INTERSECTING IDENTITIES: EXPLORING THE INTERPLAY OF RACE AND

DISABILITY IN EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS

By

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Lay Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of race and disability in employment support systems. The first paper is a scoping review examining the existing literature to understand the process of accessing employment services for racialized disabled workers. The findings of the review highlighted that racialized disabled workers face disparities in accessing employment supports and require personalized supports that cater towards their intersecting identities. The second paper is a qualitative study drawing on interviews with racialized disabled workers, service providers, and employers to understand their experiences navigating the Canadian employment support systems. The findings show that several participants reflected on the lack of development regarding employer education, government policy and programs, service provider training and capacity to better serve disabled workers with multiple intersecting identities. This thesis expands our understanding of how social constructs such as race and disability can impact experiences of accessing employment supports and consequently affect employment outcomes.

Abstract

Employment supports have traditionally been available to help reduce barriers to employment, promote workforce participation, and empower individuals to achieve their career goals. However, there is very limited knowledge regarding the intersection of race and disability and how it can impact the delivery of employment supports for racialized disabled job seekers and workers. To address this gap, this thesis includes a scoping review and a qualitative study to understand the impact of race and disability in employment support systems.

The scoping review consists of 73 studies and a grey literature search on vocational rehabilitation (VR). Data was extracted and thematically analyzed to synthesize the existing knowledge about VR services currently in place for racialized disabled job seekers and workers. The findings highlight the disparities in accessing VR and its delivery in the United States. The included studies reported lower acceptance rates to enter VR programs, and lower probabilities of a successful exit. These findings suggest the importance of service providers conducting comprehensive assessments to determine the unique requirements of each job seeker and worker to customize their supports accordingly.

To capture the varied lived experiences and perspectives while navigating the Canadian employment support systems, a qualitative interpretive descriptive study was conducted. In-depth semi-structured interviews were performed with racialized disabled job seekers and workers, service providers, and employers. Interviews were thematically analyzed to identify common themes and patterns about the impact of race and disability in employment supports. The employment support process, as reported by the participants in this study, was identified to be inflexible and bounded by multifaceted structural, organizational, and attitudinal challenges that intersect across race, disability, and employment. Overall, an intersectional approach that is

targeted, flexible and inclusive of changes and strategies is needed to create a more equitable

employment landscape that better supports racialized disabled workers.

Acknowledgements

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Declaration of Academic Achievement

As a Master's student, Eakam Grewal received feedback and guidance from the supervisory committee to conduct a qualitative research project as the Primary Student Investigator, and to complete the contents of this thesis. Contributors to chapter two and three are listed as co-authors, and co-authors include the three members of the supervisory committee. Their role was critical in evolving the thesis drafts, and in helping the primary author to evaluate and refine the contents of this thesis. This thesis is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, Rehabilitation Science.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Employment is an important social determinant of health that can provide substantial benefits to both personal and societal well-being (Armenti et al., 2023). However, benefits and risks associated with employment are not equitably distributed among all workers and industries (Landsbergis et al., 2014). Inequity is particularly evident when looking at employment in intersection with other social determinants of health, particularly race and disability. As described in the Accessible Canada Act (2023), accessible employment for disabled workers means that individuals are supported throughout their employment journey and barriers are to be mitigated and resolved. Despite this federal legislation, disabled persons in Canada experience lower rates of employment than their non-disabled counterparts, with 65.1% being employed compared to 80.1% (Statistics Canada, 2023). Statistics Canada data also highlights that this disparity is even more significant when it intersects with race, with employment rates for racialized disabled workers at only 49.9% being employed because of compounding impacts of both discrimination and inaccessible workplaces (Statistics Canada, 2020).

The compounded discrimination arising from racism and ableism demonstrates that individuals can face prejudice based on multiple facets of their identity, such as race and disability. In the past, scholarly research on race and disability within different disciplines has artificially maintained a surface-level divide between race and disability, consequently reinforcing and reproducing invisibility of their intersection in available data (Bell, 2011). Most research on the intersection of race and disability has been theoretically grounded by the medical model (Artiles et al., 1997) in which the individual can be portrayed through a lens devoid of social or historical influences. The medical model tends to overlook the broader social, cultural,

and environmental factors that contribute to the experience of disability, instead, it siloes the individual's condition from the context in which they live, including their social identities ().

Recently, an increasing volume of research has explored how disability can shape opportunities for employment, career success and economic growth (Fuentes et al. 2023; Tompa et al., 2022). In the past decade, governments have concentrated their efforts to enhance the employment opportunities and conditions for disabled workers and key policy changes have been made to promote equal rights to employment and workplace accommodations for disabled job seekers and workers (Berghs & Dyson, 2022). Current research suggests that if Canada were a fully accessible and inclusive society for disabled persons, economic benefits would amount to approximately $337.7 billion, or approximately 17.6% of gross domestic product in the calendar year 2017 (Tompa et al., 2022). However, little research has highlighted intersections of race and disability in relation to gaining and retaining employment (Fuentes et al., 2023). An exploration of current employment support systems through examination of the social and organizational factors would highlight existing challenges experienced by workers, employers, and service providers. Such an examination could provide information to improve capacity to meet the intersectional needs of disabled and racialized job seekers and workers.

In this chapter, I provide my reflection, definitions of reoccurring terms, and the basis and rationale of my chosen theoretical framework and model, as well as set the context for the thesis research presented in chapters two and three. I begin by reflecting on my own experiences and perspective entering this research to establish my positionality with respect to my topic of study. I then provide definitions of key terms that arise within my two manuscripts. I follow this with an introduction to the theoretical framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and the social model of disability (Oliver, 1996), which inform this research. I conclude by outlining the

methodologies of the two studies presented in chapters two and three, while providing a summary of the purpose, research questions, objectives, and outline of the full thesis.

Reflexivity

My personal experiences have heavily influenced my mindset as a researcher. As a graduate student in my early twenties, I do not have a great deal of lived experience to corroborate my beliefs and passions in the traditional sense, but I believe that I have witnessed enough to know who I am as a person and what my priorities are. The concept of my research study happened very naturally; it emerged from personal and educational experiences, as described below, and seeking patterns and links in what I have seen happen.

Through my undergraduate degree in Life Sciences at McMaster University, I had the privilege and opportunity to take courses that were outside the traditional biology stream curriculum. In my final years of undergraduate studies, I saw myself focusing my attention on courses that had an emphasis on global health. I gained interest in understanding health and illness as a social, cultural, political, and historical phenomenon, and understanding the importance of valuing lived experiences in research. In tandem with my personal trajectory, I have seen firsthand what oppression and discrimination can do to one's confidence and their perception of seeing the world. My personal experiences of navigating life as a woman of South Asian descent has helped me see privileges that I do and do not have; I have the privilege to be aware of my own social location and help those in similar situations. At the same time, I feel my skin colour limits the opportunities that I have, and I have felt like an outsider in environments where people do not look like me. I believe my social location heavily influences the type of research I am interested in pursuing and conducting. I have always had a passion for doing research that contributes transformative actions to reducing inequities and that bring to light

relations of power that have been socially constructed, reinforced, and reproduced through institutional and social forces. As researchers we need to acknowledge, understand, and bring to light the impact of oppressive social forces. As a researcher, I know that I hold a level of influence and I hope to use that power to raise awareness, inform and find solutions for complex forms of discrimination.

When trying to place myself as an insider or outsider in relation to my research study, I believe I fall somewhere in the middle. Being regarded as 'one of us' or a 'stranger' is convoluted in the context to my research population, and this blend comes with its own advantages and disadvantages. I consider myself an insider because as a racialized person I am able gain easier access and trust from workers from racialized communities. However, I might be biased towards certain interpretations and outcomes of the participants experiences that align with my personal perspectives or beliefs and become too invested by advocating strongly for their narratives to be accurately represented, potentially overlooking alternative viewpoints or nuances in their stories. I consider myself as an outsider as well since I have not experienced the different lived experiences that a disabled worker may experience.

Despite being a woman and belonging to a racialized group, I am also aware that I hold a certain amount of privilege from growing up in a middle-class household with the means to obtain an education. Furthermore, being connected to a university and having the opportunity to pursue a graduate degree where I can perform research further reinforces my privilege. By recognizing my privilege, I notice power differences between me and my participants. Noticing these power differences raises the importance of recognizing and addressing my own assumptions regarding my research and the participants. I can assume that participants might be reluctant to trust a researcher with sensitive information. I can also assume that participants will

be wary and have feelings of apprehension due to their lack of control over what gets published and shared with the outside world and whether their experiences will be presented in a manner that accurately represents them and their experiences. Participants can come with their own set of assumptions about the research process, which can cause conflict between the researcher and participants. On the other hand, I can assume that participants might be happy to be given a platform to address systemic issues they have encountered in their experiences identifying as a disabled worker from a racialized community. As a researcher I hold accountability to incorporate the participants' voices in my research and to understand their history in which they might have been exploited and underrepresented.

Explanations of Key Recurrent Terms

Within this thesis, certain terminology will be referenced and used to explain the systems in place to assist workers in the process of obtaining employment or who are employed. Terminology in the literature and described within this thesis often differ depending on the context. In the US, vocational rehabilitation (VR) is often used to describe the process to help job seekers and workers to secure, regain or retain employment. In Canada, the term employment supports is predominantly used to describe the same process. The definitions of these terms and their various components are described as follows:

Vocational Rehabilitation. Vocational rehabilitation is a set of services designed to enable disabled individuals to attain, maintain, or return to employment (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 2024). To qualify for VR services, an individual must have a physical or mental impairment that significantly hinders their ability to work, be capable of benefiting from VR services in relation to employment, and need VR services to prepare for, enter, engage in, or retain a job (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 2024). Once eligibility is determined, a VR

counselor helps the individual create an Individualized Plan for Employment. This plan outlines the vocational goal and specifies the services that will be provided to achieve that goal (Rehabilitation Services Administration, n.d.). Through the Rehabilitation Services Administration, an individual can receive comprehensive rehabilitation services including (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024):

Information and Referral: Information and referral refers to the process of providing disabled individuals, their families, and service providers with information about available resources, services, and supports.

Assessment: Assessment involves the evaluation of the individual's skills, abilities, and limitations to identify the type of work the individual would be best suited for.

Counselling and Guidance: In counselling and guidance, VR counsellors provide advice on career options and development to help with career goal setting.

Physical Restoration: Physical restoration includes medical and therapeutic services aimed at improving or restoring the physical functions and capabilities of disabled individuals, enabling them to pursue employment.

Vocational Training and Post-Secondary Education: VR counselors can offer training programs to develop specific job skills and provide access to educational resources and programs to their clients to enhance their knowledge and skillset.

Job Search: VR counselors engage in various strategies and support services designed to help individuals identify job opportunities, apply for positions, and successfully secure employment. This can include resume assistance, interview preparation, and networking.

Job Placement: Job placement refers to the process of assisting disabled individuals in securing suitable employment. This involves matching their skills, interests, and capabilities with appropriate job opportunities and providing the necessary support to ensure successful employment.

Job Coaching: Job coaching is a service designed to assist disabled individuals in learning and performing their job duties effectively.

Supported Employment: Supported employment is a service designed to help individuals with significant disabilities obtain and maintain competitive employment in integrated work settings. This approach provides ongoing support tailored to the needs of the individual and is intended to ensure long-term job success and stability.

Employment supports. Employment supports are supplied through service providers and aid in the entire process of a finding and keeping a job (Government of Canada, 2024). Service providers are funded at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels (Government of Ontario, 2022). Service providers can range from non-profit and for-profit organizations and their point of focus can be only employment or can be mixed with other services such as immigration aid (Government of Ontario, 2024). These employment supports can entail (Government of Canada, n.d.):

Assessment: Service providers determine the applicant's eligibility for the nature and scope of services that need to be provided.

Counselling: Counselling in this case can include personal adjustment training and any counselling necessary to achieve the desired work outcome.

Job Search Assistance: Job search assistance is a process that involves preparation work including writing resumes and cover letters, as well as preparing for job interviews, and learning how to search for available jobs.

Job Readiness Training: Job readiness training provides teaching to prepare an individual for their workplace environment. This can include information about what is appropriate dress attire and grooming according to workplace standards, as well as the importance of correct work behaviours, getting work on time and addressing skills directed towards organization and productivity.

Job Placement Assistance: Job placement assistance involves referrals to a specific job for certain individuals who fit the criteria.

On-the-Job Training: Service providers or prospective employer train an individual for a specific job while doing that job and learning the necessary skills for the job.

On-the-Job Supports: On-the-job supports are provided to the individuals to help stabilize and enhance job retention including job coaching.

Job Accommodations: Accommodations refers to any changes to the workplace environment that allow the disabled person to do their job.

Assistive Technology and Devices: Disabled job seekers and workers are provided with technologies and devices designed to address any barriers while working on the job (e.g. accessible software, mobility devices).

Transportation: Disabled job seekers and workers are granted services arranged to transport the individual to and from work and/or to necessary appointments.

Job Development: In this service, service providers engage and support employers and workplaces to broaden their uptake of disabled persons through increased job opportunities.

Job Coaching: Service providers are placed on and off the job sites to help workers build their professionalism, interpersonal skills, and independence.

In this thesis, terms related to intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) are also often referenced to describe the complex interplay between race and disability and various other social identities.

Intersecting identities. Intersecting identities (Moffitt et al., 2023) is a concept suggesting that an individual's identity is shaped by multiple intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity, sexual identity, gender, disability, social location and many more. These factors shape individuals to be muti-layered and there is an emphasis on identity being fluid and constantly shifting as one moves through life (Azmita & Mansfield, 2021).

Throughout this thesis, I also raise the importance of using consistent language to describe my targeted population group. Coming from a critical perspective, I chose to use identity-first language. This form of language places the identity at the forefront of the individual and emphasizes that their identities are integral part of their lived experiences (Best et al., 2022). Using identity-first language in tandem with intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) enhances the depth and inclusivity of my research by explicitly recognizing and valuing the complex nature of intersecting identities. The current literature discussing the perspectives of similar populations in this thesis also adopts the use of identity-first language (Moola et al., 2023). I also acknowledge the implications of using identity-first language, which prioritizes the identity or condition (such as "disabled person") over personhood ("person with a disability"). This choice reflects a deliberate decision to affirm the individual's identity as integral to their experiences and

community, rather than separating it from their personhood (Best et al., 2022). However, identity-first language fits within the scope and perspective of my research since it emphasises social constructs and systemic issues related to identity such as race and disability.

In this thesis, I examine how race and disability and potential situations that can arise for job seekers and workers can shape and set up situations of double discrimination. Gee and Ford (2015) describe racism as a conscious or unconscious distinction or action based on a person's race that can have an effect of imposing inferiority. Ableism is defined as a set of beliefs and actions that lead to discrimination against disabled persons (Frederick & Shifrer, 2019). In past literature, racism and ableism were often written as parallel systems of oppression that work separately to perpetuate social hierarchy (Harpur, 2009). However, racism and ableism can intertwine and interact to generate unique forms of inequities (Frederick & Shifrer, 2019).

There is limited scholarship exploring intersections of ableism and racism (Fuentes et al., 2023). This notable gap in the research is significant despite the large proportion of persons identifying as both racialized and disabled. In the context of North America alone, US data suggests that one out of every four Black adults and three out of ten Indigenous adults are disabled (Courtney-Long et al., 2017). In Canada, 14.3% of Canadians aged 15 and older are disabled and part of a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2018). A large of portion of the existing research that is focused on individuals with multiple intersecting identities can overlook cultural differences and dichotomous variables concerning race and disability (Artiles, 2013; Hannon, 2017). Despite recent efforts, the significant social and organizational burdens racialized disabled individuals can face and the ambiguity within policy and legislation to address barriers for racialized disabled job seekers and workers suggests that there is a need to better examine employment supports systems currently in place (Ontario Human Rights

Commission, 2016). This examination should include how service providers, employers, job seekers/workers are accessing and utilizing these systems. Insights gained from this examination can enable service providers to become more competent at supporting job seekers/workers and employers, thereby fostering a more inclusive and progressive environment in which the correct expertise, attention, and training is being provided.

Theoretical Framework and Model

The framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) provides the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis work. Historically, the framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) has been directly linked to oppression, which is the unjust treatment or exercise of power and control that invokes a system that regularly discriminates against an individual, group, or institution (Wyatt et al., 2022). Created by the black feminist and critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, "intersectionality" as an interdisciplinary framework engages individuals to think about their own identities and how their identities impact their experiences in the world. Intersectionality can be comprehended as a theory, theoretical framework, heuristic device, methodology, concept, paradigm, tool for action, and an informed stance (Collins, 2015; Heard et al., 2020). A theoretical framework offers a perspective for interpreting literature and shaping research methodology, akin to providing structural support for a study (Varpio et al., 2020). As a researcher, I am utilizing intersectionality as a theoretical framework, highlighting its relevance in addressing intersecting oppressions, the significance of lived experience in knowledge formation, power dynamics, social justice, and the coherent linkages between these concepts (Macgregor et al., 2023). The framework of intersectionality highlights a phenomenon that describes how overlapping identities and various socio-demographic factors can create forms of

intersectional oppression and discrimination especially in historically marginalized individuals or groups (Runyan, 2018).

Intersectionality is used to describe how social categories and structures that are present in many facets of life result in unique experiences, opportunities, and barriers for each individual (Runyan, 2018). This intersectionality perspective offers an appropriate foundation for exploring the experiences of racialized disabled job seekers and workers as they work to secure meaningful employment with the assistance of employment support service providers and employers.

In response to traditional medical models of disability—such as the biomedical model (Rocca and Anjum, 2020) and the deficit model (D'Amato et al., 2005)—which fail to account for societal and environmental barriers encountered by disabled individuals (Artiles et al., 1997), disability activists and scholars sought alternative approaches. This led to the establishment of the social model of disability (Goering, 2015), which aims to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of disability by emphasizing the role of societal factors. The social model of disability (Goering, 2015) is based on distinct and defined differences between impairment and disability (Goering, 2015). According to the social model, an individual's limitations are not the cause of disability rather, disability is the result of disabling environments and social structures, as well as inadequate services and supports (Lawson & Beckett, 2020). In this research, drawing on the social model of disability will help me identify barriers that racialized disabled job seekers and workers encounter within employment support/vocational rehabilitation services (Bingham et al., 2013).

Qualitative Methodology and Analysis

Once I entered the Rehabilitation Science program, my desire to capture and outline experiences of racialized disabled job seekers and workers navigating the employment support

systems drew me to qualitative methods (Pathak et al., 2013), which can be used to guide the investigation of lived experiences and develop new knowledge in light of participants' views, thoughts, opinions, and ideas. In terms of qualitative methodologies, I chose to use interpretive description (Thorne, 1997). Interpretive description was first described by Dr. Sally Thorne and colleagues (1997), as an approach to qualitative research that would go beyond description and into the realm of understanding patterns of human subjective experiences within applied disciplines (Thorne, 1997; Thorne, 2016). The interpretive description methodology reveals the interaction of social concepts and relationships within the phenomenon of interest (Thorne, 2016). The goal of interpretive description is to produce practical findings that can improve services in everyday practice and guide the identification of components needing further study (Thorne, 2016). Interpretive description is the most appropriate approach to address my research questions.

For my scoping review and qualitative study, I will be following the steps of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clark, 2006) and aligns with the principles of interpretive description. Thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2022) follows six phases: (1) dataset familiarisation; (2) data coding; (3) initial theme generation; (4) theme development and review; (5) theme refining, defining, and naming; and (6) writing up. My reasoning for using this analytic approach is that it is flexible and focuses on the essence of the data. Thematic analysis is independent from a singular theory and epistemology and can be applied across a wide range of theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Summary

In summary, examining different elements of employment supports and their respective advantages and disadvantages can be beneficial for creating strategies to support service providers and employers to create fair and inclusive opportunities for racialized disabled job seekers and workers. The examination of race and disability within the employment support process has not been well defined or explored in research, policy, and legislation (Fuentes et al., 2023). The overall focus of my research is to investigate the process of supplying, obtaining, and using employment support services through the perspectives of service providers, employers, and racialized disabled job seekers and workers to explore challenges and improvements required to create a more sustainable system for successful employment. The following table presents the research questions and objectives that guide this thesis.

Table 1.1: Research questions and objectives

	Manuscript #1 – Chapter 2	Manuscript #2 – Chapter 3
Research Question	What is written about the experiences of racialized disabled workers receiving employment support services?	What are the experiences of racialized job seekers and workers as they use employment supports?
Objective #1	Identify and synthesize what has been written about the practices and processes for providing employment supports to racialized disabled job seekers and workers while specifying the gaps in the existing literature base	Explore intersecting identities of disability and race in the context of employment support services
Objective #2	Explore the intersectional perspectives and experiences of racialized disabled job seekers and workers documented in the literature	Better understand the experiences of racialized disabled workers, and employers as they respectively utilize employment support services in their attempts to find, keep

		and advance their careers and hire, support, and promote racialized disabled workers
Objective #3	Suggest potential next steps to enhance current employment supports systems for racialized disabled seekers and workers in a broader context	Identify strategies, recommendations, and practices to improve employment and career experiences for racialized disabled workers

Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of four chapters. In Chapter 1 I provided background information on recurrent terms used throughout the thesis and an overview of current research. I also provided a description of my reflexive orientation and positionality as a researcher. I then defined key terms as well as introduced my theoretical framework and model, my chosen methodological approach, along with the research question and objectives for each manuscript.

