

The Impact of Receipt of Social Security Supplemental Income on Vocational  
Rehabilitation Closure Status for Transitional-Aged Youth

by

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## ABSTRACT

The current study examined the effects of the receipt of the Social Security Administration's Supplemental Security Income (SSI) on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth ranging from 14 to 22 years. The fiscal year 2016 Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA-911) data set was used to examine the effects. Due to limitations with the data and significant data errors in the data set, no statistical significance was found. It was significant that the data had substantial and numerous errors that did not allow for determining whether or not there were meaningful effects on the receipt of SSI, or any services provided by the federal/state vocational rehabilitation system. The finding established the lack of any meaningful way for a researcher to utilize the data set to determine the effects of the receipt of SSI or the effects of the services provided to program participants. Several suggestions are made to increase the accuracy of the data set as well as for potential research directions once the data are collected and managed appropriately.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM**

#### **Background of the Problem**

The rehabilitation of people with disabilities has historically focused on the treatment of people who deviate negatively from the majority of society in regard to one or more of the following: physical appearance, physical functioning, intellectual functioning, and behavior (Rubin & Roessler, 2007). The treatment referred to above tended to focus on helping the person with a disability to be or appear “more normal” and did not focus on a person’s abilities. If a person was perceived to be normal, they would have better opportunities. However, persons with disabilities were not treated with normalcy. The recognition that people with disabilities experience stigmatization and discrimination similar to minority groups led to the inclusion of civil rights for persons with disabilities within the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Further legislation that addressed the stigma and discrimination people with disabilities face included the American with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Stigma has been well researched in the social sciences, with early researchers such as Erving Goffman (1963) describing stigma as “the phenomenon whereby an individual with an attribute is deeply discredited by...society [and] is rejected as a result of the attribute” (p. 3). Other scholars, Crocker, Major, and Steele (1998) described stigma as a mark of disgrace associated with a particular quality of a person. Stigma towards people with disabilities may result in reduced access to housing, education, employment, poor mental health, and low social status (Corrigan, 2002), and may

influence the cognition, affect, and behavior of an individual (Miller & Major, 2000). Corrigan proposed that the process of public stigma is comprised of three levels, including stereotype (i.e., negative belief about a group), prejudice (i.e., agreement with the belief and/or negative emotional reaction), and discrimination (i.e., behavior response to belief and/or negative emotional reaction). For example, a person with Schizophrenia is perceived as being dangerous or unstable by society (stereotype), which can lead to emotional responses (fear), resulting in a behavioral response such as not being hired for an employment position, or not provided (housing).

Historically, peoples with disabilities have been viewed as detrimental to society (Parker & Patterson, 2012) and negative attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions may contribute to people with disabilities being marginalized in education and employment settings (Antonak & Livneh, 1988, 2000; Yunker, 1988). A current representation of the marginalization of people with disabilities in employment can be shown by comparing labor force participation rates from 2018 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018) of people with disabilities (20.6%) to people without disabilities (68.3%). In addition to the challenges for people with disabilities in acquiring employment, other challenges exist for transitional-aged youth aged 14 to 21 with disabilities.

### **Transitional-Aged Youth and Employment**

A national effort to improve outcomes for youth with disabilities transitioning from secondary education into adulthood has been a complicated and challenging process. There are approximately 2,947,534 youth with disabilities within the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Research in rehabilitation counseling has examined

the role of work on perceived quality of life, and findings from several studies have shown that being employed is a strong predictor of a higher perceived quality of life (Rubin & Roessler, 2007). People with disabilities often suffer from greater social isolation, stigma, and financial burdens (Blustein, 2008). Employment can serve as a means to reduce these barriers (Smart, 2015). Furthermore, work activities help people with disabilities overcome these negative experiences by providing them with economic opportunities, social belonging, self-esteem, purpose, and personal growth (Lent & Brown, 2013). When considering transitional-aged youth with disabilities, specific labor force participation rates are unavailable as available data and statistics regarding disability status and employment utilize the age category 16 years and over. Fifty-five percent of individuals 16 to 24 years old were employed in 2018; however, this percentage did not account for disability status (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

### **Relevant Legislation**

Several pieces of legislation have been passed in an attempt to mitigate employment-related issues for people with disabilities, such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. More recent legislation targeted transitional-aged youth with disabilities and included the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014. In addition to legislative action taken by Congress in an attempt to reduce discrimination in employment, education, and other services that promote independence, funding has been

provided to agencies, such as Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), that emphasize employment.

VR is a program that provides individualized and supportive services to assist people with disabilities in finding, obtaining, and maintaining employment compatible with his or her knowledge, skills, and functional abilities with or without accommodations (Sprong, Dallas, Upton, & Bordieri, 2015). VR programs were established as early as 1918 with the passing of the Soldier's Rehabilitation Act (provided to soldiers returning from World War I) and have since evolved to provide services to adults with disabilities and transitional-aged youth with disabilities. Below is a summary of each piece of the aforementioned legislation. Despite legislation and federal/state programs designed to reduce employment barriers for transition-aged youth with disabilities, labor force participation continues to remain low for all transition-aged youth and has not yet been investigated when considering disability. Therefore, the goal of the current study is to investigate outcome data to investigate the effectiveness of VR services for transitional-aged youth with disabilities.

- **Soldier's Rehabilitation Act of 1918:** training for injured Veterans as preparation for new jobs matching their "new" abilities. (Rubin & Roessler, 2007).
- **Rehabilitation Act of 1973:** extend and revise the authorization of grants to States for vocational rehabilitation services, with special emphasis on services to those with the most severe disabilities, to expand special federal responsibilities and research and training programs with respect to individuals with disabilities, to establish special responsibilities in the Secretary of Health,

Education, and Welfare for coordination of all programs with respect to individuals with disabilities within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and for other purposes.

- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990:** The ADA was a civil rights law designed to prohibit discrimination based on disability.
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004:** This federal special education law ensures all children with disabilities have access to a free and appropriate public education.
- **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009:** The primary objective of ARRA was to save existing jobs and create new jobs as soon as possible. Other objectives were to provide temporary relief programs for those most affected by the recession and invest in infrastructure, education, health, and renewable energy.
- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014:** enacted to strengthen and improve our nation's public workforce system and help get Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment into high quality jobs and careers. WIOA has a specific youth program which seeks to deliver a comprehensive array of youth services. These services focus on assisting out of school youth and in school youth with one or more barriers to employment prepare for postsecondary education and employment opportunities, attain educational and/or skills training credentials, and secure employment with career/promotional opportunities.

## **Social Security and Vocational Rehabilitation**

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program is a nationwide federal assistance program administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to provide a minimum level of income for aged, blind, or disabled individuals. It is a safety net for individuals and families who have limited resources and little or no other income from any other source. As of January 2017, there were approximately 1.2 million childhood disability recipients and 8.12 million individuals receiving SSI payments (SSA, 2017). This income is often referred to as an income of last resort and is often the difference between extreme poverty and a basic subsistence for a family.

As previously mentioned, VR is a program that provides individualized and supportive services to assist people with disabilities in finding, obtaining, and maintaining employment compatible with his or her knowledge, skills, and functional abilities with or without accommodations (Sprong et al., 2015). The federal/state Vocational Rehabilitation Services program can begin to offer services at around the age of 14 to 16 (WIOA, 2014). This age range varies from state to state. This program is administered via the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) which provides formula grants to fund services to individuals with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining employment. There is a requirement that priority must be given to individuals with the most significant disabilities if a state is unable to serve all eligible individuals (RSA, 2019). WIOA (2014) amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and required that vocational rehabilitation agencies to set aside 15% of their federal funds to provide pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities who

are eligible or potentially eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. Pre-ETS services are generally provided in a partnership with a local school district.

Despite the recent policies and governmental legislation focusing on increasing the labor force participation by targeting transitional-aged youth (focusing on early intervention), transitional-aged individuals with disabilities have consistently struggled with obtaining and maintaining employment. The Social Security Administration (2018) reported that once an individual enters the adult disability programs (SSI or SSDI), less than 1% leave annually, even with programs such as VR being readily available to assist in finding the person with the disability employment compatible with his knowledge, skills, and functional abilities. Further analysis is needed to understand the variables that are impacting such a low percentage of individuals on SSI or SSDI are leaving the program on an annual basis. Prior to developing research that explores causation, research is needed to determine factors influencing closure status for transitional-aged youth, as there are a reduced number of peer-reviewed journal articles exploring transitional-aged youth and VR.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There were several benefits to exploring closure status of consumers on SSI receiving VR services, including but not limited to: (a) this specific research had not been investigated, (b) rules governing work-trial periods for those on SSI could be re-examined to determine if modification leads to motivation and compliance for VR services, (c) determining whether the receipt of cash benefits and health insurance



impacts a person's motivation or ability to work, and (d) determining the effectiveness of laws and policies currently in place to assist youth with disabilities in working.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the current study was to (a) investigate the impact of the receipt of SSI on closure status for transitional-aged youth receiving vocational rehabilitation services from the Division of Rehabilitation Services (Research Question 1), (b) investigate outcome data related to consumers of transitional age that are receiving vocational rehabilitation services (Research Question 2, 3, 4 and 5), and (c) observe how receiving SSI benefits impacts successful closure status (Research Question 6).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions have been developed from literature to help guide the current study:

1. Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at application?
2. Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at closure?
3. How does job placement, job readiness, and job search services impact closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no

employment) for consumers of transitional age, controlling for race, and gender?

4. Are consumers within the transitional-aged category more likely to exit with a successful closure (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) than consumers in other age categories, controlling for job placement services, job readiness training, and job search services?
5. What impact does the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services have on closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth who received SSI at application?
6. How does receiving SSI benefits at application affect successful closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers receiving vocational rehabilitation services through the Division of Rehabilitation, controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job-skills training, gender, and race?

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

The receipt of government benefits is a topic of interest to many. According to the Social Security Administration, less than 1% of recipients of disability benefits leave the program and return to work on an annual basis (SSA, 2019). There has been limited research exploring the effect of receiving SSI benefits as a child and its impact on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth into adulthood. Children who receive SSI benefits reside in families that have little economic resources. SSI is seen as the income of last resort. In determining eligibility for SSI, SSA considers an individual's

income in determining both eligibility for and the amount of his or her SSI benefit.

Further, resources are considered in determining SSI eligibility and monthly benefit amounts. Generally speaking, an individual cannot have more than \$2000 in resources in order to be eligible for SSI benefits (SSA, 2019).

SSI is an assistance of last resort. Oftentimes, children on social security benefits apply for SSI benefits as adults once they reach the age of 18. Given the transition from childhood to adult SSI benefits, emphasis on early intervention has increased in recent years (Rehabilitation Act Section 504). Specifically, transition planning within special education programs focus on three primary goals, including education, independent living, and employment. With employment goal being a main focus for early intervention strategies, VR counselors have started to be integrated into the individualized education plan (IEP) team to provide vocational services. Private sector VR counselors is one service provider that school districts may elect to use, but providers such as federal/state VR programs are used as well. The predominant provider of services is the federal/state VR program.

The federal/state Vocational Rehabilitation Services program can begin to offer services at around the age of 14 to 16 (WIOA, 2014). This program is administered via the RSA, which provides formula grants to fund services to individuals with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining employment. There is a requirement that priority must be given to individuals with the most significant disabilities if a state is unable to serve all eligible individuals (RSA, 2019). Finally, the SSI program provides an income of last resort and medical insurance for individuals with disabilities that qualify under their program guidelines (SSA, 2018). These services are designed to improve the

socioeconomic conditions for individuals with disabilities. These policies, laws and services are designed to work to improve access to services and participation in common life activities (Taylor, 2018).

### **Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

There are several pieces of legislation mandating that youth with disabilities receive services to increase their likelihood for living meaningful lives in the least restrictive environment as possible. VR Services are an array of services designed to help individuals with disabilities and barriers achieve an employment goal established by the consumer and consistent with their knowledge, skills, and functional abilities (Sprong et al., 2015). The federal/state VR system, our current system, was established in 1965 with the expressed purpose of assisting individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment (Rubin & Roessler, 2007).

VR services are some of the most effective public services provided to youth with disabilities (Kaya, 2018). The services are available in all 50 states. The services provided include counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, career counseling, on the job training, supported employment, job development and placement, assistance with advocacy, assistance with job accommodations and financial assistance with training and postsecondary education as well as necessary requirements for work. They are designed to assist all individuals with disabilities in working (Job Accommodation Network, 2019). There is an urgent need to facilitate services to assist youth with disabilities that assist with mitigating barriers to employment and facilitate successful employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities (Wehman, Chan, Ditchman, & Kang, 2014).

The federal/state VR program serves a critical role in assisting transitional-aged youth (aged 16-24 years) with disabilities to attain their vocational goals by offering the above specific vocational training and providing funding for higher education (Honeycutt, Thompkins, Bardos, & Stern, 2015). There is a dearth of knowledge about the best practices for agencies in serving transitional-aged youth despite this population comprising about 33% of the individuals seeking VR services (Honeycutt et al., 2015). The optimal level of services and outcomes for youth is unknown. Specifically, the presenting issue is that the performance measures and goals that the federal/state program collects are related to the entire population served but there are no specific numbers collected for transitional-aged youth (Honeycutt et al., 2015).

### **Assumptions**

Given the research and literature that has addressed receipt of SSI benefits and transitional-aged youth and employment, the following paragraphs are used to address the assumptions utilized with regard to the research questions.

#### **Research Question 1 Assumptions**

The first question was: Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at application? If individuals receive SSI benefits, they have a disability that is generally determined to be severe. It is clear that individuals without disabilities have higher employment rates when compared to individuals with disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). However, some individuals have disabilities that are not as severe as those experienced

by others. If an individual has a severe disability, the ability to obtain and maintain employment has been affected more so than peers with less severe disabilities and those with no disability.

### **Research Question 2 Assumptions**

The second question was: Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at closure? There are many reasons an individual with a disability may not want to lose SSI benefits including the difficulty involved in obtaining the benefits, the length of time needed to obtain the benefits, the loss of healthcare benefits, as well as the loss of a primary source of income. Less than 1% of individuals leave the disability benefit system once benefits are obtained (SSA, 2018).

### **Research Question 3 Assumptions**

This question asked: How does job placement, job readiness, and job search services impact closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers of transitional age, controlling for race, and gender? Research has shown the effectiveness of some services provided to individuals with disabilities. The services were not assumed to be effective. It was assumed the data could generate empirical knowledge about which services were effective and which were not to be helpful in guiding service provision and achieving consistently positive employment outcomes.

#### **Research Question 4 Assumptions**

This question asked: Are consumers within the transitional-aged youth category more likely to exit with a successful closure (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) than consumers in other age categories, controlling for job placement services, job readiness training, and job search services? In theory, the government has placed importance on early intervention in assisting individuals with disabilities of transitional age through legislation, such as WIOA. It was not known whether this early intervention was successful.

At this current time, the government does not track the employment statistics for transitional-aged youth with disabilities who have received job placement services, job readiness training, and job skill training. WIOA was a new law with recent implementation. The WIOA Youth Program indicated that 156,520 youth were served with a 69.2% placement in employment/education rate and a 66.7% degree/certificate attainment rate in 2015 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019b). However, the data represented all youth with one or more barriers to employment and not youth with disabilities specifically. A barrier to employment can be socioeconomic status or criminal history. Further, the grouping of placement in employment or education does not indicate if the person is employed or in school still or how many people who graduate from a degree or certificate program gain employment. It is essential to know if the money spent on early intervention and services has helped the individuals with disabilities seeking to obtain and maintain employment.

### **Research Question 5 Assumptions**

This question asked: What impact does the receipt of VR services have on closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth who received SSI at application? VR services, specifically counseling and guidance, are primary services provided by the federal/state VR program. These services should be a service that most individuals receive and a primary function of a VR counselor. However, little was known as to the effectiveness of this particular service. Of specific interest in this case was whether these services affected the employment outcomes at closure of individuals receiving SSI at application.

### **Research Question 6 Assumptions**

This question asked: How does receiving SSI benefits at application affect successful closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers receiving VR services through the Division of Rehabilitation, controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job-skills training, gender, and race? The receipt of SSI benefits suggests that an individual has a severe disability. There are other factors that could impact an individual's ability to obtain and maintain employment, such as educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job skills training, gender, and race. While higher educational level does positively affect the ongoing employment outcomes of persons with disabilities, employment outcome differences between females and males with disabilities were not known. Further, the examination of services provided was essential



to determine if receipt of services positively or negatively affected ongoing employment outcomes and could guide future service provision.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Supplemental Security Income (SSI).** A federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues (not Social Security taxes) designed to help aged, blind and disabled people, who have little or no income and it provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter (SSA, 2019).

**Transitional age.** An individual with a disability that is not younger than 14 years of age and not older than 21 years of age. More specifically, each state can have different ages for transition services to start and end (RSA, n.d.)

**Stigma.** A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

**Employment:** the condition of having paid work (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

**Workforce Investment Act.** A public law that sought to consolidate, coordinate, and improvement employment, training, literacy, and VR programs in the United States that was enacted in 1998. In practicality it sought to increase employment, retention and earnings of participants and as a result improve the quality of life of individuals (P.L. 105-220).

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).** A public law that makes available free and appropriate public education to children with disabilities in the United States and ensures special education and related services to children with disabilities.

IDEA was reauthorized in 2004 and most recently amended IDEA through Public Law 114-95, Every Student Succeeds Act, in December 2015.

**Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).** A public law that is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training and support services to succeed in the labor market. It seeks to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. WIOA superseded WIA and amended the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wagner Peyser Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019a).

