

enhancing employment outcomes for survivors of intimate partner violence: a developmental work personality perspective

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Rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) are high. Many survivors elect to leave abusive relationships and seek treatment to address the abusive cycle and psychiatric symptoms that may result. Programs to assist survivors often include an employment component. This article discusses the use of the Developmental Work Personality Scale (D. R. Strauser & J. Keim, 2002) in assessment and counseling, to assist survivors of IPV with obtaining successful employment outcomes.

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Survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) are often simultaneously pursuing employment while recovering from the violent situation. Exacerbating problems in their recovery, survivors of IPV who are seeking work may have limited educational backgrounds and may not have worked consistently because of their roles as homemakers or their difficulty maintaining employment when being repeatedly psychologically, physically, emotionally, economically, and/or sexually assaulted. Despite these obstacles, assisting survivors with obtaining employment in which they will be successful is critical in the clients' long-term personal, emotional, and financial independence. For these reasons, employment, career, and rehabilitation counseling and other human-service-oriented organizations aimed at assisting survivors of IPV often include an employment component in their programs.

Beyond education and skill requirements for jobs, employers increasingly examine contextual work behaviors (e.g., the ability to complete tasks, get along with coworkers, and learn from role models). These contextual role behaviors are usually acquired or learned during childhood and adolescence. However, in the case of survivors of IPV, the behaviors might not have been learned or might have been forgotten, depending on the duration and intensity of the violence (Keim, Malesky, & Strauser, 2003).

CONCEPTUALIZING EMPLOYMENT FOR SURVIVORS OF IPV

IPV is a worldwide concern. Global investigations extend to persons from North America, Central America, Russia, Europe, Australia, and beyond (Costello, Chung, & Carson, 2005; Horne, Keim, & Ake, 2000; Jeyaseelan et al., 2004; Katula & Simpson, 2006; McCloskey, Southwick, Fernandez-Esquer, & Locke, 1995). In the

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United States, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2001) has indicated that 45% of murdered girls and women (from 1993 to 1999) were killed by intimate partners. Rates of reported violence for girls and women are 15.6 per 1,000 for those ages 16 to 24 years (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001). However, most attacks go unreported. Actual violence rates in the general public are estimated between 12% and 22% for physical assault (Strong, DeVault, & Cohen, 2008).

Securing and maintaining employment can be problematic for persons who experience IPV (Villarreal, 2007), especially when psychiatric symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) negatively affect work performance. A survey conducted by National Organization on Disability/Louis Harris & Associates (2004) found that although persons with psychiatric disabilities are more educated today and have more protection from employment laws, those survivors of IPV who may also have psychiatric symptoms are not as protected as those who do not have psychiatric symptoms (Katula & Simpson, 2006). Although strides have been made to increase employee retention, less effort has focused on protecting employees in violent situations that often spread into the workplace (Katula & Simpson, 2006; Keim, 1999; Reece, 2006). According to Keyes and Keim (1996), measures to protect survivors of IPV must be initiated and followed through at their workplaces. Individuals with a history of IPV have a difficult time facing the challenges in today's competitive workforce that demand successful contextual work performance. Moreover, IPV that may come into the workforce complicates applying for, securing, and maintaining employment. Clinicians working with survivors of IPV, who seek employment, need to assess client situations that include current levels of personal and employment skills development.