In Chapter 2 I present a scoping review in which I explore and synthesize existing literature about employment support systems in place for racialized disabled job seekers and workers. The scoping review included 73 research articles from selected scientific databases and supporting documents identified in a grey literature search. All data was collated, organized, and coded. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted to explore common processes and tensions that arise when a racialized disabled job seeker or worker uses employment supports.

In Chapter 3 I present the manuscript of a qualitative study undertaken to examine the experiences of providing and utilizing employment supports amongst racialized disabled job seekers, service providers, and employers. Interpretive description (Thorne, 2016) was used as the qualitative methodology and a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was performed on all the participant data collected via interviews. The common themes that arise during the

employment support process are identified, along with what was reported to be helpful or challenging amongst our three population groups.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I provide a more in-depth discussion of the findings from both manuscripts, identify limitations and practical implications, and provide next steps for research, policy, and practice.

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Chapter 2: A Scoping Review of Current Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Racialized Disabled Job Seekers and Workers

Abstract

Purpose

Racialized disabled job seekers and workers continue to face disadvantages in the labour market, potentially leading to reduced employment opportunities among other challenges. This gap in labour market outcomes suggests there is a need to investigate the range of employment supports, also known as vocational rehabilitation (VR) services, available to this population. By examining the entire employment journey—from job preparation to retention—we can thoroughly assess how these supports and services impact their employment outcomes. The purpose of this scoping review is to examine the existing evidence about vocational rehabilitation, synthesize the knowledge, and identify gaps in practice with racialized disabled job seekers and workers using supports and services to help them gain employment.

Methodology

An extensive literature search was carried out, encompassing the search of four electronic databases and a review of grey literature. From this search, seventy-three studies and six grey literature documents met the inclusion criteria.

Findings

The results of the analysis are focused on the intersectional impact of racial and (dis)ability identities on VR experiences and outcomes. The analysis suggests that current VR systems are not structured to address the complex needs of racialized disabled job seekers and workers. Service providers and employers should address this gap and design services that can be tailored for individual needs and strengths.

Originality

The study provides a crucial step towards establishing a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of how the intersection of race and disability affects outcomes and experiences within VR services.

Introduction

Employment is a recognized social determinant of health (Raphael *et* al., 2020) and can provide benefits to both personal and societal health such as contributing to establishing social status and developing a sense of belonging (Armenti *et* al., 2023). Programs and initiatives focused on delivering employment supports for racialized disabled job seekers and workers have emerged to help individuals obtain and maintain employment. Employment-focused support services can improve the employability of an individual by providing job readiness training, job development supports, onboarding supports and retention/promotion services (Canadian Association for Supported Employment, 2024). However, issues of ableism and racism are inherently prevalent in organizational structures of employment services (Yin *et* al., 2022), which can contribute to ongoing barriers to employment faced by racialized disabled individuals.

Experiences and challenges of disabled individuals seeking and maintaining employment have been well documented in the literature (Vornholt *et* al., 2013), and yet disabled individuals remain among the most disadvantaged in the labour market (Saleh and Bruyère, 2018). Disabled individuals also continue to report consistently lower employment quality and are nearly twice as likely to report low-quality employment, either as being stuck in secure yet unfulfilling jobs or in in insecure and unrewarding positions (Shahidi *et* al., 2023). Following labour market trends, the labour force participation of disabled individuals is in decline in recent years despite ongoing efforts across many Canadian jurisdictions to implement innovative policies and legislation to

improve their employment opportunities (Pettinicchio and Maroto, 2017). Disabled workers who are employed often contend with ableist attitudes at workplaces, leading to deeply rooted workplace discrimination, exclusion and oppression, (Dirth and Branscombe, 2019; Fuentes *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, racialized individuals also face disparities in the workforce and labour market due to racist beliefs and behaviours (Lippens *et al.*, 2022).

Despite the expansive literature focused on employment supports for disabled individuals, there has been little attention paid to how intersecting identities of race, and disability can impact employment related experiences, amongst racialized disabled workers (Berghs and Dyson, 2020). A lack of consistent standards for collecting racial data across various disciplines, and a historical tendency to neglect the combined impact of race and disability contribute to this gap (James *et al.*, 2006). This gap persists within the rehabilitation sector, as does a lack of awareness about how one's identity can impact their experiences and the challenges they face (Saia *et al.*, 2023).

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a service which helps disabled persons to overcome barriers to accessing, retaining, or returning to employment through supportive services (US Department of Labor, 2024). In this review we explore the intersection of disability and race within employment supports broadly, with a specific focus within our analysis on VR services in the US. In the US, VR programs are federally funded and provide services such as referrals to other supportive services (e.g., occupational therapy, assistive technology), assessment, counselling, physical restoration, vocational training, post-secondary education, job search assistance, job placement, job coaching, and supported employment to disabled persons with the support of VR counsellors (US Department of Labor, 2024). Similarly, in Canada we often refer to the same suite of services as employment supports; these include services to find and keep

jobs, however, these services are provincially/territorially funded (Canadian Association for Supported Employment, 2024). Due to the similar nature of VR and employments supports, both terms can be used interchangeably but differ in light of geographical contexts. Traditionally, VR and employment supports have targeted individuals and their skills, competencies and behaviours to improve their fit in existing workplace contexts (Yin *et* al., 2022). However, such individual-level approaches rarely address structural and social barriers embedded in workplace organizations that can limit employment opportunities for racialized disabled job seekers and workers.

An intersectional approach can guide an examination of the experiences of those who identify with multiple marginalized identities, creating overlapping disadvantage (Kelly *et* al., 2021). Originally introduced by Crenshaw (1991) and later described by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (n.d.), intersectionality captures idea that individuals who have multiple marginalized identities can face a myriad of individual and systemic forces that can reproduce and reinforce inequities (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.). To address such inequities in the context of employment, service providers and employers should be aware and understand how complex forms of oppression may impact both the process and nature of employment supports received by racialized disabled job seekers and workers. In Canada, available estimates from Statistics Canada (2020) indicate that among racialized disabled individuals between the ages of 25 to 64 years, 49.9% have the potential to work but are currently unemployed, highlighting an urgent need to better understand the intersectionality of race and disability in the context of employment supports.

The purpose of this scoping review is to synthesize existing knowledge about employment support systems currently in place for racialized disabled workers and to explore

strategies and guidelines to address the employment needs of this population. Significant research exists around employment supports for disabled persons but to our knowledge, no review has examined the issue of race in this body literature despite growing awareness of how race and disability intersect in the context of the employment (Fuentes *et* al., 2023).

Methods

To assess existing knowledge and identify research priorities, we conducted a scoping review of the literature on employment support processes and practices concerning racialized disabled job seekers and workers. This method is particularly suited for complex research topics that have not been systematically examined. Scoping review approaches can be used to: 1) summarize the extent, range, and nature of the existing literature; 2) determine the value of undertaking a full systematic review on the topic; 3) disseminate existing evidence; and 4) identify research gaps and set research priorities (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005; Levac *et* al, 2010). Drawing on the scoping review framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and advanced by Levac and colleagues (2010), we sought to identify the current state of the employment support systems as documented in the literature for racialized job seekers and workers. Specifically, we completed the six steps proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) to describe what is written about this topic and how this topic has been examined to date. These steps are: 1) identifying a research question, 2) identifying studies, 3) study selection, 4) charting the data, 5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results, and 6) consultation with stakeholders.

We began by asking the broad question: "What is written about the experiences of racialized disabled workers receiving employment support services?" This question guided us to address the following research objectives to:

1. identify and synthesize what is written about practices and processes for providing employment supports to racialized disabled job seekers and workers while specifying gaps in the existing literature;

2. explore intersectional perspectives and experiences of racialized disabled job seekers and workers;

3. suggest potential next steps to enhance current employment supports systems for racialized disabled job seekers and workers in a broader context.

The initial phase of this scoping review included a search of electronic databases. In the consultation with a university librarian having expertise in health and social care research, we identified four databases as relevant to our topics: CINHAL (Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health), Web of Science, ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts), and Business Source Premier. The database search strategy combined terms related to the population of focus (racialized disabled job seekers and workers), concept (employment supports) and concept (intersectionality). The search was not limited in terms of language of the literature or publishing date so that we could capture international trends and practices and examine how the literature has changed over time. A grey literature search was conducted through a Google search and the top ten pages of the results of this search were reviewed (see Appendix A for search strategy).

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were initially stated broadly. However, we engaged in an iterative process to further refine our inclusion and exclusion criteria as we examined the available literature. Our finalized inclusion criteria were that papers: (1) focused on racialized disabled workers over the age of 16; (2) focused on employment supports, and; (3) address race as a contributing factor to the employment experience as opposed to race being merely a

demographic variable. Quantitative and qualitative studies, descriptive, theoretical, case reports, dissertations, and conceptual papers, as well as scoping and systematic reviews were included. Articles were excluded if all or most participants were under the age of 16 years since our target population was adult job seekers and workers. We also excluded opinion pieces, editorials, and conference abstracts.

Covidence software was used throughout all stages of the review to organize papers and assist with the collaborative review and data extraction process. Our use of broad terms as listed in our search strategy during the electronic database searches generated a total of 13406 articles. We engaged in a systematic process of reviewing and assessing the relevance of each article. First, we removed the duplicates (2180 articles). Next, two members of the research team reviewed the titles and abstract of the articles to identify those potentially meeting the inclusion criteria, resulting in the exclusion of 11099 articles. The research team then reviewed the full text of the remaining 126 articles. Among these, an additional 53 were excluded because they could not be accessed through the university library system or did not meet our inclusion criteria or were not specifically about hiring disabled racialized persons. A total of 73 articles were included in the review (see Figure 2.1 for an outline of the study selection process and Table 2.1 for information regarding each included study). Additionally, a total of six grey literature documents were identified and included in the final analysis. The grey literature search was performed independently and the results of the grey literature search were not included in Figure 2.1, which exclusively depicts the study selection process for articles identified through database searches.
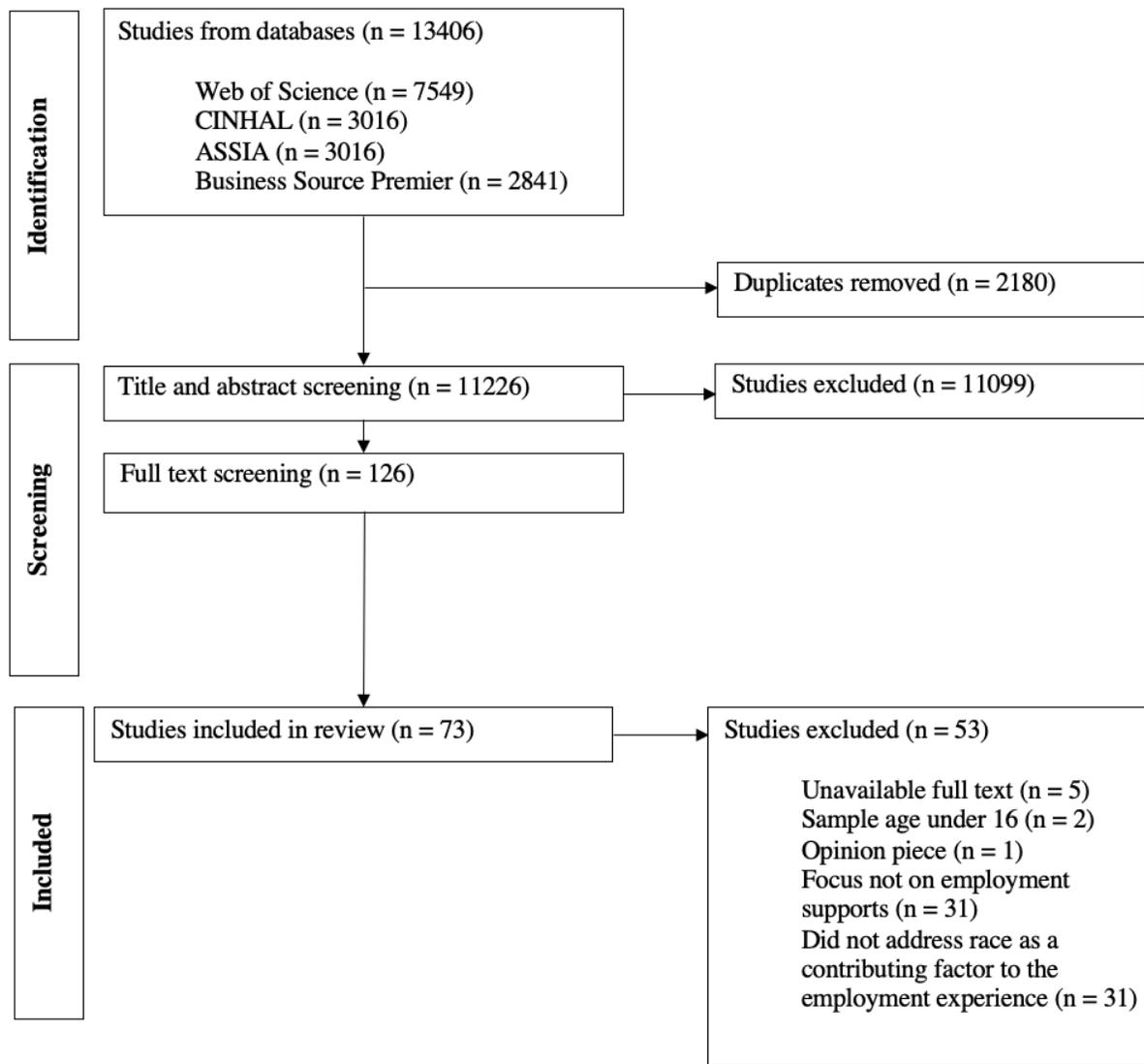
Figure 2.1: Study selection process

The data extraction process was conducted by the same two members of the research team. We extracted data from each article focusing on the purpose, methods and any information related to employment supports in the context to race and disability. The data extracted from the literature were thematically analyzed through a process of identifying and synthesizing recurrent or emerging themes by examining points of agreement and disagreement as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Through an iterative process of reviewing papers, comparing, and contrasting

the data, a summary of key themes was created to capture the experiences of racialized disabled job seekers and workers.

Results

Description of sample

Our review included 73 studies conducted in three countries over a span of a 25-year period (1998-2023). Most of these studies (n = 71) were conducted in the United States (US), one was conducted in the United Kingdom and one in Sweden. Prominent racial groups included in the articles consisted of Black/African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, and White/Caucasian/European American. There was a range of types of disabilities discussed in the included articles. Some articles used broad categories like mental, physical, intellectual, sensory, neurodivergent, psychiatric, developmental and neuropsychiatric to describe the type of disability studied. Some articles focused on specific chronic health conditions such as depression, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS. Sixty-four studies had a quantitative design and the authors analyzed VR outcomes amongst different racialized disabled groups; four of the studies had a qualitative design and involved interviewing individuals with lived experience; and five studies were review articles. Through our broad search for this scoping review with the intent to capture international literature, we saw that all the included articles focused on race and disability in the context of VR in the US. Moving forward, the rest of this scoping review will use the term VR when discussing the results of the analysis. Importantly, we recognize differences in preferred terminology across cultures, within individual groups and over time regarding disability, race, and ethnicity. Thus, throughout our presentation of our results, we use the original terms used by the authors in the included studies.

Overview of themes

We identified three key themes in our analysis: (1) the impact of race and disability; (2) VR services that promote employment success; and (3) action needed and recommendations in shaping employment supports and subsequently, labour market experiences and outcomes. See Table 2.2 for a summary of assigned themes for each included study.

The impact of race and disability

This theme explores the significant impacts of race and disability within VR, drawing on thirty-two studies to highlight how intersecting social identities shape VR outcomes, service accessibility, client-counselor dynamics, and employment prospects. These studies reveal that racialized disabled groups experience markedly poorer VR outcomes compared to their White counterparts, often facing unsuccessful case closures due to issues like non-cooperation or service refusals. Moreover, racial disparities influence acceptance rates into VR programs, with racialized individuals less likely to receive essential services like rehabilitation planning or job training, exacerbating their employment challenges. Client-counselor relationships also play a pivotal role, as mismatches in race correlate with lower success rates, while racial biases among counselors can hinder fair treatment. Employment outcomes further reflect these disparities, with racialized disabled individuals encountering higher barriers to securing stable employment and earning sustainable incomes. Gender and educational disparities among racialized groups further compound these challenges. Overall, this theme emphasizes the imperative of addressing intersectional inequalities to enhance VR effectiveness and promote equitable outcomes for all racialized disabled job seekers and workers.

Poor VR outcomes

Authors of six USA-based studies identified that certain racialized disabled groups had significantly poorer VR outcomes than White disabled participants. On average, African

American, American Indian, and Latino disabled clients were more likely than White disabled clients to receive unsuccessful case closures from their VR program (Dunham *et* al., 1998; Goodwin, 1998; Elmore-Williams, 2008; Lukyanova *et* al., 2014; Ware, 2005; Wehman *et* al., 2007). For example, African Americans were more likely to have their cases closed due to reasons of "failure to cooperate", "unable to locate or contact", and "refused further services" (Dunham *et* al., 1998; Elmore-Williams, 2008).

Disparity in VR services

The authors of four studies suggested that the combined effects of race and disability can lead to reduced rates of acceptance into VR programs. There was a consensus amongst authors of these four studies in which African American, Asian American, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander clients with varying disabilities were identified as less likely to be referred and/or accepted for VR services than White clients with varying disabilities (Kim-Rupnow *et* al., 2005; Ni, 2000; Park *et* al., 2005; Rosenthal *et* al., 2005).

Authors of five studies reported differences in the type of services that were provided to certain racial groups whereby certain individuals were not provided the required foundational and supportive services to succeed. In two studies, it was noted that African Americans and Hispanic clients with specific learning disabilities or TBI or spinal cord injuries were less likely than European (White) Americans to be accepted for specific services including rehabilitation planning, college training, and on-the-job training (Elmore-Williams, 2008; Garcia-Iriarte *et* al., 2007). Instead, racialized individuals living with disability primarily received workplace support, food, shelter, and transportation services (Arango-Lasprilla *et* al., 2011; Elmore-Williams, 2008; Romero-Ramirez, 2009). Arango-Lasprilla and colleagues (2011) and Mwachofi and colleagues (2009) also identified significant statistical differences in access to services in which White

clients were receiving VR interventions for longer periods and case expenditures were significantly higher for White clients.

Authors of three studies revealed significant gaps between racialized and White groups in terms of access and use of VR services and delivery of VR services. At a national level, disabled job seekers and those who identify as African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic apply for VR services at a higher rate than their White counterparts but have lower eligibility, receival of services, and employment rates (Yin *et* al., 2022). For example, Crudden and colleagues (2020) reported that White applicants on average, waited 6 days less than applicants of all other races from application to a signed individualized plan for employment services. This delay in services is also prevalent amongst women with HIV/AIDS in which 51% of racialized women with HIV/AIDS reported that race limited their use of employment services (Conyers and Datti, 2008).

Authors of three studies highlighted the impact of same client-counsellor race relationships. Matrone and Leahy (2005) examined the relationship of having a counsellor and client be of the same race. Additionally, Matrone and Leahy (2005) identified that most of the significant explanatory variables are located at the client level, not at the counsellor level. For example, non-White clients working with a counsellor of any race have a lower probability for successful closure in comparison with same race counsellors (Matrone and Leahy, 2005). In terms of successful VR outcomes, evidence suggests that client-counsellor matches based on race resulted in a 7.3% higher VR rate than did client-counsellor race mismatches (Whitfield *et* al., 2010). Lastly, another study examined racial perceptions and identified that White rehabilitation counsellors were more eager to jump to conclusions about African American

clients in early stages of the rehabilitation processes, creating inequitable treatment and assumptions (Rosenthal *et al.*, 2005).

Poor employment outcomes

A common trend that was identified in three studies was poor employment outcomes for racialized disabled job seekers and workers. Among transition-age youth, three studies explicitly highlighted the experiences of African American and Hispanic/Latino participants with intellectual/learning disabilities and depressive disorders and identified significantly lower odds of such individuals securing employment in comparison to their White peers with the same conditions (Akinola and Doabler, 2022; Ji *et al.*, 2015; Kaya, 2018;). Issues that may have contributed to this finding include cultural mistrust and lack of agreement on the type of employment services needed for successful employment of racialized disabled transition-age youth (Akinola and Doabler, 2022; Ji *et al.*, 2015; Kaya, 2018).