**Rehabilitation Act of 1973.** This legislation continued VR services and retained an 80% to 20% ratio for federal to state dollars established by the Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendment of 1968. This act set five clear mandates to serve individuals with severe disabilities, promote consumer involvement, stress program evaluation, provide support for research, and advance the civil rights of persons with disabilities (Rubin & Roesler, 2008).

**Soldiers Rehabilitation Act of 1918.** The first federal program for VR in the United States. The program was designed to rehabilitate veteran with disabilities and the primary intent was to authorize VR services to veterans with disabilities that resulted from their military service that presented a handicap to employment (Rubin & Roesler, 2008).

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.** The ADA addressed the systematic and pervasive discrimination people with disabilities faced in daily life including employment, architectural barriers, nondiscrimination in state and local

services, and increased access to telecommunications, such as teletype telephones (Rubin & Roesler, 2008).

**Vocational Rehabilitation.** A series of services that are designed to assist individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain a job. Services can include vocational assessment, training, upgrading of general skills, refresher courses, on the job training, career counseling, job placement and development, and assistance with advocacy and self-advocacy for accommodations (Parker & Patterson, 2012).

**Reasonable Accommodation.** A modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done that enables an otherwise qualified individual with a disability equal employment opportunity. Equal employment opportunity refers to the opportunity to attain the same level of performance or to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment as are available to an average or similarly suited employee without a disability (Job Accommodation Network, 2019).

### **Limitations**

Utilization of a pre-existing dataset presented some limitations that were considered when designing the proposed project. The ability to prove causality was limited as three factors had to be present (Huck, 2007) including the following: (a) the cause must come before the effect; (b) the variables must covary (i.e., be related); (c) there must not be any confounding variables that are present that can explain the difference in the regression model (Shmueli & Koppius, 2011). Due to the fact that secondary analysis was performed, experimental research accounting for these three factors were not performed for this study. Although this study could provide much insight

in terms of exploring differences between consumers receiving and not receiving SSI, the study was correlational in nature with the external validity (generalizability) of such findings to be considered with caution against drawing inferences without further exploration. Rather, this study was used to provide a foundation for future research exploring the impact of SSI benefits on closure status of VR consumers of transitional age. Although selecting employment goals and placements that were compatible with a consumer's knowledge, skills, interests, and functional abilities (Rubin & Roessler, 2007) is important, motivation to obtain employment was a difficult construct to measure but must continue to be explored.

### **Significance of Study**

This study was conducted to determine what, if any impact, the receipt of SSI benefits had on a transitional-aged youth's employment outcomes. This was significant given that once an individual receives disability benefits from SSA, less than 1% leave the program in a given year (SSA, 2018). When only 1% of individuals leave the program, it creates a subset of individuals with disabilities that do not engage in all the experiences that self-sufficiency offers. An important marker of success in adult life is working (Lindstrom, Doren, & Miesch, 2011). Inclusion in society to the fullest extent possible makes employment essential. The nation has a vested interest in understanding the role that the receipt of benefits as a child has on a person's ability to work as an adult. Additionally, this study was conducted to determine if VR services can impact the employment outcomes of transitional-aged youth with a disability who received SSI as a

child. This study was significant due to the limited research on what services might be helpful or provide desired outcomes that include sustainable employment.

### **Organization of the Study**

The receipt of government benefits and economic self-sufficiency was a topic of interest to many. Chapter I provided an overview of the dissertation study as a whole. According to SSA, less than 1% of recipients of disability benefits leave the program and return work on an annual basis (2019). Children with disabilities can receive SSI as a child when their parents/guardians have limited economic resources. This is an income of last resort for these families. However, there was limited research exploring the effect of receiving SSI benefits as a child and the impact these benefits might have on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth into adulthood.

An important marker of success as an adult in U.S. society is employment (Lindstrom et al., 2011). Employment provides financial stability, allows self-sufficiency, increases overall self-esteem and personal satisfaction levels (Szymanski, Enright, Hershenson, & Ettinger, 2003). There was limited research on the impact of VR services on transitional-aged youth that receive SSI benefits on employment outcomes. The primary question was whether the services that are being provided assisting transitional-aged youth with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment and economic self-sufficiency.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the receipt of SSI on closure status for transitional-aged youth receiving services from state VR services. Closure status refers to either a successful employment outcome or not employed. The

RSA-911 Case Service Report for fiscal year 2016 archival data set was utilized for this study. The designs used included data mining, descriptive, and covariance.

Chapter IV includes the results obtained from the study. The results answered the following six research questions:

1. Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at application?
2. Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at closure?
3. How does job placement, job readiness, and job search services impact closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers of transitional age, controlling for race, and gender?
4. Are consumers within the transitional-aged youth category more likely to exit with a successful closure (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) than consumers in other age categories, controlling for job placement services, job readiness training, and job search services?
5. What impact does the receipt of VR services have on closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth who received SSI at application?

6. How does receiving SSI benefits at application affect successful closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers receiving VR services through the Division of Rehabilitation, controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job-skills training, gender, and race?

Chapter V contains the results and how these results inform policy and practice. The intent of the laws, policies, and services were discussed in this dissertation to assist individuals with disabilities in working. If there was an impact on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth that received SSI benefits, such a finding could be used to assist in advocating for positive legislative and policy changes. Further, if positive or negative impacts were found for VR services, such a finding could benefit positive policy and legislative changes. Recommendations for best practices appear in Chapter V.

### **Summary**

This chapter addressed the problem which necessitated the need for this study, namely how the receipt of SSI benefits and what services impacted the employment outcomes of traditional-aged youth in the program. People with disabilities have historically faced great amounts of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, which has led to the development of governmental programs to assist individuals with disabilities. Assumptions were addressed in this chapter, specifically that data showed lower employment rates for individuals with disabilities, the effectiveness of services, the potential effectiveness of early intervention at the transitional age, and demographic factors of level of education and gender affected the employment outcomes of

transitional-aged youth. Relevant terms, legislation, and policy were covered. Limitations of the study were addressed, specifically causality versus correlation. This study was correlational in nature, and the generalizability of the findings was questionable.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The receipt of government benefits is a topic of interest to many. Employment and economic self-sufficiency remain a desired goal for many individuals. However, some individuals with disabilities receive government benefits because they have been declared unable to work. Children receive benefits if they have a condition determined to be severe and their parents have limited economic resources to care for their children with disabilities. According to the Social Security Administration (SSA, 2019), less than 1% of recipients of disability benefits leave the program and return to work on an annual basis. There has been limited research exploring the effect of receiving supplemental security income (SSI) benefits as a child and its impact on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth into adulthood. Children who receive SSI benefits reside in families with few economic resources. The SSA considers an individual's income in determining both eligibility for and the amount of an individual's SSI benefit. Further, accessibility to resources affects SSI eligibility and monthly benefit amounts. Generally speaking, an individual cannot have more than \$2,000 in resources to be eligible for SSI benefits. Therefore, SSI endures as an assistance of last resort.

Chapter II includes the current literature related to transitional-aged youth receiving SSI and their potential employment outcomes. What SSI is and who it serves is presented in this chapter. A working definition of transitional-aged youth, an overview of relevant policy and legislation related to this particular age group, the economic status of transitional-aged youth, and incidence data are discussed. Vocational implications

relevant to the transitional-aged youth group are also described. Finally, existing literature on the services available to these consumers in the RSA's Vocational Program (VR) is explicated.

### **Economic Characteristics of Individuals with Disabilities**

The report entitled *Americans with Disabilities: 2014* by Taylor (2018) was based on the SSA's Supplemental to the 2014 Panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation and sponsored by SSA. Most of the data were obtained between September and November of 2014, and the collection methodology involved interviews of households. Taylor reported on individuals with disabilities aged 18 to 64 years and found those employed at the end of 2013 typically earned less than adults without disabilities. The median annual earnings per the U.S. Census Bureau and SSA for an employed adult with a disability of any kind was \$27,080 compared to adults without a disability who earned on average \$35,915 (Taylor, 2018). Earnings from work, unsurprisingly, showed that individuals with severe disabilities earned the least. According to the SSA, adults with severe disabilities were less likely to work full time (65.2%) than adults with a nonsevere disability (74.4%) and adults without disabilities (77.7%; Taylor, 2018).

Individuals with disabilities have a higher incidence of living in poverty. For adults without disabilities, only 12.9% lived in poverty in 2013 (Taylor, 2018). Individuals with a disability had a poverty rate of 24.0% compared to individuals with a severe disability 28.6%. In general, individuals with disabilities were more likely to receive some form of public assistance. About 61.8% of adults with severe disabilities

received some form of public assistance, and 24.0% of adults with nonsevere disabilities received public assistance. Overall, working age adults with severe and nonsevere disabilities were more likely to be uninsured than adults with no disability. Taylor (2018) noted that adults with severe disabilities were most likely to have a government health coverage (47.7%) than an adult with a nonsevere disability (15.9%).

According to Taylor (2018), there were 73.5-million children under the age of 18 years in the nation in 2014, and of those children 12.6 million (17.1%) had a disability, of which about half of that group had a severe disability. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) was the most commonly diagnosed disability among school-aged children (8.6%), and 2.1% of children had a developmental disorder, such as autism or cerebral palsy, while 6.1% had other developmental conditions for which they received treatment and services while in school. Finally, 2.2% had a learning disability, and 2.8% had a mental illness.

### **Transitional-Aged Youth and Employment**

A national effort to improve transition outcomes for youth with disabilities transitioning from secondary education into adulthood represented a complicated and challenging process. There were approximately 2,947,534 youth with disabilities within the United States according to the American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Research in rehabilitation counseling about the role of work on perceived quality of life showed being employed to be a strong predictor of a higher perceived quality of life (Rubin & Roessler, 2007).

People with disabilities often suffer from greater social isolation, stigma, and financial burdens (Blustein, 2008). Employment can serve as a means to reduce these barriers (Smart, 2015). Furthermore, work activities might help people with disabilities overcome negative experiences and gain economic opportunities, social belonging, self-esteem, purpose, and personal growth (Lent & Brown, 2013). Employment has been linked to a higher perceived quality of life among persons with disabilities (Rubin & Roessler, 2007). These benefits have been the impetus for VR services and the development of a federal/state VR program that meet the needs of transitional-aged youth with disabilities.

Legislation such as the WIOA was to increase self-sufficiency and reduce dependency upon welfare programs by better aligning the differing workforce development programs with education, training and economic developmental initiatives to address labor market challenges. Meeting the hiring needs of employers and connecting job seekers with training opportunities and VR services they might need continues as a critical goal (WIOA, 2014). VR services for individuals prepare for, obtain, retain or advance in employment (Texas Workforce Commission, 2019). These services to individuals with disabilities are to assist these individuals in maximizing their employment, independence and integration into the community and competitive labor market (RSA, 2019).

The need to employ effective intervention strategies to assist youth with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining employment persists. Evidence that helping youth with disabilities to early work experiences leads to better long-term VR outcomes is mounting (Cimera, Burgess, & Wiley, 2013). Youth with disabilities constitute a group

with long term potential, if they were to become employed for the long term, it would reduce expenses associated with the adult care system (Wehman, Schall, et al., 2014).

The federal/state VR program is a primary place for individuals with disabilities seek to services.

### **Laws and Policies Related to Transitional-Aged Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)**

There are several laws that guide the provision of services to youth with disabilities and youth with barriers to employment, including (1) IDEA of 2004, (2) WIOA of 2018, (3) Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (specifically Title I), (4) American's with Disabilities Act of 1990 and (5) Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act. These laws form the framework for services to individuals with disabilities as well as youth (17 and under) with disabilities and youth with barriers to employment. Laws and policies have been developed to specifically address the issues faced by individuals with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining employment. Recently, specific interest has focused on assisting transitional-aged youth with a successful transition adulthood via education, training and services with the ultimate end goal of employment and economic independence (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019a).

### **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) History**

IDEA is a federal special education law that ensures all children with disabilities have access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). IDEA was originally named the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1975, P. 94-142. It was renamed to IDEA in 1990. IDEA was amended significantly in 1997, P.L. 101-476. IDEA of 1997 indicated that transition services should be focused on in annual meetings

beginning at the age of 14. For most states, by at least the age of 16, the focus shifted to planning for transition services, targeting three goals (i.e., employment, independent living, and education) as opposed to discussing the transition service needs (Johnson, 2017). The student's needs or challenges, their desires, and the specific services required to assist the student with a disability in achieving their goals formed the core of this planning (Johnson, 2017). IDEA of 1997 also recognized the complexity and long-term nature of transition and it was generally clear that neither families, schools, adult service providers, state agencies, colleges or universities could carry the entire fiscal, programmatic or planning responsibility (DeStefano & Hasazi, n.d.). With the passing of IDEA of 1997, legislators sought to increase involvement from all parties such as the student, families, and outside agencies. In 2004, IDEA was again amended and re-authorized. In 2009, the ARRA provided additional funding for IDEA (2004) to ensure that children with disabilities have access to free and appropriate public education to meet each child's unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and/or independent living. The goal of this legislation was to stimulate the economy by assisting individuals to work.

### **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 Reauthorization**

IDEA (2004) detailed educational law and policy for serving children and youth with disabilities. The law was focused on the importance of preparing youth for success after high school and indicated that transition planning for students who receive special education services includes an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) that must begin by the age of 16. Transition planning was mandated to facilitate the movement from school

to postsecondary activities such as education, independent living, and work. The intent of transition planning was for the individual to work and transition to adult life. Transition planning would start before the student turned 16, be individualized, based on a student's strengths, preferences, and interests and include opportunities to develop functional skills for work and community life. IDEA 2004 continues in place in the public school today.

**IEPs.** According to IDEA (2004), transition services must be included in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team. The IEP team must include parents and the student, and this plan must be updated annually. The IEP document should include appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and where appropriate independent living goals. Parental involvement in the transition process is necessary and essential. Parents are an important source of information regarding their children. Parents must buy into the notion that their children can work and do not need to be dependent upon government benefits for survival. Parents serve as a motivating factor for transitional-aged youth with disabilities. Unfortunately, parents can serve as a nonmotivating factor for transitional-aged youth with disabilities in that they may be dependent upon the SSI benefits that the transitional-aged youth may receive. Further, transition services including course work must be provided to assist the child in reaching those goals.

**Transition services.** According to IDEA 2004, transition services are a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is a results-oriented process focusing on improving the academic and functional achievement of a child with a

disability to help the child move from school to post school activities. Services can include postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), adult education, adult services, as well as independent living and/or community participation. The intent of these services is to lead to work, if possible, and a productive adult life in the community. Throughout the evolution of IDEA, there has been a steady and increased focus on improving outcomes for individuals with disabilities during their adult lives. This focus reflects the increased economic opportunities for individuals with disabilities. If individuals with disabilities can participate in the open labor market they can contribute economically and improve their own lives without reliance on government benefits.

### **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA)**

WIOA, also known as U.S. Public Law 113-128, was enacted in 2014 as the primary federal workforce development program legislation that focused on increased coordination among federal workforce development programs. WIOA was enacted to strengthen and improve the nation's public workforce system and help get Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment into high-quality jobs and careers. WIOA has a specific youth program which seeks to deliver a comprehensive array of youth services. These services are designed to assist both out-of-school youth and in-school youth with overcoming one or more barriers to employment, preparing for postsecondary education and employment opportunities, attaining educational and/or skills training credentials, and securing employment with career/promotional opportunities. This law contained five titles.



**Title I.** Title I includes workforce development activities which authorize job training and related services to unemployed or underemployed individuals and establishes the governance and performance accountability system for WIOA. Title I is administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (2019a), primarily via its Employment and Training Administration (ETA). WIOA is designed to be a demand-driven workforce development program. The system is, in theory, required to provide employment and training services responsive to the demands of local area employers. WIOA is designed to provide services via a central point, One Stop Centers, to ensure a seamless and efficient process in accessing employment services. WIOA provides services to all individuals, not just individuals with disabilities. Services are provided regardless of age or employment status, but it does have a priority service for career and training services for low income and skill deficient individuals.

**Title II.** Title II addresses Adult Education and Literacy which authorizes educational services to assist adults in improving their basic skills, completing secondary education, and transitioning to postsecondary education. Literacy is an essential skill in today's labor market. The inability to read significantly limits a person's employment options. Improving basic skills and completing a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) significantly improves a person's ability to obtain employment and gives them access to higher earnings.

**Title III.** Title III addresses amendments to Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933 (P.L. 73-30) which integrated the U.S. Employment Service (ES) into the One Stop system authorized by WIOA. The Wagner-Peyser Act established a nationwide system of public employment offices known as the Employment Service. This service seeks to improve

the functioning of the nationwide labor market by bringing together individuals seeking employment with employment seekers (WIOA, 2014).

**Title IV.** This title amends the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112) and authorized employment related vocational services to individuals with disabilities to integrate VR into the One Stop system, such as Title I of WIOA. Title IV extends and revises the authorization of grants to state for VR services with a special emphasis on services to individuals with severe disabilities. It further expands special federal responsibilities and research and training programs for individuals with disabilities. Finally, it establishes special responsibilities for the Secretary of Education for coordination of all activities for individuals with disabilities within and across programs administered by the federal government.

### **Rehabilitation Act of 1973**

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which was the original law, and its subsequent amendments addressed the needs of individuals with disabilities and the discrimination they faced. The focus of this law and its services was to assist individuals with obtaining and maintaining employment to reduce dependence upon government support. There was a special emphasis placed on serving individuals with the most severe disabilities. This law contained five titles, and the relevant titles are discussed.

