# Empowering Individuals With Psychiatric Disabilities to Work: Results of a Randomized Trial

## Article Metadata

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| Authors | Russinova, Zlatka; Gidugu, Vasudha; Bloch, Philippe; Restrepo-Toro, Maria; Rogers, E. Sally |
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## Background

### Background Information  
  
#### Research Problem  
The research problem addressed in this study is the effectiveness of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment for individuals with severe mental illness who have a history of arrest or incarceration. While IPS has been established as an effective approach for helping people with severe mental illnesses attain competitive employment, its efficacy specifically for justice-involved individuals remains under-explored.  
  
#### Previous Research and Existing Knowledge Gaps  
Previous research has shown that the IPS model is beneficial for individuals with severe mental illness in achieving competitive employment. However, there is a gap in knowledge regarding whether this model is as effective for those who have been involved in the criminal justice system. Studies on employment interventions for people with severe mental illnesses have included counseling, case management services, training programs, and job clubs. Yet, these approaches have not specifically targeted individuals with justice involvement.  
  
#### Theoretical Framework or Model  
The study utilizes the IPS model of supported employment, which is an evidence-based practice designed to help people with severe mental illness achieve competitive employment. This model emphasizes individualized support, integration of vocational services with mental health treatment, and a focus on competitive employment rather than sheltered work.  
  
#### Significance and Rationale for the Study  
The significance of this study lies in its potential to address a critical gap in the literature: the efficacy of IPS for justice-involved individuals with severe mental illness. The rationale is that employment is crucial for community integration, reducing recidivism, and improving overall well-being. Justice involvement often exacerbates the challenges faced by people with severe mental illnesses, making it imperative to identify effective interventions tailored to their needs. By examining whether IPS can be as beneficial for this population, the study aims to inform better practices in supporting justice-involved individuals with severe mental illness, ultimately promoting recovery and community integration.

## Methods

### Methodology Summary  
  
#### Study Design  
The study employed a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design to compare the effectiveness of two interventions: Individual Placement and Support (IPS) and Work Choice, a job club approach with peer support.  
  
#### Population and Sampling  
The population consisted of 85 participants with severe mental illness who had been involved in the criminal justice system. Demographic details included significant justice involvement, such as arrests or incarceration. Participants were recruited from Thresholds, a large psychiatric rehabilitation agency in Chicago, through clinician referrals.  
  
#### Intervention Description  
- \*\*IPS Group\*\*: This intervention followed the eight principles of IPS, including eligibility based on consumer choice, focus on competitive employment, integration of mental health and employment services, attention to client preferences, work incentives planning, rapid job search, systematic job development, and individualized job supports.  
- \*\*Work Choice Group (Control)\*\*: Participants in this group received a job club approach with peer support.  
  
#### Duration and Implementation  
The study followed participants for one year after randomization. Both groups were eligible to receive the same mental health and residential services, ensuring that differences in outcomes could be attributed to the interventions rather than other factors.  
  
#### Control or Comparison Groups  
The comparison group received Work Choice, a job club approach with peer support, which served as the control condition against which the effectiveness of IPS was measured.  
  
#### Outcome Measures  
- \*\*Primary Outcome\*\*: Competitive employment.  
- \*\*Secondary Outcomes\*\*: Rates of hospitalization and justice involvement (arrests and incarceration).  
  
#### Data Collection Procedures  
Data were collected through baseline interviews and follow-up assessments. Participants were followed for one year, with outcomes assessed at the end of this period.  
  
#### Statistical Analysis Methods  
The study used statistical tests to compare the proportions of participants who obtained competitive employment between the IPS and Work Choice groups. Significant differences were identified using p-values (e.g., p < .01).  
  
### Summary  
This RCT examined whether the IPS model, an evidence-based practice for helping people with severe mental illness attain competitive employment, was effective for individuals with justice involvement. The study found that a greater proportion of participants in the IPS group obtained competitive employment compared to the Work Choice group (31% versus 7%). However, there were no significant differences in rates of hospitalization or justice involvement between the groups. These findings suggest that while IPS is effective for this population, augmentations may be needed to enhance its impact further.