Authors of three studies reported on income differences as well along the intersection between race and disability among VR clients. Race was a significant predictor for earnings and success in employment, with White disabled clients being more likely to escape the cycle of poverty through employment despite working fewer hours than their African American, American Indian, and Hispanic counterparts (Glynn and Schaller, 2017; Goodwin, 1998; Mwachofi *et al.*, 2009;).

Other intersecting identities

The authors of nine US studies reported gender differences amongst racialized disabled job seekers and workers. Six of the included articles in the review identified that racialized disabled men were more likely to successfully rehabilitate and become employed than their female counterparts (Cimera *et al.*, 2015; Homa, 2004; Johnstone *et al.*, 2003; Martz and Xu,

2008; Ni, 2008; Oswald *et* al., 2016). Three additional studies reported that the mean earnings of males were significantly higher than females (Akinola *et* al., 2021; Glynn and Schaller, 2017; Ji *et* al., 2015).

Authors of four studies reported how education can influence VR success. Specifically, higher education (i.e., an associate/undergraduate degree/diploma or higher) contributed towards successful case closure among racialized disabled job seekers (Kaya *et* al., 2021; Muesser *et* al., 2014; Rogers *et* a., 2005; Vaughn and Boston, 2010).

This theme underscores the pervasive inequalities faced by racialized disabled individuals within VR. Across thirty-two studies, results consistently highlight poorer VR outcomes, reduced service access, and employment disparities for African American, American Indian, Latino, and other racialized groups compared to White counterparts. The intersection of race and disability demands targeted interventions to address inequities, enhance accessibility, and ensure equitable opportunities in VR, advocating for systemic reforms that prioritize inclusivity and fairness in support of all individuals.

VR services that promote employment success

This theme explores the impact of specific VR services on the employment success of racialized disabled job seekers and workers, drawing from thirty-two studies. Specific VR supports predictive of positive employment outcomes were identified however, there are notable gaps and disparities in service utilization and access.

VR supports

The authors of twenty-five studies discussed what VR supports were predictive of successful employment. In particular, VR counselling, assistive technology, diagnostic/treatment services, job placement services, on-the-job services, and job search assistance were predictive

of positive employment outcomes for racialized disabled individuals (Akinola *et* al., 2021; Bromet, 2005; Chun *et* al., 2018; Crudden *et* al., 2018; Fagundo, 2020; Ji *et* al., 2015; Kaya, 2018; Lee *et* al., 2020; Lukyanova *et* al., 2014; Martz, 2008; Miller *et* al., 2016; Moore *et* al., 2002a; Moore *et* al., 2002b Ni, 2008; Rogers *et* al., 2005; Rumrill *et* al., 2022; Schronburn, 2005; Spence, 2004; Ware, 2005). For example, job placement and on-the-job services have been identified to play a central role in predicting successful employment, however, are significantly under-utilized (Ahonle *et* al., 2020; Chan *et* al., 2006; Johnson *et* al., 2020; Vaughn and Boston, 2010). A study conducted through the perspectives of VR counsellors saw that VR counselling was the most frequently offered service because it helps counsellors to identify their clients' strengths and weaknesses to inform their VR plan (Johnstone *et* al., 2003). A similar finding was identified in a qualitative study, which revealed that young Black adults primarily focused on the characteristics, qualities, and skills of their vocational counselor in achieving their financial goals. They favored counselors who were nonjudgmental, understanding, relatable, and willing to provide several engagement options for their ongoing work together (Delman and Adams, 2022).

Amongst racialized transition-age disabled youth, completion of college/university was significantly regarded as a predictor for successful employment in four studies. Both uptake of services and services aimed at upward mobility such as college/university training are associated with positive employment outcomes and higher reported linear incomes (Cimera *et* al., 2015). However, fewer than 12% of successful VR clients received college/university training (Berry and Caplan, 2010; Cimera *et* al., 2015; Glynn and Schaller, 2017; O'Neil *et* al., 2015).

Authors of five studies considered the benefits of wrap-around supports such as transportation, food, shelter, and clothing. For example, the authors of a study including

Black/African American disabled clients who received transportation support or supported employment were 19% and 38% more likely to be employed than White disabled clients who received similar services (Ahonle *et* al., 2020). The authors of four other studies reported that a combination of wrap-around supports and job-oriented VR services were strong predicators of successful employment outcomes when offered to racialized disabled clients (Austin *et* al., 2019; Catalano *et* al., 2006; da Silva Cardoso *et* al., 2007; Wang and Ethridge, 2022).

The key ideas emerging from this theme is that targeted VR services are crucial in promoting employment success for racialized disabled individuals. While specific supports such as VR counseling, assistive technology, job placement, wrap-around supports and monetary assistance significantly enhance employment outcomes, these services are often underutilized or inequitably accessed. Despite evidence showing the effectiveness of these interventions, there remain significant gaps in service delivery and accessibility, particularly in higher education training and comprehensive wrap-around support.

Action needed and recommendations

In total, twenty-seven articles and six pieces of grey literature discussed the critical need for actionable strategies and reforms within VR systems to improve employment opportunities for racialized disabled job seekers and workers. Revisiting VR policies, enhancing counselor training, and implementing effective outreach can bridge the existing gaps and foster an inclusive and equitable workforce.

Revisit of VR policies and services

Significantly, authors from seven studies suggest that many individuals who might benefit from VR services do not receive them. For example, nearly three fourths of clients with TBI in the study by Johnstone and colleagues (2003) discontinued services before they could be

offered or completed. Specifically, 60% of the sample had disabilities that would adversely impact their ability to work, but they dropped out before services could be initiated or completed, while 13% dropped out before their eligibility could be determined (Johnstone *et* al., 2003). Similarly, Conyers and Datti (2008) reported that 75% of the respondents had never received any VR services. In terms of specific supports, the results reported by O'Neil and colleagues (2015) identified that college/university training as a VR intervention is a viable method of improving earning potential of disabled persons, demonstrating the benefits for groups where college/university training is appropriate but is severely under-utilized. Authors of other studies acknowledged the need to create employment training opportunities by ensuring that racialized disabled youth receive relevant school services and workshops to foster community participation, independence and develop transferable skills (Akinola *et* al., 2021; Cimera *et* al., 2015; Garcia-Iriarte *et* al., 2007; Ni, 2008)

In the grey literature, authors of six studies, reports, and government documents detailed key policy gaps and needed reforms to create better VR systems for racialized disabled job seekers and workers. Key reforms include delinking VR services from income support programs (Torjman and Makoul, 2016), developing guidelines regarding workplace accommodations (Ives-Rublee *et* al., 2022), strengthening employee rights (Ives-Rublee *et* al., 2022), and improving access to unionized employment (Maroto and Pettinicchio, 2022). Regarding upskilling VR staff, strategies include compulsory intersectional disability anti-bias training for service providers (Rajan, 2021), revising social assistance programs to create person-centeredness (Torjman and Makoul, 2016), hiring more diverse and culturally competent workforce system staff (Goodman *et* al., 2019), and developing the cultural competency of existing workforce system staff (Gurney *et* al., 2022).

Counsellor training and skills

Authors of nine studies also reported the need to provide better training to VR counsellors to better capture the needs of racialized disabled job seekers and rectify their concerns. Fagundo (2020) recommended that teaching medical and psychosocial aspects of disability should include a cultural and lifespan perspective. Authors of eight studies noted there is a need to assess VR needs and services within the context of client characteristics and create more culturally diverse services for the rapidly growing diverse population being served (Delman and Adams, 2022; Greene, 2006; Kaya, 2018; Kim-Rupnow *et* al., 2005; Hasnain and Balcazar, 2009; Homa, 2004; Miller *et* al., 2016; Owalla *et* al., 2021; Ware, 2005).

Motivating racialized disabled clients was highlighted as a key skill among VR counsellors in six studies. Daniels (2007) and Matrone and Leahy (2005) noted that if counsellors encourage their clients to increase their social network, the client will become more aware of employment opportunities and sets goals for themselves. Authors of five other studies also pointed out the need of counsellors to have a positive, empowered and forward-oriented perspective to create motivation, transparency, and commitment to better experiences for their clients (Balcazar and Taylor-Ritzler, 2009; Elmore-Williams, 2008; Glynn and Schaller, 2017; Ji *et* al., 2015; Martz and Xu, 2008).

Outreach

Authors of three studies identified outreach as a key factor in motivating and raising awareness of the services and programs communities offer for job seekers and workers with multiple intersecting identities including disability and race. For example, these authors reported that there is a need to provide better information to potential clients about the eligibility criteria for services and to implement outreach and information campaigns that help potential consumers make informed decisions about applying for VR services (Anderson *et* al., 2021; Lukyanova *et*

al., 2014; Park *et* al., 2005). These authors also suggested that service providers need to do outreach with business communities and employers to reduce Eurocentric biases that might still exist within the labour market.

The reviewed literature emphasizes the necessity of revisiting VR policies, implementing comprehensive counselor training, enhancing outreach efforts, and developing culturally competent services. Addressing these issues is crucial for creating equitable opportunities and ensuring that VR services effectively support the diverse needs of racialized disabled individuals, ultimately leading to better employment outcomes and greater community participation.

Discussion

In this scoping review we mapped out existing evidence about the intersection of race and disability in the VR system. As noted by Berghs and Dyson (2020), previous studies have explored the impacts of race and disability discrimination as separate entities but in this review, we aimed to explore if and how the intersection of race and disability has been explored in existing literature and what has been written about the unique hurdles faced by racialized disabled job seekers and workers while accessing VR services. Understanding this intersection is important since racialized disabled job seekers and workers face many complex challenges in preparing for, finding, and maintaining, employment. The multiple intersecting forms of racism and ableism that has been reported in the literature suggest there is a need for tailored and specialized employment/vocational supports and services (Elmore-Williams, 2008).

Most of the authors of the studies included in this review compared VR case closure rates, service utilization rates, and employment rates after exiting VR programs across various racial groups. Our analysis of the existing literature suggest that racialized disabled workers face poorer VR outcomes in comparison to their White disabled counterparts. VR outcomes include

lower probabilities of success of exiting VR programs, disparities in accessing services and service delivery, and lower earnings once entering the workforce.

In the 25-year period covered in the reviewed literature, it is evident that the focus on race has increased, especially in the United States, through the Black Lives Matter Movement (Okoroji *et* al., 2023). This finding is in alignment with Dunbar's (2022) work in which they identified an emphasis on promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion. However, research examining the impact of race and disability within the African American population is lacking (Berghs and Dyson, 2020). Through our grey literature search, a factsheet by the US Department of Civil Rights (Johnson, 2024) suggested that approximately 40% of disabled African Americans are living in poverty compared to 22% of African Americans without disabilities. Some studies within our sample also highlight a distrust grounded in historical patterns of systemic racism that requires efforts to dismantle (Wingfield and Chavez, 2020).

VR counsellors play an important role in recognizing cultural differences that can shape employment. However, these counsellors are often not equipped with necessary resources, training, or capacity to build the trust and respect amongst their clients (Delman and Adams, 2022; Rosenthal *et* al., 2005). A study by Fernando and colleagues (2022) explored experiences of disabled Black, Indigenous and People of Colour as they navigated their employment journey with assistance from a supported employment program. Service providers listed language and cultural barriers as their top two challenges for supporting racialized disabled job seekers. These challenges can further prompt more unsuccessful case closures due to the counsellor's perception of the client being difficult or uncooperative (Dunham, 1998; Elmore-Williams, 2008). In the past, researchers have drawn on theories such as the critical race theory (Crenshaw *et* al., 1995) or critical disability theory (Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009) to contend with the idea of race

and disability as by-products of socially and historically constructed ideas (Artiles, 2013) to inform counselling interventions for racialized disabled clients through a multidimensional approach (Mpofu and Harley, 2006). The theory of social capital (Machalek and Martin, 2015) can also be applied within the VR systems to examine how social relationships are resources that can lead to the development and accumulation of human capital. Consistent with the results of our analysis presented here, stable counsellor-client relationships can support employment attainment, and support the development of highly rewarded skills and knowledge (Daniels, 2007; Matrone and Leahy 2005). In alignment with the theory of social capital (Machalek and Martin, 2015), racialized disabled job seekers and workers benefit from stable counsellor-client relationships to further advance in their careers and increase their networks.

Our analysis suggests racialized disabled job seekers and workers have experienced layered forms of discrimination and bias within rehabilitation and employment systems. These results support an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1991), highlighting the complex and nuanced experiences of individuals as they pursue employment. Individuals with multiple intersecting marginalized identities face overlapping experiences of oppression, domination, and discrimination, despite formal legislative and policy reform intended to reduce such inequity (Yin *et* al., 2022). The analysis presented in this review suggests that policy change, while important, is an insufficient to counteract the legacy of structural disadvantage, bias, and discrimination.

Our analysis suggests that while many workers already contend with ableism and racism, other intersecting identities can alter their employment trajectories and career opportunities. Consistent with existing research (Fuentes *et* al., 2023; Lindsay *et* al., 2018), we identified that individual and systemic inequalities shape labour market outcomes and daily lived experiences.

For example, our results of the analysis suggest that gender can influence employment outcomes, with disabled men being more likely to report higher earnings and more VR success than disabled women (Akinola *et* al., 2021). These results suggest how intersecting forms of discrimination impact employment services and outcomes and the importance of addressing workplace discrimination broadly to create more inclusive and just workplaces.

In our review, we identified several VR services that are critical in finding and maintaining employment. However, it was noted in our results that many services predictive of successful employment are underutilized among racialized disabled VR clients, including college/university training, job search, finding and placement. Our analysis suggests the importance of removing barriers to accessing services among underrepresented populations, further encouraging counsellors to start building profiles of services that have been successful in the past to better allocate their attention and resources, and to create supports that are customizable to the needs of each job seeker and worker (Chan *et* al., 2006; Chun *et* al., 2018; Vaughn and Boston, 2010). Briefs by the National Network of the Americans with Disabilities Act (Gould *et* al., 2021) and the Harvard Business Review (Alemany and Vermeulen, 2023) noted the missed opportunity of hiring racialized disabled persons, as many companies seek to develop a more inclusive organizational culture and an improved reputation for equity and diversity.

Limitations and future directions

There are several noteworthy limitations to this review. First, most of the included studies were conducted in the United States, which is why some of the terminology used and analysis are specific to that country. Second, most of the studies were quantitative and presented analyses of national/state data or VR programs. As a result, through this scoping review we cannot report

about aspects of lived experiences of racialized disabled job seekers and workers that could have been captured through qualitative studies. Most of the studies reviewed here predominantly focused on outcomes rather than on the underlying mechanisms. While valuable insights have been gained from quantitative analyses of national/state data or VR programs, the emphasis on outcomes often limits a deeper understanding of the processes and mechanisms that influence the experiences of racialized disabled job seekers and workers. This approach has implications for the comprehensiveness of our understanding, as it may overlook critical factors that shape employment outcomes and the effectiveness of support interventions within diverse racial and disability contexts. Further, other demographic variables beyond race and disability (such as gender, age, education, and socioeconomic background) were often included in the studies. Although this demographic information was pertinent to understanding the broader message, it can be difficult to examine distinct aspects of race and disability and how these intersect in VR. Furthermore, most studies did not directly examine and compare the intersection of race and disability, rather these were often listed as individual variables. This limitation was addressed during the study selection process, and studies were excluded if they reported disability and race as independent without consideration for their intersection. Another limitation was the reporting of disability types; while most studies in this review included a wide range of disability types, neither disability nor race are considered homogenous, which is why more research is required in which different experiences are explored. Lastly, amongst the included studies and grey literature, there were a lot of inconsistencies in terminology used to describe different racial groups. This oftentimes made it difficult to synthesize information with coherent and consistent terms. However, to remain true to the literature, we used terms as described directly from the sources to avoid being misconstrued.

Future research should be aimed at better analyzing lived experiences of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and VR through more qualitative studies to gain more insight on how race and disability can culminate and affect various employment outcomes and experiences. By capturing the nuanced realities of individuals with multiple intersecting identities, policy development and workplace inclusivity can be driven to create impact on job accessibility, inclusive hiring practices and retention by formulating supportive measures that address compounded disadvantages. There is an urgent need to conduct research across jurisdictions, different regions and countries since many have varying legal frameworks, cultural attitudes, and resources concerning employment and disability (Heymann *et* al., 2021). Comparative studies can highlight best practices and areas needing improvement, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how intersectionality plays out globally. Additionally, while race and disability are critical, it is important to consider how social identities such as gender, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status can affect experiences of employment services through an intersectional lens. This approach would broaden the intersectional analysis, offering a fuller picture of how diverse identities influence employment experiences and outcomes.

Conclusion

This scoping review raises the need for comprehensive research and policy interventions that address the intersecting challenges faced by racialized disabled individuals in accessing VR services and achieving equitable employment outcomes. By embracing an intersectional lens and promoting inclusive and personalized VR service practices, stakeholders can work towards dismantling systemic barriers and fostering workplaces that are truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

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Wehman, P., Targett, P., Yasuda, S., McManus, S. and Briel, L. (2007), "Helping persons with

    traumatic brain injury of minority origin: improve career and employment outcomes",

    Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 95-104.

Whitfield, H. W., Venable, R. and Broussard, S. (2010), "Are client-counselor ethnic/racial matches

    associated with successful rehabilitation outcomes?", *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*,

    Vol. 53 No. 2, pp. 96-105.

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Wingfield, A. H. and Chavez, K. (2020), "Getting in, getting hired, getting sideways looks: organizational hierarchy and perceptions of racial discrimination", *American Sociological Review,* Vol. 85, pp. 31 - 57.

Yin, M., Pathak, A., Lin, D. J. and Dizdari, N. (2022), "Identifying racial differences in vocational rehabilitation services", *rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin,* Vol. 66 No. 1, pp. 13-24

Table 2.1: Overview of study characteristics

Citation	Country	Objective	Design	Sample Size	Results
*Ahonle, Z. J., Barnes, M., Romero, S., Sorrells, A. M. and Brooks, G. I. (2020), "State-federal vocational rehabilitation in traumatic brain injury: what predictors are associated with employment outcomes?", *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, Vol. 63 No. 3, pp. 143-155.	USA	The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that predict successful employment in individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI)-related disabilities	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset model was performed	4,923	- The likelihood of being successfully employed at closure was decreased by 15% for Black/African American individuals compared with White individuals
*Akinola, O. A. and Doabler, C. T. (2022), "Determinants of employment outcomes of transition-age youth with depressive disorders", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, Vol. 56 No. 1, pp. 55-68.	USA	The study investigates whether and to what extent demographic characteristics and vocational rehabilitation (VR) services received correlate with successful employment and earnings of transition-age youth (TAY) with depressive disorders who participated in the state-federal VR program	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset	4,772	- African American and Hispanic/Latino participants were reported to experience significantly lower odds of securing employment compared to their White peers - Specifically, Hispanic/Latino participants were 56 times on average less likely to make more earnings compared to White participants

*Akinola, O. A., Horsman, E. N. and Dunkley, L. (2021), "Correlates of vocational outcomes of youth with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders: evidence from a vocational rehabilitation program", *Australian Journal of Rehabilitation Counselling*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 110-121.	USA	The current study aimed to investigate the role of personal factors and VR services received in the VR outcomes of youth with mental illness (MI) and substance use disorders (SUD) who enrolled in the state-federal VR program	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for 2013, 2014, and 2015 fiscal years	4,298	- Youth with co-occurring MI and SUD have a greater probability of obtaining and maintaining gainful employment when they have a high school diploma or postsecondary education as well as when they receive pertinent services such as job training, job search, job placement services, and on-the-job support services
*Anderson, C. A., Hergenrather, K. and Jones, W. D. (2021), "Empowering community voices: the influences of consumer race, disability, and poverty on public vocational rehabilitation service engagement", *Journal of Rehabilitation*, Vol. 87 No. 1, pp. 40-47.	USA	The purpose of the study was to better understand the needs of current and former Black American VR consumers residing in a large urban area to inform current and future policy and practice needs within the state agency	Focus group interviews	30 current and recent VR consumers	- Participant comments and recommendations emerged in three primary themes: (1) the importance of effective counselor communication, attentiveness, and responsiveness, (2) concerns over the seemingly high rate of VR counselor turnover and need for enhanced empathy, and (3) the need to increase outreach and collaboration with other community programs
*Arango-Lasprilla, J.C., da Silva Cardoso, E., Wilson, L. M., Romero, M. G., Fong, C.	USA	The purpose of the present study is to identify demographic	Secondary analysis of the Research	3119 White and	- European Americans were reported to require less time to become eligible

and Sung, C. (2011), "Vocational rehabilitation service patterns and employment outcomes for Hispanics with spinal cord injuries", *Rehabilitation Research, Policy and Education*, Vol. 25 No. 3/4, pp. 149-162.		and service-related predictors of successful employment outcomes for Hispanics with spinal cord injuries (SCI) receiving services from state VR agencies	Services Administration dataset	395 Hispanics	for services than Hispanics, and case expenditures were higher for European Americans than for Hispanics
*Austin, B. S., Lee, C. L., Fleming, A. and Pi, S. (2019), "Vocational rehabilitation outcomes for individuals with intellectual disabilities and co-occurring psychiatric disorders", *Journal of Rehabilitation*, Vol. 85 No. 4, pp. 14-23.	USA	The purpose of the study is to assess VR service variable interactions and client demographic differences	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset	3,719	- Non-White VR clients were less likely to achieve a competitive employment outcomes
*Balcazar, F. E. and Taylor-Ritzler, T. (2009), "Perspectives of vocational rehabilitation counselors on the factors related to employment outcomes of racial and ethnic minorities with disabilities", *Journal of Social Work in Disability and Rehabilitation*, Vol. 8 No. 3/4, pp. 102-116.	USA	The purpose of this study was to explore and better understand the supports provided by VR counselors to non-White individuals with various disabilities seeking employment	Semi-structured interviews	21 VR counsellors	- Effective counselors are flexible, have an open-door policy, understand the need to provide additional supports, know the strengths and challenges of their consumers, help their consumers recognize their limitations, and, more important, find ways to overcome barriers to be productive on the job with necessary