**Section 501.** Section 501 required affirmative action and nondiscrimination in employment by federal agencies. In plain language, federal government's agencies must provide preference to individuals with disabilities in their hiring practices. Further, federal agencies must not discriminate against individuals with disabilities. This law did

not apply to the private sector but was an important first step in assisting individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment.

**Section 503.** Section 503 required the affirmative action and nondiscrimination in employment by federal government contractors whose awards were greater than \$10,000. Similar to Section 501 in its requirements, Section 503 applied to entities that contracted with the federal government. These contractors must provide preference to and affirmatively hire individuals with disabilities. This was the only application the private sector at that time in terms of employment. This section represented the first attempt to assist individuals with disabilities with obtaining and maintaining employment by providing a preference category for the group.

**Section 504.** Section 504 created and extended civil rights to individuals with disabilities. This section provided opportunities to all individuals with disabilities in education, employment, and in other settings. Section 504 is an unfunded, nondiscrimination civil rights law that emphasizes equal opportunity in any program receiving federal funding. Reasonable accommodations were addressed and allowed in any program receiving federal funds. Regulations required reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities and students with disabilities. Section 504 also required new construction and existing building alterations provide 100% accessibility to individuals with disabilities. The primary difference between IDEA (2004) and Section 504 is that IDEA requires services be provided to students with disabilities whereas Section 504 only requires accommodations. This means students with disabilities in the school system under Section 504 receive no transition services or educational services, only accommodations, such as extended time to complete assignments or tests.

Students with dyslexia are a prime example of the differences between IDEA 2004 and Section 504. The U.S. Department of Education found in January of 2018 that Texas had effectively capped federally funded special education services for at least a decade. Further, the report indicated that the ambiguity in the state's policy on dyslexia may have directed students away from federally funded special education services, thus violating federal law (Swaby, 2018). Texas was not the only state that had difficulty with providing services to students with dyslexia. The U.S. Department of Education authored the 2105 Dear Colleague Letter to address some of the issues relating to providing services to students with dyslexia (Yudin, 2015). This letter reminded schools that students with dyslexia are eligible for special education services under IDEA of 2004 (Yudin, 2015). Students with dyslexia are eligible under a specific learning disability categorization.

In Texas, many educators told federal investigators they interpreted state policy on dyslexia to mean that a student with dyslexia could not qualify for special education services unless they had another disability along with dyslexia. The U.S. Department of Education found that this violated federal policy (Swaby, 2018). The practical effect of funneling students with dyslexia to Section 504 as opposed to IDEA (2004) special education services meant that these students had no access to federally funded services such as transition services. These students did not have access to the more intensive federally mandated services for dyslexia. Essentially, these students only received accommodations and did not receive appropriate services.

Further, Section 504 did not require parental involvement or parental ability to advocate for appropriate services for their children. Parents reported persistent and

consistent issues with lack of services for their children with dyslexia and that their children could not read; the evidence mounted that little being done to address these issues among students with dyslexia in Texas (Swaby, 2018). Further, educators reported consistent and persistent issues with understanding what services a student with dyslexia should receive according to Section 504 or special education services under IDEA (2004). Educators also reported persistent issues with receiving appropriate funding levels to provide services (Swaby, 2018).

**Section 508.** Section 508 required that all electronic and information technology that is developed, maintained, procured, or used by the federal government must be accessible to individuals with disabilities, including employees and members of the public. The accessible technology is something that can be operated in a variety of ways and does not rely on a single sense or ability of the user. Furthermore, some individuals with disabilities may need accessibility related software or peripheral devices in order to use the systems that comply with Section 508.

### **WIOA Youth Program**

The Youth Program was enacted under Title I of WIOA. WIOA provides formula funds provided for states to provide local workforce areas resources to deliver comprehensive services to youth who have barriers to employment. These services are to prepare youth with one or barriers to employment to attain education and skills training, to secure employment with career and promotional opportunities. Section 508 focused on economic opportunities for individuals who have barriers to employment. It provided

recognition that work is a central role in the economy, and it is better for the country if all who can work have jobs.

**Transitional-aged youth, the target population.** There are two target populations for the WIOA Youth Programs (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019b). The first population is the out-of-school youth (OSY), aged 16 to 24, who are not attending school and have one or more barriers to employment. The second population is the in-school youth (ISY), aged 14 to 21, who are attending school, represent low-income households, and have one or more barriers to employment. The focus is on assisting youth who have barriers to employment to be productive members of the community by working. Assisting transitional-aged youth, instead of waiting until they are adults, indicates an awareness of the need to start on the road to economic independence before adulthood. Transitional-aged youth with disabilities require services and assistance in navigating a path to a successful adulthood defined by economic independence (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019a).

**Consumer-choice.** WIOA (2014) required consumer-choice for all participants deemed eligible for services. Participants must have the choice about the type of training and training provider they use (WIOA, 2014). Consumer choice is essential to appropriate planning for the future. It means that individuals hold control over their own destinies. It is important to consider the interests, abilities and barriers to employment outcomes. If an individual is vested and interested in the outcome, they gain motivation to participate and work.

Further, it is important to consider what a realistic goal and outcome is. Unrealistic occupational goals do not provide a benefit to anyone and are an extreme

disservice to individuals with disabilities. WIOA (2014) required a performance accountability system based on required levels of performance to ensure that goals selected are appropriate and realistic. If unrealistic occupational goals are selected, outcomes suffer. Occupational goals should be selected based on participants' abilities, the ability to accommodate for barriers, and labor market availability.

**Service priorities.** The priorities for services in WIOA (2014) mandated that 75% of the Youth Program funds must be allocated to the states and local areas for OSY youth. A total of 20% of the Youth Program funds allocated to states and local areas must be used to provide for paid and unpaid work experiences. Funds are allocated based on three factors: (a) the number of unemployed in areas of substantial unemployment, (b) the number of excess unemployed individuals, and (c) the number of economically disadvantaged youth. This focus on unemployment rates occurred because of understanding that individuals with disabilities already struggle to find employment and do require additional services to obtain and maintain employment. The law was focused on growing industries that need individuals to work in their specialized fields. There was no need to focus on shrinking industries and occupations no longer expected to have many job openings in the future.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990**

The ADA (1990) was enacted to address the discrimination that individuals with disabilities have traditionally faced. This law addressed architectural barriers in public venues as well as discrimination experienced by individuals with disabilities in employment (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2008b). It was no

secret that individuals with disabilities encounter difficulties with obtaining and maintaining employment. Select statements from the findings section of the ADA (1990) stated:

- (1) The nation's proper goals regarding individuals with disabilities are ensure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for such individuals; and
- (2) The continuing existence of unfair and unnecessary discrimination and prejudice denies people with disabilities the opportunity to compete on an equal basis and to pursue those opportunities for which our free society is justifiably famous and costs the United States billions of dollars in unnecessary expenses resulting from dependency and nonproductivity. (Pub. L. 101-336, § 2)

### **ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA)**

The ADAAA became law in January of 2009 (P.L. 110-325). This law made it easier for an individual seeking protection under the ADA to establish that they have a disability within the meaning of the statute. Specifically, Congress overturned several Supreme Court decisions that narrowed the definitions of disability to result in the denial of protection for numerous individuals with impairments such as cancer, diabetes, and epilepsy (EEOC, 2008a). The law indicated that the definition of disability should be interpreted in favor of broad coverage of individuals. The act required an individualized assessment to determine whether an impairment substantially limits a major life activity. This assessment is to be made without regard to the ameliorative effects of mitigating



measures, such as medication or hearing aids. It clarified that episodic or relapsing/remitting conditions are considered a disability if it substantially limits a major life activity when active (EEOC, 2008a). The heart of this law is that the determination of disability should not require extensive analysis rather the focus should be whether discrimination occurred.

### **Social Security Administration (SSA) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**

The SSI program is a nationwide federal assistance program administered by the Social Security Administration that provides a minimum level of income for aged, blind, or disabled individuals. It is a safety net for individuals and families who have limited resources and little or no other income from any other source. This program was established in 1972 by legislation and payments began in 1974. SSI replaced the former federal-state programs of Old-Age Assistance, Aid to the Blind, and Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disabled in the 50 states and District of Columbia. This means tested assistance provides a safety net for vulnerable individuals who is not eligible for Social Security or whose benefits could not provide a basic level of income (SSA, 2018).

In 2017, the monthly cash benefit was \$735 (\$1,103 for a couple if both are eligible) for an eligible person living in his or her own house and having no other income. The monthly cash benefits have increased over the years with the same cost of living adjustment applied to the benefits under the Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) program. This level of monthly cash benefit is equating to \$8,820 annually (Social Security Administration. In 2017, the federal poverty level for a single person household was \$12,060 annually (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,

2017). This is truly an income of last resort and does not allow an individual to be economically independent. It is at such a low level, individuals with disabilities would have significant difficulty meeting even the most basic needs of housing and food (SSA, 2019).

**Definition of disability.** SSA has uniform definitions of disability and blindness. The definitions of disability for individuals age 18 and older are the same as the definitions utilized by the Social Security Disability Insurance program. In order to be considered disabled by SSA, an individual must have a medically determinable physical or mental impairment that is expected to last or has lasted at least 12 continuous months or is expected to result in death and, if age 18 or older, results in the individual being unable to engage in Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA). SGA refers to a level of work activity that results in the individual earning via work activity over \$1,170 per month. SGA values generally increase annually and is based on the national average wage index (SSA, 2019).

If under the age of 18, the definition of a disability is a medically determinable physical or mental impairment that results in marked or severe functional imitations. In order to be considered blind, an individual must have central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the use of corrective lenses (eyewear) or have a visual field limitation of 20 degrees or less in the better eye (SSA, 2019).

**Income of last resort.** Individuals and families who receive SSI are economically disadvantaged. Generally speaking, an individual cannot have more than \$2000 in resources/assets in order to be eligible for SSI benefits. Families of children with disabilities depend upon these monthly payments for a primary source of income and

health insurance. This is an income and resource of last resort. These benefits prevent further descent into poverty (SSA, 2019).

**Medical insurance.** Individuals that qualify for SSI receive medical insurance, generally referred to as Medicaid, depending upon the state. This provides a way for the individual with a disability to receive treatments and medical care for their conditions that caused their disabilities. Further, it provides for all medical care necessary to allow the individual to lead as healthy of a life as possible (SSA, 2019).

**Eligibility.** For an individual with a disability or blindness to receive SSI they must meet the means tested program requirements. SSI considers all income and resources that an individual or family has and can access. The individuals or families amount of countable income and resources are the measure of his or her need for assistance (SSA, 2019).

**Income.** SSI requires that the individuals or family's income be assessed in determining both eligibility for and the amount of his or her SSI benefit. Income is defined as earned or unearned. Earned income is wages, net earnings for self-employment, for wages from a sheltered workshop, royalties on published work and Honoria for services. Unearned income includes Social Security Benefits, pensions and unemployment compensation (SSA, 2019).

**Resources.** The value of an individual's or family's resources must be considered. Resources are defined as a liquid asset such as cash, or any real property that individuals, spouses of individuals, or parents of a child under the age of 18 own or could convert to cash for support or maintenance. Individuals who receive SSI benefits are not permitted to have any significant assets. They cannot own homes and are basically denied

the ability to even have an emergency fund or savings (SSA, 2019). In order to receive SSI, individuals must be destitute, and in order to maintain those benefits, they must remain destitute.

**Number of SSI recipients.** In January of 2017, there were 1.2 million childhood disability recipients with a total of 8.12 million individuals receiving SSI payments. 7.0 million individuals who were blind or disabled received benefits (SSA, 2017). This represented a decrease of 30,000 recipients from 2016. Federal SSI recipients as a percentage of the total U.S. population decreased from 2.49% in 2015 to 2.45% in 2016. SSA projected that they expected this number to continue to decrease (SSA, 2017).

### **Federal/State Programs Serving Youth with Disabilities**

Individuals with disabilities receive services via differing programs. They first receive services from their local school district under special education services or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The federal/state VR Services program can begin to offer services at around the age of 14 to 16 (WIOA, 2014). This program is administered via the RSA, which provides formula grants to fund services to individuals with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining employment. There is a requirement that priority must be given to individuals with the most significant disabilities if a state is unable to serve all eligible individuals (RSA, 2019). Finally, the SSI program provides an income of last resort and medical insurance for individuals with disabilities that qualify under their program guidelines (SSA, 2018). These services are designed to improve the socioeconomic conditions for individuals with disabilities. These policies, laws and

services are designed to work to improve access to services and participation in common life activities (Taylor, 2018).

### **Public Education System**

The public education system is a federal/state program that assists children with disabilities in obtaining free and appropriate public education under IDEA (2004). IDEA authorizes formula grants to states and discretionary grants to institutions of higher education and other nonprofit organizations that serve to educate children with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is dedicated to improving results for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities aged birth to 21 years of age. Public education services are provided in individual states and districts. These services are provided to educate children with disabilities and help them achieve to their maximum abilities. Schools provide limited transition services and generally in conjunction with state VR agencies.

Services in the public education system can be provided under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which is now found under Title IV of WIOA, 2014. As noted above, Section 504 refers to civil rights and anti-discrimination for individuals with disabilities. It requires that accommodations be utilized to assist the student with a disability in learning while enrolled in school with the end goal of preparing the individual with a disability to function in life after graduation to the maximum extent possible. Under Section 504, the student with a disability is often in the general education classroom and the disability is usually not as pervasive as those students receiving services under IDEA (2004), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and WIOA (2014).

## **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services**

There are several pieces of legislation mandating that youth with disabilities are required to receive services that increase their likelihood to live meaningful lives in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2004, & WIOA, 2014). To accomplish this goal, independent living, employment, and educational goals are examined and services are provided to improve the chance of achieving the goals that are established by the youth with the disability and treatment team members. One service that is utilized by individuals with disabilities to assist in the employment process is VR.

VR involves performing an array of interventions designed to help individuals with disabilities and barriers achieve an employment goal. The VR services plan is established by each consumer and consistent with his or her knowledge, skills, and functional abilities (Sprong et al., 2015). The current federal/state VR system was established in 1965 with the express purpose of assisting individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment. This program is administered via the RSA, and the goal was to assist individuals with becoming system contributors as opposed to system absorbers. Foundationally, it recognizes that work is a central role for all individuals and is equally important for individuals with disabilities. The federal/state program focuses on independent living in a limited fashion. Individuals with disabilities may have deficits that make it difficult to live independently. The ability to have a stable home environment impacts a person's ability to obtain and maintain work as well.

VR Services are an important service for individuals with disabilities. These services help address barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities and assist in overcoming these barriers. The goal is to assist the individual with a disabilities to obtain

and maintain high quality jobs and careers by not only assisting the individual with disabilities but also partnering with employers to hire and retain skilled workers under Title IV of WIOA (2014) and amended Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Thus, services to individuals with disabilities became a primary focus in recent years.

VR services are some of the most effective public services provided to youth with disabilities (Kaya, 2018). The services are available in all 50 states. The services provided include counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, career counseling, on the job training, supported employment, job development and placement, assistance with advocacy, assistance with job accommodations and financial assistance with training and postsecondary education as well as necessary requirements for work. They are designed to assist all individuals with disabilities in working. There is an urgent need to facilitate services to assist youth with disabilities that assist with mitigating barriers to employment and facilitate successful employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities (Wehman, Chan, et al., 2014).

The federal/state VR program serves a critical role in assisting transitional-aged youth (ages 16-24) with disabilities to attain their vocational goals by offering specific vocational training and providing funding for higher education (Honeycutt et al., 2015). There is a dearth of knowledge about the best practices for agencies in serving transition-age youth even though despite this population comprising about 33% of the individuals seeking VR services (Honeycutt et al., 2015). The optimal level of services and outcomes for youth is unknown. The performance measures and goals that the federal/state program collect are related to the entire population served there are no specific numbers collected for transitional-aged youth (Honeycutt et al., 2015).

## **Transition Services**

WIOA amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and required that VR agencies to set aside 15% of their federal funds to provide Pre-ETS to students with disabilities eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. The Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) coordinates with state VR agencies and their partners to effectively implement the transition requirements of WIOA. The required services include:

1. Job exploration counseling including a variety of professional activities to help individuals with career related issues. The work focuses on helping youth explore career options. This can be accomplished via interest inventories, labor market information including in demand industries and occupations, nontraditional employment options, and identification of career pathways based on the interests of the student with a disability (WINTAC, 2018).
2. Work-based learning experiences (WBL) comprised of in-school or after-school opportunities, experiences outside of the traditional school settings and/or internships. These experiences must be provided in an integrated environment to the maximum extent possible. Work based learning is an approach that uses workplace or real-life work activities and future career opportunities. An essential component is direct employer and/or community involvement be a component of WBL. Opportunities are meant to engage, motivate and augment learning process. Services can be provided in conjunction with private, for profit and nonprofit, businesses in the



community and/or through web- based resources. When paid experiences are provided, the wages are to be at least minimum wage (WINTAC, 2018).

3. Counseling opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs are services that allow for an individual to gain an awareness of the wide range of career pathway options and labor market realities and projections. These services allow for the individual to explore potential career options that may require additional training to access in various industry sectors. Strategies that support a smooth transition from high school to postsecondary education (PSE) include documenting academic accommodations, advocate for needed accommodations and services, identify interests and abilities, assist with researching career options, attend college fairs and tours, apply for VR services and access services from other related agencies if necessary (WINTAC, 2018).
4. Workplace Readiness Training is utilized to develop social skills and independent living. Workplace readiness involves training on the traits commonly expected skills that employers seek from most employees. These are sets of skills necessary to keep any job and can be referred to as employability or soft skills. Specific social skills taught include communication, positive attitude, teamwork, problem solving, talking/writing, cooperation, active listening, decision making, and conflict resolution. Additional social skills taught include body language, empathy, professionalism, good manners, support others and being respectful. Independent living skills include good hygiene, time management, and

healthy lifestyle. Finally, using a cell phone, using transportation, money management, nutrition/meal preparation, accessing community, services and supports, community participation, civic responsibility, community safety, developing friendships, appropriate dress and appropriate behavior remain essential (WINTAC, 2018).

