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FAKULTET ZA SPECIJALNU
EDUKACIJU I REHABILITACIJU

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE
FACULTY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
AND REHABILITATION

12.

MEĐUNARODNI
NAUČNI SKUP
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EDUKACIJA I
REHABILITACIJA
DANAS”

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TODAY”

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EMPLOYABILITY SUPPORT AND BARRIERS AMONG INDIVIDUALS WITH FUNCTIONAL DIVERSITY – A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Sofija Pajić**¹, Nevena Strižak², Luka Mijatović²

¹Radboud University, Faculty of Economics and Business, Institute of Management Research, The Netherlands

²University of Belgrade – Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, Serbia

Introduction: *Employability refers to the “capability to move self-sufficiently within the labor market to realize potential through sustainable employment”. Some authors analyze employability as an outcome in terms of a person’s subjective or objective chance of a job on the labor market, whereas others focus on employability as a set of individual and contextual antecedents of sustainable employment. In the last few decades, research on employability has blossomed, which resulted in a great volume of literature coupled with the variety of contexts and populations among which employability is studied. Among people with functional diversity, understanding factors that support or impede employability is a key element in promoting social inclusion.*

Aim: *The aim of this study is to provide a systematic review of the individual and contextual factors that relate to employability of individuals with functional diversity. In addition, comparing the findings from multiple primary studies, the study contributes to explaining the current inconsistencies.*

Methods: *We conducted a comprehensive search for relevant publications across different databases (i.e., PsycINFO, Web of Science, Business Source Premier). We used combinations of keywords pertinent to employability and functional diversity in order to perform a qualitative analysis of the key relationships.*

Results: *Preliminary results show inconsistency in theorizing and measurement, as well as a lack of insight into the “how” of the theoretical framework. Moreover, individuals with functional diversity experience a range of barriers to employability, which vary depending on the context where studies are conducted. Finally, the results substantially vary depending on the specific conceptualization of employability, measurement, and functional diversity in question.*

** sofija.pajic@ru.nl

Conclusion: *We unpack the antecedents of employability, increasing insight into the complexity of its promotion among individuals with functional diversity. From a societal standpoint, this is relevant in promoting decent work for all. With the current labor shortage in key societal sectors, societies need workers to develop beyond organizational boundaries.*

Keywords: *employability, functional diversity, systematic review*

INTRODUCTION

Functional diversity encompasses individuals that experience “long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (United Nations, 2006, p. 4). In the current study, we choose the term functional diversity over disability because it emphasizes the non-accommodation of these individuals and their way of functioning, and it distances itself from the negative connotation associated with the word disability (Patston, 2007). For individuals with functional diversity, active engagement in the labor market plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life because the attainment of decent employment represents a fundamental factor in achieving social inclusion (Novo-Corti, 2017). Therefore, the workplace integration of these individuals has been a focal point of multiple social policies, such as the United Nations (UN) Agenda 2030, which aims to acknowledge and protect the rights of people with disabilities (Nations, 2007). However, despite progress regarding equal opportunities, no discrimination, and universal accessibility, there are still substantial differences in employment rates of people with functional diversity and the general working population, as well as prejudice and discrimination in work relations (Schur et al., 2009). As indicated by the UN, 82% of people with functional diversity living in developing countries are below the poverty threshold (Ríos, 2013). Hence, understanding factors that support or impede employment is a key element in promoting social inclusion among this group.

In the current study, we approach the employment integration of individuals with functional diversity from the employability perspective, focusing particularly on the psychological approach to employability (Vanhercke et al., 2014). Employability refers to the “capability to move self-sufficiently within the labor market to realize potential through sustainable employment” (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Some authors analyze employability as an outcome in terms of a person’s subjective or objective chance of a job on the labor market, whereas others focus on employability as a set of individual and contextual antecedents of sustainable employment (Forrier & Sels, 2003). In the last few decades, research on employability has blossomed, which resulted in a great volume of literature coupled with the variety of contexts and populations among which employability is studied (Pajic, 2020), including a plethora of studies that looked into employability of individuals with different forms of functional diversity (Mahalik et al., 2006; Noyes et al., 2018).

Given this state of affairs, there is a need to systematically review the literature and assemble knowledge on factors that actually promote and sustain the employability of individuals with functional diversity. Hence, the aim contribution of this paper is twofold. First, we will perform a systematic review of the literature in order to ascertain individual and structural factors that relate to the employability of individuals with functional diversity. In doing so, we will gain greater insight into those factors that contribute to employability. Second, we will highlight the gaps, inconsistencies, and limitations in current research to advance an agenda for future research. This is important for providing policy recommendations that are evidence-based and are likely to be particularly persuasive to policymakers.

METHODS

We conducted a comprehensive search for relevant publications across different databases (i.e., PsycINFO) between January 2020 and May 2023. We used combinations of keywords pertinent to employability and functional diversity in order to perform a qualitative analysis of the key relationships. Titles and abstracts of the identified studies were evaluated against the inclusion criteria: (a) We included qualitative and quantitative empirical studies and research reports published in academic while conceptual and theoretical studies were excluded. (b) Population-wise, only studies reporting on adults with various forms of functional diversity (i.e., psychiatric diagnoses, intellectual capabilities, musculoskeletal, neurological, and other physical health issues, visual or hearing impairments, etc.) were included. Studies targeted at the general population, students, or very specific vulnerable populations (e.g., immigrants, criminal offenders, war veterans, individuals with low SES) were excluded; (d) We excluded studies that referred to a completely different meaning of the term “functional diversity”, such as diversity in job functions within a team. The initial search yielded 617 papers. One hundred seventy-eight papers were immediately excluded because they did not fulfill the publication or year requirements. Additional 327 papers were excluded because they did not focus on the right population or conceptualization of functional diversity. In total, 112 papers satisfied the inclusion criteria and were used in the analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, to provide a general overview of the most studied themes and topics within the analyzed literature, we created a visual representation of the keyword occurrence (Figure 1).

the country context where the studies were performed, the functional diversity in question, and the specific conceptualization and measurement of employability.

From a practical angle, information targeted at all involved, including employers, employees, government, and policymakers, is necessary to support the employability of those with functional diversity and balance the expectations of employers and employees. Also, it is essential for rehabilitation counselors to understand the complexities of intersectionality, including personal and structural barriers that influence employability.

CONCLUSION

We unpack the antecedents of employability, increasing insight into the complexity of its promotion among individuals with functional diversity. From a societal standpoint, this is relevant in promoting decent work for all. With the current labor shortage in key societal sectors, societies need workers to develop beyond organizational boundaries.

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