					-	accommodations or assistive technology
*Berry, H. G. and Caplan, L. J. (2010), "Employment and earnings growth among transition-age supplemental security income program participants", *Journal of Disability Policy Studies,* Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 152-159.	USA	The purpose of this study was to examine individual demographic, disability, and VR service factors related to employment status and earnings growth for supplemental security income (SSI) beneficiaries who have participated in the VR program.	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset	3,046	-	Supported employment was positively associated with being employed, although this advantage appeared to decrease in states reporting high consumer-to-counselor ratios
Bradley, C. F., Geyer, P. D. and Ebener, D. J. (2013), "Contributors to successful VR outcomes among non-Latino (Caucasian) and Latino consumers with hearing loss", *Journal of Rehabilitation,* Vol. 79 No. 2, pp. 24-33.	USA	This study focused on the following research question: What is the relationship between VR case outcomes, types of VR services, and counselor and consumer characteristics among Caucasians and Latinos with hearing loss?	Secondary analysis of the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) dataset and a survey was sent to Florida DVR counsellors	481	-	Among those who are hard of hearing, those who are male, older, financially independent, having at least a high school diploma or equivalency, and who receive job placement services are more likely to achieve a successful case outcome in VR
*Bromet, E. S. (2005), "The relationship between vocational rehabilitation services, demographic variables and outcomes among individuals with	USA	The purpose of this study was to examine the various types of VR services provided through the federal-state VR system to	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset;	79,967	-	Job placement services, on-the-job services, job search assistance and other support services were somewhat predictive of a positive employment

psychiatric disabilities", Ohio State University.		individuals with psychiatric disabilities and the relationship of these services to employment outcome	consisting of consumers with psychiatric disabilities who received services during federal fiscal year 2002		outcome for individuals with psychiatric disabilities
*Catalano, D., Pereira, A. P., Wu, M. Y., Ho, H. and Chan, F. (2006), "Service patterns related to successful employment outcomes of persons with traumatic brain injury in vocational rehabilitation", *Neurorehabilitation*, Vol. 21 No. 4, pp. 279-293.	USA	The purpose of the present study, is to examine the effect of demographic factors, work disincentives, and rehabilitation services on employment outcomes of individuals with TBI in VR settings	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2004	7,366	- Results revealed work disincentives, job placement assistance, job search assistance, on-the-job supports, VR counseling and guidance, maintenance services (e.g., monetary support for food, shelter, and clothing) and case expenditures occurred repeatedly as important predictors of employment outcomes
*Chan, F., Cheing, G., Chan, J. Y. C., Rosenthal, D. A. and Chronister, J. (2006), "Predicting employment outcomes of rehabilitation clients with orthopedic disabilities: a CHAID analysis", *Disability and*	USA	The purpose of the study is determine factors influencing employment rates of a group of VR clients with orthopedic disabilities.	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset	74,861	- VR clients with the highest probability of successful employment were women who had no work disincentives, no transportation barriers, and received counseling, university training, and job placement services

Rehabilitation, Vol. 28 No. 5, pp. 257-270.					
*Chun, J., Pi, S., Lee, E.-J. and Park, J. (2018), "An exploration of Asian Americans in the state vocational rehabilitation system by disability type", *Work,* Vol. 60 No. 2, pp. 281-294.	USA	To examine how differently demographic characteristics and type of services contribute to employment outcomes	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset	4.332	- Diagnostic and treatment services, VR counseling and guidance, job placement, on-the-job support, and rehabilitation technology were significant predictors of employment success for this population
*Cimera, R. E., Rumrill, P. D., Fong, C., Kaya, C. and Bezyak, J. (2015), "Vocational rehabilitation services and outcomes for transition-age youth with visual impairments and blindness", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation,* Vol. 43 No. 2, pp. 103-111.		To evaluate the impact of demographic variables and VR services on the employment outcomes of TAY adults (i.e., 16 to 25 years old) with visual impairments and blindness	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset	2,543	- Participants in this study who received more VR services, who were the beneficiaries of higher levels of case service expenditures, and whose VR services included a college education were more likely to be successfully rehabilitated than their counterparts
*Conyers, L. and Datti, P. (2008), "The unmet vocational rehabilitation needs of women with HIV/AIDS", *Journal of Prevention Assessment and Rehabilitation,* Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 277-290.	USA	Investigate economic and health characteristics of respondents and how they differ by employment status	Survey	122	- 51% of participants of colour reported that race limited their use of employment services compared to only 22% of the white respondents
Cook, J. A., Burke-Miller, J. K. and Roessel, E. (2016),	USA	Examines the long-term effects of	Multisite controlled trial	449	- Findings indicate a significant vocational

"Long-term effects of evidence-based supported employment on earnings and on SSI and SSDI participation among individuals with psychiatric disabilities'", *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 173 No. 10, pp. 1007-1014.		evidence-based supported employment services on VR outcomes through suspension or termination of disability cash payments due to work	of supported employment		advantage accruing to recipients of evidence-based supported employment in the decade following service delivery
*Crudden, A., Giesen, J. M. and Sui, Z. (2018), "Contrasting competitively employed and unemployed VR applicants with visual disabilities: characteristics and VR service delivery patterns", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, Vol. 49 No. 1, pp. 117-126.	USA	The purpose of this study was to identify and contrast the personal characteristics and services received by persons who are blind or have low vision	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2015	14,229	- Persons who are blind or have low vision and who were competitively employed at application were more likely to be White non-Hispanic, older, and more highly educated
*Crudden, A., Sui, Z. and Lund, E. (2020), "Employed vocational rehabilitation applicants with visual disabilities: factors associated with timely service delivery", *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, Vol. 114 No. 1, pp. 31-42.	USA	Investigated time from VR application to a signed Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for employed applicants with visual disabilities	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2015	5,096	- Employed applicants who were non-White waited longer from application to IPE than did White applicants. - For the present sample, White applicants, on average, waited 72.6 days from application to IPE compared to 78.5 days for other races
*Daniels, T. M. (2007), "Determinants of employment outcomes	USA	To examine factors that predict successful employment among	Secondary analysis of the Longitudinal	5,305	- Successfully employed VR clients tend to be

among persons with disabilities in public vocational rehabilitation", George Washington University.		persons with disabilities	Study of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program (LSVRSP) database		White and younger than 50 years of age - They were also likely than non-employed clients to have more number of years of education, fewer functional limitations, higher levels of self-esteem, internal locus of control, and higher levels of social capital
*da Silva Cardoso, E., Romero, M. G., Chan, F., Dutta, A. and Rahimi, M. (2007), "Disparities in vocational rehabilitation services and outcomes for Hispanic clients with traumatic brain injury: do they exist?", *Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation,* Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 85-94.	USA	To examine Hispanic VR service disparities in terms of demographics, work disincentives, service patterns, and employment outcome	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2005	5,831	- European American clients with TBI were reported to have higher employment rates (55%) than Hispanic clients did (49%)
*Delman, J. and Adams, L. B. (2022), "Barriers to and facilitators of vocational development for Black young adults with serious mental illnesses", *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal,* Vol. 45 No. 1, pp. 1-10.		Examined how Black young adults with serious mental illnesses (SMI) perceive the barriers and facilitators to achieving their vocational goals	Semi-structured interviews	28	- Participants believed that race concordance was advantageous in vocational counseling
*Dunham, M. D. (1998), "Vocational rehabilitation outcomes of African	USA	Examined the psychological, educational, and	Secondary analysis of the	119	- College training was the only VR service that predicted closure status

American adults with specific learning disabilities", *Journal of Rehabilitation,* Vol. 64 No. 3, pp. 36-41.		rehabilitation service factors associated with successful VR outcomes for African Americans with specific learning disabilities	Missouri VR system data		
*Elmore-Williams, P. D. (2008), "Differences in the vocational rehabilitation process between African Americans and European Americans with specific learning disabilities on acceptance, services, and reasons for closure", University of Texas at Austin.	USA	To investigate the relationship between consumer race and VR acceptance, services, and reason for closure	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2006	47,767	- African Americans with SLD were less likely than European Americans with SLD to be accepted for services
*Fagundo, E. (2020), "Older vocational rehabilitation consumers with gainful employment outcomes: correlation of VR services, demographics, and disability characteristics", *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*.	USA	This study sought to research the correlation between demographic characteristics, disability, and vocational rehabilitation services for older VR consumers	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset	44,165	- Being a racial and ethnic minority predicted and was associated with VR services that focused on assessment and treatment of diagnoses, job readiness and placement, postsecondary education, including four-year and graduate college, and information referral other services
*Garcia-Iriarte, E., Balcazar, F. and Taylor-Ritzler, T. (2007), "Analysis of case	USA	Analyzed employment-related supports provided by	Ex-post facto analysis of the	65	- Although supports were largely available to all participants, the provision

		case managers in a transition program for urban ethnic minority youth with disabilities.	case notes of case managers		of different types of supports varied for participants with more and less severe disabilities
managers' support of youth with disabilities transitioning from school to work", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation,* Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 129-140.					
Giesen, J. M. and Lang, A. H. (2018), "Predictors of earnings enabling likely roll departure for SSDI beneficiaries with visual impairments in vocational rehabilitation", *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 166-177.	USA	Examined individual, socioeconomic, disability, service, and state-level factors predicting VR closure earnings exceeding substantial gainful activity for Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) beneficiaries in VR who were blind or visually impaired	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset	3,505	- Positive characteristics are being younger, relatively well educated, African American, male, blind or visually impaired but with no secondary disabilities
*Glynn, K. and Schaller, J. (2017), "Predictors of employment outcomes for transition-age state-federal vocational rehabilitation consumers with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation,* Vol. 47 No. 2, pp. 159-174.	USA	To examine employment outcomes, relationships among demographics and case service variables and weekly earnings for African American, White, and Hispanic consumers with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) ages 16-19 and 20-24	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2012	7,776	- Results indicated that the demographic variables of Hispanic and African American ethnicity, high school graduation and postsecondary education, and public support at application, as well as the case service variables of college training, on the job training, job search assistance, job placement, and on the job supports

					were significantly related to successful employment
*Goodwin, G. L. (1998), "Success-rate probabilities of persons with disabilities in the Nebraska department of vocational rehabilitation", University of Nebraska.	USA	Investigate the influence that demographic, disability and geographic factors have upon the probability of success from the VR program in the state of Nebraska	Secondary analysis of data from the Nebraska Department of VR	12,470	- Research findings reveal that African American and American Indian participants consistently experience lower probabilities of success than Whites in the program
*Greene, S. B. (2006), "An investigation of relationships between customer demographics, case service variables, and successful vocational rehabilitation outcomes for transition-age adults with autism", University of Texas at Austin.	USA	To investigate relationships among customer demographics, case service variables, and successful closure in supported or competitive employment for VR customers with autism aged 18-25.	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2004	576	- African American participants were more likely than White participants to be closed in supported employment
*Hasnain, R. and Balcazar, F. (2009), "Predicting community- versus facility-based employment for transition-aged young adults with disabilities: the role of race, ethnicity, and support systems", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 175-188.	USA	Examines the effects of socio-economic, attitudinal, and support-related variables on the employment status of young adults with disabilities who participate in community-based and	Secondary analysis of the 1994–1995 U.S. National Health Interview Survey on Disability	1,899	- Whites with disabilities were significantly more often working in community-based employment rather than facility-based, compared to Blacks and Latinos with disabilities

		facility-based work settings			
*Homa, D. B. (2004), "The impact of vocational evaluation on outcomes in the vocational rehabilitation services program", Illinois Institute of Technology.	USA	Investigate the characteristics of persons who are more likely to receive vocational evaluation (VE) services and to examine the contribution of VE to employment outcome	Secondary analysis of the Longitudinal Study of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program database	8,332	- Consumers of Latino/Hispanic origin were significantly less likely to receive VE than other racial/ethnic groups
Huang, I.-C., Cheing, G., Rumrill, P., Bengtson, K., Fong, C., Telzlaff, J. and Snitker, M. (2016), "Characteristics of people with disabilities receiving assistive technology services in vocational rehabilitation: A logistic regression analysis", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, Vol. 45 No. 1, pp. 63-72.	USA	To examine characteristics of people with disabilities who are most likely to receive assistive technology services from state VR agencies and to identify complementary VR services that are closely aligned with receiving assistive technology services	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2009	32,088	- Results of this study suggest that VR consumers who are less educated, younger, and not of European descent were less likely to receive AT services than were other consumers
Izzo, M. V. (1998), "The effects of transition services on outcome measures of employment for vocational students with disabilities", Ohio State University.	USA	To determine the effects of transition services delivered to youth with disabilities enrolled in a secondary vocational school program from 1990-93	Secondary analysis of the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services database	122	- Youth who received additional transition services beyond graduation had significantly higher earnings for the two years following the termination of services

*Ji, E., Schaller, J., Pazey, B. and Glynn, K. (2015), "Education and employment outcomes from the RSA data file for transition-age African American, White, and Hispanic youth with learning disabilities", *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, Vol. 46 No. 3, pp. 15-24.	USA	To examine education and employment outcomes, and relationships among demographic and VR case service variables for African American, White, and Hispanic youth	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset	25,218	- African American males had significantly lower successful employment rates than White and Hispanic males, and African American females had significantly lower successful employment rates than White and Hispanic females
*Johnson, J. E., Aref, F., Ward-Sutton, C., Moore, C. L., Washington, A. L. and Webb, K. (2020), "National study of American Indian vocational rehabilitation program and veterans affairs interagency collaborations: an emerging conceptual framework for co-serving Native American and Alaskan native veterans with disabilities", *Journal of Rehabilitation*, Vol. 86 No. 4, pp. 48-57.	USA	Identify, catalog, and describe AIVRP respondents' perceptions on AIVRP and Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VA-VR&E) program promising co-service strategies that could facilitate improved employment outcomes among Native American and Alaskan Native veterans with disabilities	Survey	35	- The overwhelming majority of AIVRP respondents (82%) rated most effective those domains of co-service practices that more directly and visibly contribute to successful employment outcomes, namely job placement services, referral services, and co-service agreement
*Johnstone, B., Vessell, R., Bounds, T., Hoskins, S. and Sherman, A. (2003),	USA	To determine the characteristics of individuals with TBI	Survey	78	- The results indicate that persons with TBI who seek VR services have

"Predictors of success for state vocational rehabilitation clients with traumatic brain injury", *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation,* Vol. 84 No. 2, pp. 161-167.		who request state VR services and to determine the best predictors of their successful vocational outcomes			demographic characteristics that are young, single, males with limited education and intelligence
*Kaya, C. (2018), "Demographic variables, vocational rehabilitation services, and employment outcomes for transition-age youth with intellectual disabilities", *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities,* Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 226-236.	USA	To examine the relationship between demographic factors, VR services, and employment outcomes for youth intellectual disabilities (ID)	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset	8,320	- The findings indicate that youth with ID who have a higher level of education are more likely to obtain competitive employment
*Kaya, C., Hsu, S., Rumrille, P. D., Hanley-Maxwell, C. and Chan, F. (2021), "Differential vocational rehabilitation service patterns and outcomes for transition-age youth with specific learning disabilities: Implications in the COVID-19 era", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation,* Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 59-70.	USA	To examine the relationships among individual characteristics, VR services, and employment outcomes of TAY with specific learning disabilities (SLD)	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2013	9,114	- Results suggested that being male, Caucasian, and having a higher level of education were positively associated with competitive employment
*Kim-Rupnow, W. S., Park, H. C. and Starbuck, D. E. (2005), "Status overview of vocational rehabilitation services for Asian Americans	USA	To investigate the status of rehabilitation services provided to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration	624,250	- AAPI are approximately three times less likely to be closed for VR services than all races combined

and Pacific Islanders with disabilities", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation,* Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 21-32.		(AAPI) with disabilities	dataset for fiscal years 1990-2000		
*Lee, E.-J., Park, J., Chun, J. and Pi, S. (2020), "State vocational rehabilitation services and employment outcomes for Asian Americans with psychiatric disabilities", *Community Mental Health Journal,* Vol. 56 No. 5, pp. 854-866.	USA	To identify unique patterns of VR service utilization and key factors associated with successful employment outcomes for Asian Americans with psychiatric disabilities	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2013	110,924	- Asian Americans with psychiatric disabilities appeared to stay longer in the VR system to receive services and had higher service costs compared to the other service users
*Lukyanova, V. V., Balcazar, F. E., Oberoi, A. K. and Suarez-Balcazar, Y. (2014), "Employment outcomes among African Americans and Whites with mental illness", *Journal of Prevention Assessment and Rehabilitation,* Vol. 48 No. 3, pp. 319-328.	USA	To address this gap in the literature by examining the factors that contribute to racial disparities in employment outcomes for African American and White VR consumers with mental illness	Secondary analysis of a virtual case management (VCM) dataset of a Mid-western state VR agency	5,284	- Lower employment outcomes for African Americans with mental illness compared with White consumers with mental illness
*Martz, E. and Xu, Y. J. (2008), "Person-related and service-related factors predicting employment of individuals with disabilities", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation,* Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 97-104.	USA	Investigated the best predictors of employment among individuals with disabilities who have exited from a state-federal VR services program in a US state in the south	Secondary analysis of a database of clients who received VR services from the Tennessee Division of Rehabilitation	13,571	- The findings suggested that males were more likely to be employed than females among individuals with visual and "other" disabilities

			Services during the years of 1998–2004		
*Matrone, K. F. and Leahy, M. J. (2005), "The relationship between vocational rehabilitation client outcomes and rehabilitation counselor multicultural counseling competencies", *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, Vol. 48 No. 4, pp. 233-244.	USA	To examine employment outcomes of VR clients in relation to the multicultural counseling competencies of rehabilitation counselors who served them in a public rehabilitation setting	Survey	5,669 clients and 147 counsellors	- Counselor and client race were reported to be important variables in explaining differences in client outcomes
*Miller, E., Gonzalez, R. and Jeong Han, K. (2016), "Vocational rehabilitation outcomes among older adults with diabetes", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, Vol. 44 No. 1, pp. 109-121.	USA	To examine the impact of consumer demographic characteristics, public supports, and rehabilitation service variables for predicting employment outcomes for persons aged 55 and over who have diabetes	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2009	1,489	- The most observable indicator of successful employment outcomes among people age 55 and over with diabetes was rehabilitation technology, which includes services designed to address barriers in functional areas such as mobility
*Moore, C. L., Feist-Price, S. and Alston, R. J. (2002a), "Competitive employment and mental retardation: interplay among gender, race,	USA	Examines the relationships between race, BR services, and the rehabilitation outcomes of persons	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration	188	- Identified race and job placement as variables significantly related to closure status

secondary psychiatric disability, and rehabilitation services", *Journal of Rehabilitation,* Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 14-19.		with severe/profound mental retardation	dataset for a midwestern state		
*Moore, C. L., Feist-Price, S. and Alston, R. J. (2002b), "VR services for persons with severe/profound mental retardation: does race matter?", *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin,* Vol. 45 No. 3, pp. 162-192.	USA	To investigate the relationship between consumer and service variables and the rehabilitation outcomes as measured by work status at closure and level of income.	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 1998	253	- Identified job placement as a service that was positively associated with achieving competitive jobs
*Mpofu, E. and Harley, D. A. (2006), "Racial and disability identity: implications for the career counseling of African Americans with disabilities", *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin,* Vol. 50 No. 1, pp. 14-23.	USA	To address a gap in the literature regarding the career-related aspects of racial and disability identity development, with specific reference to persons of color with disabilities, especially African Americans	Literature review	N/A	- Persons of color have unique career counseling needs because of their developing identities as a dual minority population
*Mueser, K. T., Bond, G. R., Essock, S. M., Clark, R. E., Carpenter-Song, E., Drake, R. E. and Wolfe, R. (2014), "The effects of supported employment in Latino consumers with severe mental illness", *Psychiatric*	USA	Evaluate the effectiveness of different VR programs for individuals with severe mental illness	Secondary analysis of data from a randomized controlled trial	204	- Latino consumers had lower levels of education and were less likely to have worked a competitive job over the past five years than non-Latino consumers