5. Instruction in self-advocacy assists an individual in being able to effectively

communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his/her own interests and desires.

This process refers to the concept of self-determination meaning that individuals with disabilities have the freedom to plan their own lives, pursue things that are important to them and experience the same life opportunities as other people in their communities. Self-advocacy skills include self-awareness, disability understanding, disability disclosure, decision making, set goals, evaluate options, identify independence, accommodations, request and utilize accommodations, know your rights and responsibilities, self-determination, and know how to request or accept help. Further self-advocacy skills necessary include intrinsic motivation, taking a leadership role, in support plans, assertiveness, listen to different opinions, problem solving, monitor progress and positive self-talk (WINTAC, 2018).

### **Employment and Earnings Among People with Disabilities**

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Person with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics–2018 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018), 19.1% of people with disabilities were employed. In a stark contrast people, without a disability have an

employment rate of 65.9%. This does represent an increase from the previous year. In 2018, 31% of workers with disability were employed part time, compared with 17% for those without a disability. Among persons aged 16 to 24 years with a disability, an employment rate of 30.4% was found compared to persons aged 16 to 24 years without a disability who had an employment rate of 74%.

Higher educational attainment (i.e., a bachelor's degree or higher) leads to increased employment rates for both those with and without a disability. Across all levels of education in 2018, people with a disability were much less likely to be employed than their counterparts without disability. Further, individuals with disabilities are much more likely to be employed part time as opposed to their counterparts without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Individuals with disabilities who are employed tended to be employed in service occupations (19% compared to 17.2%) and in production transportation, and material moving occupations (13.9% compared to 11.8%). These occupations often have lower earnings as compared to other occupational groups. These industries are generally easily accessible, low wages and high turnover sectors. Interestingly, people with disabilities were more likely to be employed in government than were workers without disabilities (14.1% compared to 13.4%). This not surprising given the government interest and promotion of employment with disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Unfortunately, individuals with disabilities continue to struggle with access to quality employment outcomes.

Due to higher unemployment rates, higher part-time employment rates, and employment in lesser paying industries, individuals with disabilities earn fewer dollars in

wages compared to individuals without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Part-time employment does not tend to include benefits such as health insurance coverage. The above issues combine to create a system of disadvantage and disincentivizes individuals with disabilities from working. If an individual cannot expect to earn enough money to provide for themselves or to gain access to appropriate healthcare, they need to rely on governmental benefit programs.

### **Employment Issues of Discrimination and Prejudice due to Disability**

Individuals with disabilities have historically struggled with acceptance and participation in society as evidenced by the need for legislation such as the ADA, IDEA, WIOA and the Rehabilitation Act. Further evidence of the struggle includes lower employment rates for people with disabilities according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). They often have complex needs that require assistance from others and various programs. They may require medical treatments/care that require health insurance. They may require assistance with obtaining and maintaining employment. They may require accommodations to perform the essential functions on jobs. The number of individuals with disabilities has increased over the years (Smart, 2009).

The number of individuals with disabilities has increased for numerous reasons. Advances in neonatal medicine has increased the number of infants who survive at earlier gestations and congenital conditions (Smart, 2009). Medical advances and fertility technologies have increased multiple births. For example, there is a fourfold increase in the chance of an infant developing cerebral palsy if they are part of a multiple birth

(Smart, 2009). Advances in emergency medicine and trauma care have improved survival rates for individuals who are injured in severe accidents such as motor vehicle accidents. Individuals with disabilities are living longer and the liberalization of the definition of disabilities contribute to the change in numbers.

For anyone with or without a disability, society contributes to an individual's sense of self (Allport, 1954, 1958). An individual with a disability internalizes society's judgments and reactions to the disability (Albrecht, 1976; Gove, 1976; Ince, 1980; Phillips, 1992; Schur, 1971, 1979). Despite the presence of disability in all societies in the world throughout history, individuals with disabilities have faced discrimination ranging from embarrassment to complete exclusion from society. This leads to social isolation and lack of opportunities. Davis (1997) noted that people with disabilities have "been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group" (p. 1).

Various laws have attempted to address employment for individuals with disabilities such as ADA (1990), IDEA (2004), WIOA (2014), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended in WIOA, and ADAAA (2009). Work is a central role to most members of society in that money is required to survive. Money is required to meet the basic needs of food and shelter. These laws have recognized the presence of discrimination, prejudice, and reduced employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. For many, this lack of opportunity has led to dependence on governmental assistance programs (e.g., SSI) for simple survival.

### **Transition Planning**

According to employment statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau (2017) and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), a persistent and consistent lack of employment opportunities for people with disabilities continues to exist. Youth with disabilities struggle with finding and obtaining appropriate opportunities. At the heart of the issue is transition planning, which occurs, in some cases, in local schools in partnership with the state VR program. Transitioning from high school to postsecondary education and/or employment has been a complicated and challenging process for youth with disabilities (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Leucking, & Mack, 2002). Unfortunately, there has been a lack of cohesiveness in transition planning as there is confusion concerning what agency provides which services. A clearly established sets of practices and scope of personal responsibilities for state and/or federal agencies has failed to lead collaborative efforts among secondary schools, rehabilitation, and other adult service systems (Kaya, 2018).

Transition plans are often fraught with difficulties. Students with disabilities may have inappropriate goals (WINTAC, 2018). A lack of vocational evaluation services at the appropriate time can confound any potential goal selection. Vocational evaluation is a process in which an individual's abilities, aptitudes, and interests are evaluated to determine and aid in appropriate identification and selection of occupational goals (Rubin & Roessler, 2007). This process is exceedingly necessary to consider the whole person and the sum of their abilities and limitations as it relates to the world of work.

### **Current Research on the Effectiveness of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services**

Transition-aged individuals with disabilities have consistently struggled with obtaining and maintaining employment. Research and statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor (2019a) demonstrate that youth with disabilities need help in obtaining and maintaining employment in order to achieve economic independence as opposed to economic dependence. According to SSA, once an individual enters the adult disability programs (SSI or SSDI) less than 1% leave the program annually, despite programs designed to assist individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment (SSA, 2018). Access to quality education and employment improves the life of the individual with a disability and improves the nation as a whole. Unfortunately, the benefits of employment have not accrued to individuals with disabilities (Alsaman & Lee, 2017). Persistent and consistent low employment rates have continued for individuals with disabilities.

Alsaman and Lee (2017) conducted a multilevel analysis using RSA-911 data to examine the relationship between individual factors and rehabilitation outcomes of youth with disabilities receiving federal/state VR services and to determine contextual effects of the state unemployment rates on the employment outcomes of transitional-aged youth and its potential interactions with personal and service factors. They utilized a hierarchical generalized linear modeling was used to analyze the RSA-911 data set for the year 2013. The results showed that a state's unemployment rate was found to moderate the relationship between some demographic and service variables and successful employment outcomes. Contextual variables such as a state's unemployment rates and their predictive strength of specific personal and service variables on

employment outcomes of youth with disabilities. Alsaman and Lee (2017) found that due to the significant impact of state unemployment rates on outcomes, the federal/state VR program needed to exert more effort to assist youth with disabilities in obtaining employment when the state reported higher unemployment rates.

Honeycutt et al. (2015) conducted a study to determine to which states' youth with transitional-aged youth with disabilities applied for VR services, actually received services, and became employed at closure. Honeycutt et al. utilized an analysis that included five ratios for each state's VR agency that reflected its involvement with transitional-aged youth at distinct stages. Using data from the RSA-911 data set and other sources, they identified a cohort of individuals who applied for SSI between 2004 and 2006. The data sources utilized to supplement the RSA-911 data included 2004 VR state plans, RSA-2, and RSA-113 and were agency-specific data. Additionally, the number of adolescents with disabilities in each state was developed from the 2004 to 2006 American Community Surveys (ACS) published by the U.S. Census Bureau (2017). The findings indicated that the percentage of a state's transitional-aged youth population applying for VR services ranged from 4% to 14%. Of the percentage that applied, 31% to 82% received services, and of those that received services, 40% to 70% were closed with a successful employment outcome. The findings represented a wide variation in transitional-aged youth applying for services. Importantly, of those transitional-aged youth applying for and receiving services across the nation, 56% had a successful closure rate. This finding indicated that receipt of services could be beneficial. However, these results might have been influenced by the economic conditions within the individual states or nationally.



Honeycutt et al. (2015) illustrated the need for developing specific standards and guidelines for VR agencies serving this population. The study provided a first look at the outcomes for cohorts of transitional-aged youth who received VR services by utilizing RSA-911 closure data over multiple years and the use of supplemental statistics for those applications with state-level data. Transitional-aged youth represent a significant proportion, almost 33%, of the population served by VR and have unique vocational and education needs (Honeycutt et al., 2015), yet the optimal level of resources that an agency should provide remains unknown. Due to the size of the proportion of the population that has disabilities, state agencies have dedicated programs and specific counselors to this population.

Stapleton and Martin (2017) denoted that policy makers have a substantial interest in how the provision of employment services to person with disabilities affects earnings and the receipt of SSA disability benefits. They reviewed and summarized 14 studies involving SSA and RSA data to determine to what extent the findings addressed the effects of service provision on employment and benefit outcomes. The reviewed studies utilized SSA's Disability Analysis File (DAF) and RSA-911 files. Stapleton and Martin focused their review on the impacts on employment and disability benefit outcomes of providing employment services to DI/SSI beneficiaries and the impacts on employment and disability benefit outcome of providing employment services to those who have not yet entered the DI/SSI programs. The reviewed studies documented beneficiary application or enrollment for employment services, examined employer and disability benefit outcomes of individuals who utilized services, and estimated the impacts of services on outcomes (Stapleton & Martin, 2017).

Stapleton and Martin (2017) identified large differences across states in that the clients served by VR agencies and their employment outcomes and disability benefit receipt indicated clearly that state level policies and other environmental factors mattered. They produced limited evidence to indicate how VR services affect employment and disability benefit outcomes. Further, for those who receive DI/SSI prior to receiving VR services, a share of the small minority who successfully work and forego benefits do use VR or other SSA sponsored employment services in the process (Stapleton & Martin, 2017).

Numerous questions remain on the impact of employment services and their impact or lack of impact on disability benefit receipt. No study has estimated the full cost to the government or the impact of SSA-sponsored employment since its expansion in 2008. Finally, the impact of new laws, such as WIOA (2014) and ARRA (2009), have not been fully realized or studied. These laws could have specific impacts on the transitional-aged youth with disabilities population and require further investigation.

Berry and Caplan (2010) examined factors related to employment and earnings for SSI only transitional-aged youth (16-25 years of age) who applied for VR services. The methodology utilized hierarchical and nonlinear modeling (HLM) to examine the employment status and earnings of individuals with mental retardation who received SSI benefits for 2 years after exiting the VR program. They examined state level economic and VR agency factors as well as individual level factors such as demographics, disabilities, and service types. HLM was employed to determine earnings growth among SSI beneficiaries who sustained employment for 5 years after exiting VR services.

Key findings in Berry and Caplan's (2010) study revealed that SSI beneficiaries with mental retardation the odds of employment were 1.3 times higher than the odds of unemployment. Participation in supported employment services in this population increased the odds of employment by 1.14 compared with those individuals not in supported employment. Finally, individuals with college level training and more sustained employment and higher earnings. Individuals with mental retardation were found to be employed more often than other disability types exiting vocational rehabilitation, but they earned markedly less. This is not a surprising finding, in that most individuals with mental retardation are in unskilled and entry level type jobs. These jobs tend to be simpler and easier to learn which would certainly compliment an individual with mental retardation abilities and disabilities.

Berry and Caplan (2010) found that individuals who received college or university training were less often employed for 2 years after exiting VR services but unsurprisingly the earnings of those employed after 5 years were higher. College or university level training had lesser employment outcomes and pointing to a myriad of additional issues. Whereas this type of training often leads to higher earnings, if the person does not pick an appropriate field of study (i.e., a strong labor market exists for potential jobs) this could lead to lesser employment. Further, the person may be able to obtain a position based on the college or university level training but may be unable to maintain the position due to disability issues. Careful consideration is needed to ensure appropriate occupational goal selection.

Barry and Caplan (2010) suggested, in their findings, that job placement services negatively influenced employment status. Supported employment was positively

associated with being employed; however, this advantage decreased in states reporting high consumer to counselor ratios. Finally, individuals who received VR services for a longer period of time and who were older, were less likely to be employed and earned less. Job placement services should theoretically be associated with higher employment rates as the individuals received specialized services to assist them in obtaining employment. It could be that once the job is obtained the individual with a disability may have needed more intensive services to maintain the job for the 2-year period. Barry and Caplan (2010) found that higher poverty levels in a state and consumer-to-counselor ratios negatively influenced the employment status of transitional-aged youth with disabilities who received SSI benefits. It is reasonable to assume that if a state has high poverty levels, individuals with disabilities are likely encounter difficulty in obtaining and maintaining employment due to the well documented issues with prejudice and discrimination. Not only do individuals with disabilities have to find compensatory strategies to address their limitations, they must also contend with societal views of disability and an unwillingness on some employers to see the value in hiring an individual with a disability.

Fraker (2013) of Mathematic Policy Research authored an issue brief which detailed the interim impact analysis of seven Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD). The cost of providing disability benefits to young people is quite high. In 2011, 1,136,000 youth aged 13 to 25 years were receiving SSI benefits totaling \$8 billion. Youth with disabilities may need SSI or DI benefits in the future if unable to successfully make the transition to paid employment in adulthood. Therefore, SSA initiated YTD projects targeting youth aged 14 to 25 years of age to address the issue. Significant resources were

devoted to developing and evaluating promising strategies to help youth with disabilities to become as economically sufficient as possible.

SSA contracted with seven different agencies to provide these services (Fraker, 2013). In the impact analysis, which as noted to continue, data were obtained from a baseline survey, surveys conducted at 1- and 3-year follow-up intervals and reviews of administrative files of SSA to determine benefit amounts. The survey data contained information on service receipt, educational level, employment and earnings, attitudes and expectations, and other outcomes for evaluation enrollees. Fraker (2013) found that YTD projects providing more hours of service had a greater impact on the employment outcomes of youth during the year after they entered the evaluation. Of the four projects that provided the most hours of services, three projects had positive influences on youth who found high paying jobs, and two projects positively impacted annual earnings. The two projects providing the fewest hours of services had no impact on employment or earnings. Fraker (2013) noted that further research was needed to determine if these positive outcomes persisted beyond the particular period of service.

Kaya (2018) conducted a study to determine the relationship between demographic factors, VR services, and employment outcomes for youth with intellectual disabilities. Chi-squared automatic interaction and multivariate logistic regression analysis were used to investigate the relationships between demographic variables, receipt of VR services, and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. The results indicated that gender, race, education level, and cash benefits were significantly associated with employment outcomes for youth with intellectual disabilities (Kaya, 2018).

Further, after controlling for the effects of the demographic variables, job placement and on-the-job support, on-the-job training, maintenance services, other technical assistance, and diagnostic and treatment services were significantly associated with competitive employment (Kaya, 2018). Kaya (2018) found that cash benefits (i.e., disability payments) were negatively associated with employment outcomes for youth with intellectual disabilities. The receipt of cash benefits could potentially be tied to the severity of the disability and might reduce motivation to work, resulting in lower levels of competitive employment.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) encourages disability beneficiaries to work to their fullest capability. Benefits counseling provides a guidance service that allows an individual to make informed decisions about working and maximizing their benefits (National Disability Institute, 2018). These services are provided free of charge by the federal/state VR program, Work Incentive Planning and Assistance Projects (WIPA) and many Employment Networks (EN). Finally, it is a possibility that families encourage youth with intellectual disabilities to remain on public support system as well (Luecking & Wittenburg, 2009).

Kaya (2018) found that higher levels of education were linked to positively to competitive employment. This seems plausible in that jobs that require education tend to focus on higher level activities that could be more amenable to accommodations. Further, job related services, such as placement assistance, were positively linked to employment outcomes. There is a need to ensure customized services, via transition planning focusing on individual needs and abilities, and supported employment to achieve higher levels of competitive employment (Kaya, 2018).

In 1998, the RSA focused on ensuring that counselors in the federal/state VR agencies met requirements of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Due to legislative changes in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA, 1998), federal/state VR agencies were required to hire qualified people who must possess the required educational level and experience to obtain the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) certification. However, the WIOA (2014) removed the requirement for an individual to be eligible for the CRC credential. There has been little research on the impact of this change. It is unknown whether this negatively or positively impacted services provided to individuals with disabilities in the federal/state VR program.

Mackay et al. (2018) compared closure rates of counselors with master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling to counselors with master's degrees in related disciplines. They found that counselors with master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling had higher quality closures, which were defined as a full-time job with a livable wage. This study did not address counselors with bachelor's degree. Counselors with a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling were more likely to secure high quality jobs for their clients, which would be aligned with the goals of WIOA (2014).

