

A STUDY OF VOCATIONAL SKILLS OF PEOPLE WITH MILD AND MODERATE MENTAL RETARDATION

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ABSTRACT

This study identifies the generic skills, work traits and aptitude of people with mild and moderate mental retardation from regular and special schools. Further, it explores the relationships between generic skills and aptitudes, as well as work traits and aptitudes of people with mild and moderate mental retardation from different schools. The sample for this study consists of 19 persons with mild mental retardation and 26 with moderate mental retardation. Twenty five persons had studied in regular schools before they started their vocational training, while the other 20 had studied in special schools. They were assessed for generic skills, work traits and aptitude. Analysis of variance (ANOVA), correlation co-efficient, and critical ratio between the co-relations were used on the data to test the hypotheses. This paper highlights the implications of the findings for the future.

INTRODUCTION

Work is an essential part in the life of a person because it gives him status and binds him to the society. Acceptance of disabled persons at work can be viewed as society's acceptance of these persons without discrimination. Successful performance at work makes a disabled person self-confident. However, many people with disabilities are still unable to obtain work and are dependent on others.

Just as normal adults work to earn their livelihood, persons with mental retardation also have the potential to work and earn if they are provided with the necessary training, placement and other supports. At present, many of them are idle, work in sheltered workshops or work a few hours every week. Their earnings do not reflect their capabilities. To make employment a realistic option for people with mental retardation, appropriate jobs from the open market need to be identified. Simple jobs that require minimum supervision and low risk need to be selected for successful training and placement of individuals with mental retardation. If not by their intellectual ability, they need to be selected for the training based on their generic skills and aptitude. Vocational rehabilitation helps persons with mental retardation to hold on to a job.

On most occasions mentally retarded children are sent to special schools, where they learn skills that help them to develop an aptitude for certain kinds of jobs later. Research shows that generic skills and work traits improve with systematic training and also develops their aptitude in many different ways. In order to explore their relationship this study identified generic skills, work traits and aptitude of people with mild and moderate mental retardation from different schools.

For the purpose of this study the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Generic skills, work traits, aptitude among people with different types of mental retardation from different schools will be at the same level.
2. Significant relationship is present between generic skills and aptitude, among people with different types of mental retardation from different schools.
3. Significant relationship is present between work traits and aptitude, among people with different types of mental retardation from different schools.
4. Relationship between generic skills and aptitude will be greater in people with mild mental retardation, than in people with moderate mental retardation.
5. Relationship between generic skills and aptitude will be greater among people with mental retardation from regular schools, than in people from special schools.
6. Relationship between work traits and aptitude will be greater in people with mild mental retardation than in people with moderate mental retardation.

7. Relationship between work traits and aptitude will be greater among people with mental retardation from regular schools than in people from special schools.

METHOD

The present study included 19 persons with mild mental retardation and 26 persons with moderate mental retardation. Twenty five persons were in regular schools before they joined for vocational training, while 20 persons came from special schools before they joined for vocational training. All the persons in the sample were from the city of Chennai. All were men ranging in age from 18 to 25 years.

The tools and questionnaires used in this study are standardised and commonly used.

1. Vocational placement check list developed by the National Institute of the Mentally Handicapped (1).
2. Work traits questionnaire developed by National Institute of the Mentally Handicapped (1).
3. The General Aptitude Test Battery (Form B-B1002), Indian adaptation by Ashok M. Dolke (2).

Analysis of Variance, correlation co-efficient and critical ratio between the correlation were used to test hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Work traits, generic skills, aptitude of persons with mild and moderate mental retardation from regular and special schools.

The findings here show that persons with mild and moderate mental retardation have the same level of generic skills, work traits and work aptitude confirming the first hypothesis, which states that they will be at the same level even if the people are from different schools. These findings are in line with the findings of other researchers (3,4).

Table 2 : Generic skills and aptitude among persons with mild and moderate mental retardation from regular and special schools .

These results indicate that there is a good relationship between generic skills and aptitude of persons with mild and moderate mental retardation. It is possible to infer from these findings that generic skills are significantly related to aptitude among persons with mild and moderate mental retardation. Generic skills play a significant role in developing aptitude. Unless generic skills are developed, vocational skills are difficult to learn.