Links have been shown between IPV and work productivity as well as with self-esteem, poverty, and social isolation (Rothman, Hathaway, Stidsen, & de Vries, 2007). Written workplace policies are essential for survivors of IPV so that they can feel some sense of safety and protection, that their productivity is not affected, and that their chances of voluntarily leaving or being terminated are lessened (Reece, 2006). Chronister and McWhirter (2006), in a self-efficacy study on social-cognitive career theory, found that completers of a four- to five-session program perceived support systems as a viable means for reaching their long-term career goals and for defining emotional, physical health, and skill-building goals. Albaugh and Nauta (2005) reported similar results from their program that required participants to focus on self-appraisal, goal selection, and problem solving. Other psychological constructs that require attention in counseling are psychosomatic complaints, rationalizing, avoidance behaviors, money management, shame, fear of reprisal, language barriers, decreased self-worth, isolation, confidence levels, self-blame, humiliation, denial, suicidality, depression, PTSD (and other anxiety disorders), eating disorders, gynecologic complications, substance abuse, sleep disturbances, guilt, and confusion (Dorahy, Lewis, & Wolfe, 2007; Gorde, Helfrich, & Finlayson, 2004; Katula & Simpson, 2006; McCloskey et al., 1995; Schewe, Riger, Howard, Staggs, & Mason, 2006).

More recently, Rothman et al. (2007) examined survivors of IPV and the effects of spillover into the workplace and identified six ways employment empowers women: finances, promotion of physical safety, increase in self-esteem, improving social connections, securing a place for mental respite, and motivation to find meaning and purpose in their lives. The six areas cited by Rothman et al. are helpful when assessing for safety and developing employment preparation strategies. Jeyaseelan

et al. (2004) reported that one avenue in which clients find meaning is through education, which in turn can affect employment and salary.

Researchers have found that the development of resiliency among survivors of IPV who exit abusive relationships was prevalent; in particular, the concern of physical safety for themselves and their children was a commonality. Swanberg and Logan (2005) stressed that counselors and case workers must also consider perpetrator actions—before work, during work, and after work—to ensure survivors' safety, progress throughout treatment, and success in the workplace. This type of thorough assessment and counseling helps survivors prepare for employment success by knowing how to avoid the common pitfalls of increased absenteeism (especially on Mondays), tardiness, frequent breaks during a shift, and lack of concentration (Katula & Simpson, 2006). Often overlooked, yet important to consider in counseling programs, is the level of community violence that has been linked as a contributor to IPV (McCloskey et al., 1995; Swanberg & Logan, 2005).

Counselors working with survivors of IPV often rely on clients' career interests and aptitudes on which to base their recommendations for employment. One aspect of employment that these factors fail to address is that of contextual skills (i.e., work personality). Work personality has been demonstrated to identify vocational and work-related behaviors that are critical in long-term success in work settings (Hershenson, 1996a, 1996b; Keim et al., 2003; Strauser, Ketz, & Keim, 2002; Strauser, Waldrop, & Ketz, 1999). The application of the Developmental Work Personality Model and Developmental Work Personality Scale (DWPS; Strauser & Keim, 2002) to survivors of IPV is theoretically based and a natural extension of prior applications to clients with mental health disorders, given the stress and frequent PTSD diagnosis among those who survive IPV (Keim et al., 2003).

DEVELOPMENTAL WORK PERSONALITY MODEL

The Developmental Work Personality Model integrates the work of Erikson, Bandura, and Neff (Strauser et al., 1999) and suggests application to career counseling and work transitions. Focusing on two areas, the model suggests *structure* for the development of work personality and the *process* by which it is developed. The structure provides the foundation for work personality development and identifies the issues that need to be resolved for the development of a healthy and well-developed work personality. The process addresses the mechanisms by which an individual's work personality is developed.

STRUCTURE FOUNDATIONS OF DEVELOPMENTAL WORK PERSONALITY

Erikson's (1959) theory of individual development proposed eight psychosocial stages. Industry Versus Inferiority, the fourth stage (occurring between age 6 years, corresponding with first grade, and puberty), is the point where individuals develop the basis for their work personality. Erikson suggested that during this critical stage, individuals gain knowledge and learn to complete tasks. They also learn to work with others, expand their interactions well beyond their family of origin, and complete tasks within groups (Erikson, 1959; Miller, 1993; Strauser & Keim, 2002). In relation to task orientation, individuals leave home and attend school; adapt to the classroom and school; learn to be on time; learn to wait for feedback and rewards; and learn to focus on tasks, be accountable, and, finally, to achieve (Neff, 1986). Behavior orientation during this stage occurs as the individual learns to get along with others

at school and accept feedback and direction from the school staff. Finally, the positive influence of role models during this stage provides the individual with an opportunity to observe adults and significant others engaging in effective contextual job behaviors.

