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Are Young Adults With Intellectual Disabilities Getting Work Experiences from Participating in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program?

By Alberto Migliore, Jean Winsor

To learn about whether young adults with intellectual disabilities in the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program are getting work experience, we examined the age at application of people with intellectual disabilities who exited the VR program in 2012.

As Figure 1 shows, the largest age group at application was people who were age 18 (n=6,400). This is good news because it shows that the VR program has a focus on young adults. However, we found that seeking VR services at a young age did not necessarily result in reporting an employment closure at an earlier age. For example, people who were 14 years old at application took 6.2 years to exit VR with employment, compared to only about 1.6 years for people age 21 or older (Figure 2).

Some of the reasons why younger people reported a longer time to achieve employment might have to do with their enrollment in school. Even if work entails only a few hours per week or is concentrated in the summer, working while attending high school can be challenging. Moreover, some people may have worked, but not long enough to qualify for an employment outcome as defined by VR (at least 90 work days).

Another reason could be that VR counselors wait to close case records until a student exits the school system, even if an employment outcome was achieved while the individual was enrolled in school.

Finally, these data do not report on work experiences that occur through schools or other state agencies, or that arise from the youth's own community connections.

Knowing more about the role of the VR program in promoting work experiences for young adults with intellectual disabilities is critical for developing effective policy and practices that lead to better employment outcomes for this target population.

Definitions

A person was considered to have an **intellectual disability** if "mental retardation" (code 25 in the RSA-911) was either a primary or secondary cause of an impediment to employment.

Young adults are people age 30 or younger who exited the VR program in fiscal year 2012.

Employment means that a person worked full-time or part-time in integrated settings, with or without support, for at least 90 days.

Figure 1. Number of people who exited VR

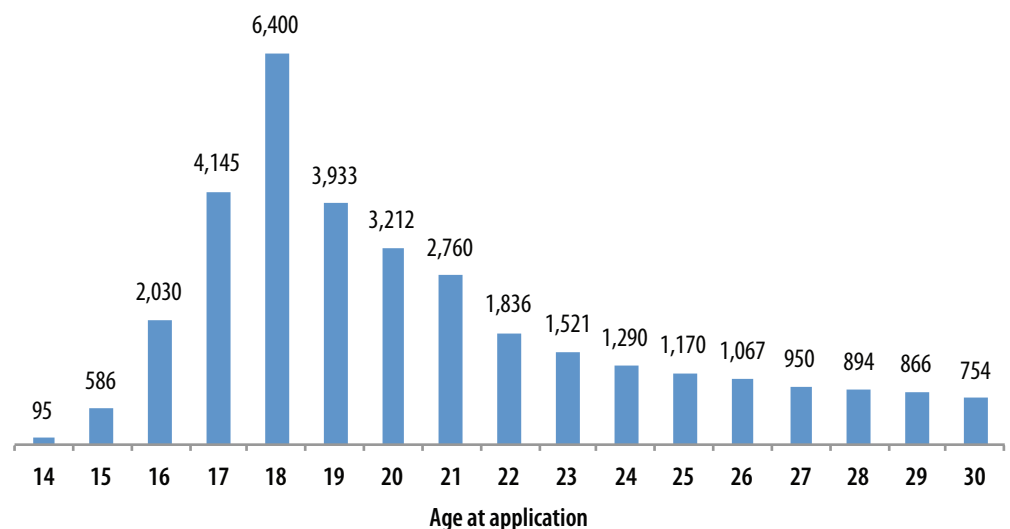
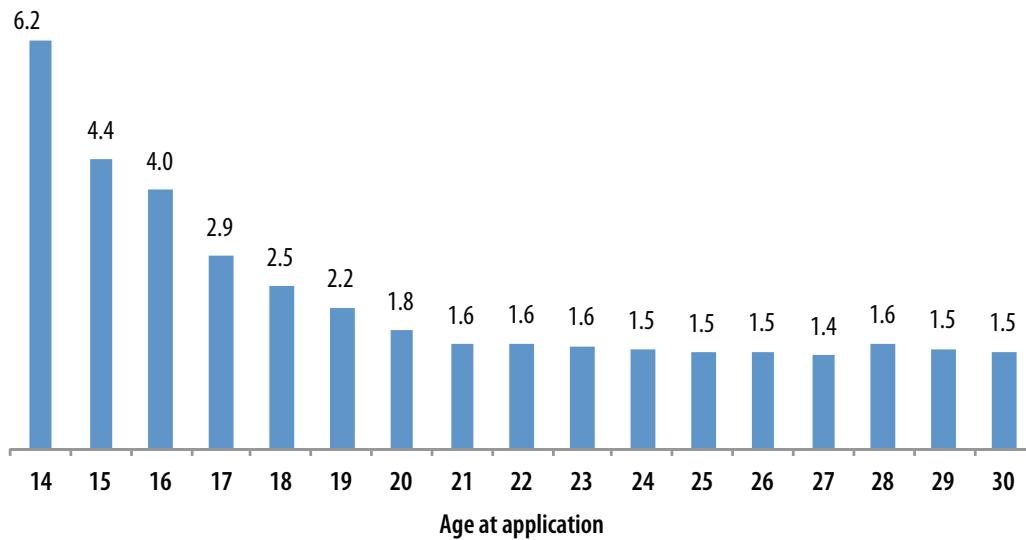
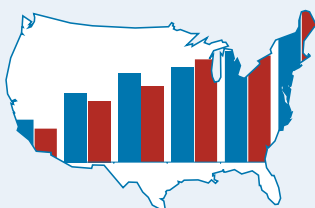


Figure 2. Average years to employment



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