

TWENTY YEARS LATER: A FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF GRADUATES OF TWO SHELTERED WORKSHOP PROGRAMMES IN ISRAEL

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A follow-up study of 210 graduates of two sheltered workshops for persons with mental retardation was carried out in Israel in 1972 (Katz and Yekutieli, 1975). These two sheltered workshops were set up as model services and were pioneers in providing this type of service for persons with mental retardation. The first of these workshops was established in 1961 and its success and achievements subsequently provided the impetus for the development of a network of sheltered workshops in Israel. The second workshop which was established a number of years later, was also regarded as a model pioneer project because of the emphasis placed on training persons for placement in the open job market. Therefore, the purpose of both facilities in addition to providing sheltered employment, was to train and place persons with mental retardation who displayed potential for employment in the open job market. Broadly stated the goal of the two workshops was to provide these persons with the social and vocational skills necessary to achieve at least partial independence,

and whenever possible independent living status within the community. Two hundred and ten graduates were included in the sample for the follow-up study.

At the time of the first study in 1972 the mean age for male graduates was 21.6 with a range of 17-50 and the mean age for female graduates was 22 with a range of 17-36. The mean IQ level for female graduates was 58.2 with a range of 31-84, and 57.5 for male graduates with a range of 30-85. On completion of the first follow-up study, out of the original 210 graduates, 33 (18 males and 15 females) had been institutionalized in various institutions around the country. Sixty two graduates (4 females and 59 males) were found to be employed in the open job market mainly in unskilled occupations. Close to 50% of these graduates were earning wages that could allow them a certain amount of economic independence. However, all the graduates who were employed continued to live with their parents. Forty three graduates (33 males and 10 females) were living with

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their parents at home and were unemployed. An additional 31 graduates (18 males and 13 females) had been transferred to other sheltered workshops that had subsequently been set up. Four graduates (1 male and 3 females) were deceased, three could not be traced, and four refused to be interviewed (Katz and Yekutieli, 1975).

In addition to evaluating the graduates' vocational and social status, the study in 1972 attempted to determine what independent variables related to the graduates appeared to predict employment in the open job market. An Automatic Interaction Detector computer programme (Sonquist and Morgan, 1964) was used to ascertain which variables appeared to predict vocational adjustment. This analysis uncovered a complex interaction between independence, sex of the graduate and age in respect to being employed. A male over the age of 20, deemed independent was the most likely to be employed. Female graduates in spite of being independent and over the age of 20, were as a group less likely to be employed. This stemmed mainly from parental reluctance to allow them to find employment in the open job market, due to the parents' perception of a lack of appropriate community follow-up and supervisory services.

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the vocational and social status of these graduates 20 years after the first follow up in 1972. More specifically the present study looked at two dependent variables, current employment and independent living status of these persons. Furthermore, it attempted

to clarify what changes if any had occurred in their vocational and social status as a result of the aging process and if the predictor variables uncovered in the first study were relevant today.

Method

Sample

Potential subjects for the present study were 138 graduates that were living in the community at the time of the first study, either working in the open job market (62), or in sheltered employment (31), or were unemployed (43). Out of the original 138 graduates that were interviewed in the first follow-up only 54 (39%) graduates were located in the present study. They included 25 (40%) from the original working group, 21 (66%) from the sheltered workshop group and eight (16%) at home unemployed.

In the present study the current mean age for male graduates was 44.3 with a mean IQ level of 49. The mean age for female graduates was 43 with a mean IQ level of 52. All the graduates in the present study were living in the Gush Dan area of the country.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was prepared that related to the domain of the study. There were questions on current employment status, earnings, how long in the current job, prior jobs, and level of employment, unskilled or semi-skilled, and how they found the job. Additional questions were, present living accommodation, marital

status, if married number of children, were the parents still alive, if not who was the legal guardian, and the state of the graduates' health.