Rehabilitation Journal, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 113-122.					
*Mwachofi, A. K., Broyles, R. and Khaliq, A. (2009), "Factors affecting vocational rehabilitation intervention outcomes: the case for minorities with disabilities", *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 170-177.	USA	Examines VR's effectiveness in assisting minorities achieve gainful employment	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset	617,149	- Reported significant differences in access to services, with Whites accessing VR interventions for longer periods than minority clients
*Ni, C. (2008), "Transition success: what factors relate to VR acceptance and employment outcomes?", University of Connecticut.	USA	To investigate the effects of characteristics of transitional youth on VR acceptance rates.	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal years 2001-2005	3,240	- Individuals who received public financial support, were European Americans, or had a high school degree were more likely to be accepted for VR services
Nye-Lengerman, K. (2017), "Vocational rehabilitation service usage and outcomes for individuals with autism spectrum disorder", *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, Vol. 41-42, pp. 39-50.	USA	To explore the relationships of participant characteristics and service delivery patterns upon VR employment outcomes for individuals with autism spectrum disorder	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2013	10,209	- The type of service an individual received was related to likelihood of experiencing case closure in integrated employment
Okoroji, C., Ibison, Y. and Robotham, D. (2023), "Employment support for	United Kingdon	To understand the effectiveness, and experience of,	Systematic narrative review	Six included studies	- Previous research highlighted in this paper identifies Black people as

Black people with long-term health conditions: a systematic narrative review of UK studies", *Journal of Mental Health*.		employment support in the UK for Black people with long-term mental or physical health conditions			being more likely to be marginalised from the labour market and more likely to have a long-term health conditions
Olney, M. F. and Kennedy, J. (2002), "Racial disparities in VR use and job placement rates for adults with disabilities", *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, Vol. 45 No. 3, pp. 177-185.	USA	Examine the racial disparities in access to VR services	Secondary analysis of data from the Disability Supplement	2,467	- European Americans who receive VR services do much better in the workplace than their minority counterparts
*O'Neill, J., Hyun-Ju, K., Sánchez, J., Muller, V., Aldrich, H., Pfaller, J. and Fong, C. (2015), "Effect of college or university training on earnings of people with disabilities: a case control study", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, Vol. 43 No. 2, pp. 93-102.	USA	To examine whether college or university training is in fact an effective mechanism of change for improving earnings for people with disabilities served by state VR agencies	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2011	178,290	- Individuals who received college or university training had higher weekly earnings than those who did not receive college/university training
O'Neill, J., Kaczetow, W., Pfaller, J. and Verkuilen, J. (2017), "Impairment, demographics and competitive employment in vocational rehabilitation", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, Vol. 46 No. 2, pp. 149-158.	USA	Examine employment outcomes for 17 impairment types included in the Research Services Administration dataset	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal years 2010-2013	354,414	- Women were more likely to not be competitively employed than men - Increasing age is a significant predictor of poor employment outcomes

*Oswald, G., Flexer, R., Alderman, L. A. and Huber, M. (2016), "Predictive value of personal characteristics and the employment of transition-aged youth in vocational rehabilitation", *Journal of Rehabilitation,* Vol. 82 No. 4, pp. 60-66.	USA	To explore the personal characteristics of transition-aged youth and to determine if these characteristics are predictive of service provision and successful employment	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2006 of a Midwest VR agency	3,215	- Recommended that VR counselors receive continued training in transition specific evidence-based practices, to not only understand the student service needs (such as guidance, job placement and further training) but also how to broker other adult services that will likely be required by the individual (such as transportation and supported employment follow along)
*Owalla, B., Vorley, T., Coogan, T., Smith, H. L. and Wing, K. (2021), "Absent or overlooked? Promoting diversity among entrepreneurs with public support needs", *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Venturing,* Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 231-261.	USA	Gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and support needs of ethnic minority entrepreneurs and those with disabilities to participate in entrepreneurial activity	Focus groups and semi-structured interviews	15	- Findings suggest that the fragmented, short-term nature of some initiatives result in under-represented groups remaining unaware of the support available
*Park, H. C., Kim-Rupnow, W. S., Stodden, R. and Starbuck, D. E. (2005), "Disparity of closure types in vocational rehabilitation services", *Journal of*	USA	To determine whether any disparity exists in closure types between White Americans and AAPI	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for	1000	- White Americans have been accepted for VR services at a higher rate than Asian Americans

Vocational Rehabilitation, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 33-38.			fiscal years 1999-2000		
*Rogers, J. B., Bishop, M. and Crystal, R. M. (2005), "Predicting rehabilitation outcome for supplemental security income and Social Security Disability Income recipients: implications for consideration with the ticket to work program", *Journal of Rehabilitation*, Vol. 71 No. 3, pp. 5-10.	USA	To explore the relationship between provision of various services and rehabilitation outcome	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2001	6.264	- White race individuals were approximately 1.5 times more likely to be closed rehabilitated
*Romero-Ramirez, M. (2009), "Service patterns and employment outcomes of people with traumatic brain injury in vocational rehabilitation: the contribution of race and ethnicity", University of Wisconsin.	USA	Examines VR service patterns and employment outcomes for racial and ethnic minority individuals with TBI compared with European Americans	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2007	5,772	- Over half of the clients in this study reported receiving some cash, in-kind, and medical benefits, with Native Americans (76%) and African Americans (68%) having the highest proportion of people receiving benefits, while Asian Americans had the lowest percentage at 54%
*Rosenthal, D. A., Ferrin, J. M., Wilson, K. and Frain, M. (2005), "Acceptance rates of African-American versus White consumers of vocational rehabilitation services: a meta-analysis",	USA	To determine the acceptance rates of African American versus White consumers of VR services	Meta-analysis	Five included studies	- Revealed statistically significant differences between VR acceptance rates for Whites versus African Americans

Journal of Rehabilitation, Vol. 71 No. 3, pp. 36-44.					
*Rumrill, P. D., Lee, B., Minton, D., Bishop, M. L., Koch, L. C. and Pittman, C. (2022), "Emerging vocational rehabilitation strategies for people with diabetes mellitus", *Journal of Prevention Assessment and Rehabilitation,* Vol. 73 No. 3, pp. 753-759.	USA	Describe the characteristics and needs of Americans with diabetes mellitus	Literature review	N/A	- Among various VR services, on-the- job supports and college or university training were identified as the services that most strongly enhanced the chances of competitive employment in people with diabetes
*Schonbrun, S. L. (2005), "Vocational rehabilitation outcome in clients with traumatic brain injury", University of Arizona.	USA	Analysis of the relationship between demographic information and between specific VR services and employment outcomes	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2002	14,311	- There is a relationship between a consumers' race (i.e., White, Black, Hispanic, and Hawaiian), level of education, and presence of substance abuse
*Spence, M. A. S. (2000), "Successful vocational rehabilitation for persons with significant mental disabilities: a logistic regression analysis", Ohio State University.	USA	To examine the effectiveness of a VR unit in Ohio	Secondary analysis of the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission dataset for fiscal years 1997-1998	211	- The most significant variable for predicting success was job development, followed by rehabilitation readiness training, and race
Sprong, M. E., Dallas, B., Upton, T. D. and Bordieri, J. (2015), "The influence of	USA	To explore if recommendations for hypothetical	Survey	275	- Results conclude that there were no differences in recommendations for

race, causal attribution, and in-group favoritism on recommendations for rehabilitation services", *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, Vol. 58 No. 4, pp. 227-239.		rehabilitation services, by current rehabilitation counseling (RC) students, were influenced by the consumer's race and disability			rehabilitation services when accounting for the race of the consumer, and when accounting for the race of the RC students
Stapleton, D., Honeycutt, T. and Schechter, B. (2010), "Closures are the tip of the iceberg: exploring the variation in state vocational rehabilitation program exits after service receipt", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, Vol. 32 No. 1, pp. 61-76.	USA	Explore how the proportion of noninstitutional working-age people with disabilities completing VR services varies with individual characteristics and across states	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2007	308,943	- Relatively few individuals with disabilities – around 1.3 percent – exit state VR agencies annually after receiving services
*Vaughn, S. (2009), "Predicting employment outcomes among women of color with psychiatric disabilities in the state-federal vocational rehabilitation program", Michigan State University.	USA	To examine predictors of employment for women of color with psychiatric disabilities who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2007	10,238	- 65.5% of the women that received job placement had a successful employment outcome.
*Wang, Y. D. C. and Ethridge, G. (2022), "Identifying factors that promote successful vocational rehabilitation case closure: comparison of individual characteristics,	USA	To examine effects of VR services on the employment outcomes for people with disabilities while accounting for individual	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for	1,202,074	- Participants should receive at least one, preferably multiple, types of job-oriented vocational services (e.g., occupational training, on-the-job training, job search

		characteristics and state economic conditions	fiscal years 2015-2017		assistance, and benefits counseling), with the understanding that monetary assistance does not improve employment prospects
VR experiences and state economic conditions", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation,* Vol. 56 No. 2, pp. 139-147.					
*Ware, S. M. (2005), "Exploring vocational rehabilitation outcomes of African Americans with emotional and behavioral disabilities: a national investigation", Ohio State University.	USA	To explore the relationship between African American consumers with a primary mental health (emotional and behavioral) disability and VR outcomes	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset for fiscal year 2002	1600	- Consumers' race and educational level at application affect type of closure
*Wehman, P., Targett, P., Yasuda, S., McManus, S. and Briel, L. (2007), "Helping persons with traumatic brain injury of minority origin: improve career and employment outcomes", *Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation,* Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 95-104.	USA	Reviews the literature related to return to work following TBI for minorities	Literature review	N/A	- The employment and community re-entry challenges of persons with TBI, especially those with severe injury, are significant
*Whitfield, H. W., Venable, R. and Broussard, S. (2010), "Are client-counselor ethnic/racial matches associated with successful rehabilitation outcomes?", *Rehabilitation Counseling*	USA	To determine if client–counselor ethnic/racial matches were associated with successful VR outcomes.	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset	805 applicants and 14 counselors	- Reported evidence to support the notion that client-counselor matches based on race resulted in a significantly higher (7.3% higher) rehabilitation rate than did client-counselor mismatches

Bulletin, Vol. 53 No. 2, pp. 96-105.					
Witte, I., Strandberg, T., Granberg, S. and Gustafsson, J. (2023), "Intersectional perspectives on the employment rate in supported employment for people with psychiatric, neuropsychiatric, or intellectual disabilities: a scoping review", *Journal of Prevention Assessment and Rehabilitation*, Vol. 74 No. 2, pp. 435-454.	Sweden	To examine previous research regarding the influence of intersecting statuses on the employment rate in supported employment for people with psychiatric, neuropsychiatric, or intellectual disabilities	Scoping review	53 included studies	- Intersecting statuses do not appear to affect the employment rate for people in supported employment interventions in a majority of cases, at least not for people with psychiatric disabilities - However, many studies do not report the influence of intersecting statuses, and those who do are often underpowered
*Yin, M., Pathak, A., Lin, D. J. and Dizdari, N. (2022), "Identifying racial differences in vocational rehabilitation services", *rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, Vol. 66 No. 1, pp. 13-24.	USA	To investigate potential racial differences in each step of the VR service process: application, eligibility determination, Individual Plan of employment (IPE) development (which signifies the start of VR services), and case closure	Secondary analysis of the Research Services Administration dataset and American Community Survey for fiscal year 2017	460,977	- African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic individuals with disabilities apply for VR services at a higher rate than White individuals with disabilities but have lower eligibility rates

*Included in the scoping review write-up

Table 2.2: Summary of assigned themes

Author, Year, Country	The impact of race and disability	VR services that promote employment success	Action needed and recommendations
Ahonle et al., 2020, USA		✓	
Akinola et al., 2022, USA	✓		
Akinola et al., 2021, USA		✓	✓
Anderson et al., 2021, USA			✓
Arango-Lasprilla et al., 2011, USA	✓		
Austin et al., 2019, USA		✓	
Balcazar and Taylor-Ritzler, 2009, USA			✓
Berry and Caplan, 2010, USA		✓	
Bradley et al., 2013, USA		✓	
Bromet, 2005, USA		✓	
Catalano et al., 2006, USA		✓	
Chan et al., 2006, USA		✓	
Chun et al., 2018, USA		✓	
Cimera et al., 2015, USA	✓	✓	✓
Conyers and Datti, 2008, USA	✓		✓
Cook et al., 2016, USA		✓	
Crudden et al., 2018, USA	✓	✓	
Crudden et al., 2020, USA	✓		
Daniels, 2007, USA			✓
da Silva Cardoso et al., 2007, USA		✓	

Delman and Adams, 2022, USA		✓	✓
Dunham et al., 1998, USA	✓		
Elmore Williams, 2008, USA	✓		✓
Fagundo, 2020, USA		✓	✓
Garcia-Iriarte et al., 2007, USA	✓		✓
Giesen and Lang, 2018, USA	✓		
Glynn and Schaller, 2017, USA	✓	✓	✓
Goodwin, 1998, USA	✓		
Greene, 2006, USA			✓
Hasnain and Balcazar, 2009, USA			✓
Homa, 2004, USA	✓		✓
Huang et al., 2016, USA	✓		
Izzo, 1998, USA		✓	
Ji et al., 2015, USA	✓	✓	✓
Johnson et al., 2020, USA		✓	
Johnstone et al., 2003, USA	✓	✓	✓
Kaya, 2018, USA	✓	✓	✓
Kaya et al., 2021, USA	✓		
Kim-Rupnow et al., 2005, USA	✓		✓
Lee et al., 2020, USA		✓	
Lukyanova et al., 2014, USA	✓	✓	✓
Martz and Xu, 2008, USA	✓	✓	✓
Matrone and Leahy, 2005, USA	✓		✓
Miller et al., 2016, USA		✓	✓
Moore et al., 2002a, USA		✓	

Moore et al., 2002b, USA		✓	
Mpofu and Harley, 2006, USA			✓
Mueser et al., 2014, USA	✓		
Mwachofi et al., 2009, USA	✓		
Ni, 2008, USA	✓	✓	✓
Nye-Lengerman, 2017, USA		✓	
Okoroji et al., 2023, United Kingdom	✓		
Olney and Kennedy, 2002, USA	✓		
O'Neill et al., 2015, USA		✓	✓
O'Neill et al., 2017, USA	✓		
Oswald et al., 2016, USA	✓		
Owalla et al., 2021, USA			✓
Park et al., 2005, USA	✓		✓
Rogers et al., 2005, USA	✓	✓	
Romero-Ramirez, 2009, USA	✓		
Rosenthal et al., 2005, USA	✓		
Rumrill et al., 2022, USA		✓	
Schonbrun, 2005, USA		✓	
Spence, 2004, USA		✓	
Sprong et al., 2015, USA	✓		
Stapleton et al., 2010, USA	✓		
Vaughn and Boston, 2010, USA	✓	✓	
Wang and Ethridge, 2022, USA		✓	

Ware, 2005, USA	✓	✓	✓
Wehman et al., 2007, USA	✓		
Whitfield et al., 2010, USA	✓		
Witte et al., 2020, Sweden			
Yin et al., 2022, USA	✓		

Chapter 3: Exploring Intersections of Race and Disability in the context of Canadian Employment Support Systems through the Experiences of Job Seekers/Workers, Employers, and Service Providers

Abstract

Purpose: Racism and ableism have impacts at individual and organizational levels and can produce and reproduce inequities and injustices in diverse contexts. However, their intersection remains largely unexamined in the provision of employment supports. The objective of this qualitative study is to identify barriers and facilitators within employment supports to seek strategies to improve the employment outcomes of racialized disabled job seekers and workers and address gaps faced by service providers and employers. **Methods**: This study used interpretive description (1). Four racialized disabled job seekers and workers, two employers and four service providers participated in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis (2) was used to analyze the data. **Results**: Five core themes were identified: 1) managing intersectional confusion; 2) employer education; 3) contextual barriers; 4) client-service provider relationships; and 5) urgency for solutions. **Conclusion**: This study provides grounding evidence about common concerns and barriers within existing employment support systems and can assist policymakers and service providers to better understand the complex and nuanced lived experiences of racialized disabled job seekers and workers.

Introduction

Historically, disabled persons have experienced poor employment outcomes compared with persons without disabilities (3). These outcomes can include lower rates of employment, lower earnings, and higher work precarity (4). These labour market inequalities become more pronounced among racialized disabled job seekers and workers due to intersecting layers of race

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and disability and their impact on health and social challenges (5). Supported employment programs have existed for years and continue to serve 8 million Canadians aged 15 years and older with disabilities (6). However, missing from the literature is an examination of the intersection of race and disability within employment support services, and of the impact of this intersection on the experiences of racialized disabled job seekers.

Wilkerson and Penn in 1938 (7) started documenting racial differences in access and use of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services in the United States (US). In their study, they reported significantly lower rates of successful VR outcomes amongst disabled Black individuals. Nearly a century later, patterns of inequality persist despite the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and the emergence of racial justice movements, such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), which originated in 2013 (8). This enduring disparity prompts critical examination of why anticipated changes have not materialized despite these legislative and activist efforts. In their scoping review, Fuentes and colleagues (5) identified that racialized disabled individuals still experience: unique stereotyping at the individual and institutional level, which the authors attribute to be in relation of negative assumptions based on ableist and racist disbeliefs; poorer labour market outcomes; and negative effects on well-being and on career development. Authors of other studies conducted largely in the US have reported racial variations across the type and amount of VR services provided to clients (9, 10, 11, 12). In their study focused on the effect of demographic characteristics and VR service patterns on employment outcomes of persons with traumatic brain injury, Catalano and colleagues (13) reported that Hispanic, and Black clients were more likely to receive on-the-job and monetary (e.g. transportation, food, clothing) supports whereas, White clients were more likely to receive higher education training and assistive rehabilitation technology services. Other

authors have also identified that disabled clients from racialized groups received employment support services for shorter periods of time, had higher rates of unsuccessful case closures and received less financial support (14, 15). Recent labour market shifts have also been linked to the COVID-19 pandemic in that disabled workers are facing a rise in job precarity (16). In Canada, between July 2020 to June 2021, an average of 28% and 31% of Indigenous persons and racialized individuals respectively lived with economic insecurity compared to only 16% of White individuals (16). The cumulative effects of these economic barriers in our current ableist and racist labor market have led to significantly higher rates of poverty among racialized disabled job seekers and workers (16). It is crucial to create knowledge about the process of receiving and using employment supports for racialized disabled job seekers, and how the intersection of race and disability can shape the experience of accessing and utilizing employment supports.

Literature to date is heavily reliant on administrative or survey data focused on particular subpopulations within organizations (5). As a result, existing results cannot be generalized at a national level or capture various state/province level variations. In the past, demographic data such as race, age, gender, and sexual identity were superficially analyzed, without sufficiently exploring potential correlations with employment outcomes (17). Consequently, these factors were often deemed irrelevant to the broader context of VR and supported employment. This existent and affirming evidence (5, 17) has presented a large gap in employment research and our current labour market. The purpose of this research is to explore the intersecting nature of disability and race in the context of employment support services, and to explore experiences of racialized This study will offer novel information about experiences of those involved in the

processes of accessing, help identify strategies, recommendations, and practices to improve employment and career experiences for racialized disabled job seekers and workers.

Theoretical Framework

To explain the experiences of racialized disabled job seekers and workers, we drew on the intersectionality framework (18) because of its foundational tenets about how intersectional identities contributes to discrimination, oppression, and disadvantage. The term 'intersectional identities' was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 work examining anti-discrimination laws in the US in relation to lesbian Black women (19). Intersectionality can capture the lived and multifaceted experiences of individuals at crossroads due to their multiple intersecting identities and social locations (20). Intersectionality also offers researchers a robust analytical framework to help them examine interconnections between various socially constructed identities such as race, gender, class, sexual identities, as these collectively shape the lived experiences of individuals and groups (20). The intersectionality framework is interdisciplinary and consists of three key principles: (a) individuals hold multiple identities that can intersect; (b) each identity carries dynamics of power or oppression; and (c) identities, while personal, are also constructed within socio-cultural contexts and are therefore subjected to change (18).

Methods

To capture the lived experiences of racialized disabled job seekers and workers, the perspectives of employers and service providers, and the perception of how existing employment supports are meeting their needs, we conducted a qualitative interpretive description (ID) (1) study informed by the framework of intersectionality (18). Interpretive description is used to generate knowledge of a subjective experience for the purpose of informing research (1). ID, rooted in interpretivist and naturalistic inquiry, was originally developed for nursing and other

applied health sciences to generate practice-oriented knowledge (1). This approach is instrumental in analyzing phenomena through the lens of subjective experiences, uncovering the underlying characteristics, patterns, and structures while acknowledging the constructed and contextual nature of human experience (1). The process of ID involves using reflective and critical examination techniques to create a narrative that will ultimately influence and inform disciplinary thought (1). In the context of this study, interpretive description enabled a nuanced exploration of how race and disability intersect to influence the accessibility and effectiveness of employment supports for racialized disabled workers. By focusing on their personal experiences, this methodology revealed critical insights into the concepts of identity and equity in the labor market. ID also offers guidance in developing an interpretive account based on informed inquiry and also ensures that the research outcomes are practical and capable of informing meaningful change in employment practices and policies. This study was approved by the ethics board overseeing research in the affiliated university.