When the three components of work personality (task orientation, behavior orientation, and influence of role models) are successfully resolved for individuals, they view themselves as industrious and as having secured the foundation for a well-developed work personality. As a result, they may exhibit behaviors that allow them to accomplish tasks and meet the emotional and contextual demands of their work environment, and they interact appropriately with those who supervise or teach them and find value in their accomplishments. Adolescents who fail to resolve these issues have an underdeveloped work personality and end up feeling inferior. Individuals with an underdeveloped work personality experience difficulties in working with others, sensing the importance of being on time, following directions or accepting supervision, and/or are lacking a sense of accomplishment in a job well done. Consequently, they tend to have employment problems because their lack of a strong developmental work personality results in contextual work behaviors that are not congruent with the current employment settings (see Figure 1).

PROCESS COMPONENTS RELATED TO DEVELOPMENTAL WORK PERSONALITY

Observational learning most accurately accounts for the development of work personality (Bandura, 1989). Miller (1993) and Neff (1986) pointed to the importance of life experiences in the development of personality, including work personality. Bandura described the importance of attention, retention, production, and motivation within the observational learning process. Parents, teachers, and other significant individuals in children's lives are role models. As such, their behaviors become the models on which observational learning is based. The role models provide valuable information and examples that children attend to and retain regarding effective task and behavior orientation. Moreover, the ability of these role models to be productive and earn rewards motivates children to do the same.

DWPS

The DWPS (Strauser & Keim, 2002) is a useful screening instrument that is theoretically based and useful in assisting survivors of IPV when preparing for employment. The scale

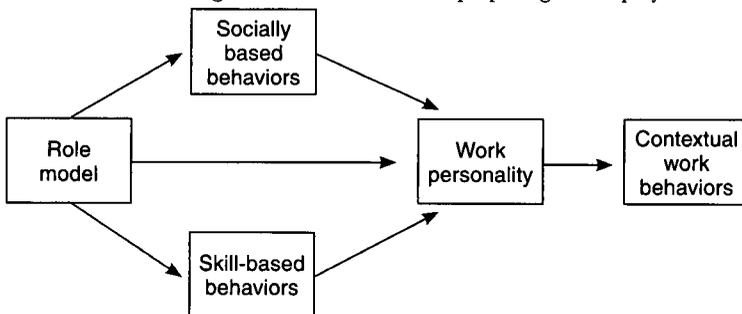


FIGURE 1

Conceptual Model of Developmental Work Personality

directly assesses items related to the development of individuals' work personality and ability to meet the contextual demands of the current labor market. Because items are not directly assessing current work behaviors or problems, clients tend to respond honestly to the items that assess school and home environments during their school years. The DWPS consists of 11 items forming three subscales based on factor analysis (see Strauser & Keim, 2002; Strauser, Lustig, & Leierer, 2007). All items in the scale relate to work personality and job-related behaviors that individuals may or may not have been exposed to while growing up. The instrument's strength is the brevity and accuracy in providing an overview of areas in which a client may have weaknesses in relation to successfully acquiring and maintaining employment. Although composite scores on the instrument are helpful for research and client comparison purposes, individual items and subscales are more useful when working with individual clients. Based on normative data obtained from initial research with individuals with disabilities, college students, and more than 300 women transitioning from welfare to work, the following guidelines have been offered for basic scale interpretation (Strauser et al., 2007). Individual item scores in Task Orientation and Parent Influence subscales that are low (≤ 2) should be explored. For the Behavioral Orientation subscale items, high scores (≥ 3) should be explored with the client. Higher scores on Task Orientation and Parental Influence subscales with a low score on the Behavioral Orientation subscale indicate the client has acquired the developmental work personality necessary for employment success (Strauser et al., 2007). The scales have high internal consistency with Cronbach's alphas for the three subscales as follows: Task Orientation ($\alpha = .88$), Behavioral Orientation ($\alpha = .96$), and Parental Influence ($\alpha = .77$). Despite the inherent challenges of short instrument subscales, the DWPS psychometrics have provided strong evidence related to its factorial structure and internal consistency. The psychometric data provide evidence that the scale is appropriate for screening and determining areas of focus for career and employment counseling interventions (Strauser et al., 2007).

