

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



“Focusing on youth with physical disabilities is important because they arguably have different needs regarding developmental tasks, social development, and role functioning” (p. 2).

A 12-Week Electronic Mentoring Employment Preparation Intervention for Youth With Physical Disabilities: Pilot Feasibility Randomized Controlled Trial

1. What is the research about?

Youth living with disabilities have more difficulty finding jobs than their peers with no disabilities. Existing employment training programs often do not support the needs of youth with disabilities; in fact, youth living with physical disabilities often receive less attention than youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Mentoring is linked to positive outcomes for youth, including increased employability skills, social skills, and self-esteem. Since youth with physical disabilities may face challenges meeting with mentors in-person, e-mentoring can be a very helpful source of support in preparing these youth for employment. Empowering Youth Towards Employment is an e-mentoring program that was designed to support employment preparation for youth living with physical disabilities. The purpose of this study was to determine the impacts of this program on **self-determination, career development, and social support**.

2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place online, but ethics approval was organized by a pediatric hospital in Toronto and the University of Toronto. Youth were not recruited from a particular geographic area.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about youth living with physical disabilities, aged 15-25. This age range was chosen because youth with physical disabilities often begin careers later in life than their peers.

4. How was the research done?

The effectiveness of the 12-week Empowering Youth Towards Employment intervention was measured using a **randomized controlled trial**. Twenty youth were recruited using online advertisements and referrals from a pediatric hospital and disability organizations. The researchers randomly assigned participants into two groups: an intervention group, in which youth received support from mentors, and a control group, in which no support was provided.

Both groups participated in the web-based employment support program by interacting on an online discussion board.

In the intervention group, participants engaged with two peer mentors who had a physical disability and employment experience. The mentors were supportive and had positive attitudes toward the participants. They were available to support the participants online and facilitate discussions in real-time. During the program, the intervention group received emotional, informational, and social support from the mentors.

In the control group, there was no mentor; instead, the researchers posted weekly discussion topics (e.g., managing disability at work, finding a job, social networking, community resources, etc.). Unlike in the intervention group, in which participants received help from the mentors through supportive and positive replies and comments, participants in the control group could only interact with each other.

The researchers conducted a pre-and post-survey to measure participants' self-determination, career maturity, and social support. The post-survey also included a set of open-ended questions that asked the youth to provide feedback about the program. Although 20 participants were engaged in the program, only 13 completed both surveys (9 in the intervention group and 4 in the control group).

The researchers also recorded their observations as field notes during the study. Two researchers independently reviewed the data and compared results.

5. What are the key findings?

Youth in the intervention group experienced **greater improvements in self-determination**. Since self-determination is an important skill in employment, this was a significant outcome of e-mentorship support.

Although there was no difference in career maturity and social support between the intervention group and the control group, participants from both groups agreed that **peer mentors are needed and helpful**. The researchers suggest that these findings may be a result of the study's small sample size, as well as participants' stage in the career development process and their access to high levels of social support.

Participants found the e-mentoring program helpful for finding resources since they faced several barriers in accessing employment training programs, such as mobility barriers and cost. Receiving feedback from mentors was also supportive for participants.

However, the program had lower engagement levels than expected, as the participants had busy school schedules. As time went on, the researchers recorded lower engagement rates, suggesting that even e-mentoring programs may have challenges with engagement.

6. Why does it matter for youth work?

The effectiveness of the Empowering Youth Towards Employment intervention suggests that youth with physical disabilities need innovative and flexible support for employment preparation. This research indicates that youth with physical disabilities prefer **peer mentors** and that **e-mentoring and web-based employment preparation programs can be very helpful in providing connection, resources, and support**.

To improve the employment outcomes of youth with physical disabilities, organizations should offer more adequate employment supports, including mentorship and flexible education supports. **Youth workers can consider the unique needs of this population and explore innovative ways to use online tools and technology in providing mentorship opportunities**, especially when and where in-person mentoring is difficult or not possible. It is important to **seek feedback from youth living with disabilities** to identify the best ways to provide meaningful support.

The findings also suggest that similar interventions might be the most effective in the summer months when youth have more time to engage in such programs.



Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Leck, J., & Stinson, J. (2019). A 12-week electronic mentoring employment preparation intervention for youth with physical disabilities: Pilot feasibility randomized controlled trial. *JMIR Pediatrics and Parenting*, 2(1), e12088–e12088.