## Results

### Summary of Key Results  
  
#### Primary Outcome Results  
The study compared the effectiveness of Individual Placement and Support (IPS) with a job club approach (Work Choice) in helping individuals with severe mental illness and justice involvement gain employment.  
  
- \*\*Employment Rates\*\*: Over the 12-month period, 31% of IPS participants obtained competitive jobs compared to only 7% of Work Choice participants. This difference was statistically significant (χ² = 7.99, df=1, p < .01).  
- \*\*Job Retention\*\*: The mean days of competitive employment were significantly higher for IPS participants (40.5 ± 69.9) compared to Work Choice participants (15.9 ± 65.7). This difference was also statistically significant (Mann-Whitney U test = 2.67, p < .01).  
  
#### Secondary Outcome Results  
Secondary outcomes included mental health improvements and quality of life measures.  
  
- \*\*Mental Health Improvements\*\*: There were no significant differences between the groups in terms of self-reported recovery or hospitalization rates.  
- \*\*Quality of Life\*\*: Neither group showed changes from baseline to follow-up on the Recovery Assessment Scale, indicating no improvement in self-reported recovery.  
  
#### Subgroup Analyses  
The study did not conduct formal subgroup analyses but noted that justice-involved clients generally achieved modest employment outcomes regardless of the services offered. This suggests that specific barriers and challenges faced by justice-involved individuals may need to be addressed more comprehensively.  
  
#### Statistical Significance and Effect Sizes  
- \*\*Employment Rates\*\*: The χ² test indicated a significant difference in competitive job acquisition between IPS and Work Choice participants (χ² = 7.99, df=1, p < .01).  
- \*\*Days of Employment\*\*: The Mann-Whitney U test showed a significant difference in mean days of employment (U test = 2.67, p < .01).  
  
#### Unexpected or Negative Findings  
- \*\*Barriers to Engagement\*\*: Many participants faced barriers such as lack of engagement with services, substance abuse issues, and medical problems.  
- \*\*Lack of Protective Effect on Justice Involvement\*\*: IPS did not show a protective effect against justice involvement or hospitalization, consistent with prior research.  
  
#### Interpretation  
The results indicate that IPS is more effective than Work Choice for helping individuals with severe mental illness and justice involvement gain employment. However, the overall competitive employment rates and total days employed were lower than in previous IPS studies. This suggests that justice-involved clients may require additional support to overcome specific barriers to employment.  
  
#### Study Limitations  
The study had a small sample size and short follow-up period, which limited the ability to stratify the sample for justice involvement characteristics. Additionally, recruiting clients who did not spontaneously express interest in employment prior to study invitation may have contributed to engagement issues.  
  
#### Future Directions  
Future research should focus on augmenting IPS with motivational strategies and specialized training for justice-involved clients. Developing IPS teams with expertise in serving this population could enhance integration with treatment teams and improve employment outcomes.  
  
In conclusion, while IPS shows promise for individuals with severe mental illness and justice involvement, further refinements are needed to achieve optimal results.

## Discussion

### Summary of the Discussion Section  
  
#### Authors' Interpretation of Main Findings  
The authors conclude that Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is more effective than a job club approach with peer support in helping people with severe mental illness and justice involvement gain employment. However, they note that the competitive employment rate and total days employed were lower than expected based on prior IPS studies. This suggests that justice-involved clients generally achieve modest employment outcomes regardless of the type of employment services offered.  
  
#### Relation to Previous Research  
The findings align with previous research indicating that IPS is effective for individuals with severe mental illness but less so for those with justice involvement. The study also confirms earlier findings that IPS does not have a protective effect on reducing justice involvement or hospitalization and does not improve self-reported recovery over time, consistent with prior studies.  
  
#### Implications for Practice or Policy  
For practice, the results suggest that IPS may need augmentation to achieve optimal outcomes for justice-involved clients. Motivational strategies and specialized training for employment staff are recommended. Developing IPS teams with expertise in serving justice-involved clients could improve engagement and coordination with treatment teams. Policies should consider these augmentations to better support this population.  
  
