# The impact of co-location employment partnerships within the Australian mental health service and policy context: A systematic review

## Article Metadata

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Field | Value |
| Article ID | 2 |
| Filename | A meta\_regression of the impact of policy on the efficacy of individual placement and support.pdf |
| Processing Date | 2025-03-17 11:59:06 |
| Authors | Mallick, Sue; Islam, Md Shahidul |
| DOI | 10.1111/inm.13007 |

## Background

### Background Information  
  
#### Research Problem  
The research problem addressed in this study is the efficacy and generalizability of Individual Placement and Support (IPS) as a vocational rehabilitation intervention for individuals with severe mental illness. While IPS has shown promising results in improving competitive employment outcomes, there are concerns about its applicability across different countries due to varying socio-economic and policy contexts.  
  
#### Previous Research and Existing Knowledge Gaps  
Previous research has established that IPS is more effective than traditional vocational rehabilitation methods in achieving competitive employment for individuals with severe mental illness. However, this evidence primarily comes from a limited number of countries, raising questions about its generalizability. There are knowledge gaps regarding how contextual factors such as legal protections, disability benefits, and economic indicators influence the efficacy of IPS in different settings.  
  
#### Theoretical Framework or Model  
The study does not explicitly mention a specific theoretical framework but relies on meta-regression analysis to examine the impact of country-specific contextual data obtained from organizations like the OECD and World Bank. This approach allows for the inclusion of variables such as legal protections, disability benefits, and economic indicators to understand their moderating effects on IPS efficacy.  
  
#### Significance and Rationale  
The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policy decisions regarding the implementation of IPS in various countries. By examining whether contextual factors influence IPS outcomes, the study aims to address delays in IPS implementation and requests for country-specific randomized controlled trials (RCTs). The rationale is to provide robust evidence that can support the generalization of IPS efficacy across different socio-economic and policy contexts, thereby facilitating wider adoption and adaptation of this effective intervention.

## Methods

### Methodology Summary  
  
#### Study Design  
The study employs a meta-regression approach to examine the efficacy of Individual Placement and Support (IPS) across different countries. The systematic review identified 27 randomized controlled trials (RCTs), which were then analyzed using meta-analysis techniques. This design allows for a robust comparison of outcomes across diverse settings.  
  
#### Population and Sampling  
The population consists of individuals with severe mental illness (SMI). Demographic details include participants from various countries, primarily focusing on those with different welfare systems and employment regulations. The studies included individuals with varying levels of severity in mental illness, disability benefits, criminal convictions, and comorbid drug and alcohol problems.  
  
#### Intervention Description  
IPS is a supported employment program designed to help individuals with severe mental disorders achieve competitive employment. The intervention typically involves:  
- \*\*Type\*\*: Supported employment model.  
- \*\*Duration\*\*: Ongoing support as needed.  
- \*\*Components\*\*:  
 - Job development and placement services.  
 - Individualized job matching based on client preferences and skills.  
 - Continuous support from an IPS specialist.  
 - Integration with mental health treatment.  
- \*\*Implementation\*\*: The intervention is implemented by specialized employment staff who work closely with participants to find suitable jobs and provide ongoing support.  
  
#### Control or Comparison Groups  
The control groups in the studies varied but generally included:  
- Traditional vocational rehabilitation services.  
- Treatment as usual, which may include standard mental health care without specific employment support.  
  
#### Outcome Measures  
- \*\*Primary\*\*: Employment rates, specifically competitive employment.  
- \*\*Secondary\*\*: Various contextual factors such as legal protection against dismissal, regulation of temporary employment, generosity of disability benefits, integration policies, GDP, unemployment rate, and employment rate for those with low education.  
  
#### Data Collection Procedures  
Data was collected from the 27 RCTs identified through a systematic search following PRISMA guidelines. Contextual data specific to each country and time period were obtained from sources like the OECD and World Bank.  
  
#### Statistical Analysis Methods  
- \*\*Meta-analysis\*\*: Overall efficacy of IPS was established using meta-analytic techniques.  
- \*\*Meta-regression\*\*: Random effects meta-regression was employed to analyze the generalizability of IPS efficacy between countries, incorporating country-specific contextual data.  
  