### **Significant Need for Research**

Employment is a desired outcome for all individuals, but more importantly for individuals with disabilities. There is research available that discusses the impact of VR services but there is a dearth of information available on the impact the receipt of SSI benefits and more specifically the impact the receipt of SSI benefits for transitional-aged

youth is unknown. Determining the impact of SSI benefits and the impact that VR services for a transitional-aged youth who receives SSI may or may not have on employment outcomes is essential to assessing the effectiveness of current legislation and policies. WIOA authorized an array of early intervention strategies and the effectiveness of services at an early age is unknown. The following research questions were developed from literature to help guide the current study:

1. Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at application?
2. Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at closure?
3. How does job placement, job readiness, and job search services impact closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers of transitional age, controlling for race, and gender?
4. Are consumers within the transitional-aged youth category more likely to exit with a successful closure (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) than consumers in other age categories, controlling for job placement services, job readiness training, and job search services?



5. What impact does the receipt of VR services have on closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth who received SSI at application?
6. How does receiving SSI benefits at application affect successful closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers receiving VR services through the Division of Rehabilitation, controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job-skills training, gender, and race?

### **Summary**

An important marker of success as an adult in U.S. society is employment (Lindstrom et al., 2011). Employment provides financial stability, allows self-sufficiency, increases overall self-esteem and personal satisfaction levels (Szymanski et al., 2003). Individuals with disabilities have encountered consistent and persistent issues with obtaining and maintaining employment. Policy makers have observed this issue and have made multiple attempts to address this issue via legislation and a vast array of benefit schemes available. Youth with disabilities who receive SSI benefits as a child generally reside in homes where there are little financial means. SSI provides an income of last resort for the family as well as access to healthcare via Medicaid. Childhood disability recipients are required to undergo a redetermination under the adult disability guidelines. It is a national interest for these individuals to obtain and maintain employment in order to reduce public expenditures on government benefit programs.

Youth with disabilities who are of transitional age are a primary target group for services related to assisting them with obtaining and maintaining employment as adults. IDEA 2004 mandates transition services beginning at 16. WIOA 2014 has added an emphasis on providing transition services in the federal/state VR program. There is limited research on the impact on the receipt of disability benefits on employment outcomes. Earnings for individuals with disabilities are lesser than those without disabilities. Further, jobs that provide health insurance are generally higher paying jobs as opposed to entry level and easy access positions. Overcoming less employment opportunities and lower earnings is essential to assisting youth with disabilities in obtaining gainful employment. Research has been limited on the new services provided under WIOA 2014 and the impact these services are having for youth with disabilities. The goal of transition services to youth with disabilities is to assist them in obtaining and maintaining employment that provides for financial stability and lesser dependence upon the government for benefits.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The major research question investigated in this study centers around comparing VR closure status with the impact of receiving supplemental security income (SSI) of youth with disabilities. The purpose of the current study is to (a) investigate the impact of the receipt of SSI on closure status for transitional-aged youth receiving VR services from the Division of Rehabilitation Services (Research Question 1), (b) investigate outcome data related to consumers of transitional age that are receiving VR services (Research Questions 2, 3, 4, and 5), and (c) observe how receiving SSI benefits impacts successful closure status (Research Question 6).

#### **Research Questions**

There were six research questions that guided this study. They are listed as the following:

1. Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at application?
2. Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at closure?
3. How does job placement, job readiness, and job search services impact closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no

employment) for consumers of transitional age, controlling for race, and gender?

4. Are consumers within the transitional-aged youth category more likely to exit with a successful closure (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) than consumers in other age categories, controlling for job placement services, job readiness training, and job search services?
5. What impact does the receipt of VR services have on closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth who received SSI at application?
6. How does receiving SSI benefits at application affect successful closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers receiving VR services through the Division of Rehabilitation, controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job-skills training, gender, and race?

### **Rationale**

The RSA-911 fiscal year 2016 dataset was examined by using data-mining techniques. Data mining is the practice of examining large databases in order to generate new information (Han, Kamber, & Pei, 2012). There were several limitations to consider when using secondary analyses on pre-existing data, including data input errors. VR professionals were tasked to enter data into the RSA system, and the inputs then were recorded into the national RSA-911 database. If a VR professional inputted the incorrect

code, then database could contain flawed data. Despite many attempts to improve the accuracy of the data entered into this database, error was most likely present.

Causality was another limitation to secondary data analysis. For research to show causality, the following three factors needed to be present (Huck, 2007): (a) two variables must be associated, (b) the causal variable must produce its influence before the outcome occurs, and (c) other possible explanations must be eliminated (other variables mediate the relationship). In terms of secondary analysis, the variance explained represented a way for determining if other confounding variables could have explained variances seen in regression models. In other words, as the variance that can be explained increases, the degree to which the results can be explained by error or other variables decreases. If the variance explained by the regression model is small, then other, unaccounted for variables may influence the findings.

There were several benefits to using secondary analysis, despite the described limitations. This type of research was beneficial in VR to observe how certain variables, such as gender, race, and level of education, influenced the outcome variable of successful closure status. The advantages of using census data included the data providing a true measure of the population (i.e., no sampling error), providing a benchmark for future studies, and detailing information about small subgroups within the population (Fowler, 1984). Other areas a researcher does not have to consider when designing an experimental or survey design include, but are not limited to: (a) accrued costs associated with recruiting participants, (b) participant attrition, (c) reduced barriers to research access, (d) no risk to participants, and (e) social desirability in case study and survey research.

### **Context of the Study**

Given the nature of the study, all data were available on a computer and analyzed at the researcher's office. Variables such as temperature, setting, time of day, and other environmental concerns for experimental designs were not considered because the study was secondary analysis on a pre-existing dataset. Based on the design of the study, external validity was reduced because of the inability to show causality. However, the trends demonstrated could have been valuable during the examination of the census data.

### **Data Source**

Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA-911) Case Service Report fiscal year 2016 archival dataset was obtained from the U.S. Department of Education and utilized for this study. RSA-911 data is usually updated on an annual basis and consists of all state-federal rehabilitation consumers served in the prior fiscal year. The data set contains each consumer's demographic information (age at application, racial and ethnic identity, living arrangement, type of disability), other supplemental information (monthly public support amount [SSDI, SSI, TANF, General Assistants, Veteran's Disability Benefits]), and vocational-related services provided to each consumer (job readiness training, transportation, job placement services, personal assistant). Each dataset is accompanied by a policy directive (specific to that fiscal year) pdf containing a coding system for each data point collected. For example, type of disability is collected, classified into 23 types primary disability classifications, and included in the RSA-911 dataset. Other demographic variables such as race and ethnicity are included in the RSA-911 data set. The policy directive is beneficial because it assists a researcher in understanding the

coding system once the data set is obtained. After discussing with representatives from RSA-911, fiscal year 2016's data set is the most recent version available at the time of the beginning of this dissertation.

### **Definition of Variables Utilized in Study**

Several variables were used in this study. The definitions of the variables per the RSA-911 data set are provided below:

**Age.** Two age groups were utilized in this study. Age was calculated by utilizing the date of birth (DOB) to determine age at application. The date utilized to make this calculation was 12/31/2016 minus the DOB of the applicant. The two age groups utilized were 24 and under (transitional age) and 25 and over.

**Sex (Gender).** Sex was reported as the individual self-indicating as male or female or not self-indicating as representing either sex.

**Race.** Race was defined as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, or Ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino. In the case of multiracial individuals, more than one race variable (i.e., more than one coded categorical value) could be used. If an individual was not in elementary or secondary education and refused to self-identify, the data could be recorded.

**Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for the aged, blind or disabled at application.** This variable indicated whether the individual applying for VR services received SSI or not.

**Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for the aged, blind or disabled at exit.**

This variable specified whether the individual exiting VR services received SSI or not.

**Highest education level completed.** This variable denoted the highest level of education completed at entry into the VR services program. There were numerous codes for highest level of education completed, including the following: (a) individual attained a secondary school diploma; (b) individual attained a secondary school equivalency; (c) individual had a disability and attained a certificate of attendance or completion as a result of successfully completing an Individualized Education Program (IEP); (d) individual attained a postsecondary certification, license, or educational certificate (nondegree); (e) individual attained an associate's degree; (f) individual attained a bachelor's degree; (g) individual attained a degree beyond a bachelor's degree; (g) individual completed no educational level.

**Job readiness training.** Training was provided to prepare an individual for work that typically teaches about work behaviors that included getting to work on time, dress and grooming, increasing productivity, and other activities pertinent to maintaining employment.

**Job placement assistance.** Job placement assistance was a referral to a specific job resulting in an interview, regardless of whether the individual obtained the job.

**VR counseling and guidance.** This variable designated counseling and guidance information and support services to assist an individual in exercising informed choice and was distinct from the case management relationship that existed between the counselor and individual during the VR process.



**Job search assistance.** Job search activities were provided to support and assist individuals searching for an appropriate job. Job search assistance could include help in resume preparation, identifying appropriate job opportunities, developing interview skills, and making contacts with companies on behalf of the consumer.

**Type of exit.** This variable revealed the categories used to determine if an individual achieved employment. This variable included the following types of exits: (a) individual exited during or after a trial work experience, (b) individual exited after eligibility but from an order of selection waiting list, (c) individual exited after eligibility but prior to a signed IPE, (d) individual exited after an IPE without an employment outcome, (e) individual exited after an IPE in noncompetitive and/or nonintegrated employment, (f) individual exited after an IPE in a competitive and integrated employment or supported employment, and (g) individual exited as an applicant but prior to eligibility determination or trial work.

For the purposes of this study the code utilized to determine whether employment was achieved was specifically if an individual exited after an IPE in a competitive and integrated employment or supported employment. Competitive integrated employment refers to the following: (a) work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis (including self-employment), (b) work for which the individual is compensated at a rate that equals at least minimum wage or Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, and (c) work for which the pay rate is not a customary rate paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by people without disabilities. In the case of self-employment, the earnings must be comparable to income received by other individuals who are not individuals with disabilities while self-employed in similar occupations. Other

requirements include eligibility for the level of benefits provided to other employees, a location typically found in the community where an individual with a disability interacts with individuals without disabilities, and appropriate opportunities for advancement that are similar to those available to employees who are not individuals with disabilities.

Supported employment in a competitive integrated environment is a competitive integrated environment as defined above that contains ongoing support for individuals with significant disabilities.

### **Hypothesis**

A hypothesis is a supposition made on the basis of limited evidence as a starting point for further investigation. Kaya (2018) found a negative association with receipt of cash benefits and employment outcomes. Further, professional experience suggested that the receipt of cash benefits from the government can be a disincentive to working by creating the fear of losing benefits that took a good deal of time to obtain. Regarding VR services, some evidence suggested services work and are appropriate, but limited information on the effectiveness of services for transitional-aged youth with disabilities existed. This lack of information was due to the newness of WIOA and early intervention services as well as a lack of research specific to this age group's receipt of SSI benefits.

The null hypothesis was there would be no impact on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth who receive SSI. Further, there would be impact of VR services on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth that receive SSI. The alternative hypothesis involved there would be an impact observed on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth who receive SSI. Additionally, there would be an impact

observed from VR services on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth who receive SSI.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The data were obtained by sending an email to an RSA-911 representative requesting that the dataset be provided for research purposes. The purpose of the study was provided to the RSA representative, and the dataset was then delivered to the researcher on a compact disc via the U.S. Postal Service. Benefits of the data collection method included no issues with (a) accrued costs associated with recruiting participants, (b) participant attrition, (c) barriers to research access, (d) risks to participants, and (e) social desirability risks of case study and survey research. The weaknesses related to the inability to demonstrate causality in the current study design.

### **Data Analysis**

A Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney test was a nonparametric test of the null hypothesis that was used to answer the first research question, as there was one independent variable (SSI status at application) with two levels (recipient, not a recipient) and one dependent variable (employment outcome) with two levels (exited with employment, did not exit with employment). The independent variable was nominal in nature, because it was categorical and contained no magnitude (i.e., no strength, no rank order, no difference between the two levels, and no clear definition of 0; Trochim, Donnelly, & Arora, 2015). The dependent variable was categorical but had magnitude and two levels (exiting with employment was greater than exiting without employment). This analysis was used for the second research question in which both the independent variable of SSI status at exit

(recipient, not a recipient) and the dependent variable of employment outcome (exited with employment, did not exit with employment) contained two levels.

A multiple logistic regression analysis was performed for the third research question to assess the influence of job placement, job readiness, and job skills services on closure status for consumers of a transitional age (14-22 years) while controlling for race and gender. This analysis was used for the fourth research question to assess the influence of job placement, job readiness, and job skills services on closure status for consumers of a transitional age (14-22 years) compared to consumers of a nontransitional age (23 or more years). A multiple logistic regression model was used for the fifth research question to assess how SSI status at closure influenced closure status when considering VR counseling and guidance as compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at closure. A multiple logistic regression was used for the final research question to assess how SSI status influences closure status when considering educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job-skills training, gender, and race as other explanatory variables.

A logistic regression analysis was used to examine relationships between predictor and outcome variables (Sprong, Dallas, Paul, & Xia, 2018) because the outcome variable was dichotomous (i.e., exited with employment versus did not exit with employment), and there were several predictor variables and covariates included in the model. This statistical process was used for the third through sixth research questions. The chance of making a Type I error (i.e., rejecting the null hypothesis when the null hypothesis should be retained) was increased with several predictor variables included in the logistic regression model. In order to decrease the likelihood of a Type I error (rejecting the null

hypothesis when it should be retained), a Bonferroni correction was deployed. Specifically, the original significance level of .05 was divided by the total number of predictor variables in the regression model. For the third research question, the new significance level was  $.05 / 7 = .007$ . For the fourth research question, the new significance level was  $.05 / 3 = .016$ . For the fifth research question, the new level of significance was  $.05 / 3 = .016$ . For the sixth research question, the level of significance was  $.05/13 = .003$ .

### **Assumptions of Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney**

The first assumption of Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney (WMW) was that the dependent variable was ordinal. The dependent variable was comprised of two levels, because closure status was the outcome variable and had two levels (exited with employment, did not exit with employment) and the scale was ordinal in nature and had magnitude with exiting with employment greater than exiting without employment (Drummond & Jones, 2010). The second assumption was one independent variable had two categorical, independent groups (i.e., dichotomous). In this study, the independent variable of SSI status (i.e., the receipt of SSI or the nonreceipt of SSI at application or closure) was dichotomous. The third assumption was independence of observations. In this study, an individual could not receive SSI and simultaneously receive SSI, so each group was mutually exclusive. No individual could belong to both groups.

Finally, the fourth assumption required that a determination be made as to whether the distribution of scores for both groups was the same shape or a different shape. The distributions could have had the same shape or a different shape. The shape of

the distributions was determined by running a histogram and selecting the distribution. The same shape or different shape of distributions determined how the results of the WMW were interpreted.

### **Assumptions of Logistic Regression**

The first assumption of a logistic regression analysis was the outcome variable was dichotomous. If there were more than three levels of the dependent variable, an ordinal or multinomial logistic regression analysis would have been more appropriate, depending on the outcome variable containing magnitude or specific, hierarchical ranks. If the outcome variable had been interval or continuous, then a linear multiple regression analysis would have been the appropriate statistical test to use. Because closure status was the outcome variable and had two levels (i.e., exited with employment and did not exit with employment), and the dichotomous scale was ordinal in nature and had magnitude based on an underlying assumption that exiting with employment as greater than exiting without employment (Drummond & Jones, 2010).

The second assumption of logistic regression required the cases to be independent. The data points must be independent of each other, and the model should have had little to no multicollinearity, suggesting two or more predictor variables in a multiple regression model should not be described as highly correlated. If multicollinearity were to occur, the mediating or moderating effect of the predictor variables could be explored.

A third assumption was the linearity of the independent variables and log odds. Failure to accomplish this linearity would have resulted in the strength of the

relationships being underestimated, in which case, the null hypothesis would be retained when it should have been rejected (Type II error) or the null hypothesis would be rejected when it should have been retained (Type I error). Finally, an adequate sample size was required. Given that the entire census was used, the sample size assumption was met. Additionally, the total number of consumers were served in the VR system in 2016 was contained in the fiscal year 2016 data set. This number was obtained from the RSA-911 data. Without acquiring the dataset, the number of transitional-aged youth served in fiscal year 2016 could not be estimated accurately.

### **Data Management Plan**

The data were obtained from the RSA-911 data for the fiscal year of 2016. The data set held all census information for all people served in the VR system in the 2016 fiscal year. For the purposes of this study, individuals who were of transitional age at the time of application were extracted from the RSA-911 as well as older individuals as a comparison group. The advantage of using the population (i.e., census) enabled the opportunity to gain: (a) a true measure of the population (e.g., no sampling error), (b) detailed information about small subgroups within a population, and (c) benchmark data for future studies (Fowler, 1984). The data had already been collected, and therefore, no actual data collection took place. The data utilized in this study included the types of services consumers received and consumers' employment outcomes and receipt of SSI benefits. The data were completed by the state in which services were received.

The data were located on a compact disc. The data were anonymized, creating no issues with protection of individual data, because there were no personally identifiable

information or medical information in the files. The compact disc of data was stored in a locked file cabinet. Drs. Sprong, Lock, and Brown had access to the data by request. The compact disc containing the data was destroyed by document shredding after all analyses were completed, and the dissertation was successfully defended.

The possibility of data entry errors existed. A way to reduce data input errors involved verifying the codes entered for each column. For example, there were 23 disability types within the RSA-911 data set. If a code was 24 or higher, then the data with codes higher than 23 were not accurate. In order to determine if any data needed to be eliminated from statistical analysis, two observers checked the data entered for errors using a method called interobserver agreement (Kazdin, 2011). Interobserver agreement occurs when two or more independent observers report the same observed values after measuring the same event. Essentially, each observer put a plus (+) if the data point was entered correctly or a minus (-) if the data were incorrectly entered. All of the disagreements between the two observers were summed and used in the following formula in which interobserver agreement equaled value of the number of matching observations divided by the total number of data points multiplied by 100 to obtain a final percent value. For example, using a sample of 1000 participants, if the first observer found 15 incorrect data points, and the second observer found the same 15 incorrect data points plus an additional 5 incorrect data points, then the formula became  $(995/1000) \times 100 = 99.5\%$ . Thus, the formula revealed that both observers would have had a 99.5% agreement rate for all correctly entered items.

