

Research shows unemployment programs lacking for people with disabilities

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The University of Kansas study, published recently in the *Career Development Quarterly*, shows two major federal programs have inadequacies in aiding people with physical or mental health impairments.

Federal programs to assist the unemployed are failing [job seekers](#) with disabilities, according to an investigation by Jean Hall and Kathy Parker of the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas.

The KU study, published recently in the [Career Development Quarterly](#), shows two major federal programs — the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program, which requires recipients to find employment within two years, and the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which set up “One-Stop” centers to cluster services for the unemployed — have inadequacies in aiding people with physical or mental health impairments.

“The biggest problem is that these are one-size-fits-all programs,” said Hall, associate research professor in the Center for Research on Learning’s Division of Adult Studies. “People with disabilities, because they are a smaller subset, don’t get the kind of services they need. They are lost in the system.”

The insufficiency of the programs is striking because about 63 percent of Americans with disabilities are unemployed. Moreover, 29 percent of TANF benefit recipients nationwide have physical or mental health

impairments, as opposed to 11 percent of the population not receiving TANF benefits.

Yet counselors for the unemployed lack the training necessary to help clients with disabilities.

“When we spoke with the service providers who work in these centers they expressed a level of discomfort working with people with disabilities,” Hall said. “They really did desire training to learn how to do that better. It’s a matter of a comfort level and availability of training or information that they don’t have.”

Hall said that barriers to employment common to people with disabilities include résumé gaps due to illness and the need for special workplace accommodations.

But the KU researcher said that attitudes about disabilities present the largest barrier to employment.

“What we found is that people with disabilities who are in these systems, whether it’s welfare or trying to find a job, experience low self-esteem,” Hall said. “When they go into a center, the staff at the center is not well-prepared to address their particular needs. That response reinforces their feelings of disempowerment — that the system is not really there to help them.”

The KU researchers found job seekers with disabilities often experienced “an endless loop” without finding gainful employment through the center.

To study the TANF program, Hall and Parker conducted six focus groups and surveyed 57 TANF recipients with and without disabilities in Kansas. For the WIA study, the researchers used focus groups with

consumers and staff in Kansas along with data collected from “mystery customers,” job seekers with [disabilities](#) who made visits to One-Stop centers.

Provided by University of Kansas

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