### Summary  
  
The study by Brinchmann et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis and meta-regression to assess the efficacy of Individual Placement and Support (IPS) for individuals with severe mental illness across different countries. Using 27 RCTs, the authors found that IPS significantly doubled employment rates compared to traditional vocational rehabilitation. The efficacy of IPS was marginally influenced by strong legal protection against dismissals but was not affected by other contextual factors such as unemployment rates or disability benefits. This robust evidence supports the generalization of IPS efficacy across diverse welfare and economic systems, suggesting that IPS can be an effective intervention for improving employment outcomes for people with severe mental disorders globally.

## Results

### Summary of Key Results  
  
#### Primary Outcome Results  
The primary outcome results indicate that Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is significantly more effective than traditional vocational rehabilitation in helping individuals with mental illness secure competitive employment. The relative risk (RR) for getting people into work through IPS compared to traditional methods is 2.07, which is statistically significant (p < 0.0001). This means that IPS is more than twice as effective in achieving this primary outcome.  
  
#### Secondary Outcome Results  
Secondary analyses did not find significant effects on mental health improvements or quality of life directly related to the employment outcomes. However, the study suggests that legal protections against employer dismissals may have a negative impact on job retention and stability for those who do secure jobs through IPS. Specifically, stricter regulations on 'hire and fire' flexibility were associated with reduced efficacy of IPS.  
  
#### Subgroup Analyses  
Subgroup analyses revealed that certain aspects of labor market regulations can influence the efficacy of IPS:  
- \*\*Notification Procedure\*\*: There was a significant moderating effect (log(RR) = -0.09, p = 0.029).  
- \*\*Definition of Justified or Unfair Dismissals\*\*: This also showed a significant moderating effect (log(RR) = -0.07, p = 0.04).  
  
#### Statistical Significance and Effect Sizes  
The overall effect size for IPS compared to traditional methods is substantial, with an RR of 2.07 (95% CI: 1.82-2.35). The study also found evidence of publication bias, which was corrected using Duval and Tweedie’s trim-and-fill method, reducing the adjusted summary effect size from RR = 2.07 to a slightly lower value.  
  
#### Unexpected or Negative Findings  
One unexpected finding is that while IPS is generally more effective in countries with less stringent employment regulations, it remains significantly more effective even in contexts with stricter protections. This suggests that while legal protections may reduce the relative efficacy of IPS, they do not negate its overall effectiveness compared to traditional methods.  
  
### Interpretation  
  
The study provides strong evidence supporting the generalization of IPS efficacy across different welfare and labor market systems. Despite variations in disability benefit rates, unemployment rates, and educational attainment, IPS remains a robust intervention for improving employment outcomes for individuals with mental illness. The findings suggest that while certain legal protections can reduce the relative effectiveness of IPS, it is still more effective than traditional methods in all contexts studied.  
  
The subgroup analyses highlight the importance of considering labor market regulations, particularly those related to employer flexibility in hiring and firing. This underscores the need for policy considerations when implementing IPS in different countries.  
  
Overall, this study supports the implementation of IPS across various welfare systems without the necessity for country-specific efficacy trials, given its consistent superiority over traditional vocational rehabilitation methods.

## Discussion

### Summary of Discussion Section  
  
#### 1. Authors' Interpretation of Main Findings  
The authors conclude that Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is more than twice as effective as traditional vocational rehabilitation in helping people with mental illness secure competitive employment. This efficacy remains consistent across various welfare systems, suggesting that IPS can be effectively implemented in different policy contexts. The study found no significant association between IPS efficacy and GDP growth, disability welfare benefit rate, unemployment rate, or educational attainment. However, specific legal protections against employer dismissals were identified as moderators that slightly reduce the effectiveness of IPS.  
  
#### 2. Relation to Previous Research  
The findings align with previous research indicating the superior efficacy of IPS over traditional methods. Unlike a prior meta-analysis that found an association between GDP growth and IPS efficacy, this study did not replicate this finding. The results also differ from recent meta-analyses regarding the impact of welfare policies on IPS effectiveness. The inclusion of additional trials and diverse populations (including those with moderate mental illness) provides a more comprehensive view.  
  
#### 3. Implications for Practice or Policy  
The results suggest that IPS can be effectively implemented across different welfare systems, reducing the need for country-specific efficacy trials. Policymakers can confidently implement IPS programs without significant adaptations based on local policies. However, practitioners should be aware of potential challenges posed by strict employment regulations, particularly those protecting employees from dismissal.  
  
#### 4. Limitations of the Study  
The study acknowledges publication bias and the potential influence of Type I errors in secondary analyses. The lack of clear effect moderation was somewhat surprising but reassuring for implementation purposes. Additionally, the variation in outcome definitions across RCTs limits the generalizability of findings.  
  