We recruited participants from various organizations who provide formal employment supports to disabled job seekers and workers, and employers across Canada. We posted our advertisement materials to various social media platforms and presented them to various service providers to spread the message about the study through their own communication channels. Anyone interested in the study was invited to contact the research team. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to attain maximum variation in our sample with respect to diverse characteristics such as gender, age, disability type, and race that may impact the experience of and participation in providing or receiving employment supports (21). No exclusion criteria related to the types of disabilities and racial backgrounds were set during the recruitment process. We sought to incorporate multiple perspectives in the sample, including (a) racialized

disabled participants who were actively seeking work or who were already employed, (b) employers who had experiences hiring and accommodating racialized disabled workers and (c) service providers who managed and provided employment supports to employers and racialized disabled job seekers and workers.

We conducted in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with 10 participants. We posed questions to the participants that explored their experiences using or implementing employment supports and their perspectives of how current systems were operating, what were challenges and facilitators, and how services could be improved. Interview guides can be viewed in the Appendix B. Interviews ranged from 30-60 minutes in length, with an average duration of 40 minutes, and were performed through the Zoom video conference platform. All audio was recorded and transcribed through Artificial Intelligence built into the Zoom platform. Transcription clean-up was completed by re-listening to the recorded audio files. Re-listening allowed for increased engagement and immersion with the data to create greater awareness of what was shared by each participant. Thorne describes how in an ID approach, the transcription process is powerful and encourages researchers to take more active roles during this experience to become more attune with the data (1). We uploaded all transcripts onto Dedoose Version 9.2.012 (22), a cloud-based qualitative data management software.

According to Thorne, in the ID research process, data collection and analysis inform one another iteratively and thus shape and guide the direction of inquiry (1). The product of an ID study involves identifying thematic patterns and commonalities to characterize the phenomenon under study (1). Our data was analyzed abductively through thematic analysis, a process that involves iteratively cycling between data and theory to generate insights (2). Abductive analysis allowed us to identify emergent themes while continuously refining our understanding based on

both the participants' narratives and existing theoretical frameworks (23). Immersion in the data was upheld throughout the entire analytic process by re-reading of the data and integrating emerging data insights with the framework of intersectionality to enhance creditability and reflect the lived experiences of our participants. It is crucial to avoid excessive precision during open coding and remain open to the element of surprise in our data, as this flexibility allows for the discovery of emergent themes and unexpected insights, capturing the full complexity and richness of the phenomenon under study without prematurely constraining the analysis (1). Therefore, our analysis process was done in steps starting with describing, moving to conceptualizing, and finally interpreting meaning within the data (1).

Two members of our research team conducted open coding to first code all statements pertaining to the overall research questions and objectives. Transcripts were read several times by each coder to identify new codes. Then, the codes were grouped into categories and these categories were arranged into themes. These themes were created after several discussions amongst the coders and the overall essence between all themes was constructed as part of the iterative process of finding interpretation. As one method to establish rigour and further engage with participants, member-checking was done by sharing a summary of the emerging results with the participants and they were invited to provide feedback in writing by email, or verbally by phone or Zoom. Member-checking informed the later stages of analysis, guiding the inclusion of new, complex, or contradictory results (24). Reflexivity was also a key consideration, acknowledging that the investigators' background and experiences related to the research issue could influence the research process (24). Reflexivity was maintained throughout the entire research process by researchers writing memos to promote self-reflection and explore

preconceptions and biases, and journaling to describe any thoughts, ideas, and emotions experienced throughout the study process.

Results

Sample characteristics

A total of 10 individuals participated in this study: two were employers, four were service providers, and four were racialized disabled job seekers and workers (see Table 3.1 for participant characteristics). Participants described their experiences of using or implementing employment supports and what needs were or were not met. From the data we generated five themes. See Table 3.2 for a summary of the themes.

Table 3.1: Participant characteristics

	Pseudonym	Disability (Yes/No)	Racial Identity	Gender	Age	Employment Status
Service Provider (n=4)	Alex	No	White	Man	46	Employee client coordinator
	Claudia	No	White	Woman	34	Manager of supported employment
	Maya	No	Black	Woman	26	Facilitator for employment programs
	Ayesha	No	South Asian	Woman	25	Mental health occupational therapist
Racialized Disabled Job Seeker/Worker (n=4)	Jasmine	Yes	South Asian	Woman	45	Seeking employment
	Rajesh	Yes	South Asian	Man	24	Seeking Employment
	Megan	Yes	Black	Woman	32	Food and hospitality worker
	Michael	Yes	Black	Man	46	Seeking employment
Employer (n=2)	Daniel	No	White	Man	59	Café owner
	Don	No	White	Man	59	Café manager

Theme 1: Managing intersectional confusion

Participants expressed difficulty navigating various intersecting aspects of their lives and attributed this difficulty to balancing and making sense of multiple identities simultaneously in terms of their impact on their employment journey. Two sub-themes were identified under this broader theme.

Sub-theme: The compounding effect

In reflecting on their experience of using employment supports to find and retain jobs, racialized disabled job seekers and workers reported that they were confused and struggled to navigate their intersecting health issues as they attempted to use employment supports that often failed to account for the full spectrum of their needs. For example, Michael described his experience of confusion while managing multiple identities associated with race and disability in the context of employment:

> "*Does it have to with my disabilities? I don't know. Does it have to do with my race? I don't know…. I am trying to figure it out, the problem with having so many intersectionalities… In having all of these intersections, is confusing. I do not know what it is" [Michael].*

Michael went on to emphasize that this confusion and complexity makes it hard to identify the root cause of the barriers to finding sustainable work.

Participants living with multiple intersecting identities also frequently reported a lack of comprehensive understanding and support from service providers. As suggested by Rajesh, participants with multiple disabilities were often conflicted when obtaining supports from disability specific employment support organizations.

"The other thing is I guess for my case specifically, epilepsy's not the only disability that I live with. I have a few other health condition disabilities as well. I have cystic fibrosis which affects my lungs, liver, and kidneys as well. And then I have diabetes as well. So, with all those conditions in mind, like obviously, [the service provider mentioned] specializes in helping people with epilepsy, and I think they've been great in helping me on the epilepsy section. They know about my other disabilities, but it's you know… just finding, helping me kind of navigate through the workplace and finding employment, keeping my other conditions in mind has been a bit more of a challenge. I think if I had like one condition it would have been okay, but you know adding my diseases on top of each other makes it significantly more difficult" [Rajesh].*

Rajesh noted that service providers and organizations can often lack the resources or expertise to fully address co-occurring conditions. As a result, participants often find themselves at a crossroads, struggling to obtain adequate and holistic support that considers the entirety of their intersecting identities.

Other respondents also reported about compounding effects of multiple social identities. Many service providers noted that their clients were living with many other social challenges such as precarious immigration statuses and poverty, which caused further barriers in accessing supports for finding and retaining employment. Ayesha, a service provider, highlights how these compounded barriers disproportionately affect racialized disabled persons: *"Other barriers that are compounding… it is sort of known as fact in [social and health] research that racialized and disabled people are more exponentially faced by challenges like low income and homelessness and addiction and all those different things"* [Ayesha].*

Service providers often reported that they are limited in their capabilities and can only address a specific disability. Many noted that, despite the impact of other social challenges on employment opportunities, they are often unable to tackle broader socioeconomic issues that restrict employment opportunities. According to participants, this limitation can create a complex web of obstacles for job seekers or workers in securing and retaining employment. In situations where clients require help in multiple facets of their lives, service providers described feeling restricted in what they can provide and do in terms of support. They mentioned being able to assist with the client's specific disability but not the other factors that restrict employment opportunities. Ayesha, a service provider, highlighted this issue:

> *"If a client can't get somewhere because they have no money and those sorts of things, it compounds on top of each other, and the employment counsellors are stuck and cannot provide the supports for the client, so they are not able to do what they need to do"*
> *[Ayesha].*

Ayesha's statements emphasize the interconnectedness of financial stability and employment success, revealing the profound impact of socioeconomic factors on the support services available to job seekers.

Sub-theme: Emphasising merit

When contacting potential employers, service providers reported that they have sometimes tried to conceal client traits that are known barriers to employment such as gender, age, disability, and race to create traction and approachability when introducing them to potential employers:

> *"I'm a master word spinner. But to just give an example, the person's resume that I was just working on, she has a business management degree, proficient in Microsoft office,*

> *she has their basic bookkeeping, iCloud and business administrative supports technician*
>
> *and customer service technician. Oh, I literally was telling her, you are my dream resume*
>
> *right now. Like you should be so easy to be placed based on your resume. But she will*
>
> *basically hit that hurdle when she goes through an interview, and they see that [she has]*
>
> *a disability. So now my job is to basically [say] 'hey, look at her qualifications. That's*
>
> *exactly what you want. She may take longer to do what you want, but she can do the*
>
> *job'" [Alex].*

As described by Alex, many racialized disabled job seekers become successful in reaching later stages of the job recruitment process but are ultimately not hired because of employer misconceptions and judgements based on their race and disability rather than skill and capability during in-person encounters such as job interviews.

Both racialized disabled job seekers and service providers highlight the critical need for employers and workplaces to transcend biases associated with intersecting identities of race and disability. Instead of focusing on these identities, service providers suggest adopting a merit-based approach that emphasizes measurable skills, abilities, and alignment with the company culture in hiring decisions:

> *"It literally comes down to can the person do the job? Can you teach the person to do the*
>
> *job? Do they meet the culture of your company? I just don't know if [we will] ever get*
>
> *[to] that point. There are too many barriers in place for salvage" [Alex].*

Alex emphasized the importance of using objective criterion to assess a candidate's capability, and of focusing on both technical competencies and soft skills such as the candidate's willingness and ability to learn, adapt, and acquire new skills on the job.

The theme of managing intersectional confusion underscores the significant challenges that racialized disabled job seekers face in navigating multiple identities and conditions within the employment support landscape. Participants highlighted the compounding effects of intersecting disabilities and social challenges, often finding that service providers lack the resources to address these comprehensively. Emphasizing merit over identity in hiring practices was suggested as a crucial step toward more equitable employment opportunities.

Theme 2: Employer education

According to participants, educating employers is a critical strategy for creating inclusive workplaces for racialized disabled job seekers and workers. Several participants described ways in which service providers play a crucial role in bridging understanding between employers and potential employees by advocating for diversity and promoting effective accommodations. Two sub-themes were identified under this broader theme.

Sub-theme: Advocacy

Several service providers acknowledged a lack of employer education about the business case for hiring racialized disabled job seekers and workers. Participants noted that a lack of knowledge and awareness leads employers to be wary and reluctant to hire racialized disabled workers. For example, Alex observed that employers are often overly influenced by negative assumptions and stereotypes about racialized disabled workers' ability to perform, contribute, and integrate into the workplace:

> *"Like I'll hear quite often, 'I guess somebody that's going to be employed for me will not be able to do the job so am I going to have to do hand holding'. So, there's a lot of education involved with my job, a lot of networking, a lot of telling and working with*

people through that having somebody that has a barrier for employment is a great

addition to a team" [Alex].

This service provider highlighted the need for extensive education efforts to dispel

misconceptions and biases held by employers regarding the capabilities of individuals with

disabilities and other barriers to employment.

Service provider participants highlighted the need for greater awareness and education

among employers regarding disability confidence and inclusion. For example, Maya observed

that many employers are primarily motivated by meeting mandated targets, such as hiring a

specific percentage of disabled workers, rather than genuinely understanding and embracing

inclusivity:

"I think the first thing is just awareness for employers, especially they just need to be

educated more on disability confidence and inclusion. Most of these employers just want

to hit a certain target, like maybe the government said you have to hire like 20% [of

workers who are disabled]. That system doesn't really sit well with me" [Maya].

Maya expressed that this target-driven approach lacks the depth required for true inclusivity. Her

comments suggest that there is a need to shift towards educating employers to foster a more

authentic and effective integration of diverse individuals into the workforce, including racialized

disabled workers.

Service provider participants also noted that their job included supporting employers, to

create more inclusive workplaces so that disabled and racialized workers can fully integrate the

workplace and reach their fullest potential without discrimination:

"'Why would an employer want to hire somebody like that when they can hire normal

people?' Is a direct quote that came up just like a couple weeks ago. And like I would

> *say, daily, weekly, monthly part of my job is challenging bias. And trying to have*
>
> *conversations with people about their intrinsic kind of biases and then trying to uncover*
>
> *different ways of viewing things and trying to encourage different viewpoints" [Claudia].*

Claudia acknowledged that challenging bias, engaging in regular discussions with employers to uncover and address their intrinsic biases, and encouraging them to consider alternative viewpoints and perspectives can promote diversity and inclusivity.

Sub theme: Accommodations

The most significant support reported by employer participants was receiving education on how to effectively provide accommodations for disabled workers. Participants indicated that effective accommodations, when combined with clear communication and flexibility, can help mediate conflicts among workplace stakeholders and allow workers to maximize their skills and abilities:

> *"I think there has been frustration that someone cannot necessarily do the job and it is*
>
> *slowing the entire team down, but that soon passes [as they learn the job with*
>
> *appropriate accommodations]. If we do ever see anything like that, we typically take*
>
> *someone aside, maybe both parties and we say, listen, we have seen this and we want you*
>
> *to be aware, and we want you to accommodate here and recognize that someone is*
>
> *learning the job… I want you to give this person this particular responsibility and take*
>
> *them through it carefully and we will clearly define the steps they need to follow in order*
>
> *to improve somebody's experience of working and giving them the skills and the*
>
> *confidence so that when they go out the next time" [Daniel].*

Daniel described that employers who take a proactive approach by engaging in dialogue and clearly defining responsibilities can help facilitate the learning process and improve the overall work experience for disabled employees and the employers who hire them.

However, according to participants, workplace accommodations can still be challenging for employers to conceptualize, implement and can be intertwined by the presence of ableism and unconscious racial homogeneity in workplace settings. For example, one service provider noted, the mindset of employers providing workplace accommodations is rooted intrinsically and subconsciously through ableism and racism:

> *"I would say that the biggest thing we have noticed day to day is that baked in ableism against people with disabilities and then with some of the clients that I have talked to, just not being able to identify the whiteness in a space. Such as paying attention to DI [Divesity Inclusion] in very meaningful ways because it is very unconscious when a space is really white. They are not really going to notice, and no one is going to feel very comfortable speaking about it. Yes, definitely ableism will create ways that will also prevent them from engaging in these very easy accommodations that can be put in place to make things easier, but they are not willing to consider that because they could just hire a worker who does not need that"* [Ayesha].

Ayesha points out the difficulty in recognizing biases, which can hinder the meaningful implementation of necessary accommodations for disabled individuals.

Participants emphasized that educating employers on the value of diversity and effective accommodations is crucial for creating inclusive workplaces for racialized disabled job seekers. They highlighted that addressing biases and misconceptions, along with implementing proper

accommodations, can significantly enhance the integration and success of disabled workers in the workplace.

Theme 3: Contextual barriers

According to participants, contextual barriers often stem from community prejudices, cultural biases and insufficient administrative support, making it difficult for these individuals to navigate the job market successfully. Service providers highlighted several key areas in which contextual barriers manifest, impacting their clients' ability to find and maintain employment.

Service providers discussed how their racialized disabled clients were often pigeonholed by members of the community, especially in small rural areas. Common examples included labelling certain racial groups into categories and associating stereotypes. For example, one service provider noted:

> *"Pigeonholing, so, for example, the group I'm with, there's a lot of, racial diversity amongst our group. So, it's really nice but you have a lot of people, where for example, the subway a couple of weeks ago, I hear 'oh, man, those people are everywhere'. So, there's a lot of that racism that's still there, and pigeonholing can bring everybody in one box" [Alex].*

As Alex described, generalized assumptions and comments can extend into other settings such as the workplace and impact the employment experiences of racialized individuals. The prevalence of pigeonholing presents challenges to inclusion, where the presence of diverse individuals does not automatically translate to an inclusive and respectful environment.

Service providers participants frequently discussed the challenge of determining which workplace standards and practices to emphasize to help their clients succeed in Canadian

workplaces. Participants noted that cultural differences among newcomer clients present unique challenges in employment services. As one service provider shared:

> *"I've had clients who've come to me for employment services and arrive like 15-20 min late for their appointment because that's normal and acceptable wherever like they grew up. Then when they moved to Canada, they had to kind of learn about like the Canadian workplace expectations of arriving on time or early... And that's something that, you know, in employment services we try to educate people in like the Canadian work experience expectations, but I don't even know if that's really like, right?" [Claudia].*

This service provider observed challenges faced by newcomers in adapting to new cultural norms and the role of employment services in facilitating this transition.

As reported by services providers in this study, a lot of barriers can exist via the administrative side of employment supports. For example, as Ayesha noted, disabled job seekers and workers receive a fixed amount of money to purchase work supplies but oftentimes it is insufficient and does not cover the necessary equipment for the jobs they are seeking:

> *"Job seekers, through these organizations, get $500 from the organization to support them in things that they need. For example, if they need things like orthotics that is technically covered under that amount of money, or clothes for interviews or bus passes, it comes from that money. It is not really enough... I think that it would be amazing if that amount was increased and then job seekers would have some level of support there for a longer period of time, but that amount is used up so fast and that is certainly the financial piece" [Ayesha].*

Ayesha also expressed that increasing financial support would help job seekers and workers by providing them with sustained assistance over a longer period. Increasing financial support

would allow job seekers to better meet their employment needs, reducing the immediate pressure and providing a more stable foundation for their job search and retention efforts.

Participants highlighted that contextual barriers such as community prejudices, cultural biases, and inadequate administrative support significantly impact the ability of racialized disabled individuals to navigate the job market.

Theme 4: Client-service provider relationships

According to participants, client-service provider relationships are crucial as they can significantly influence the effectiveness of employment support programs and the overall experience of job seekers and workers. Service provider participants shared their experiences while navigating these relationships within employment support services. Two sub-themes were identified under this broader theme.

Sub-theme: Client-service provider matches

According to several participants, client-service provider relationships are an integral part of the employment support process and can be shaped by similarities and differences in client-service provider race relations. For example, one service provider commented about the predominance of white providers and expressed an awareness of the differences in how support might be provided in programs with only white service providers:

> *"The other thing that I have also noticed is that in a lot of spaces that I have been in, a lot of the employment support providers are white, and I cannot necessarily speak to how that has influenced my client's interactions with employment services or anything like that, but they are noticeably that kind of environment. I certainly feel an awareness of the differences and differences not in ideology but in how I might support somebody in that*

kind of space. Like I said, I have had those conversations before with some clients"

[Ayesha].

However, participants pointed out that it is not common for clients and service providers to share the same racial background. Many participants reported that service providers are often not racially representative of the communities they serve. One participant described: *"A lot of the employment services staff isn't, what's the word I'm looking for? Like it's not representative of the city. So, the way that the programs are offered or the way that they're designed are not catering to like a non-Western culture" [Claudia].* A lack of diverse representation can result in a disconnect between service providers and their clients, making it challenging for clients to fully engage with the programs designed to assist them.

Sub-theme 2: Case load and additional support

Other tensions experienced within client-service provider relationships include issues of caseload balance, which came up only among the service provider participants. For example, Claudia noted that service providers are often assigned a caseload beyond their capacity to fully meet the needs of each client: *"each [case worker] has a caseload of 100 to 200 clients" [Claudia].* Another service provider, Ayesha further suggested that large caseloads can lead to significant staff burnout and turnover: "*[Service providers] are overwhelmed. Apparently, and I will say this generally, there has been a lot of turnovers in a lot of different places from what I have heard. It has been challenging" [Ayesha].*

Under these circumstances, service provider participants report they often struggle to fully address the significant needs of their clients and the employers who hire them. One service provider participant pointed out:

> *"So I feel like some of them would benefit if there was like a therapist in house just to talk to maybe on high days or someone. I also think like I think I heard of this recently, like I don't know what they call them, if it's employment coach or something, but it's like maybe when someone follows like a client to maybe a job interview, or maybe follows them for the first couple of months. Especially for people with like anxiety or something and they just follow them through until they are somewhat comfortable. So, I would say that is one thing I thought of that it's not present right now"* [Ayesha].

Ayesha explained that incorporating mental health and sustained support services could benefit job seekers and workers, particularly those facing anxiety and other barriers to employment.

Participants emphasized that the alignment between client and provider, including shared racial and cultural backgrounds, can enhance the relevance and impact of the support provided. Additionally, service provider participants discussed that addressing issues such as service provider caseloads and incorporating comprehensive support measures could significantly improve the overall effectiveness of employment services and the experiences of job seekers.