The first subscale, Task Orientation, focuses on prioritizing task completion, motivation to do one's best work, and willingness to complete undesirable or less favored tasks. The second subscale, Behavioral Orientation, consists of three items focusing on willingness to follow rules, get along with others, and take direction from supervisors or leaders. The three items of the final subscale, Parental Influence, focus on availability of role models who worked and consistently prioritized work.

CASE STUDY

The following case study, based on fictional characters, is used to highlight how developmental work personality and the DWPS can be used in the career and employment planning of individuals who are survivors of IPV. It is important to note that we are not advocating for exclusive use of the DWPS. Instead, sound employment and career assessment principles should be applied, with the DWPS being one of several employment and career development instruments used to facilitate planning with this specific group of individuals.

Mary is a 31-year-old Caucasian woman who recently left her spouse. She was married to John for 15 years and is now in the process of filing for divorce. Mary and John have four children: two boys (13 and 15 years old) and two girls (10 and 12 years old). Mary and John dated and were sexually active starting when both were 13 years old. Mary

dropped out of school to marry John when she was 16 years old. Within a few months of their becoming sexually active and dating, John became verbally abusive to Mary. The verbal abuse tended to erupt any time Mary spoke with another male individual, spent what John perceived as too much time with her girlfriends, or was unavailable to spend time with John regardless of the reason. Once they were married and Mary was expecting their first child, the verbal abuse escalated to slapping. Within weeks of the birth of their first child, she was punched repeatedly. Over the years, Mary had many bruises and broken bones. Out of fear for her children, she finally sought shelter from John's abuse. She has been afraid that John, who is currently incarcerated, may kill her if she leaves, but she also believes that staying with him will result in the same fate. She has given up hope that John will change his violent behavior toward her.

Mary, who has never been employed, earned her General Education Development certification after leaving her spouse. A review of her academic history indicates that she began having academic problems in the seventh grade when she met John. She frequently was disruptive in class and spent extended periods in detention, and she rarely arrived to school on time and seldom, if ever, completed her homework. After Mary's parents divorced, she ended up living with her mother.

Both of Mary's parents have had a limited education, with her mother completing 11th grade and her father completing the 8th grade. Mary's mother supported her and five siblings on public assistance and by working intermittently in low-wage, entry-level positions; she was not able to maintain steady employment because of poor child care and demanding family issues. Mary's estranged father worked in the construction industry and at times struggled with alcohol. As a result, he had an intermittent work history and was asked to leave several positions because of his poor work performance and attitude on the job. Both parents still maintain this work pattern. Mary has been referred for employment counseling and vocational assistance because of her participation in a displaced and abused women's shelter program.

ASSESSMENT AND APPLICATION OF THE DWPS

Once an initial intake interview was completed, Mary was given the DWPS to complete. The instrument provided a rapid assessment of her strengths and weaknesses in developmental work personality factors that are associated with successful long-term employment outcomes. On the basis of Mary's responses to the DWPS, her counselor was able to quickly identify areas in which intervention and resources should be directed as part of a larger plan to obtain and maintain employment. Additionally, through the use of the DWPS, areas that should be explored further in personal counseling were highlighted. In Mary's case, the Task Orientation and Parental Influence subscales of the DWPS revealed low scores, with high scores on Behavioral Orientation. Participation in a short-term job training program helped Mary. In the job training program, she learned job-related skills while work role behaviors were identified, explored, and strengthened. Self-efficacy theory provided the foundation for behavioral change, and role models were used to provide examples of effective contextual work skills.