#### 5. Suggestions for Future Research  
Future research should focus on understanding how different policy environments affect IPS efficacy more granularly. Investigating specific legal protections and their impact on job retention and stability could provide valuable insights. Additionally, exploring the effects of collective dismissal regulations and active welfare states would be beneficial. More studies are needed to confirm the findings related to notification procedures and definitions of dismissals.  
  
In summary, this systematic review and meta-analysis provide robust evidence supporting the generalizability of IPS efficacy across diverse welfare systems. While specific legal protections may slightly reduce its effectiveness, IPS remains a highly effective intervention for people with mental illness seeking competitive employment.

## Conclusions

### Summary of Authors' Conclusions  
  
\*\*Main Takeaway Messages:\*\*  
The meta-analysis concludes that Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is highly effective in improving competitive employment outcomes for individuals with severe mental illness, significantly outperforming traditional vocational rehabilitation methods. The efficacy of IPS was found to be consistent across different countries, despite variations in contextual factors such as legal protections against dismissal, disability benefits, integration policies, GDP, unemployment rates, and educational attainment.  
  
\*\*Recommendations for Implementation:\*\*  
The findings strongly support the implementation of IPS programs globally. Policymakers should prioritize adopting IPS models based on their proven efficacy, regardless of country-specific differences in economic and social policies. This recommendation is particularly relevant given the consistent positive outcomes observed across diverse contexts.  
  
\*\*Significance of Findings for the Field:\*\*  
This study provides robust evidence that IPS can be generalized to various countries, addressing previous concerns about its applicability beyond a few specific regions. The results underscore the importance of policy decisions in mental health and employment, emphasizing the need for continued research and implementation efforts to support individuals with severe mental illness in achieving competitive employment.  
  
The authors' work is significant as it dispels doubts about IPS efficacy across different contexts, encouraging broader adoption and further research to refine and enhance these interventions.

## Critical Synthesis

### Critical Synthesis of the Article on Employment Interventions for People with Mental Health Disorders  
  
#### Assessment of Study Quality  
The study conducted by Brinchmann et al. is methodologically robust, employing a systematic review and meta-analysis approach to evaluate the efficacy of Individual Placement and Support (IPS) across different countries. The use of PRISMA guidelines ensures a rigorous selection process for identifying relevant randomized controlled trials (RCTs). The inclusion of 27 RCTs from 14 different countries provides a comprehensive dataset, enhancing the study's external validity. However, potential biases such as publication bias and the quality of individual studies are acknowledged. The authors' use of meta-regression to analyze contextual data from OECD and World Bank datasets adds depth to the analysis but also introduces complexity in interpreting results.  
  
#### Significance to the Field  
This study is highly significant for the field of employment interventions for people with mental health disorders. It provides strong evidence that IPS is more than twice as effective as traditional vocational rehabilitation in securing competitive employment for individuals with severe mental illness. The findings challenge previous concerns about the generalizability of IPS efficacy across different countries and welfare systems, making a compelling case for wider implementation.  
  
#### Comparison to Other Approaches  
Compared to other interventions, IPS stands out due to its consistent superiority in outcomes. Traditional vocational rehabilitation approaches often fail to match the employment rates achieved by IPS. The study's findings align with previous research highlighting the effectiveness of IPS but extend this by demonstrating its efficacy across diverse contexts.  
  
#### Practical Implications for Employment Support Services  
For practitioners and policymakers, this study underscores the importance of adopting IPS as a best-practice model. It suggests that despite variations in labor market regulations and welfare systems, IPS can be effective. However, it also highlights the need to adapt IPS to contexts with stringent employment protections, where employers might be more hesitant to hire individuals with mental health disorders.  
  
#### Generalizability of Findings  
The findings are largely generalizable, given the diverse sample of countries included in the meta-analysis. The efficacy of IPS is shown to be robust across different economic and welfare systems, which is reassuring for policymakers seeking to implement similar programs globally. However, specific adaptations may be necessary based on local labor market conditions and regulations.  
  
In conclusion, Brinchmann et al.'s study provides a strong foundation for advocating IPS as a gold standard in employment interventions for people with mental health disorders. Its rigorous methodology and comprehensive analysis make it a valuable contribution to the field, despite acknowledging potential biases and the need for context-specific adaptations.