Theme 5: Urgency for solutions

Participants recognized an urgency for solutions to address the limitations in existing employment support systems and policies to meet the immediate needs of racialized disabled job seekers and workers, as well as the employers who could hire them. All participants emphasized a need for swift and effective action to address limited funding, a lack of clarity about implementing accommodations and creating more supported and tailored employment supports for racialized disabled professionals seeking work.

There was collective agreement amongst participants about the urgent need to create solutions that foster momentum: *"We are in a crisis right now. I don't need a solution years*

from now, I need a solution right now" [Michael]. Micheal noted that there is a necessity to provide tangible and practical solutions that can be implemented without delay as of now, rather than long-term strategies that may take years to materialize.

Several participants reported an urgent need to increase dedicated funding to employment support programs to expand their services and capacity: *"If there was more funding allocated to each client…, that would still be used up really fast, but at least it would be a little more money, which I think would be really helpful" [Ayesha].* This service provider suggests a need for careful consideration of resource distribution to ensure that funds are directed towards areas of greatest need and can have the most significant impact on client outcomes.

Service provider participants outlined a lack of consistency and acknowledgement from the government's perspective, and how little employers really understand about their requirement to accommodate disabled persons. Such a lack of understanding is especially troublesome among small to mid-sized businesses, who may not have the resources needed to consult an employment lawyer. For example, one service provider noted:

> *"What's happening is small businesses, large businesses, employers in general are understanding the law as best they can without any clarity. Like nothing is clear unless they actually talk to an employment lawyer, and nobody can afford that. And so, they're just making judgments based on what they think they're supposed to be doing" [Claudia].*

Service provider participants emphasized that, without clear guidance or accessible resources, many employers are left to interpret the law on their own, often resulting in inadequate or misinformed approaches to accommodation.

Another barrier noted by participants is a current focus on school to work transitions and young disabled workers. As a result, those with more developed work histories or professional

qualifications may really struggle to get the services they need. Participants suggested a shift towards prioritizing younger disabled workers that often leads support services to focus on entry-level positions, internships, or apprenticeships. Racialized disabled worker participants have noted that this focus can leave seasoned professionals without the necessary support to navigate the job market, upgrade their skills, or transition into roles that align with their experience and expertise. For example, one racialized disabled worker noted:

> *"I hold my breath; I feel like they have changed focus to focus on young people with disabilities. That is where it is really hard for me. I wonder where the actual support for professionals with disabilities. They talk about all these challenges with turnover etc. but I do not have any of that. I do not understand the logic behind why it is so hard to hire me"* [Michael].

This participant and others noted the need to ensure that all disabled persons can access employment supports that will support their employment journey regardless of their current stage in their employment journey. This sentiment raises the importance of inclusive policies and programs that address the diverse needs of racialized disabled individuals throughout their employment journeys, promoting equal opportunities and support for all.

In the results, participants consistently highlighted the insufficiency of current services, especially in addressing the complex, intersecting needs of disabled job seekers and workers. They stressed the importance of increasing funding, providing clear guidance for employers, and expanding support to include seasoned professionals. This collective urgency underscores the need for solutions that are not only effective but also timely, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their stage in their employment journey, receive the support they need to thrive.

Discussion

This study presents perspectives of service providers, employers, and racialized disabled job seekers and workers on facilitators and barriers encountered in their experiences navigating and utilizing employment support services, an area that has received limited attention in Canadian research to date (5). In this discussion, we suggest how the results of our analysis can advance knowledge through an intersectional lens focused on how socially structured concepts such as race and disability can cause disadvantage and negatively influence experiences with employment support services and subsequent employment outcomes. We also identify limitations and future avenues in which policy, practice, and research can fill the gaps as experienced by our study participants to reduce the racial and disability disparities in the employment support sector.

Participants in this study reported that the identified employment services are inflexible and suggested that there is a need for personalized supports that align with social identities related to race, disability, gender, religion, immigration and citizenship, and socioeconomic status. Delman and Adams (25) examined how young Black adults with serious mental illness perceive the barriers and facilitators in achieving their vocational goals and identified that their participants rejected rigid programmatic approaches of employment support systems that failed to consider their individual life experiences and expressed needs. In the present study, several participants also reflected on a lack of development and innovations of employment supports in areas such as service provider capacities, employer education, monetary supports, and personalized aid. These results align with the research of Anderson and Hergenrather (26), which suggests that current employment support policies and practices may contribute to work

conditions that threaten a service provider's ability to provide competent service, primarily due to an environment that fosters a high risk of burnout.

Service provider participants in this study reported often struggling with large caseloads, which may preclude or impair their abilities to provide sufficient guidance and services to each client (27). As the service provider participants in this study outlined, the implementation of other personnel in the form of mental health therapists and occupational therapists can ease some caseload burdens. In addition to caseloads, participants experienced high service provider turnover, which can lead to unstable service provider-client relationships. A similar challenge was identified in the study by Anderson and Hergenrather (26) due to repetitive re-introductions and lack of knowledge and understanding of the client. There results suggest there is a need to find ways to increase stability in the employment support sector.

A need for employer education was also suggested by numerous participants in this study. This sentiment was also reported by Park and colleagues in a study exploring the VR experiences of Asian American job seekers (11). Consistent with the results of our analysis, Park and colleagues called upon service providers to do more outreach with businesses and employers in their respective areas and provide job development and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI) training to dispel ableist and racists myths (11). This proactive approach could not only foster a more inclusive workplace culture but could also empower employers to make informed decisions based on merit and ability rather than biases (28). Moreover, an EDI approach can position businesses to harness the full potential of a diverse workforce, contributing to broader societal goals of equity and opportunity for all individuals, regardless of their background or ability (29).

Service provider participants in the present study suggested that racialized disabled job seekers and workers can be pigeonholed by members of the community and can be streamlined into limited types of jobs based on societal assumptions and attitudes about their capabilities. This streamlining can lead to what Casad and Byrant (30) refer to as a "stereotype threat" in the workplace, defined as the risk of confirming negative stereotypes about one's social group. Stereotype threat can exacerbate the challenges faced by individuals as they navigate employment opportunities (30). This threat may lead to internalized doubts and external perceptions that hinder their ability to fully demonstrate their skills and potential (30). The results of our analysis, together with existing literature, suggest that service providers must do more to combat intrinsic attitudes and biases. Service providers might need to be more explicit to employers about the business case of hiring diverse candidates, and employers might need additional information and guidance on the specific benefits for increasing workplace diversity (31), including racialized disabled job candidates.

From the perspectives of job seeker and worker participants in this study, foundational change is needed. Based on the views of the participants in this study, service providers should focus on the worker's capabilities relevant to the job as opposed to their physical appearance, intersectional identities or other limitations. This approach requires service providers to focus on the merit of each job candidate in terms of what they bring to the specific position. This change is critical because, despite numerous initiatives and policies aimed at promoting equity, employment rates for racialized disabled persons have largely remained stagnant (31). Similar findings were reported by Catalano and colleagues related to vocational rehabilitation among clients with traumatic brain injuries (13). The results of our analysis, together with the existing

literature suggest that targeted investment in evidence-based services including personalized employment supports that cater to needs of the job seekers and employers is urgently needed.

This study has several limitations. Participant recruitment was challenging and ultimately limited to only 10 participants from a few organizations, resulting in a relatively homogenous sample in terms of race, disability, geographic location and position. Therefore, we suggest caution before making inferences in relation to other populations and organizations. Despite these limitations we analyzed the data from the collected interviews until no new themes emerged. Trustworthiness was built through reflexive techniques such as constant debriefing, reflecting, and memoing (32).

Our study was strengthened by the application of the intersectionality framework (18), which guided the research approach from the initial stages of design through to data analysis. Specifically, our research focused on assessing how identifying as a racialized disabled person can impact seeking employment supports for career growth. Intersectionality (18) provided a lens in which the purpose of this research could be framed to create awareness of how the multiple identities of individuals can cause layered forms of disadvantage and do not work as single entities. During data collection, we used intersectionality (18) to guide the development of our interview guide and questions. Using the framework of intersectionality as a guide allowed us to explore how various social identities intersected to shape participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to employment. By analyzing race and disability through an intersectional approach, the complexity of participants lived experiences was captured, offering rich and detailed narratives that went beyond a one-dimensional analysis (33). The framework of intersectionality (18) encouraged the inclusion of diverse perspectives within the study, ensuring

that the sample, while limited, reflected the varied experiences of service providers, employers, and racialized disabled job seekers and workers.

The framework of intersectionality increased the validity and reliability of our qualitative study by providing a comprehensive approach to understanding how multiple identities and social categories interact to shape individuals' experiences (34). Intersectionality enhanced the validity and reliability of the results by prompting us to analyze the data through a holistic lens to create more thorough and rigorous interpretations (34). By considering the complex interplay of race, gender, disability, and other social factors, our analysis captures the nuanced and multifaceted nature of participants' experiences (18). This approach mitigates the risk of oversimplification and acknowledges the diversity within groups, leading to more accurate and representative results (34). Furthermore, intersectionality prompted reflexivity and critical thinking, helping to identify and address potential biases, and ultimately contributing to the credibility and depth of the results (35).

Informed by this study, numerous future steps can be taken. Specifically, the results of our analysis highlight a need to create intersectional programing that target issues faced by racialized disabled persons (e.g. immigration, poverty, etc.), re-design resources to enhance service provider capacity and relatability, and implement EDI training to integrate racial and cultural adaptations. Intersectional programs might include comprehensive support services that address not only employment but also related challenges such as healthcare access, housing stability, legal assistance for immigration issues, and financial counseling (36). These programs would aim to achieve greater equity and accessibility, empowering individuals by providing a robust network of support tailored to their unique intersecting needs. Services would include coordinated case management, interdisciplinary teams of professionals, and personalized plans

that integrate various forms of assistance into a cohesive strategy (36). Interagency

collaborations involving one-stop centers, would streamline access to these services, allowing

individuals to receive comprehensive support from multiple agencies in a single location (37).

This approach would reduce the burden on individuals to navigate complex systems, ensuring

more efficient and effective service delivery. By integrating resources and expertise from various

sectors, these programs would enhance service provider capacity and reliability, ultimately

leading to better outcomes for racialized disabled persons (38). Current literature highlights the

significance of incorporating cultural competency training in the curriculum for service providers

(39, 40, 41). Cultural training can promote effective communication strategies that are sensitive

to cultural nuances, reducing misunderstandings and improving rapport with clients (40). Service

providers can also learn to recognize and mitigate biases, leading to fairer treatment and more

equitable service delivery (41).

In terms of added value, this study raised the importance of creating sustainable solutions

now that leads to systemic improvements and can benefit the future generations of racialized

disabled job seekers and workers. To drive this change, collaborative approaches (42) need to be

implemented to create practical solutions in which all stakeholders are involved. Collaborative

method not only produces more comprehensive and inclusive solutions but also leverages the

lived experiences of service users and the expertise of service providers, ensuring the

interventions are practical, sustainable, and beneficial to the target community (42). For instance,

a study in Australia involving people with acquired brain injury used a collaborative approach to

review existing employment support programs (43). This process involved focus groups with

individuals with acquired brain injury (ABI), employers, allied health professionals, and

social/injury insurance funders, highlighting enablers and barriers to employment (43). Enablers

included replacing interviews with onsite assessments to meet key staff and trial work tasks, employer education on ABI, the use of compensatory cognitive aids, and graded on-the-job support (43). These insights further guided the creation of a new approach for employment entry, support, and skill development, specifically designed for individuals with ABI, known as Employment CoLab (43). Furthermore, future qualitative studies can also provide a more in-depth examination of the Canadian context and provide more information about the importance of reporting racialized status when navigating the employment support systems, shedding light on how racial identity influences access to resources, support, and opportunities. Future research can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the barriers racialized individuals encounter and inform the development of more inclusive and effective employment support strategies.

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Table 3.2: Description of themes

Theme	Description	Sub-theme	Description	Significant Quote
Intersectional Confusion	Explores the challenges individuals face when navigating multiple intersecting identities and responsibilities, particularly in their employment journey.	**The Compounding Effect**	Focuses on how multiple intersecting social identities, particularly disabilities and race, compound to create significant confusion and barriers in finding and retaining employment.	"In having all of these intersections, it is confusing. I do not know what it is" [Michael].
		Emphasising Merit	Discusses how service providers and employers often try to neutralize or overlook the diverse identities of job seekers, which can lead to further discrimination and missed opportunities.	"Like you should be so easy to be placed based on your resume. But she will basically hit that hurdle when she goes through an interview, and they see that you have a disability" [Alex].
Employer Education	Highlights the importance of educating employers to create more inclusive workplaces for racialized disabled job seekers.	**Advocacy**	Emphasizes the need for service providers to educate employers about the benefits and capabilities of hiring racialized disabled workers, combating negative stereotypes and biases.	"Daily, weekly, monthly part of my job is challenging bias" [Claudia].
		Accommodations	Addresses the necessity for employers to understand and implement accommodations effectively, which is often hindered by underlying biases and lack of awareness.	"Ableism will create ways that will also prevent them from engaging in these very easy accommodations" [Ayesha].
Contextual Barriers	Examines the broader, systemic obstacles that racialized disabled job seekers face in securing employment.		Describes how racialized disabled individuals are often stereotyped and confined to specific roles or expectations by employers and society, limiting their opportunities.	"Pigeonholing can bring everybody in one box" [Alex].
			Discusses the challenge of adapting to new cultural norms and expectations in the workplace for racialized	"In employment services we try to educate people in like the Canadian work experience

				individuals, which can be a barrier to successful employment.	expectations, but I don't even know if that's really like, right?" [Claudia].
				Highlights the insufficiency of financial resources provided to job seekers for essential employment-related expenses, which hampers their job search and retention.	"Job seekers through these organizations get $500 from the organization to support them in things that they need... I think that it would be amazing if that amount was increased" [Ayesha].
Client-Service Provider Relationships	Focuses on the dynamics between racialized disabled job seekers and service providers, and how these relationships impact employment support outcomes.	**Client-Service Provider Matches**		Discusses how the racial and cultural match between clients and service providers can influence the effectiveness and comfort of the support provided.	"A lot of the employment services staff isn't... representative of the city" [Claudia].
		Caseload and Additional Support		Discusses the strain on service providers due to high caseloads and turnover rates, which limits their ability to offer comprehensive and personalized support to clients.	"[Service providers] are overwhelmed." [Ayesha].
Urgency for Solutions	Addresses the urgent needs of racialized disabled job seekers for immediate and effective solutions to their employment challenges.			Highlights the pressing need for immediate solutions and supports to address the employment barriers faced by racialized disabled workers.	"We are in a crisis right now. I don't need a solution years from now, I need a solution right now" [Michael].
				Advocates for increased financial resources for employment support programs to better assist job seekers and workers over a sustained period.	"If there was more funding allocated to each client..., that would still be used up really fast" [Ayesha].
				Emphasizes the need for clearer policies and regulations regarding	"Employers in general are understanding the law as best they

		disability accommodations and the role of employers, particularly for small to mid-sized businesses.	can without any clarity" [Claudia].
		Points out the gap in support for racialized disabled professionals who are not at the beginning of their career journey but still face significant employment barriers.	"Where is the actual support for professionals with disabilities" [Michael].

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Introduction

In this thesis work I explore how racialized disabled job seekers and workers are supported by employment supports in Canada. The first study (Chapter 2) presented a scoping review of the literature, demonstrating that although race has been described within vocational rehabilitation in the US, little attention has been dedicated to the intersection of race and employment supports for disabled persons in Canada. In the second study (Chapter 3), racialized disabled job seekers and workers, employers, and service providers shared their diverse perspectives on how employment supports are provided, implemented, and experienced. The overall goals of this thesis were to build upon knowledge about how Canadian employment support services are experienced by racialized disabled job seekers and workers, and improvements service providers and employers can make to sustainably enhance the employment support experience.

In the second chapter I explored the existing literature about the intersection of race and disability in employment services through a scoping review. A literature search was conducted and a total of 73 studies were included. All included studies concentrated on vocational rehabilitation (VR), but notably, none provided insights into employment support systems specific to Canada. VR is a US term to describe the process of providing services to disabled individuals to help them achieve their career goals and gain meaningful employment (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024). Both VR in the US and employment supports in Canada serve similar purposes in aiding disabled individuals to achieve and maintain employment. A significant difference is in their funding structures. VR programs in the US occur through state-federal partnerships in which each state has their own VR agency, but they receive federal funds

and comply with federal guidelines (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024). In Canada, funding for employments supports are primarily derived from provincial and territorial budgets that are often supported through federal transfer payments but can lead to more variability in resource allocation (Government of Canada, 2024-a).

The results of the scoping review analysis outlined that racialized disabled job seekers experienced delays in receiving VR services (Crudden et al., 2020), obtained inadequate services according to their needs (Kim-Rupnow et al., 2005; Ni, 2000), and experienced higher rates of unsuccessful case closures (Elmore-Williams, 2008; Ware, 2005) compared to their White counterparts. Additionally, same client-counsellor race relations have a positive impact on the delivery of VR and employment outcomes amongst racialized disabled job seekers and workers (Matrone and Leahy, 2005). Employment supports such as job placement, job search, and on-the-job services were identified in the included studies to be predictive of positive employment outcomes, however, were under-utilized amongst racialized disabled job seekers compared to their non-racialized counterparts (Ahonle et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2006). This research suggests that employment supports need to be catered to the needs of individuals in consideration of their unique circumstances and intersecting identities. The results of our analysis presented in the scoping review suggest that there has been inadequate examination in the existing literature of the complexities of race and disability in employment supports and VR. The topic has been almost completely ignored in Canada, and in the US there has been little attention to the experiences of stakeholders involved in VR services.

In the third chapter I explored the experiences of racialized disabled job seekers and workers, service providers, and employers while navigating the Canadian employment support systems and how multiple intersecting identities impact accessing services and employment

outcomes. The analysis suggests that job seekers and workers who have various intersecting identities face multiple barriers in navigating employer relationships, the Canadian workplace culture, and client-service provider relationships while using employment support services. Specifically, assumptions about racialized disabled workers and the impact of whiteness in employment support environments are highlighted and discussed. The analysis suggested that whiteness in employment supports can create significant barriers for racialized disabled job seekers and workers due to the lack of representation amongst service providers. This lack of representation can lead to a cultural disconnect and a lack of trust, as racialized disabled individuals may feel that service providers do not understand or adequately address their unique experiences and needs. Such environments may also result in the inadequate provision of tailored support, which is crucial for effectively assisting racialized disabled job seekers in navigating the labor market.

Service providers in Chapter 3 noted a challenge when racialized disabled job seekers are unable to conform with the expectations of the Canadian workplace culture such as punctuality. Racialized disabled workers can feel excluded for not fitting in according to White, able-bodied standards, creating difficulties to advocate for their needs and rights (Intungane et al., 2024).). A qualitative study by Intungane and colleagues (2024) explored the integration experiences of racialized immigrants in the Canadian workplace and reported that service providers identified the normalization of whiteness and the association of Canadian identity with a White, European (ancestry), English-speaking, Christian, capitalist identity with individualist orientations. Additionally, some respondents noted that a general barrier for newcomers was their lack of knowledge of cultural norms for Canadian workplaces (Intungane et al., 2024). Together, their results and our analysis from Chapter 3, demonstrate that despite implementing

various policies and recommendations provided, the labor market integration of racialized Canadians has not significantly improved (Intungane et al., 2024).

Levine and colleagues (2022) identified similar experiences and noted that the field of employment support counselling remains predominately White. A lack of diversity amongst service providers can affect the quality of services provided to clients from diverse backgrounds and further impacts their employment outcomes (Levine et al., 2022). Building on Levine and colleagues, the results of the analysis presented in chapter 3 highlights the value of client-service provider relationships within employment support services and stresses the importance of the complex, interactive nature of providing and receiving employment supports. Together, the literature and the results of our analysis suggest that there is a need to recruit service providers with diverse backgrounds and build capacity for addressing intersectional needs within the employment support system.

Extending the Literature

Researchers who have examined the impact of double discrimination of race and disability have identified that there is a need for more in-depth research that explicitly focuses on identifying how race and disability intersect in workplaces (Fuentes et al., 2023). The process through which employment supports are provided and implemented remains relatively unknown. However, this thesis adds to the limited literature by providing insight on the experience-based process of using employment supports and how these experiences can be impacted due to the interplay of race and disability. The results from the thesis highlight that Canadian employment support service providers need to adopt more innovative strategies to support and retain racialized disabled job seekers and workers. Strategies and supports can include, developing programs that specifically tailor to the intersectional needs of racialized disabled job seekers and

workers through diversifying the staff, enhancing cultural competency training, creating one-on-one mentorship support, and offering further services and supports to accommodate those who need the extra assistance (e.g., therapy, financial support, childcare).