The table also shows that there is a very good relationship between generic skills and aptitude of persons with mental retardation from regular and special schools, even before they started vocational training. Children with mental retardation get different types of orientation through exposure to different kinds of environment that facilitate development of pre-vocational skills and aptitude for work. These results show that persons with mental retardation from special schools received training such as self-help skills, academic skills, social skills and pre-vocational skills. This training could have developed their generic skills and as a result they developed an aptitude for work also.

Table 3 : Work traits and aptitude among persons with mild and moderate mental retardation from regular and special schools .

The results suggest that there is a relationship between work traits and aptitude among persons with mild and moderate mental retardation. These findings are in line with the findings of Wlodarski et.al (3). Apart from generic skills, work traits are also considered an important factor for developing aptitude. Moreover, early training and education contribute to development of different work traits, which in turn develop different aptitudes. Work traits and aptitude have a close relationship among persons with mental retardation from regular as well as special schools. Both regular school and

special school curriculum played significant roles to develop work traits and aptitude among persons with mental retardation.

T a b l e 4 : G e n e r i c s k i l l s a n d a p t i t u d e a m o n g p e r s o n s w i t h m i l d a n d m o d e r a t e m e n t a l r e t a r d a t i o n f r o m r e g u l a r a n d s p e c i a l s c h o o l s .

These results show that the Correlation between generic skills and aptitude of persons with mild mental retardation is not higher than persons with moderate mental retardation. So both the groups have a relationship between generic skills and aptitude. However, the correlation between generic skills and aptitude of persons with mental retardation from regular schools is higher than persons with mental retardation from special schools. The reason could be because the special schools may not provide good role models even though they provide different skills to persons with mental retardation. Whereas, regular schools provide good role models for them. Regular school and integrated set-up provide opportunity for the persons with mental retardation to interact with normal persons and this in turns leads them to have good role models and an environment to learn social and life skills.

Table 5: Work traits and aptitude among persons with mild and moderate mental retardation from regular and special schools.

Group	N	R	C.R	Level of Significance
Persons with Mild Mental Retardation				
Persons with Moderate Mental Retardation				

Table 5: Work traits and aptitude among persons with mild and moderate mental retardation from regular and special schools. (Contd.)

The results show that a correlation between work traits and aptitude of persons with mild and moderate mental retardation is significant. It also shows that the correlation between work traits and aptitude of persons with mental retardation from regular schools is also significantly different from persons with mental retardation from special schools. Both regular and special school education helped to develop certain work traits among persons with mild and moderate mental retardation. Early training is very important for persons with mental retardation to improve their skills.

Generic skills like self-help skills, communication, social behaviour, functional academics, safety skills, domestic behaviour, motor skills and vocational skills are at similar levels among persons with mild and moderate mental retardation from regular and special schools. Similarly, traits like work behaviour and work related skills are also similar among persons with mild and moderate mental retardation from regular and special schools. Moreover, aptitudes like perceptual ability, motor co-ordination, finger dexterity, manual dexterity and so on, are also found to be similar among persons with mild and moderate mental retardation from regular and special schools. Irrespective of categorising persons with mental retardation as mild or moderate, they are still equally capable of taking any vocational training which will help them in independent living.

CONCLUSION

The results of the investigation conclude that persons with mild and moderate mental retardation from different schools showed similar levels of generic skills, work traits and work aptitude. The results also showed a high relationship between generic skills and aptitude, and between work traits and aptitude. On comparison of the relationship between generic skills and aptitude, and between work traits and aptitude, it shows that persons with mental retardation from regular schools have a higher relationship between their generic skills and aptitude than those persons from special schools.

This study illustrates the importance for assessing skills like generic skills, work traits and work aptitude before selecting persons with mental retardation for vocational training. It also highlights the need to

integrate children with mental retardation into regular schools because it can help them to learn various skills through modelling. Further, the findings support that orientation programmes conducted for teachers who are working in the integrated schools for persons with mental retardation, are highly beneficial.

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