The data were examined for errors, and obviously erroneous data were removed. Removed data included individuals with close type but no close date. Also, individuals



who exited after application but prior to eligibility and IPE were removed as they never had the opportunity to receive services. Finally, all missing data were excluded from analysis.

### **Limitations of Study**

All studies have limitations. There are limitations to consider when conducting secondary data analysis on pre-existing data. One limitation was data entry errors, which were present despite efforts to improve the accuracy of data entered into the database. Error is unavoidable in this case. Another strong limitation was inferring causality when there was only correlation. To infer causality, three factors must be present. Huck (2007) indicated that, first, the cause must come before the effect; second, the variables must be related (covary); and third, there must be no confounding variable that could explain the relationship with the dependent variable. Causation is nearly impossible to prove.

A secondary analysis was conducted, in that variance accounted for can be used to explain if a single factor can be used to determine if other confounding variables were present that could explain the difference in the regression model (Shmueli & Koppius, 2011). Put another way, the higher the variance accounted for, the less likely that the results could be explained by error or other variables. The smaller the amount of variance explained by the regression model, the more likely it is that other confounding variables do influence the outcome.

### **Summary**

This chapter addressed research questions, the rationale and context for the study, data sources, data collection methods, data management plan and data analysis. This

study utilized a secondary analysis of the RSA-911. This study did not intend to purport causality rather a potential correlation. Two forms of statistical analyses were utilized in this study. The first test utilized was the Wilcoxon Mann Whitney test, a nonparametric test of the null hypothesis used to answer the first research question. The second test was a logistic regression analysis to examine the relationships between predictor and outcome variables. A multiple logistic regression analysis was performed for Research Questions 3 through 6.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the effects of receipt of supplemental security income (SSI) on employment status at closure (1 = employment, 2 = no employment) for transitional-aged youth (14-24 years). The effects of job placement services, job readiness services, job search services and VR for transitional-aged youth were examined. Understanding how the receipt of SSI impacted a person's employment outcome was a matter of national importance as significant amounts of money are spent by the government through SSI benefits as well as state VR services. In 2016, SSA spent \$54.6 billion on SSI benefits (Social Security Administration [SSA], 2017). The RSA (2017) had a budget of \$3.5 billion. A primary focus on government spending is the idea that early intervention, such as by providing services to transitional-aged youth, reduces the amount the government spends on public benefits. The idea is that most individuals can and want to work. WIOA (2014) was focused on careers as opposed to nonadvancement job acquisition, thereby enabling individuals with disabilities to create paths to self-sufficiency rather than remaining dependent on government assistance.

The primary question of this study was whether the receipt of government benefits impacts a person's ability to become employed. There were many reasons that a person receiving SSI might not want to work which include continuing to receive a guaranteed monthly payment that sustains the person and his or her family, maintaining health insurance, fearing the loss of benefits by trying to work, or fearing not being able to receive the benefits in the future if employment is not sustained. Further, it is

important to understand whether the services being provided by the federal/state VR programs produce any impact on employment outcomes. Prior to the analysis beginning, six research questions were developed.

### **Research Questions**

There were six research questions that guided this study. They are listed as the following:

1. Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at application?
2. Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at closure?
3. How does job placement, job readiness, and job search services impact closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers of transitional age, controlling for race, and gender?
4. Are consumers within the transitional-aged youth category more likely to exit with a successful closure (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) than consumers in other age categories, controlling for job placement services, job readiness training, and job search services?

5. What impact does the receipt of VR services have on closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth who received SSI at application?
6. How does receiving SSI benefits at application affect successful closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers receiving VR services through the Division of Rehabilitation, controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job-skills training, gender, and race?

### **Descriptive Statistics**

#### **Data Source**

The data source utilized in this study was the RSA-911 data set for the 2016 fiscal year. The data comprising this data set is mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This data is collected by each state VR agency. This data is to be used by both the Departments of Education and Labor to determine State levels of performance and could form the basis for imposition of financial sanctions against a State (RSA, 2016). Each dataset is accompanied by a policy directive (specific to that fiscal year) pdf containing a coding system for each data point collected. For example, type of disability is collected, classified into 23 types primary disability classifications, and included in the RSA-911 dataset. Other demographic variables such as race and ethnicity are included in the RSA-911 data set. The policy directive is beneficial because it assists a researcher in understanding the coding system once the data set is obtained. After discussing with

representatives from RSA-911, fiscal year 2016's data set is the most recent version available at the time of the beginning of this dissertation.

When reviewing the data set it became clear there could be significant data entry errors. This study specifically dealt with the type of closure, specific to exit with competitive and integrated employment. The RSA-911 data set contained three different variables that could be used to describe to type of closure/exit. The variable selected for this study was closure type. For the variable close type (type of exit) there were noted to be 4,824 in the entire population that had a closure type of having competitive and integrated employment. However, when reviewing the variable closure reason, only 307 individuals were noted to have had a closure of competitive and integrated employment. Further exploration noted that in the close type (type of exit) every individual had a type of exit. The close date variable was then investigated, and it was noted that not all individuals had a close date. Therefore, the data for close type was trimmed to eliminate individuals with no close date. Further trimming included removing individuals who were never found eligible for services and exited before a plan for employment was developed. This was done because these individuals could not have possibly benefited for services because they were never able to participate. Finally, all cases that had missing data were eliminated from the data used for analysis. The data for services provided were reviewed and trimmed of cases with missing data.

## **Participants**

The RSA-911 data set contained all individuals served in the United States in the federal/state VR program. The total population in this data set was 543,161. There were

111,196 individuals of transitional-aged youth. In this data set, 55.5% of all individuals were male, and 43.6% were female. The gender distribution for transitional-aged youth was 61.4% male and 38.5% female. Frequency distributions represented the individuals (in population and in the transitional-aged youth group) who received SSI and received services are presented in Table 1.

**Frequencies of SSI Receipt at Application and at Closure**

A frequency distribution was performed to assist in determining the clinical significance of each finding for the research questions listed below. Although statistical significance was one method of determining factors that influence closure status, examining frequencies provided another explanation for the findings. As shown in Table 1, transitional-aged youth (14-24 years of age) were examined to ascertain the percentage and frequency of those on SSI at acceptance into VR services.

Table 1  
*Receipt of SSI of Transitional Youth Aged 14 to 24 Years at Acceptance*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
No SSI	92,614	83.3
SSI at Acceptance	18,475	16.6

As displayed in Table 1, majority of the transitional-aged youth enrolled in VR services from the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) did not receive SSI at acceptance. When examining the entire population of DRS consumers, SSI at acceptance has similar trends with majority of consumers not receiving SSI at acceptance. These frequencies are shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Receipt of SSI of all DRS Consumers at Acceptance*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
No SSI	343,077	81.98
SSI at Acceptance	75,412	18.02

A frequency distribution was conducted in similarly as performed above, with the exception that SSI at closure was used instead of SSI at acceptance. As shown in Table 3, majority of the transitional-aged youth enrolled in VR services from DRS did not receive SSI at closure.

Table 3  
*Receipt of SSI Transitional Youth Aged 14 to 24 Years at closure*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
No SSI	92,661	83.4
SSI at Acceptance	18,424	16.5

Similar patterns were displayed for all VR consumers. These patterns appear in Table 4. As displayed in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4, majority of VR consumers did not receive SSI at acceptance or closure. A simple linear regression was performed, and findings revealed that SSI at acceptance predicted SSI at closure,  $F(1; 328,577) = 603,490, p < .0001$ , with an  $R^2$  of .65.



Table 4  
*Receipt of SSI of all VR Consumers at Closure*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
No SSI	345,866	82.6
SSI at Closure	72,602	17.3

**Frequency of Successful Closure (Employment at Exit)**

A frequency distribution was conducted on closure type, as this variable has seven levels and the frequencies shown in each level might explain the findings later presented in this chapter. As shown in Table 5, the majority of VR consumers exited without employment or exited because they were not found eligible for services.

Table 5  
*Closure Type for all VR Consumers Receiving Services from Division of Rehabilitation Services for the 2016 Fiscal Year*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
Exited during/after Trial Work Experience	50,007	11.94
Exited after eligibility but order of selection waiting list	3,112	0.74
Eligibility prior to assigned IPE	145,422	34.72
Exited after IPE without employment outcome	110,265	26.32
Exited after IPE in noncompetitive employment	11,626	2.78
Exited after IPE in competitive, integrated, or supported employment	4,824	1.15
Applicant prior to trial work or application	93,632	22.35
Total	418,888	100.00

*Note.* Exited after IPE in competitive, integrated, or supported employment is the only successful employment outcome.

Table 6 is found that discusses the specific closure types for all transitional-aged youth who received services from the Division of Rehabilitation Services for the 2016 fiscal year. This variable as above, has seven levels, and might explain the findings found later in this chapter.

Table 6  
*Closure type for Transitional-Aged Youth Consumers Receiving Services from Division of Rehabilitation Services for the 2016 Fiscal Year*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
Exited during/after Trial Work Experience	13,720	12.3
Exited after eligibility but order of selection waiting list	851	0.8
Eligibility prior to assigned IPE	34,147	30.7
Exited after IPE without employment outcome	29,682	26.7
Exited after IPE in noncompetitive employment	4,330	3.9
Exited after IPE in competitive, integrated, or supported employment	936	0.8
Applicant prior to trial work or application	27,530	24.8
Total	111,196	100.0

*Note.* Exited after IPE in competitive, integrated, or supported employment is the only successful employment outcome.

Transitional-aged youth had a similar distribution with majority of consumers not being eligible for services of exiting after IPE with no employment. As shown in Table 6, there were a large percentage of transitional-aged youth cases that were closed for services as an applicant prior to trial work or at application.

### **Results by Research Question**

In the following sections the results are detailed by research question. Frequency distributions are provided in the relevant sections, such as for the job placement, job

search, job readiness and VR services. The frequency distributions are provided as they may explain the findings. The results are presented by each of the six unique research questions.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question was utilized in order to determine the potential impact of receipt of SSI on closure in competitive and integrated employment versus no employment for transitional-aged youth. This question asked: Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at application? Its hypotheses follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference between closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application and not receiving SSI at application.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are differences between closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application and not receiving SSI at application.

A Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney test was used to determine the impact of receiving SSI at application on closure status (exiting with competitive and integrated employment) for individuals receiving services from the federal/state VR program who were aged 14 to 24 years. The receipt of SSI was nominal in nature and entered as an independent variable. Closure status was ordinal in nature and entered as the dependent variable, because exiting with employment is greater. The results denoted that transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application ( $\mu = 24,689$ ) compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at application ( $\mu = 74,536.67$ ) indicated that exiting with employment was

greater for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application,  $\chi^2 = 33.16$ ,  $p < .0001$ , as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

*Summary of Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney Test for Transitional-Aged Youth Receiving SSI at Application Compared to Transitional-Aged Youth not Receiving SSI at Application*

Predictor	<i>n</i>	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
No SSI at Application	124,487	1	33.16	< .0001
SSI at Application	24,689			

## Research Question 2

The second research question was utilized to explore the impacts of the receipt of SSI at closure (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth. This question asked: Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at closure? Its hypotheses follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference between closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure and not receiving SSI at closure.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are differences between closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure and not receiving SSI at closure.

A Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney test was used to determine the impact of receiving SSI at closure on closure status (exiting with employment) for individuals receiving services from the federal/state VR program who were aged 14 to 24 years. The receipt of SSI at closure was nominal in nature and entered as an independent variable. Closure

status was ordinal in nature and entered as the dependent variable, because exiting with employment is greater. Findings revealed that transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure ( $\mu = 24,367$ ) had higher successful closure rates (exiting with employment) when compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at closure,  $\chi^2 = 45.27, p < .0001$ , as shown in Table 8.

Table 8  
*Summary of Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney Test for Transitional-Aged Youth Receiving SSI at Closure Compared to Transitional-Aged Youth not Receiving SSI at Closure*

Predictor	<i>n</i>	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
No SSI at Application	124,802	1	45.27	< .0001
SSI at Application	24,367			

**Job placement, job readiness, and job search services.** A frequency distribution was performed for all consumers and transitional-aged youth to ascertain the frequency of how many received job placement, job readiness, and job search services while receiving services from federal/state VR. This was done to ascertain how many in each grouping received services in order to trim the data set. Consumers not receiving these services were removed for purposes of this analysis. Further, the frequencies of services received provide potential explanations for results obtained. As shown in Table 9, most of the consumers did not receive job placement services.

Table 9  
*Receipt of Job Placement Services of all VR Consumers at Closure*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
No Services	316,329	79.65
Services Received	80,821	20.36

A frequency distribution was performed only for transitional-aged youth and job placement services. As shown in Table 10, the majority of transitional-aged youth did not receive job placement services.

Table 10  
*Receipt of Job Placement Services of Transitional Youth Aged 14 to 24 Years at Closure*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
No Services	84,443	79.6
Services Received	21,339	20.4

A frequency distribution was performed only for all consumers and job readiness services. As shown in Table 11, majority of transitional-aged youth did not receive job readiness services. Services provided by VR staff and services provided via agency purchases were the services that were provided most to consumers.

Table 11  
*Receipt of Job Readiness Services of all Consumers at Closure*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
No Services	351,131	89.2
Services Received	42,713	10.8

A frequency distribution was performed only for transitional-aged youth and job readiness services. As shown in Table 12, majority of transitional-aged youth did not receive job readiness services.

Table 12  
*Receipt of Job Readiness Services of Transitional Youth Aged 14 to 24 Years at Closure*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
No Services	87,615	78.8
Services Received	16,651	21.2

A frequency distribution was performed only for transitional-aged youth and job search services. As shown in Table 13, majority of consumers did not receive job search services.

Table 13  
*Receipt of Job Search Services of all Consumers at Closure*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
No Services	318,714	80.45
Services Received	77,472	19.55

A frequency distribution was performed for only transitional-aged youth receiving job search services. Frequencies are reported in Table 14.

Table 14  
*Receipt of Job Search Services of Transitional Youth Aged 14 to 24 Years at Closure*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
No Services	82,978	74.6
Services Received	21,726	25.4

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question was utilized to determine what if any impact common VR services had on transitional-aged youth's employment outcomes (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment). This question asked: How does job placement, job readiness, and job search services impact closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers of transitional age, controlling for race, and gender? Its hypotheses follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference between closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving and not receiving job placement, job readiness, and job skills services when controlling for race and gender.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are differences between closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving and not receiving job placement, job readiness, and job skills services when controlling for race and gender.

A multiple logistic regression analysis was performed to determine the effects of job placement, job readiness, and job search services on closure status (0 = did not exit with employment, 1 = exited with employment) for transitional-aged youth, while controlling for race and gender. All the main effects of the binary indicators on closure status were not statistically significant. Within the current study, odds ratios were used to



compare the occurrence of an outcome (i.e., exiting with employment) given the specific predictor variables of job placement, job readiness, and job search training. An odds ratio “represents the odds that an outcome will occur given a particular exposure, compared to the odds of the outcome occurring in the absence of the exposure” (Szumilas, 2010, p. 227). A Bonferroni correction was applied and yielded a new significance level of .007. An odds ratio greater than 1.0 indicates a positive relationship exists. There were no significant findings indicating that odds of exiting with employment was higher for those receiving job placement, job readiness, and job search services while controlling for race and gender. There was no observed impact of these services on employment outcomes as shown in Table 15.

**Table 15**  
*Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Effects of Job Placement, Job Readiness, and Job Search Services on Closure Status of Transitional Youth Aged 14 to 24 Years While Controlling for Race and Gender*

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Wald $\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	<i>OR</i>
Job Readiness (No services provided)	-10.10	135.80	.0055	.94	0.0009
Job Readiness (VR Agency: in-house)	5.10	202.70	.0006	.98	1.0000
Job Readiness (VR Agency Purchase)	-5.19	135.80	.0015	.97	0.0009
Job Readiness (Comparable Services/Benefits Providers)	5.09	474.30	.0001	.99	0.9930

*Note.* Backward elimination was performed. The race and gender variables were not included in the model.

**Research Question 4**

The fourth research question was utilized to determine what if any impact common VR services had on transitional-aged youth’s employment outcomes (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) versus consumers in other age categories. This question asked: Are consumers within the transitional-age category more likely to

exit with a successful closure (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) than consumers in other age categories, controlling for job placement services, job readiness training, and job search services? Its hypotheses follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference between closure status of transitional-aged youth and nontransitional youth, when controlling for job placement, job readiness, and job search services.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are differences between closure status of transitional-aged youth and nontransitional youth, when controlling for job placement, job readiness, and job search services.