Collecting race-based data is a contentious issue and has not been regularly done in Canada (Menezes et al., 2022). There is a need for further research to explore perceived racism and discriminatory practices. However, the biggest challenge in collecting race-based data is how to collect discrete and quantifiable data about a variable that is neither quantifiable nor discrete (Rossiter & Ndekezi, 2021). The ongoing debate on the merits and drawbacks of gathering race-based data has gained momentum as Canada's population diversifies and racialized communities worldwide emphasize the importance of measurable information (Rossiter & Ndekezi, 2021). Historically, data has been used as a tool to validate colonization through power mining of information from registries, census, and other official documents to endorse discriminatory policies and perpetuate marginalization (The First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2019). For example, throughout Canada's political history, the exploitation of race-based data has further reinforced oppression and framed racialized communities though stereotypes and deficit-based narratives (Rossiter & Ndekezi, 2021). This includes past attempts to eradicate Indigenous values and traditions by collecting race-based data to categorize Indigenous persons and enforce assimilation policies (The First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2019). Movements such as Black Lives Matter have put forward several calls to action for justice and systemic change based on race-based evidence outlining the economic inequalities amongst Black and White Canadians (Government of Canada, 2024-b). In the recent past, Black Canadians have experienced higher unemployment rates than non-racialized Canadians, an inequity that was further exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Due to past misconducts, researchers face a hesitancy to perform race-based research, which has led to a lack of data on the impact of race in Canadian society (Datta et al., 2021). The research conducted as part of this thesis highlights this gap in Canadian literature and provides insight into the intersectional experiences of disabled and racialized persons in the context of employment supports. This model of exploration has highlighted the complex employment support process and incidents of hidden racism and ableism faced by job seekers.

Existing literature about employment experiences of racialized disabled job seekers and workers is mostly focused on survey samples, administrative data, and quantifiable VR program outcomes (Yin et al., 2022) leading to simplistic data interpretations. There is limited qualitative research focused on the experiences of offering employment support practices from the perspectives of service providers, and employers (Fuentes et al., 2023). There is also a limited body of research exploring lived experiences of attaining work through employment supports or in relation to vocational success through the lens of racialized disabled job seekers and workers (Fernando et al., 2022). Through qualitative approaches, this thesis provides novel information on the potential challenges and barriers faced by Canadian service providers, employers and racialized disabled job seekers and workers. The work in this thesis provides foundational groundwork to identify factors that are helpful or require more attention in successfully supporting racialized disabled job seekers and workers in gaining and retaining sustainable employment through experience-based data.

Our results build off the recent work by Fuentes and colleagues (2023) examining research on the labour market and workplace experiences of racialized disabled workers. In their literature review, Fuentes and colleagues (2023) highlighted the unique challenges arising from the intersection of ableism and racism. They identified issues such as individual stereotyping and

institutional-level discrimination. They reported impacts on labour market outcomes, negative effects on well-being and professional development (Fuentes et al., 2023). Their review concluded that there is an urgent need for more in-depth research explicitly focused on identifying and understanding how disability and race intersect at workplaces in real-time. Fuentes and colleagues identified that existing research often examines disability and race as independent variables, missing the opportunity to understand how the intersection of these marginalized identities creates barriers to employment. (Fuentes et al., 2023). Future research recommendations include the importance of demographic variables and how they can create an intersectional effect on employment experiences and outcomes (Fuentes et al., 2023). However, it is worth noting that this review is relatively novice in reporting the intersection of race and disability in employment, indicating that this area of research is still in its early stages and requires further in-depth exploration. Our research extends Fuentes and colleagues existing findings about the intersection of disability and race by providing insights into how racialized disabled job seekers and workers experience current employment support systems. Consistent with the analysis done by Fuentes and colleagues, the results of our qualitative study noted that employers and various service providers need to be conscious of the social and contextual barriers that impact the process of supporting racialized disabled job seekers and workers and the existing workplace barriers (Fuentes et al., 2023). This thesis demonstrated that employment supports require flexibility, dedication, cultural awareness, and effective communication. Employers and service providers can take the next step to incorporate these components into their hiring and support practices to drive diversity forward within workplaces.

Identifying Conflicts and Tensions

Existing literature suggests that the employment support process for racialized disabled job seekers and workers should happen through a flexible alliance between the job seeker/worker, service provider and employer (Balser, 2007; Johnathan et al., 2022; Nicholas et al., 2015). However, current research suggests that in practice, providing and implementing employment supports is a difficult process tangled in power imbalances and lack of proper education and training (Shaewitz & Yin, 2021). In this thesis, I provide new insights into the specific gaps in education, training, and resources among service providers and employers that impact their ability to effectively support racialized disabled individuals in the workforce.As described by participants in Chapter 3, there can be underlying misconceptions and bias about the capacities of disabled persons present in large- and small-scale organizations and about whether they possess the skills and abilities to independently work and contribute effectively. Such ableist attitudes, compounded with a lack of racial and cultural awareness, create an overlapping effect and consequently affect hiring decisions (Delman and Adams, 2022; Greene, 2006). This thesis emphasizes the need to dismantle these misconceptions through an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI) approach (Booysen & Gill, 2020) in which service providers are equipped to address misconceptions held by employers and provide guidance about creating work environments supportive of diversity where racialized disabled job seeker and worker can feel a sense of belonging and can be empowered to achieve their full potential.

Another disconnect between the literature and the current experience of navigating employment supports suggested in Chapter 3, there are assumptions about the capacity of racialized disabled persons. Many participants described ableist and racist assumptions that have gone largely unchallenged The results of my analysis suggest significant unconscious bias

towards racialized disabled job seekers and workers and their potential at work. This perception

challenges social integration, which reinforces the constant cycle of judgment and missed

opportunities (Beatty et al., 2019). To break this cycle, stereotypes must be challenged, and

individuals should be considered for jobs based on their skills, qualifications, and past

contributions, rather than on preconceived notions.

Implications for Service Providers

This research highlights the need for service providers and employment support

professionals to recognize and address the compounding barriers associated with both race and

disability. Although providing support to racialized disabled job seekers and workers is a delicate

process because it requires a personalized and flexible approach, it is an important part of the

overall effort to diversify workplace environments. Colourblind racism often manifests as the

assertion that race does not matter or should not be acknowledged, and suggests that by ignoring

racial differences, equality can be achieved (Block, 2016). However, this ignorance denies or

downplays the existence and impact of systemic and institutional racism (Block, 2016). In the

context of this research, service providers reported that they often tried to conceal their client's

race and disability to create traction and likeability with the employer during the initial stages of

introductions, usually through email or resume exchanges. To fill the gaps as highlighted within

this research, service providers need to facilitate dialogue to address unconscious bias and

colourblind racism in service provisions. Dialogue between employers and service providers can

further prompt changes to training and quality of services to combat this intrinsic form of racism.

Efforts to promote such dialogue can include creating community/region specific

conceptualizations and approaches to addressing the intersection of race and disability by

meeting the expressed needs and cultural norms of their clients. Initiatives such as the

Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program, offered by the Government of Canada (2023) are aimed at enhancing employment opportunities for Indigenous disabled persons by providing training and support tailored to their cultural contexts and community needs. Such programs can not only foster economic empowerment, but also respect and preserve cultural practices and values.

Diversifying employment support personnel can also add value and new insight in the service provision for racialized disabled job seekers. In their qualitative study, Vaingankar and colleagues (2021) sought to understand the roles of employment support specialists in assisting young people with mental health conditions. These authors identified that successful collaboration between employment support specialists and other community, or health professionals provided the groundwork for effective job placements. Adopting an integrative mode of support ensures that clients felt well-supported and were more likely to achieve long-term success in their employment (Vaingankar et al., 2021). Similarly, as pointed out by participants in Chapter 3, diversification of employment support professionals can include additional support personnel in the roles of occupational therapists, mental health therapists, social workers, and immigration advocates. By creating an interdisciplinary team within employment services, clients with multiple needs can access support and attain their goals in one stop, ensuring seamlessness and eliminating duplication (Vaingankar et al., 2021).

The results of my analysis presented in this thesis also highlights potential benefits and advantages of race concordance between service provider and client. Racialized service providers can bring in shared experiences and foster closer relationships with their clients (Johnathan et al., 2022). Acknowledging service provider dedication and empathy are essential components of a positive employment support experience (Balcazar and Taylor-Ritzeler, 2009)

however, as reported in the research presented in this thesis, for racialized disabled job seekers, service providers can oftentimes be overworked and lack the capacity to provide long-term individualized support to their clients. Building this capacity through skill development, allotment of resources, and increased funding in the sector are needed to create a supportive and sustainable service provider network long term. Tompa and colleagues (2022) suggest flexible funding models in which service providers are part of funding and policy decision-making processes, are unconstrained by funding arrangements that require they offer specific services and have the option to deploy funds to cover training supports or other expenses that better suit their client's specific situation.

Implications for Employers

Employers play a major role in the employment support process of racialized disabled job seekers and workers. Past research has indicated that negative employer attitudes and beliefs can contribute to barriers faced by disabled workers at work, and to the low levels of employment experienced by racialized disabled persons through myths about their capacity (Kaye et al., 2011; Gewurtz et al., 2016). Similarly, in Chapter 3, participants have stressed the importance of geography, and region-specific attitudes and opinions against racialized disabled job seekers and workers. The results of our qualitative analysis illuminate the intricate interplay between employer attitudes and societal perceptions, underscoring the need for targeted interventions and education to address these entrenched biases and create more inclusive oriented employers.

To combat these issues, increased efforts can be aimed at creating more sustainable employer supports. Traditionally, service providers have collaborated with employers in job placement efforts for their clients (McDonnall et al., 2013). However, recent research indicates that focusing on establishing long-term relationships between service providers and employers

can improve employer attitudes, knowledge, and their intent to hire (McDonnall & Antonelli, 2019). Through support and educational approaches, ongoing contact between service providers, workers, and employers can build inclusive hiring practices and work towards dismantling systemic stereotypes associated with racism and ableism.

Human Rights and an Intersectional Approach

The research presented in this thesis suggests that the employment support experience can be influenced by factors such as community stereotyping, employer attitudes, service provider capacities and cultural norms for racialized disabled job seekers and workers. To combat the intersection of race and disability, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (n.d.) has also introduced an intersectional approach to dismantling multiple grounds of discrimination. As a researcher, I acknowledge benefits of an intersectional analysis in addressing various forms of discrimination since this approach promotes examination of the complexity of racism and ableism and consideration of societal and historical background of individuals. An intersectional approach shifts the emphasis towards society's evolution of discrimination, which has become less overt and multilayered, manifesting as systemic, environmental, and institutionalized biases (Ontario Humans Right Commission, n.d.).

This thesis builds on the framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), and the social model of disability (Bingham et al., 2013) by positioning disability as resulting from disabling social forces that restrict opportunities for some job seekers (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). In essence, the social model of disability emphasises that the concern should shift away from what racialized disabled persons cannot do to what society can and should do to support diverse needs. In Canada, neoliberal views and attitudes have shaped the structure, funding, and delivery of employment support services in several significant ways (Madut, 2016). Regarding emphasis on

employability, the responsibility is placed on the individuals to acquire the skills necessary for the labour market and their self-reliance determines if they can succeed in obtaining sustainable employment (Madut, 2016). There is a reduction in direct support as well, in which racialized disabled job seekers and workers are not receiving enough subsidies for transportation, childcare, clothing, and shelter (Madut, 2016). The overarching expectation is that the individual will find ways to overcome systemic barriers through personal initiative without external support. Oftentimes, employment support programs can prioritize quick job placements over long-term career development, reflecting a market-oriented approach that values immediate results over sustainable employment (Madut, 2016). This neoliberal focus on efficiency and cost-cutting may not adequately address systemic barriers and may result in inadequate support for vulnerable populations such as racialized disabled job seekers and workers, who require more comprehensive and tailored services to combat the gaps in support and persistent employment disparities.

This thesis outlines some systemic barriers and social exclusions that racialized disabled job seekers and workers can encounter due to their intersectional identities and generated knowledge as to what others (e.g., service providers, employers, community members) can do to support their journey in achieving their right to sustainable employment, protect them against unethical treatment and foster diversity.

Future Research

This thesis provided a focused lens to understand the employment support systems, how they are implemented for racialized disabled job seekers and workers and how this entire process unfolds amongst the job seeker/worker, service provider, and employer. Additional mixed method research could provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of how

Canadian service providers operate through an analysis of employment outcomes among different groups receiving different services, while gaining experience-based data at a larger scale through observation and analysis of lived experiences through various forms of storytelling, including arts-based approaches. This kind of research would strengthen the reliability and validity of existing evidence (Wasti et al., 2022). Future research can also focus on co-creation methods through co-design and co-production to establish power-sharing and collaboration between service providers and service users, recognising the unique perspectives and valuable contributions that each can offer to enhance public services such as employment supports (Mulvale et al., 2024). The emphasis on co-creation can shift the paradigm about redesigning our social systems and change our relational practices in which all stakeholders (e.g., job seekers/workers, employers, service providers, advocates, community members, researchers) are actively involved in changing research, policy, and practice.

Strengths and Limitations

A limitation in this thesis was the challenge of determining what constitutes as "correct" terminology in terms of defining various racial groups. When searching the literature, various inconsistences were identified in how racial terminology is defined and applied within various papers. Language is dynamic and constantly evolving, especially in areas related to identity and diversity (Atayde et al., 2021). In context to this research, we used the guidelines as defined by the Canadian Institutes for Health Information (CIHR, 2022) to achieve the use of de-stigmatizing language that respects an individuals' dignity, autonomy, and worth. We realize and acknowledge that our efforts are not fully expansive or complete, but we recognize that addressing this limitation requires careful consideration of the complexities surrounding

language use, ongoing dialogue and collaboration with affected communities, and a commitment to promoting inclusivity, respect, and sensitivity in research practices and communication.

Another limitation was experienced during the recruitment efforts during the qualitative study. We struggled to recruit an adequate number of participants and due to the scope of this thesis, recruitment could not be prolonged to achieve desired sample sizes. In the end, 10 participants were included but our original sample size targets were 12-15 participants. This occurred because of ongoing difficulty in finding eligible participants, likely apprehension, or unwillingness to participate due to the heavy topics discussed, and challenges in approaching hard to reach participants such as employers and racialized disabled job seekers and workers. Each individual interview contributed rich and unique data that highlighted themes about the employment support process. Within our sample, we analyzed our data until no new information or theme emerged

Conclusion

This thesis contributes knowledge to the field of rehabilitation sciences and employment support services about the intersectional experiences of race and disability when using employment supports from the perspectives of racialized disabled job seekers and workers, service providers, and employers. Our scoping review and qualitative study highlight the need to increase awareness of the inflexible nature and lack of personalization in current employment support systems. Creating awareness step towards further understanding how employment support services can be improved, where the barriers and challenges are, and how they can be overcome. To successfully support and retain racialized disabled job seekers and workers, Canadian service providers and employers must be prepared to take corrective action and foster more progressive collaboration, and inclusivity to better orient our employment supports and

strategies. Such an approach will not only enhance individual outcomes but also contribute to building a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Scoping Review Search Strategy

<u>Scoping Review Protocol</u>

Research Question: What has been written about the experiences of racialized workers with disabilities receiving employment support services?

P = Population = Working age people with disabilities (all disability types; exclude adolescent, children and babies)
C = Context = Employment supports
C = Concept = Intersectionality

Sub Questions:
1. How do employment support service providers address or create barriers to employment for racialized workers/job seekers with disabilities?
2. How do intersectional identities impact work experiences?
3. What are the gaps in existing employment support services for racialized workers/job seekers with disabilities?
4. How has the experiences of racialized workers/job seekers with disabilities (stakeholders) been documented in the literature?
5. How do employment support services impact career opportunities for racialized workers/job seekers with disabilities?
6. What are the challenges faced by employment support providers in meeting the needs of racialized workers/job seekers with disabilities?

Key Words and Search Strategy:

Concept A (Disability)
1. Handicap*
2. Impairment*
3. Disab*

Concept B (Employment Supports)
1. (work* or employ* or job* or occupation* or labor or labour or business* or office* or corporation* or industr*)
2. (employment support* or employment support service* or employment service*)

Concept C (Race)
1. Race

2. Racialized
3. Black
4. East Asian
5. Indigenous
6. Latin American
7. Middle eastern
8. South Asian
9. Southeast Asian
10. White
11. Ethnic minorit*
12. Visible minorit*
13. People of colour
14. Person of colour

Databases: CINAHL, Web of Science, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts, Business Source Premier

Grey Literature: Top 10 pages of a Google search using the terms "disability", "race" and "employment supports"

Inclusion Criteria:
1. All types of disabilities
2. Working individuals - 16+
3. Both qualitative, quantitative & mixed method studies
4. Theoretical and conceptual papers
5. Scoping and systematic reviews
6. Peer-reviewed, dissertations, and grey literature
7. Paid competitive employment
8. International
9. Case reports
10. Must explicitly address employment supports
11. Must explicitly address race

Exclusion Criteria:
1. Opinion pieces, editorials, protocols, and commentaries
2. Conference abstracts
3. Children, adolescents, babies

Appendix B

Interview Guides

Interview Guide – Racialized Worker with Disabilities

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study. We are very interested in understanding your experiences of using employment supports throughout your employment journey as a racialized worker with disabilities. We have some questions, but these are meant to be starting points. Please feel free to expand on anything you think is important.

Prompt – review consent form and ask participant if they have any questions; ask participant to sign consent form and send a picture of signature page or obtain verbal consent.

Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself and how you started your employment journey. [PROMPT – Did you experience any challenges or barriers?]
2. What kind of employment services and supports have you accessed and or utilized?
3. I am interested in your experiences using employment supports.
    a. Do you feel the supports you received were adequate?
    b. Did you feel supported through the entire journey?
    c. What aspects of the employment supports were helpful?
    d. Did you benefit from the employment supports?
    e. Did you come across any challenges or barriers while using employment supports?
4. Were there any employment supports you needed but couldn't access? If so, can you tell me more and provide examples?
5. How did you interact with your employer and employment support provider worker?
6. How did employment support services influence your journey in finding and keeping work?
7. In what ways has your racial identity and/or disability impacted your experiences using employment supports?
    a. Are there any other factors that have played an important role in your employment journey? [PROMPT – gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, immigration status, age, etc.]
8. Do you have any thoughts or recommendations you could share about how to improve the current employment support systems in place?

Thank the participant again for their time and willingness to share their experiences and views.

Interview Guide – Employer

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study. We are very interested in understanding your experiences of using employment supports throughout your journey of hiring and retaining racialized workers with disabilities. We have some questions, but these are meant to be starting points. Please feel free to expand on anything you think is important.

Prompt – review consent form and ask participant if they have any questions; ask participant to sign consent form and send a picture of signature page or obtain verbal consent.

Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself and how you started your business journey?
2. What kind of employment services and supports have you accessed and or utilized to support your organization?
3. What was your reason to use employment supports?
4. I am interested in your experiences using employment supports for racialized people with disabilities.
   a. Do you feel the supports you received were adequate?
   b. How did employment supports help you find the staff you required?
   c. What aspects of the employment supports were helpful?
   d. Did you benefit from the employment supports?
   e. Did you come across any challenges or barriers while using employment supports?
   f. Did any of the employment supports you received address the complex needs of racialized candidates/workers with disabilities?
5. Could you speak on the workplace culture about hiring diversified job candidates?
6. Did you come across any difficulties trying to actively hire racialized workers with disabilities? Did you consider other types of identities (e.g. gender)?
7. Do you have any thoughts or recommendations you could share about how to improve the current employment support systems in place?

Thank the participant again for their time and willingness to share their experiences and views.

Interview Guide – Employment Support Service Provider

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study. We are very interested in understanding your experiences of implementing employment supports to help racialized workers with disabilities and employers. We have some questions, but these are meant to be starting points. Please feel free to expand on anything you think is important.

Prompt – review consent form and ask participant if they have any questions; ask participant to sign consent form and send a picture of signature page or obtain verbal consent.

Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself and how you started your journey as an employment support worker.
2. Can you walk through the types of employment supports that you offer.
    a. How do you support employers?
    b. How do you support racialized workers with disabilities?
3. I am interested in your experiences of implementing employment supports.
    a. What challenges and barriers do racialized job seekers/workers with disabilities face in the labour market?
    b. What supports and resources do employers need to hire and support racialized job seekers/workers with disabilities?
    c. Are the current employment supports adequate for racialized job seekers/workers with disabilities?
    d. Are the current employment supports accessible for racialized job seekers/workers with disabilities and employers seeking to hire and retain diverse candidates?
    e. What are some common concerns employers face?
    f. Are there any gaps in the current supports offered that could help diverse job candidates/workers, and employers seeking to hire them?
4. Do you have any thoughts or recommendations you could share about how to improve the current employment support systems in place for racialized job seekers/workers with disabilities as well as for employers hiring and retaining disabled and racialized workers?

Thank the participant again for their time and willingness to share their experiences and views.

Or there is anything else you want to share? (ask at the end)