Procedure

The information on the current status of the graduates was mainly obtained from professionals working in social service agencies serving these graduates. This was necessary firstly, because of the legal restrictions of approaching the graduates and their parents directly without prior consent, and secondly because of the problems of finding the graduates, many of whom had subsequently changed their place of abode. Therefore it was decided in consultation with the director of services for the mentally retarded, which is the national agency responsible for services for this population, to obtain the information on the graduates' current vocational and social status from the local social service serving these graduates. In addition, these social services agencies generally have signed parental forms of consent to convey information to other agencies and professionals dealing with the graduates thus eliminating the legal restrictions to obtaining the information. Prior to sending the questionnaires to the social workers they were contacted by phone, the purpose of the study was explained and their assistance requested.

The names of the graduates who had lived in a specific geographical area during the original study were sent to the social workers in the social service agency that serves that area. If the

graduate was known to the professionals, they were requested to fill out a questionnaire on the graduates' current vocational and social status. In the event that the graduate was not receiving services, or had moved from the area, the social workers were requested to furnish information as to the graduates' current whereabouts if this knowledge was available to them. Generally, if the graduate had moved, was institutionalized, was deceased, or had been incarcerated this information would be documented in the graduates personal file.

If the social worker replied that a specific graduate had been institutionalized, was living in a group home, or in a shared apartment, the directors of the specific organisations were contacted by phone and their help requested. The questionnaires were then sent to them and a professional on the staff who was familiar with the graduate filled out the questionnaire.

Results

The current vocational status of the graduates as compared to what it was 20 years ago, is presented in TABLE I.

As can be seen from TABLE I, out of 25 graduates who were employed on the open job market 20 years ago, only 13 are currently employed in the open job market, five are employed in sheltered workshops, two are unemployed, and five have been institutionalized.

Among the sheltered employment group (graduates who were employed in sheltered workshops 20 years ago), there is a higher percentage of unemployment

TABLE I
Current Vocational Status as compared to Vocational Status in 1972

Vocational Status 1972	M	F	Total	Vocational Status 1992	M	F	Total
Employed Open Job Market N = 25	21	4	25	Employed Open Market	11	2	13
				Sheltered Employment	4	1	5
				Unemployed	1	1	2
				Institution	5	0	5
				TOTAL	21	4	25
Sheltered Employment N = 21	14	7	21	Employed Open Market	3	0	3
				Sheltered Employment	3	2	5
				Unemployed	6	3	9
				Institution	2	2	4
				TOTAL	14	7	21
Unemployed N = 8	3	5	8	Employed Open Market	0	1	1
				Sheltered Employment	0	1	1
				Unemployed	3	1	4
				Institution	0	2	2
				TOTAL	3	5	8
				TOTAL	38	16	54

today. While three graduates are currently employed in the open job market, and five graduates continued to work in sheltered workshops, nine graduates are currently unemployed and four are in institutions.

Out of the eight graduates who were unemployed 20 years ago four graduates are unemployed at present, one graduate is in a sheltered workshop, one graduate is a homemaker and two graduates have been institutionalized.

One of the variables that was uncovered in the first study as having predictive value for vocational adjustment was the sex of the person. Therefore, the current vocational status of the graduates was analysed by sex and the results are presented in TABLE II.

A comparison with the situation 20 years ago reveals a similar picture today.

In the first study a higher percentage of male graduates were employed in the open job market, while a higher percentage of female graduates were in sheltered employment or had been institutionalized. There was a similar percentage of unemployed male and female graduates.

In the current study a higher percentage of male graduates (37%) are employed in the open job market compared with female graduates (19%) whereas a higher percentage of female graduates are employed in sheltered work (25%), are unemployed (31%), or have been institutionalized (25%). The respective percentages for male graduates are 18.5% in sheltered employment, 26% unemployed, and 18.5% in institutions.