A multiple logistic regression analysis was performed to determine the effects of age (transitional age versus not transitional age) on closure status (0 = did not exit with employment, 1 = exited with employment), while controlling for job placement services, job readiness training, and job skills training. All the main effects of the binary indicators on closure status were not statistically significant. Within the current study, odds ratios were used to compare the occurrence of the exiting with employment outcome, given the specific predictor variables of job placement, job readiness, and job skills training. An odds ratio “represents the odds that an outcome will occur given a particular exposure, compared to the odds of the outcome occurring in the absence of the exposure” (Szumilas, 2010, p. 227). A Bonferroni correction was applied and yielded a new significance level of .016. An odds ratio greater than 1.0 indicates a positive relationship exists. There were no significant findings indicating that odds of exiting with employment was higher between consumers of transitional age and not of transitional age that

received job placement, job readiness, and job search services. There was no observed impact of these services on employment outcomes as shown in the table below:

Table 16  
*Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Effects of Job Placement, Job Readiness, and Job Search Services on Closure Status of Transitional Youth Aged 14 to 24 Years and Consumers in Age Categories as 25 Years of Age and Older*

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Wald $\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	<i>OR</i>
Job Readiness (No services provided)	-10.22	110.7	.0085	.93	0.0009
Job Readiness (VR Agency: in-house)	4.95	151.2	.0011	.97	1.0000
Job Readiness (VR Agency Purchase)	-4.63	110.7	.0018	.97	0.0009
Job Readiness (Comparable Services/Benefits Providers)	4.95	394.0	.0002	.99	1.0000

*Note.* Backward elimination was performed. Job Placement and Job Search Services were not included in the model.

**VR services.** A frequency distribution analysis was performed on the VR services provided to all consumers and transitional-aged consumers. These frequency distributions were performed to ascertain which consumers received services. This was done to illustrate and potentially explain results obtained. As seen in Table 17, 49.57% of consumers did not receive VR services. As seen in Table 18, 47.2% of transitional-aged youth did not receive VR services.

Table 17  
*Receipt of VR Services of all Consumers Closed for Services*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
No Services	196,113	49.57
Services Received	199,492	50.43

Table 18

*Receipt of VR services for Transitional Youth Aged 14 to 24 Years who Were Closed for Services*

SSI recipient	<i>n</i>	%
No Services	52,493	47.2
Services Received	52,177	52.8

### **Research Question 5**

The fifth research question was utilized to explore the impacts of VR services on closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth who received SSI at closure. This question asked: What impact does the receipt of VR services have on closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth who received SSI at application? Its hypotheses follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference in closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application and receiving VR services.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are differences in closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application and receiving VR services.

A multiple logistic regression analysis was performed to determine the effects SSI at application for transitional-aged youth on closure status (0 = did not exit with employment, 1 = exited with employment) while controlling for VR services. The main effects of the binary indicator on closure status was not statistically significant. Within the current study, odds ratios were used to compare the occurrence of the exiting with employment outcome, given the specific predictor variables of VR services. An odds

ratio “represents the odds that an outcome will occur given a particular exposure, compared to the odds of the outcome occurring in the absence of the exposure” (Szumilas, 2010, p. 227). A Bonferroni correction was applied and yielded a new significance level of .016. An odds ratio greater than 1.0 indicates a positive relationship exists. There were no significant findings indicating that transitional-aged youth that were receiving SSI at application and received VR services were more likely to exit with employment as shown in Table 19.

Table 19  
*Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Effects of VR Services on Closure Status of Transitional Youth Aged 14 to 24 Years who Received SSI at Application*

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Wald $\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	<i>OR</i>
VR (No services provided)	-6.03	46.28	.017	.897	0.081
VR (VR Agency: in-house)	-3.84	46.28	.007	.934	0.720
VR (VR Agency Purchase)	6.69	135.30	.002	.960	1.000
VR (Comparable Services/Benefits Providers)	6.69	134.60	.003	.960	1.000

*Note.* VR = Vocational Rehabilitation, which is the variable that designates counseling and guidance information and support services to assist an individual in exercising informed choice and is distinct from the case management relationship that exists between the counselor and individual during the VR process. Backward elimination was performed, and SSI at application was removed from the model.

### **Research Question 6**

The sixth research question was utilized to explore the impacts of VR services on closure status as competitive and integrated employment versus no employment for all consumers who received SSI at application. This question asked: How does receiving SSI benefits affect successful closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers receiving VR services through the Division of

Rehabilitation, controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job search training, gender, and race? Its hypotheses follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference in closure status for consumers receiving SSI and not receiving SSI that are provided VR Services, while controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job skills-training, gender, and racial identity.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are differences in closure status for consumers receiving SSI and not receiving SSI that are provided VR Services, while controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job search services, gender, and racial identity.

A multiple logistic regression analysis was performed to determine the effects SSI at application and receipt of VR services on closure status (0 = did not exit with employment, 1 = exited with employment) while controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job search services, gender and racial identity. All the main effects of the binary indicators on closure status were not statistically significant. Within the current study, odds ratios were used to compare the occurrence of the exiting with employment outcome, given the specific predictor variables of SSI at closure and receipt of VR services. An odds ratio “represents the odds that an outcome will occur given a particular exposure, compared to the odds of the outcome occurring in the absence of the exposure” (Szumilas, 2010, p. 227). A Bonferroni correction was applied and yielded a new significance level of .003. An odds ratio greater than 1.0 indicates a positive relationship exists. There were no significant findings indicating that consumers on SSI at application and receiving VR services were

more likely to exit with employment compared to consumers not on SSI at application but also receiving VR services as shown in Table 20.

Table 20  
*Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Effects of VR on Closure Status of Transitional Youth Aged 14 to 24 who received SSI at Application While Controlling for Educational Level at Application, Job Placement Services, Job Readiness Training, Job Search Training, Gender, and Race*

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Wald $\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	<i>OR</i>
VR (No services provided)	-7.03	200.40	.0012	.97	-1.70
VR (VR Agency: in-house)	-4.90	200.40	.0006	.98	-1.15
VR (VR Agency Purchase)	8.47	572.80	.0002	.99	-1.12
VR (Comparable Services/Benefits Providers)	8.09	595.60	.0002	.99	-1.07
Secondary school diploma	-1.70	76.74	.0005	.98	-1.70
Secondary school equivalency	-1.15	76.74	.0002	.99	-1.15
Individual has a disability and attained a certificate of attendance / completion	-1.23	76.74	.0002	.99	-1.23
Completed $\geq 1$ years of postsecondary education	-1.07	76.74	.0003	.99	-1.07
Postsecondary certification, license, or educational certificate (nondegree)	-1.24	76.74	.0002	.99	-1.24
Associate's degree	-1.13	76.74	.0003	.99	-1.13
Bachelor's degree	-1.24	76.74	.0002	.99	-1.14
Degree beyond the bachelor's degree	-1.14	76.74	.0002	.99	-0.95
No educational level completed	-0.95	76.74	.0002	.99	-0.63
Job Readiness (No services provided)	-9.68	92.86	.0109	.92	< 0.001
Job Readiness (VR Agency: in-house)	4.65	126.90	.0013	.97	1.024
Job Readiness (VR Agency Purchase)	-4.08	92.87	.0019	.97	< 0.001
Job Readiness (Comparable Services/Benefits Providers)	4.48	330.10	.0002	.99	0.866

*Note.* VR = Vocational Rehabilitation, which designates counseling and guidance information and support services to assist an individual in exercising informed choice and is distinct from the case management relationship that exists between the counselor and individual during the VR process. Backward elimination was performed, and the variables of job search, job placement, race, gender, and SSI at application were removed from the model.

## Summary

The principal focus of this study was to determine the potential impact of the receipt of SSI for transitional-aged youth on successful employment outcomes. The RSA-911 data set was utilized and is reported to include all individuals served by the federal/state VR program in the United States. The entire population was 543,161, and transitional-aged youth totaled 111,196. The number of individuals differed in each question as some individuals received certain services and others did not. The data set contained what appeared to be numerous data entry errors. This study addressed competitive and integrated employment as a successful closure type.

The Wilcoxon Mann Whitney test was utilized for Research Questions 1 and 2 to determine the impact the receipt of SSI at application and at closure on closure status (competitive and integrated employment). The results found that transitional-aged youth who had SSI at application had an increased likelihood of exiting with competitive and integrated employment. Further, the results found that transitional-aged youth who had SSI at closure had an increased likelihood exiting with competitive and integrated employment.

A multiple logistic regression analysis was performed for Research Questions 3 through 6. These questions sought to determine the impact of services typically provided by federal/state VR agencies for transitional-aged youth who received SSI and who did not as compared to individuals in other age categories who received services. No statistical significance was found for the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth research questions. Chapter V provides a detailed discussion of the findings and the resulting implications.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The current study was conducted to examine the effects of the receipt of supplemental security income (SSI) on employment outcomes for transitional-aged individuals. Further, whether certain services that included job placement services, job readiness services, job search services, and VR had any impact on closure status. Chapter V summarizes the findings and results for each hypothesis. Due to the significant errors in this data set, findings from any statistical analysis were not regarded as reliable or valid. This data set represented the only data available for statistical analysis on the effectiveness of services provided in the federal/state VR program. Unfortunately, the data could not reveal the effectiveness of the federal/state VR program and WIOA initiatives, even though the data can be used to remove funding for VR services from states. A discussion of the study's practical implications as well as future research appears in the remainder of this chapter.

#### **RSA-911 Data Set**

There were significant limitations related to the RSA-911 data set, specifically the 2016 fiscal year. Prior to 2016, the data were collected differently, and 2016 represented the first year of the new data collection methods. For example, job placement services were coded as either received or not received in the 2015 data set. In the 2016 data, three distinct levels of job placement services were collected. In the 2016 fiscal year data set, there were numerous variables for the type of exit or closure that included type of exit, employment at outcome, and closure reason. However, when frequency counts were run

on these variables, it was determined that the data did not match, and every case in the data set had a closure type, even though not every case should have had a closure date.

It was reasonable to assume individuals would continue services beyond a single fiscal year, even though each individual in the data set had a closure type. Further, differences were found in the status of competitive integrated employment across variables. The differences were large; for example, at close reason, only 377 participants were noted to be closed in a competitive and integrated environment. Still, in the “type of exit” variable field, 4,777 cases were noted to be closed in a competitive and integrated environment. Further, other related variables, such as the variable field “SOC code of occupation at employment,” had 183,000 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes entered, but that high frequency was not found in other variables that accounted for the same type of closure. SOC codes were specific occupation codes developed by the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to categorize jobs. It was possible that confusion about how to enter the data occurred, due to the numerous changes in data collection and the numerous variables that seemingly addressed the same topic, closure status or type of exit.

For the purposes of this study, the population (census) was utilized. This was done to avoid sampling errors and to have an increased generalizability. It was clear from the data that the variables that measured closure had varying numbers. It would have been possible, albeit not statistically sound, to simply pick among of the outcome variables that had a higher successful closure rate and utilized that variable for analysis. A secondary analysis could be performed using any of the closure variables, because the results could be different for each closure variable analyzed. It is not appropriate to pick

whichever variable had the desired characteristics or numbers. If simply picking the closure variable that represents desired values, statistical significance could potentially be found. Unfortunately, the results could be invalid or unreliable because of the data entry errors found in the data set, and further, it is not clear which closure variable represented the correct number of successful closures.

### **The First Hypothesis**

The first research question was utilized in order to determine the potential impact of receipt of SSI on closure in competitive and integrated employment versus no employment for transitional-aged youth. This question asked: Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at application? Its hypotheses follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference between closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application and not receiving SSI at application.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are differences between closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application and not receiving SSI at application.

There was a significant difference found in that transitional-aged individuals who received SSI at application were more likely to exit with employment. This finding was surprising in that Kaya (2018) found that cash benefits, such as disability payments, were negatively associated with employment outcomes for youth with intellectual disabilities. There was a possibility that families encouraged youth with intellectual disabilities to remain on public support system (Luecking & Wittenburg, 2009). However, Berry and

Caplan (2010) found that the odds of employment for SSI beneficiaries with mental retardation were 1.3 times higher than the odds of unemployment.

While the findings were significant, the findings should be interpreted with caution. The RSA-911 data indicated that 936 individuals of transitional age had a closure type of “exited after an IPE in a competitive, integrated, or supported employment.” This category represented 0.8% of types of closures and was the only closure type indicating actual employment. For the entire population, only 4,824 individuals had a closure type of “exited after an IPE in a competitive, integrated, or supported employment,” representing 1.15% of types of closure. Closures with employment represented a small percentage of all closure types, with the remaining closure types being individuals with disabilities who did not obtain employment because of services received in the federal/state VR program. Further, large numbers exited participation prior to having an IPE in place.

Receiving services through the federal/state VR program may frequently exceed 1 year. In the transitional-aged group, approximately 22% continued services into fiscal year 2017. WIOA placed an emphasis on careers and it is possible that individuals were attending training or college during fiscal year 2016. An individual can maintain their supplemental security benefits while enrolled in college or vocational training. The emphasis on training and careers as opposed to jobs.

### **The Second Hypothesis**

The second research question was utilized to explore the impacts of the receipt of SSI at closure (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for

transitional-aged youth. This question asked: Are there differences in closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure compared to transitional-aged youth not receiving SSI at closure? Its hypotheses follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference between closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure and not receiving SSI at closure.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are differences between closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at closure and not receiving SSI at closure.

There was a significant difference found in that transitional-aged individuals who received SSI at closure were more likely to exit with employment. This finding supports the findings in Hypothesis 1 in that individuals of transitional age are more likely to exit with employment and maintain their SSI benefits. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), individuals with disabilities are more likely to be employed in part-time work as opposed to their counterparts without disabilities. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) indicated that 31% of workers with disabilities were employed part-time, compared to 17% for those without a disability. This is important because if an individual is working part time and earning under the substantial gainful activity (SGA) level, they can maintain their SSI benefits. It is possible to work part time and continue to receive SSI benefits. In fact, many individuals may desire to do this. It allows the individual to bring in more income, while maintaining their benefits.

Finally, individuals exiting with employment while continuing to receive SSI benefits may, at some point after the closure, lose those benefits. In the federal/state VR program, successful employment is reached once the individual has maintained

employment for 90 days. Individuals who receive SSI are counseled to report their earnings to the Social Security Administration (SSA), but the responsibility is on the individual to report their earnings. The federal/state VR program does not report these earnings to SSA. SSA does review earnings for individuals receiving individuals receiving SSI, and there is no specific timeline or specific time frame in which they do so. Individuals could eventually lose their SSI benefits after successful closure and would then be required to pay SSA back for the benefits they received during the time they were earning money without reporting it.

While the findings were significant, these findings should be interpreted with caution as noted in the first hypothesis. The significant inconsistencies in the closure type variables in the data limited the reliability of the findings. Closures with employment represented a small percentage of closure types, with the remaining closure types being individuals with disabilities who did not obtain employment because of services received in the federal/state VR program.

### **The Third Hypothesis**

The third research question was utilized to determine what if any impact common VR services had on transitional-aged youth's employment outcomes (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment). This question asked: How does job placement, job readiness, and job search services impact closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers of transitional age, controlling for race, and gender? Its hypotheses follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference between closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving and not receiving job placement, job readiness, and job skills services when controlling for race and gender.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are differences between closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving and not receiving job placement, job readiness, and job skills services when controlling for race and gender.

There were no significant findings indicating that the odds of exiting with employment was higher for individuals of transitional age for those receiving job placement, job readiness, and job search services while controlling for race and gender. This could be due to the small number of observations in the closure status labeled as “competitive and integrated employment.” This result provides an opposing view to a study completed by Kaya in 2018. Kaya (2018) found that after controlling for the effect of demographic variables, job placement and on the job support, on the job training, maintenance services, other technical assistance, and diagnostic and treatment services were significantly associated with competitive employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. There is a need to ensure customized services, via transition planning that focuses on individual needs and abilities, and supported employment to achieve higher levels of competitive employment (Kaya, 2018).

Findings from a study by Barry and Caplan (2010) suggested job placement services negatively influenced employment status. It is important to note that these services did not appear to be common for transitional-aged youth. Seventy-five percent of transitional-aged youth did not receive job placement services. In fact, these services were not obtained in large numbers by any individual served by the federal/state VR

program. Nearly 80% of the population did not receive this service. Job readiness services were not common services for transitional-aged youth as the numbers reflected that nearly 80% did not receive these services. These services were not obtained in large numbers by any individual served by the federal/state VR program, with nearly 90% of the population not receiving this service. Finally, job search services were not common services for transitional-aged youth as 75% did not receive this service. This service again was not common for all individuals served by the federal/state VR program, with 80% not receiving the service.

The apparent lack of service in these areas begs the question as to why they are not provided. One potential explanation is the apparent significant data issues previously noted. Job placement, job search and job readiness resources are common services provided in the federal/state VR programs. Job placement, job search and job readiness are primary advantages for locating employment. The fact that 75% to 90% did not receive these services defies common sense. The primary purpose of the federal/state VR program is to obtain employment and the above services would be highly utilized. The service can be provided by the VR counselor or an outside vendor. Finally, it is important to consider that WIOA placed an importance on a real career, as opposed to simply a job. It is possible that numerous individuals are continuing in the federal/state VR program while participating in training or secondary education and therefore would not have closed in 2016. A post analysis descriptive analysis was performed, and 24,652 ( $N = 111,196$ ) did not have a close date, which means services continued.



### **The Fourth Hypothesis**

The fourth research question was utilized to determine what if any impact common VR services had on transitional-aged youth's employment outcomes (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) versus consumers in other age categories. This question asked: Are consumers within the transitional-age category more likely to exit with a successful closure (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) than consumers in other age categories, controlling for job placement services, job readiness training, and job search services? Its hypotheses follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference between closure status of transitional-aged youth and nontransitional youth, when controlling for job placement, job readiness, and job search services.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are differences between closure status of transitional-aged youth and nontransitional youth, when controlling for job placement, job readiness, and job search services.

