Life as a Worker: An Inclusive Research Approach to Exploring the Experiences of People with Intellectual Disabilities

by
The Centre for Disability Studies Inclusive Research Network Affiliate of The University of Sydney, NSW, Australia

at
Australasian Society for Intellectual Disability Wellington, New Zealand

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Thank you to ASID for the 2011 ASID Research Award, and for their financial contribution to our travel costs.
What is the Centre for Disability Studies Inclusive Research Network

We are a group of co-researchers with intellectual disabilities, their supporters and university researchers from CDS, Sydney, New South Wales. We do research together.

“Nothing about us without us!”
What is our research about?

• We wanted to do research about the rights of people with intellectual disability.

• We learnt about the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

• We were interested to find out what are the everyday experiences of people with intellectual disabilities of the rights covered in the Convention.

• We learnt that not a lot of research has been done in this area.
Rights as a Worker

• We have looked at peoples’ rights in the areas of health, housing, education and employment.

• This presentation looks at one of these rights – that of employment.

• Article 27 of the Convention says that people with disabilities have the same chances and rights at work as other people.

• Our research question is “What are the experiences of people with intellectual disability around their rights as workers?”.
How we did the research on Life as a Worker

• We decided that individual interviews were the best way to get the information we needed.
• So we developed a series of questions on rights around work.
• One co-researcher with intellectual disability and one without conducted the interviews.
• The study was approved by the University of Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee.
What we found out
We collected information about what 24 people said about their experiences as a worker.
Employment status

- Working: 7
- Not working: 10
- Volunteering: 3
- No data: 4
Question 1:
Do you think you have equal opportunity to do the work you want to do?

- Yes: 17
- No: 5
- No answer: 2
Question 1:
Do you think you have equal opportunity to do the work you want to do?

People who said ‘YES’ said they were HAPPY about their opportunities because they:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Have a job NOW that they like / Had a job in the PAST that they liked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>CHOOSE not to work at the moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Do VOLUNTEER work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 1: What people said about equal opportunity

This is what one person spoke about:

One person told us that he is working with dedicated staff and working in a team. He has the opportunity to teach others and learn from others.
Question 1:
Do you think you have equal opportunity to do the work you want to do?

People who said ‘NO’ said they were UNHAPPY about their opportunities because of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullying</th>
<th>Not getting a fair go</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Bullying icon]</td>
<td>![Not getting fair go icon]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
[There are] people out there who don’t give people a fair go with disabilities (...) They should give them more of a go I think. So, people should, because it's hard for them.

This is what one person said:
Question 2:
Do you have security and safety at work?

Yes: 18
No: 3
No answer: 3
Question 2:
Do you have security and safety at work?

People who said ‘YES’ spoke about:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People at work are helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good WHS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 2:
What people said about security and safety

This is what one person said:

Yes, people are nice and helpful. When I ask for help they come.
**Question 2:**
*Do you have security and safety at work?*

**People who said ‘NO’ spoke about**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No job security</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor WHS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 2:
What people said about security and safety

This is what one person said:

The room at previous work was 'too tiny' and not ventilated. The person got a sinus infection because of this, which was the main reason why he left the job. He also experienced high blood pressure while working there because he was anxious about the small room.
Question 3:
Is it easy for you to find the job that you want to do?

- Yes: 8
- No: 12
- Haven't looked: 1
- No answer: 3
**Question 3:**
Is it easy for you to find the job that you want to do?

**People said:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Hand holding a job application" /></td>
<td>I found my own job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Helping hands" /></td>
<td>I got help to find my job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Confused monkey" /></td>
<td>It’s difficult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 3: What people said about finding a job

This is what one person reported about finding their own job:

The person found an ad for a paper run in the local newspaper, rang up about it and got the job.
Question 3: What people said about finding a job

This is what one person said about finding it DIFFICULT:

With the employment situation at the moment, it’s hard to find a job anywhere.
Question 4:
Is it important that you can get to and from work and that you can get around your workplace easily?

Yes: 16
No: 4
No answer: 4
Question 4:
Is it important that you can get to and from work and that you can get around your workplace easily?

People spoke about:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public transport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelchair access</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is what one person said about having NO ISSUES:

I can walk really well. Never been in a wheelchair.
Question 4:
What people said about getting to and around their workplace

This is what someone said about PUBLIC TRANSPORT:

I have anxiety with buses.
Question 5: How important is training for you to get a job and keep a job?

- Important: 20
- Not important: 1
- No response: 3
Question 5: How important is training for you to get a job and keep a job?

People spoke about:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icon</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Training" /></td>
<td>Training is important to keep my job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Help" /></td>
<td>Would need help with training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 5:
What people said about training

This is what one person said:

Very important - but are they willing to do that for me? Can’t take pressure when employers are in your face. [I] would struggle.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working conditions</th>
<th>Not getting paid enough, I’m a hard worker.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s a good job and I'm very happy with my manager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for work</td>
<td>I just want to get a job and earn my own money. I have hope for the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has to be safe</td>
<td>Maybe I can talk for other people - very important to their workplace and inside their workplace and they must have a safe workplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same rights for people with disabilities</td>
<td>We can be just as productive as non-disabled workers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Article 27 of the Convention says that people with disabilities have the same chances and rights at work as other people.

Were the people we interviewed experiencing the same chances and rights at work as other people?
In summary, the important things that people told us were:

• People with intellectual disabilities don’t always get a fair go, although they are good workers and they want to be treated like everybody else.

• They are sometimes treated differently or bullied

• Sometimes their workplace was not safe and had poor physical access

• Training is the key to employment for people with disabilities.
What we learnt through being inclusive researchers

For us, doing research together was a **new experience**, where we learnt to **respect** other peoples’ views, keep information **confidential** and to **not impose** our own point of view.

We learnt a lot about **communicating** with different people, for example using easier language and using assistive technology.

We have demonstrated **stamina** throughout the course of the project and our **ability to relate** to other people with disability. We are passionate about advocating for others.
Conclusion

We are not just a group of co-researchers, but a community of inclusive research practice.

We look forward to sharing more of our research in the future, especially with people and organisations who can bring about change and improvements.
Thank you for your attention.
Questions? Comments?