In summary, if we combine the graduates of the three groups the current

TABLE II
First and Second Follow-Up Status by Sex

	First Study				Current Study			
	1972				1992			
	M		F		M		F	
Status	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Employed in open market	59	46	3	7	14	37	3	19
Sheltered employed	18	14	13	32	7	18.5	4	25
Unemployed	33	26	10	24	10	26	5	31
Institution	18	14	15	37	7	18.5	4	25
	128	100%	41	100%	38	100%	16	100%

employment picture is as follows. Seventeen graduates are currently employed in the open market, 11 are in sheltered work, 15 are unemployed, and 11 have been institutionalized. Out of 48 graduates who were employed or in sheltered employment 20 years ago only 28 are currently employed or working in a sheltered setting. The present results indicate that finding suitable employment in the open job market appears to be more problematic for graduates today, with female graduates having proportionally less success than male graduates.

Length of Employment. The graduates in the employed group have been working on an average four years or more in the same position with a number having worked for 10 years and more and one having worked for 20 years. The graduates who are currently working appear to display relatively satisfactory work stability.

Current Earnings. The current mean wage of the employed group is IS 720 with a range of IS 400-1000. The sheltered employment group have a mean wage of IS 528 with a range of IS 400-700. Both these means are a little below the national

minimum wage but significantly lower than the national mean wage for all employed persons.

Type of Work. The graduates who are employed predominantly work in portage type occupations with a number in light mechanical work. These are generally unskilled jobs.

Social Status

Living Arrangements. In the first follow up study all the graduates in the employed group were living at home with their parents. In the current study, eleven graduates continue to live at home with their parents, five live in shared apartments, four live in their own home and five have been institutionalized. Close to 20% of the graduates in the original employed group currently live in institutions.

All the graduates in the sheltered employment group lived with their parents 20 years ago. In the current study 12 graduates are living with their parents at home, two are living in a shared apartment, one in a group home, two live in their own apartment and four have

been institutionalized. As was found in the employed group a high percentage of graduates from the original sheltered employment group (19%) have been institutionalized.

In the original unemployed group in 1972 all the graduates were also living with their parents. In the current study, five graduates continue to live with their parents, one female graduate in her own home, and two female graduates have been institutionalized.

If we analyze this data by sex the following picture emerged. Proportionally more male graduates (16%) are sharing apartments than female graduates (6%), more female graduates have been institutionalized (25%) as compared to male graduates (18.5%). A similar proportion of male and female graduates live in their own home or with their families.

In summary, out of a total sample of 54 graduates, 28 graduates (52%) are currently living at home, seven graduates (13%), are living in shared apartments, one graduate (2%) lives in a group home, seven (13%) live in their own home, and 11 (20%) have been institutionalized.

Marital Status. Two graduates are married, two are divorced and the rest are single. Only one of the married or divorced graduates has children. This graduate is a male and has four children who are reported to be functioning in the normal range of intelligence.

Health Status. The respondents were asked to rate the graduates health status, good, poorly or very poor. Only 23 graduates (43%) of the graduates were reported as being in good health, while 30 graduates (57%) were reported to be in poor or very poor health. Among the male graduates 17 (45%) were reported as having good health, while amongst the female graduates only six (38%) were reported as having good health. There appears to be a higher percentage of females than males with poor or very poor health.

An analysis was carried out to determine if there was a relationship between the graduates present health status and their current vocational status and the results are presented in TABLE III.

The majority of the graduates (59%) who were working in the open job

TABLE III
Current Status by Health Status

	Current Health Status						
	Good		Poor		Very Poor		N
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Employed in open market	11	0	2	2	0	0	15
Sheltered employed	3	2	3	0	2	2	12
Unemployed	3	2	1	0	7	2	15
Institution	0	2	1	1	4	3	11
	17	6	7	3	13	7	
TOTAL	23		10		20		53

market or in sheltered employment were reported as having good health. In contrast (73%) of the graduates who were unemployed or had been transferred to institutions were reported as having poor or very poor health. These results indicate that there appears to be a relationship between current employment status and health status.