#### Limitations of the Study  
The study had a small sample size, short follow-up period, and heterogeneous sample regarding justice involvement. The recruitment process may have contributed to the lack of engagement, as other studies have found. Additionally, the geographic spread of participants hindered integration between IPS and treatment teams.  
  
#### Suggestions for Future Research  
Future research should focus on augmenting IPS to better address barriers faced by justice-involved clients. This could include ongoing training and technical assistance for both IPS and treatment teams, as well as developing specialized IPS teams with expertise in serving justice-involved clients. Longer follow-up periods and larger sample sizes are also recommended to better understand the long-term effects of employment interventions for this population.  
  
In summary, while IPS shows promise for justice-involved individuals with severe mental illness, significant challenges remain. Future research and practice should focus on overcoming these barriers to achieve better employment outcomes.

## Conclusions

The study by Bond et al. (2014) concludes that the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment is effective for people with severe mental illness who have a history of justice involvement, helping them achieve competitive employment at higher rates than a comparison group (31% vs. 7%). However, the outcomes were modest compared to prior IPS studies, suggesting that augmentations to the standard IPS model may be necessary for this population.  
  
The authors recommend implementing the IPS model for justice-involved individuals with severe mental illness but also suggest exploring additional supports and services to enhance employment outcomes further. The significance of these findings lies in demonstrating the potential of supported employment interventions for a marginalized group, highlighting the need for tailored approaches to improve community integration and reduce recidivism.  
  
The study underscores the importance of employment as a pathway to community reintegration and recovery, emphasizing the need for evidence-based practices like IPS. However, it also points out the challenges faced by justice-involved individuals with severe mental illness, advocating for more targeted interventions to address their unique barriers to employment.

## Critical Synthesis

### Critical Synthesis  
  
#### Study Quality  
The study by Bond et al. on supported employment for people with severe mental illness and justice involvement exhibits several methodological strengths and weaknesses.  
  
\*\*Strengths:\*\*  
1. \*\*Randomized Controlled Trial Design:\*\* The use of a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design enhances the internal validity of the findings, allowing for stronger causal inferences.  
2. \*\*Fidelity Assessments:\*\* Regular fidelity reviews ensure that the IPS model was implemented as intended, adding credibility to the results.  
3. \*\*Comprehensive Data Collection:\*\* Detailed data on participant characteristics and outcomes provide a robust basis for analysis.  
  
\*\*Weaknesses:\*\*  
1. \*\*Small Sample Size:\*\* The sample size of 85 participants is relatively small, which can limit the generalizability of findings.  
2. \*\*Limited Follow-Up Period:\*\* A one-year follow-up period may not be sufficient to capture long-term effects or sustainability of employment outcomes.  
  
#### Significance to the Field  
This study is significant because it addresses a critical gap in the literature: the effectiveness of supported employment interventions for individuals with severe mental illness who have justice involvement. The findings demonstrate that the IPS model can be effective even for this challenging population, which has implications for policy and practice.  
  
#### Comparison to Other Approaches  
Compared to other approaches such as counseling, case management, training programs, and job clubs, the IPS model shows superior results in terms of competitive employment outcomes. However, the modest outcomes compared to prior IPS studies suggest that augmentations may be necessary to achieve better results for justice-involved individuals.  
  
#### Practical Implications  
For employment support services:  
1. \*\*Adoption of Evidence-Based Practices:\*\* The study supports the adoption and implementation of evidence-based practices like IPS.  
2. \*\*Tailored Interventions:\*\* Given the modest outcomes, there is a need for tailored interventions that address specific barriers faced by justice-involved individuals, such as substance abuse and criminal justice system issues.  
  
#### Generalizability  
The findings may not be fully generalizable to different populations or settings due to:  
1. \*\*Sample Characteristics:\*\* The study population consists of individuals with severe mental illness and justice involvement, which is a specific subgroup.  
2. \*\*Geographic and Cultural Factors:\*\* Results may vary based on geographic location, cultural context, and availability of resources.  
  
In conclusion, while the IPS model shows promise for justice-involved individuals with severe mental illness, future research should focus on larger samples, longer follow-up periods, and tailored interventions to address specific barriers faced by this population.