally, the participants only represented a very small portion of rehabilitation vocational students in training.

Future Recommendations

While there were limitations to this study, this article offers new information on perceptions of prevocational rehabilitation professionals concerning training needs to address problematic behaviors at work in rural communities. A future recommendation of this study is to assist students to identify potential employment barriers in rural settings as well as interventions to address any challenges prior client's vocational placement or during training. Identifying feasible practices and implementation barriers can potentially inform training programs, employment agencies, and clients to better engage and support job-seekers. Additionally, training rehabilitation programs need to prepare future providers in effectively identify interventions to increase employability and job retention among client with disabilities.

Rural employment offers many benefits for individuals with disabilities, thus vocational rehabilitation professionals need to recognize social barriers and vocational strategies. Vocational professionals in rural areas can improve services by adequately matching a person's ability to work environment and implementing work modification strategies. Since rural employment for individuals with disabilities faces many challenges, higher education institution can enhance curricula with material related to these clients with disabilities. Finally, advocacy and policies can continue to enhance vocational services available in rural areas.

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