Discussion

The purpose of the present follow-up study was to evaluate the current status of graduates with mental retardation of two sheltered workshops in Israel as compared to their status 20 years ago. What was the impact of time and advancing age on the vocational and social status of these persons?

The current employment status of the graduates is less optimistic when compared with the results from the first study. Only 17 of the graduates found are employed in the open job market today. Although approximately 11% of the work force in Israel are unemployed, among the graduates the figure is much higher, about 50%. Without a doubt the difficult employment situation in Israel has ramifications for persons with mental retardation as in time of full employment many more unskilled jobs were available to persons with mental retardation. However, today with the influx of many immigrants from the former USSR and Ethiopia and the availability of unskilled workers from the occupied territories, these positions are being filled by people who are prepared to accept jobs below their qualifications in order to put bread

on the table. As a result of this reality persons with mental retardation have to compete with these workers who are preferred by employers because of their relatively high level of functioning and productivity. Consequently, many of these unskilled jobs are no longer available to persons with mental retardation.

In addition, the results may reflect the changing employment scene where simple mechanical and factory type jobs are making way for more automotive work places. It is clear today that service type occupations related to leisure time activities and jobs in human services working with people are the trend for the future. These are the employment areas where unskilled jobs are available. In the past persons with moderate mental retardation were generally not prepared or trained for work in service type positions, like in restaurants or as aides for the elderly. The graduates who mainly received training in assembly type jobs in the sheltered workshops, may not have had the skills, or the motivation required to seek out and make the transition to service type jobs. Thus, their employment options may have been even more limited. However, those that were employed displayed relatively good vocational stability.

The relatively low number of employed found in the present study is not unique for Israel. Studies reviewed by Wehman *et al.* (1988) indicated an unemployment rate of between 42%-88% for graduates of special education programmes in the USA depending on their functional level. Persons with disabilities had unemployment rates of 5-10 times

more than non-handicapped persons. This was true regardless of the geographical location. Edgerton and Berco-
vici (1976) found in the first follow up of the subjects in the original study, (Edgerton, 1967) that after a few years more than half the original sample were out of work. In summing up the data from the follow up studies Hasazi *et al.* (1985) suggest that "adults with mental retardation present markedly depressed work histories, are paid less than their handicapped colleagues and typically are restricted to unskilled labour and service related occupations," (p.223).

As has been found in the general population where advanced age can be a barrier to employment, the results indicate a similar trend for persons with mental retardation. Sheltered employment has been advocated as a possible solution for unemployment among older persons with mental retardation. However, the relatively large number of graduates unemployed appears to indicate that the sheltered workshops were not the answer to all the vocational needs of the graduates. Sheltered work is not always an alternative to employment in the open market. Perhaps a new approach like supportive employment may be required to help these graduates find and keep employment in the open job market. The need for such a programme is further supported by the fact that the graduates after the initial placement, if they were laid off were not able to find work. This was compounded by the deterioration in the job market. There seems to be a consensus among professionals that persons with mental

retardation will not be able to obtain a real job without ongoing professional assistance (Wehman *et al.*, 1988). Supportive employment services may be required as long as the client is employed and in addition to being effective in helping persons with mental retardation find and keep a job, they have also been shown to be cost-effective (McCaughrin *et al.* 1993). This may be a reality that rehabilitation services will have to accept and take into consideration in future when planning services for persons with mental retardation.

Another possible reason for the high unemployment was the medical status of the person. As was described in the results section the majority (73%) of persons unemployed or in institutions were reported as having poor or very poor health. The poor health status of these graduates may be a by-product of the aging process. There is evidence to suggest that the aging process among persons with mental retardation may be faster than for persons without mental retardation (Edgerton *et al.* 1984). Poor health status is not conducive to stable employment and may have been a factor in these graduates' inability to find and keep a job. Included in poor health are severe emotional and physical problems, which also mitigate against obtaining and keeping employment. Whereas, when they were younger, age was a good predictor of vocation success, once they get older the additive effect of advancing age, health problems, coupled with general high unemployment, appear to be the main reason for not finding and keeping a job in the open market.