There were no statistically significant findings indicating that odds of exiting with employment was higher between consumers of transitional age and not of transitional age that received job placement, job readiness, and job search services. Youth of transitional age and all other individuals with disabilities did not appear to significantly benefit from job placement, job readiness, or job search services due to no observed impact of these services on employment outcomes for either age group. Neither the majority of individuals in the transitional-aged youth category nor the older individual's category received job placement, job search, or job readiness assistance. Again, this observation

could be due to the small number of observations in the closure status of “competitive and integrated employment.”

The fact that these services were not common for transitional-aged individuals is puzzling. These are common and mainstay services of vocational rehabilitation. How would an individual find a job without receiving any of these services? In the federal/state VR system, the state-level VR counselor can provide these services, or these services can be referred out to another vendor. A potential explanation for these findings involves data entry errors that appeared to be present in the RSA-911 data set. It defied logic that these primary services were not provided in 75% to 90% of cases.

Transitional-aged youth represent a significant proportion, almost 33%, of the population served by VR and they have unique vocational and education needs (Honeycutt et al., 2015) yet the optimal level of resources that an agency should provide are unknown.

### **The Fifth Hypothesis**

The fifth research question was utilized to explore the impacts of VR services on closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth who received SSI at closure. This question asked: What impact does the receipt of VR services have on closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for transitional-aged youth who received SSI at application? Its hypotheses follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference in closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application and receiving VR services.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are differences in closure status of transitional-aged youth receiving SSI at application and receiving VR services.

There were no statistically significant findings indicating that transitional-aged youth that were on SSI at application and participated VR services were more likely to exit with employment. There were no significant impacts found from the receipt of VR services. VR services are defined as counseling and guidance and are noted to be distinct from case management services. Kaya (2018) indicated that VR services are some of the most effective public services provided to youth with disabilities. However, the above findings yielded no significant impact. This could be due to the small number of observations in the closure status of “competitive and integrated employment.”

The lack of consistency in the variables that measure the type of closure complicated the potential to determine if a particular service impacted a successful closure. It is nearly impossible to determine if a particular service impacts positively or negatively a successful closure if there is a lack of confidence in the reported successful closure rates. A review of the frequency at which individuals participated in VR services shows that 53% of transitional-aged youth received this service in fiscal year 2016. The entire population received the service in 50% of the cases. This service was common for all individuals served by the federal/state VR program.

Counseling and guidance are primary services provided by rehabilitation counselors in the federal/state VR program. Rehabilitation counselors provide this service typically in the federal/state VR program. Due to recent changes in the minimum requirements for individuals to work as rehabilitation counselors in the federal/state VR system there are questions as to whether individuals with a bachelor’s degree should be

providing counseling services and, if so, are these services being appropriately provided if the individual has had no training as a counselor.

### **The Sixth Hypothesis**

The sixth research question was utilized to explore the impacts of VR services on closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for all consumers who received SSI at application. This question asked: How does receiving SSI benefits affect successful closure status (competitive and integrated employment versus no employment) for consumers receiving VR services through the Division of Rehabilitation, controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job search training, gender, and race? Its hypotheses follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference in closure status for consumers receiving SSI and not receiving SSI that are provided VR services, while controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job skills-training, gender, and racial identity.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are differences in closure status for consumers receiving SSI and not receiving SSI that are provided VR services, while controlling for educational level at application, job placement services, job readiness training, job search services, gender, and racial identity.

This question addressed all individuals who were on SSI at application to compared to transitional-aged youth with disabilities on SSI at application. There were no significant findings indicating that consumers on SSI at application and receiving VR services were more likely to exit with employment compared to consumers not on SSI at

application who received VR services. This could be due to the small number of observations in closure status as “competitive and integrated employment.” Stapleton and Martin (2017) identified large differences across states in the clients on disability benefits served by VR agencies and their employment outcomes. Their study produced limited evidence of how VR services affected employment and disability benefit outcomes. These results point to a potential issue with qualifications of providers.

Educational attainment at application was addressed in this question. Barry and Caplan (2010) found that individuals who received college or university training were less often employed 2 years after exiting VR services, but unsurprisingly the earnings of those employed after 5 years were higher compared to individuals without college or university training. Nonetheless, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) reported higher educational attainment (i.e., a bachelor’s degree or higher) leads to higher employment rates for individuals with and without disabilities. The results from this current study found no significant impact from educational attainment at application. There was no more likelihood any level of education of producing an employment outcome.

## **Practical Applications**

### **RSA-911 Data Use**

The RSA-911 data set is the primary data collected by the federal government in order to evaluate the effectiveness of services provided by the federal/state VR program. The information in the RSA-911 data set can be utilized to remove funding from a state if they do not meet requirements for outcomes. This is the only data set available from

which to study outcomes for individuals with disabilities in the federal/state VR program. The specific limitations found in the data are due to the lack of consistency found in the various variables recording the type of exit or closure of an individual client as well as the reported frequencies of services provided.

First and foremost, every individual in the data set had a closure type, despite not having a closure date to represent the date at which they exited the program. This is problematic because it is not plausible that everyone who was served in fiscal year 2016 exited the program. Further, the numerous variables that discuss closure or exit types were inconsistent. If someone exited with successful competitive and integrated employment that individual should have been coded the exact same way in the other variables; however, this coding consistency could not be found in the data set.

Further, the data set contained the numbers of individuals who participated in specific services. The reported frequencies appear quite low and defy common sense. It seems infeasible that a majority of all individuals who participated in the federal/state VR program did not participate in job placement, job search or job readiness services. Due to the significant errors in this data set, findings from any statistical analysis cannot be considered reliable or valid. Unfortunately, this data is used to express the effectiveness of the federal/state VR program and WIOA initiatives.

Under Title I of the WIOA, Youth Activities funds are allotted by formula grants to States that, in turn, allocate funds to local areas in the state to deliver a comprehensive array of youth workforce investment activities. In the fiscal year of 2016, the budget of \$873,416,000 was for WIOA youth activities, a \$41,574,000 (or 5%) increase compared to the fiscal year of 2015 enacted level. The RSA-911 data set was collected pursuant to

federal law. The data in this data set can be utilized to remove funding from states not meeting requirements. These monies represent a significant funding amount for programs based on the 2016 fiscal year data set that could not be studied for effectiveness due to an incomplete and apparently inaccurate data set.

### **Services Provided**

No significant impacts were found for any of the services reviewed in this current study. There have not been clearly established sets of practices and scope of personal responsibilities for state and/or federal agencies which has led to failure in collaborative efforts among secondary schools, rehabilitation, and other adult service systems (Kaya, 2018). This study was unable to determine what services could have positive impacts on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth with disabilities. This was potentially due to low frequencies of individuals participating in the services and the low successful closure rates. The 2016 fiscal year data set appears to have had significant issues with reliability and validity of the data. The variance in data across the multiple closure variables makes it quite unclear whether the number or closures is accurate or which variable is most accurate. Attempts to contact the RSA to ask which closure variable might be accurate and the significant differences across closure variables have been unsuccessful. This researcher sent tables of the frequencies of services provided to RSA but did not receive a response from this query. It is not acceptable that the only data available to measure effectiveness at a federal level is riddled with errors and no response is received when the issues are pointed out.

## **Benefits Counseling**

One potential service that was not investigated is benefits counseling. Benefits counseling is assistance provided to an individual who is interested in becoming employed but is uncertain what impact work income may have on any disability benefits and entitlements received. Additionally, they may be aware of benefits, such as access to healthcare, that might be available to support employment efforts. Further, this service typically involves an analysis of an individual's current benefits including Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and SSI and financial situation, as well as the impact of different income levels from work on the individual's future financial situation. This assistance is intended to provide the individual an opportunity to make an informed choice about employment (RSA, 2016).

Benefits counseling has the potential to significantly impact a transitional-aged youth and their family's decisions regarding work. SSI is an income of last resort for individuals with disabilities and their families. Losing the income could mean the difference between having the necessities of housing and food. According to Luecking and Wittenburg (2009), there is a possibility that families could encourage youth with disabilities to remain on public support systems. This could lead to transitional-aged youth with disabilities seeking part-time work in order to maintain their public benefits. While there may well be many individuals who are not capable of full-time work and do have a need to maintain their public benefits, there are likely many who could work and support themselves. Once an individual is on the adult disability rolls, less than 1% leave those rolls annually (SSA, 2018). Intervening early is essential when providing service to transitional-aged youth with disabilities. Unfortunately, the inconsistencies reported in



the RSA-911 data set across the closure type variables might have affected the exploration of the benefits of counseling. One potential method of studying the impact of benefits counseling could be to develop a survey instrument or to review the VR state plans to determine if benefits counseling is impacting successful closure rates.

### **Earnings as a Predictor of Part-Time Versus Full-Time Work**

While benefits counseling is worthy of exploration, it would be important to look at the earnings. This information should be reported in RSA-911 data to determine whether the individuals are working part-time and types of earnings. Data could be analyzed to determine whether people are obtaining jobs, actual careers, or working in an entry level/minimum wage type position. A primary focus on WIOA was a career, not simply a job. There is a specific interest in assisting people to work in occupations that pay a livable wage, thereby reducing dependence on government benefits. A review of earnings could reveal whether individuals earn below substantial gainful activity levels causing them to retain the ability to receive SSI benefits. Because earnings were not reported in the 2016 fiscal year data set, a specific request to RSA to include the weekly earnings at closure is essential to understanding whether the primary goals of WIOA is being met by individuals performing in actual careers versus obtaining minimum wage jobs.

### **RSA Data and Unique Client Identification (ID) Codes**

The RSA-911 data currently released to researchers does not allow for researchers to study across different fiscal years. RSA collects the individual's Social Security number (SSN), but due to obvious privacy concerns, they do not release that data. RSA

does not include a unique and nonidentifiable client ID code to everyone served. In the youth transitional-aged category, 22% of individuals did not have a closure date for 2016. Basically, their services continued for whatever reason. Potential explanations include the likelihood to enroll in postsecondary training or education as WIOA focused on careers as opposed to simply a job. It would be beneficial to examine several years of RSA-911 data to develop a more complete picture of outcomes for transitional-aged youth with disabilities. However, this lack of unique client ID does not allow for cross-year or multiple-year study. Any statistical analysis would have violated assumptions. No reliable mechanism to ensure that each case in the data would not be duplicated in previous or subsequent years is available. RSA must allow for the creation of a unique client ID, as opposed to the use of SSNs.

Further issues with the lack of unique client ID are related to the Pre-ETS Services provided for transitional-aged youth starting at 14 years of age. These services include early career exploration services such as job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on available postsecondary training opportunities, workplace readiness and finally self-advocacy training (WINTAC, 2018). Couched as pre-employment inferring that the individuals would likely receive services over a period of years and not just 1 discrete fiscal year. The lack of unique client ID does not allow for any researcher, unless employed by RSA and having access to SSNs, to study the effectiveness of these services and their impacts on closure status. It is imperative to have unique client IDs to be able to most effectively and equitably study the effectiveness of VR services provided to transitional-aged youth with disabilities. RSA needs to begin collecting and including in the dataset the unique client IDs. It is in the interest of

individuals with disabilities, their families, and the U.S. taxpayers to determine which services are or are not effective for individuals with disabilities receiving VR services.

### **Qualifications of Service Providers**

Qualifications of service providers in the federal/state VR system have changed over the years. Most recently WIOA (2014) changed the minimum requirement from a master's degree to a bachelor's degree. The impact of this change has not been fully addressed in research. The requirements for rehabilitation counselors in the federal/state VR program is now described as follows:

(I)(aa) attainment of a baccalaureate degree in a field of study reasonably related to vocational rehabilitation, to indicate a level of competency and skill demonstrating basic preparation in a field of study such as vocational rehabilitation counseling, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, supported employment, customized employment, economics, or another field that reasonably prepares individuals to work with consumers and employers; and

(bb) demonstrated paid or unpaid experience, for not less than 1 year, consisting of--

(AA) direct work with individuals with disabilities in a setting such as an independent living center;

(BB) direct service or advocacy activities that provide such individual with experience and skills in working with individuals with disabilities; or

(CC) direct experience as an employer, as a small businessowner or operator, or in self-employment, or other experience in human resources, recruitment, or experience in supervising employees, training, or other activities that provide experience in competitive integrated employment environments; or

(II) attainment of a master's or doctoral degree in a field of study such as vocational rehabilitation counseling, law, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, management, public administration, or another field that reasonably provides competence in the employment sector, in a disability field, or in both business-related and rehabilitation-related fields. (Stat. 1643, pp. 127-128)

Individuals with the bachelor's degree are not eligible for state licensure as a counselor (American Counseling Association, 2019). They are not eligible for national

certification as a counselor (CRCC, 2019; National Board for Certified Counselors [NBCC], 2019). According to professional associations (i.e., ARCA, CRCC, CORE, and NRCA), qualified providers of rehabilitation counseling services are those professionals who have: (a) completed graduate degree training in rehabilitation counseling or a closely related degree program (counseling) at the master's degree level; (b) attained national certification (CRC); and (c) acquired appropriate state licensure (e.g., Licensed Professional Counselor, Licensed Mental Health Counselor; Leahy, 2004). Apparently, a bachelor's degree does not provide adequate training in counseling.

It would be beneficial to study how the qualifications of service providers impact the services offered and if qualifications impact positive outcomes, competitive integrated employment. The RSA-911 did not contain the qualifications of service providers. Some states plan to track qualifications, even though such tracking is not a widespread or national endeavor. Further, due to the irregularities in the 2016 fiscal year's RSA-911 data set, studying how these qualifications impacted services would be difficult at best. Due to the variance of the numerous different closure/exit variables it would be difficult to determine if qualifications impacted employment outcomes. It is recommended that RSA track and report the educational level and certification status for all service providers as well as determine the most appropriate closure/exit type variable to use and report the status in one variable.

### **Limitations**

This current study suffered from several limitations. There were limitations to consider when conducting secondary data analysis on pre-existing data. The major

limitation involved data entry errors that were present despite efforts to improve the accuracy of data entered into the database. Error was unavoidable in this case. There appeared to be significant data entry errors in the 2016 fiscal year data set.

Second, the data exhibited a lack of consistency among closure type variables as well as what appeared to be inaccuracies in the numbers reported for individuals receiving common and mainstay services. Inferring causality when merely correlation may be present was another limitation. Huck (2007) indicated that cause must precede effect, the variables must be related (covary), and there must be no confounding variables that could affect relationships to the dependent variable. Causation was nearly impossible to prove and reduced the generalizability of the data.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The focus of this current study was to determine what impact the receipt of SSI had on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth with disabilities. It is important to look at the past success or lack of success in order to determine a rational approach to providing services in the future. Understanding what services work and which do not is essential to future planning and development of best practices. The findings of this study indicated that transitional-aged youth who received SSI at application had greater odds of being employed at closure compared to those who did not have SSI at application. Transitional-aged youth with SSI at closure had greater odds of being employed than those who did not have SSI at closure. Given these findings, it would be beneficial to understand why this is. However, the limitations found in the RSA-911 data set not

prevent exploration of why transitional-aged individuals who were on SSI at application had greater odds of having a successful employment outcome.

At this juncture, it is not possible to utilize this data set to study the effectiveness of services being provided to individuals with disabilities. It is not possible to use this data set to understand the impacts of services provided or make rational plans for future services. The data set does not collect earnings, but it should since it is in the fiscal year 2016 data manual. This would allow for researchers to determine if an individual is earning part-time or full-time wages. It would allow for a determination if the earnings are above substantial gainful activity levels. Finally, studying the qualifications of providers would be beneficial. There have been limited studies as to what constitutes a qualified service provider (NBCC, 2019), such as a licensed or unlicensed counselor. The primary goal of WIOA was enabling VR participants to gain a career and not simply a job. Skills and qualifications of service providers could have a significant impact on that outcome.

### **Summary**

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the effect of the receipt of SSI on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth. The population (census) was utilized for this study as opposed to a sample. Early intervention has become a national priority with an emphasis on quality employment outcomes, essentially occupations that pay a livable wage (WIOA, 2014). The results showed that SSI at application and at closure predicted that individuals who did not receive SSI were more likely to be employed than those who did not receive SSI. This finding was surprising but could be

due to part-time work and the fact that part-time work is more readily available and is generally easier to access. Working part-time can allow an individual to maintain benefits, thereby preserving a steady source of income for transitional-aged youth and their families.

Services offered by the federal/state VR program, such as job placement services, job readiness services, job search services, and VR services (counseling and guidance), were found to have no statistically significant impact on employment outcomes for transitional-aged youth. This finding could be due to the low frequencies, 0.8%, for competitive integrated employment or supported employment at exit among transitional-aged youth. The lack of statistically significant findings could be due to the numerous errors and inconsistencies found in the RSA-911 data. The data errors might have caused an inability to produce reliable evidence. Given the variations and potential errors in the closure- and exit-type variables, statistically significant findings would have been highly questionable.

Future recommendations include a reconstruction of the RSA data set. It would be beneficial to have unique client IDs to allow for longitudinal study across multiple years. It would be beneficial for the data set to contain a single closure or exit variable to indicate whether the person exited with competitive and integrated employment. Finally, the data did not indicate that many individuals received job placement, job search, or job readiness services. The lack of indication of service receipt could be due to the inconsistencies found in the data set that might have happened from improper data entry or lack of data entry. Additionally, the services might have been provided but not accounted for in the data set.

Recommendations for future research apply once the errors in the RSA-911 data set are corrected. A study exploring whether transitional-aged youth who received SSI exited with employment continued to work part-time could be conducted. Finally, a review of rehabilitation counselors' and other service providers' qualifications could provide insight into whether or not sufficiently qualified individuals provide the services or the services themselves need to be revised. Collection of this information in the RSA data set would enable researchers seeking to evaluate the effectiveness of rehabilitation services throughout the nation and improve employment outcomes for youth with disabilities.



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