

Research In Focus: A Weekly Digest of New Research from the NIDILRR Community

Hispanic Young Adults with Disabilities and Their Families May Face Challenges Transitioning from School to Work

A study funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR).

Many young adults with disabilities, like their peers without disabilities, wish to find jobs in their communities after graduating from high school. Under federal law, teens and young adults with disabilities are entitled to receive “transition services” from their schools and community agencies to help them and their families plan for employment. However, young adults with disabilities may not always receive needed services. In particular, Hispanic (Spanish-speaking) young adults with disabilities in the United States may encounter additional challenges during the transition from school to work. According to previous studies, Hispanic students with disabilities are more likely than their English-speaking peers to face discrimination at school, such as being bullied, suspended for minor infractions, or not being fully included in school activities. In addition, Hispanic families may have difficulty accessing transition services due to language or perceived citizenship-related barriers. In a recent NIDILRR-funded study, researchers asked Hispanic family caregivers of young adults with disabilities about their experiences working with schools and community agencies. They wanted to find out what challenges these caregivers encountered while supporting their relatives with disabilities to work toward employment goals. They also wanted to find out what strategies the caregivers used to overcome the challenges.

Researchers conducting a study of [Assessing Family Employment Awareness Training \(FEAT\)](#) interviewed 13 family caregivers (12 mothers and 1 aunt) of young adults aged 14-25 with various disabilities such as cerebral palsy, autism, intellectual disabilities, or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). All caregivers were first-generation immigrants to the United States who spoke Spanish as their native language. About half were single mothers, and many had household incomes at or below the federal poverty level.

The researchers interviewed the caregivers in Spanish at a location of their choice. During the interviews, the caregivers were asked about their employment goals for their young adult family members, as well as their interactions with schools, community agencies, and other support systems.

The researchers found that the caregivers generally expected their family members with disabilities to plan for employment after high school. However, the caregivers faced several challenges working with professionals from schools and community agencies. These included:

- Inadequate transition services: Many of the caregivers felt that their family members' school teams set low expectations or did not provide transition services, such as job exploration or work experience opportunities.
- Distrust and communication problems: Several of the caregivers felt that their family member's school staff did not communicate about potential behavioral issues or did not to give clear feedback about their family member's performance in school. Some of the caregivers worried that their family member was being abused or neglected at school resulting in a lack of trust in school staff. Others described feeling that their opinions were not valued by school staff; therefore, they did not share their opinions with these staff members.
- Language and citizenship challenges: Several of the caregivers said that they could not get copies of documents related to their family member's educational plan in Spanish or an interpreter at meetings when requested. As a result, they had difficulty reviewing educational plans or participating in meetings. These caregivers also described lacking access to information about community resources outside of school because this information was not available in Spanish. For the caregivers who were not U.S. citizens, many perceived that their family members were ineligible for transition services without becoming citizens. For the caregivers who did have U.S. citizenship, some said that community service providers questioned their citizenship status.

The caregivers also described strategies that they used to secure services for their family members with disabilities. These included:

- Building partnerships: Some of the caregivers reported finding community professionals who worked hard to demonstrate a commitment to serving their family. The caregivers worked to maintain a strong partnership with these professionals while working together to help their young adult family members meet their transition goals.
- Seeking family and community supports: The caregivers described getting support and information from other family members and people in their local communities, such as neighbors from similar cultural backgrounds.
- Setting high expectations: Despite challenges, the caregivers described the importance of maintaining high expectations for their young adult family members and empowering them to learn life skills and to be involved in their own transition planning. They also described the importance of adult role models with disabilities who were successfully employed.

The authors noted that, although all young adults with disabilities may face challenges getting transition services, Hispanic young adults and their families may encounter additional difficulties. Community organizations serving Hispanic families may wish to partner with schools and transition service agencies, such as vocational rehabilitation agencies, to educate them on matters relating to culture and language, and to educate

immigrant families about services available to them. The authors also suggest that community organizations can empower Hispanic parents of young adults with disabilities by inviting them to share their knowledge with other families. Finally, future research may be useful to better understand the experiences of other linguistic minorities as they navigate transition services.

To Learn More

The [Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research](#), which includes the NIDILRR-funded Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Learning and Working During the Transition to Adulthood, offers a collection of publications for young people with mental health conditions and their families who are transitioning from school to work or college. [Many of these publications are available in Spanish.](#)

The Center for Parent Information and Resources offers many resources for parents and young people in transition from school to work. Their article Transition to Adulthood is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

To Learn More About This Study

Francis, G. L. et al. (2018) [Hispanic caregiver experiences supporting positive postschool outcomes for young adults with disabilities](#). *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 56(5), 337-353. This article is available from the NARIC collection under Accession Number J79984.

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