It appears that a fair percentage of persons with mental retardation functioning at the moderate level and placed in the community, encounter problems and have difficulty in adapting to living in the community. With time these graduates require a more supervised framework and the relatively large number of persons who were placed in institutions seems to provide support for the above. This may be related to the fact that older persons with mental retardation are more vulnerable to stressful life events, of which ill health is one (Edgerton *et al.*, 1984).

The high percentage of persons still living with their parents can be explained in two ways. The first is the lack of community services required to ensure independent living in the community. The establishment of such services is a recent phenomena in Israel and they tend to accept younger people as research has indicated that elderly persons with mental retardation fare less well in community residential facilities than do their younger counterparts (Seltzer *et al.*, 1982). In addition there are not sufficient facilities available because of the cost and difficulties of setting them up in Israel. Living independently in the community is a complicated problem for persons with mental retardation because affordable housing is difficult to find and is very expensive in urban areas. It is difficult for persons with low incomes, disabled and non-disabled alike, to afford the rent for an apartment without receiving a rent subsidy from social services or help from families. The establishment of these facilities has lagged behind the

demand and this fact in addition to the age of the graduates appears to have mitigated against their inclusion in such facilities. They have to compete with younger persons for these places.

A second possibility is that the graduates were generally functioning within the moderate range of persons with mental retardation. Thus, they may be dependent on others for social support and without a doubt the family remains the major source of social support. These graduates may need, as was described by Edgerton (1967) mentors or persons who can provide social support which is required to help them adjust and cope with the trials and tribulations of life. In some cases the graduates serve as companions for older parents or where one of the parents has perhaps passed on. As long as the parents are alive there is no need for alternative community living and services do not press for placement in the community because there are not many services available. Therefore, the relatively large number of graduates living at home may be a function of the need for social support, family constellation, and the lack of suitable independent living facilities.

In the first study the sex of the graduates was found to be a good predictor of vocational success with more male graduates finding employment in the open job market. The present results indicate that the sex of the graduates continues to have an impact on their vocational status. A higher percentage of female graduates are unemployed, are institutionalized and appear to have more health problems than male gradu-

ates. It is difficult to point to a specific reason for these findings but one possibility is that as in the first study, female graduates are perceived as being more vulnerable and therefore there is a more protective attitude towards them. Hence the tendency to place them in more restrictive environments. Similar gender differences were discovered in follow-up studies in the USA where the results indicated that females have adjusted less well to adult life than males in terms of employment (Hasazi *et al.*, 1985; Sitlington *et al.*, 1993).

The results of the present study and the conclusions that can be drawn are limited due to the fact that 60% of the sample could not be traced. No information was available as to the current vocational and social status of these missing graduates and all that is known is that they are no longer receiving services from the social agencies that provide these services. However, the results do indicate possible problems that are faced by older graduates in finding and maintaining employment and suitable independent living frameworks. Furthermore, the need for more specialized services like supportive employment and independent living facilities is demonstrated. The graduates in the present study with moderate mental retardation appear to require continuous follow-up and help if long term vocational and social adjustment in the community is to be achieved.

Summary

Graduates with moderate mental retardation from two sheltered workshops who were originally followed up in

1972, were followed up again 20 years later. The current vocational and social status of these persons was examined and compared to their status 20 years ago. Fifty four graduates from the original sample were located and the present results indicate that finding and keeping suitable employment appears to be more problematic for graduates today than 20 years ago. The majority of the graduates interviewed continue to live with their parents while 20% had been institutionalized. The impact of the aging process, and the sex of the graduates on their current status is discussed.

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