Mary's low score on the Task Orientation subscale was directly tied to her difficulty in school and acquiring a sense of task orientation. As a result, she had significant problems in meeting the contextual task demands of a job. Using a job training program based on self-efficacy theory that included task performance activities associated with contextual

demands of the work environment was beneficial. Additionally, in counseling, Mary explored those past occasions when she completed tasks that were not necessarily pleasant but important and provided needed reinforcement through the self-efficacy-based construct of verbal persuasion. For example, while working as a homemaker, Mary cleaned the bathrooms, did dishes, planned meals, and budgeted for her family. Because of her circumstances, she did not view any of these activities as valuable, did not understand their relevance to the current labor market, and, most important, reported not liking any of the tasks. During counseling sessions, she explored why it was important to complete these tasks, despite disliking them, and she identified their value and potential application to effective contextual skill development. Once Mary gained insight into the merit of these tasks, the counselor explored how it might be important to complete tasks that are not enjoyable on the job and while in job training. The counselor capitalized on and reinforced Mary's indication that she feels good when completing work-related tasks. Rewards and reinforcement are likely important to Mary as she completes less desirable tasks while preparing for employment, to reinforce what she has processed through counseling.

Mary's score on the Behavioral Orientation subscale was high. A high score on this subscale indicates that she has a history of fighting and being in trouble at school. On the basis of Mary's case history, the counselor explored and clarified when the problems at school began. Given that Mary's abuse started in the seventh grade, it was difficult to untangle the impact of the abuse on Mary's schoolwork. Given she did well in school before the seventh grade, the counselor focused on comparing how she felt about herself and her enjoyment of school, self-esteem, and enjoyment of friends before seventh grade. Mary was able to compare and contrast her school experiences before and after seventh grade in the safety of the counseling session. This helped her to gain insight into the impact of her behavioral orientation and abuse history on work and school. Job training also provided Mary with an opportunity to observe and engage in appropriate work behaviors.

Finally, Mary scored particularly low on the Parental Influence subscale. Given that she was raised by a single parent who worked intermittently, this is not surprising. However, the score is unusually low, which was explored in depth with the counselor. Mary did not experience a working parent because her family existed on public assistance and low-income housing, which provided an environment where there were a limited number of role models available to model effective work behavior. It was important for Mary to explore grandparents, early teachers, and significant role models whom she admired and reconnected with as memories of working adults. Memories of positive role models who were productive and displayed appropriate work-related behaviors were critical in her treatment. She also explored the benefits and drawbacks of employment to further clarify her desires, and exploration of current role models was also critical. For example, during counseling sessions, the workers at the shelter, the job training counselors, and those workers in public assistance agencies she had contact with since leaving the abusive relationship were discussed as role models of effective work role behaviors. She envisioned how their work habits and ethics helped them to reach their goals.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Understanding obstacles faced by survivors of IPV in regard to employment is critical for career, employment, and rehabilitation counselors. Increasingly, survivor programs

include an employment component as a way to further empower survivors and raise their chances of not returning to abusive relationships because of economic necessity. The Developmental Work Personality Model and the use of the DWPS provide a theoretically based efficient and effective method for exploring clients' strengths and weaknesses in regard to their ability to meet the contextual demands of the work environment during counseling sessions. Moreover, the DWPS is a screening instrument that highlights areas that should be addressed during training and employment development programs.

Because of the traumatic nature of abuse, clients may need assistance with insight into how their behaviors affect employment. The use of the DWPS provides a springboard for discussions regarding work roles and work behaviors. Upon reviewing scale items, strategies for achieving goals can be developed. Additionally, clarifying school and employment situations in which difficulties arise can shape employment goals. For example, if the client was engaged, on time, and completed tasks in art-related courses, employment in a similar setting of creativity might be a good employment fit.

As employer demands increase, continued pressure on individuals to meet the contextual demands will also increase. Employment, career, and rehabilitation counselors are in a unique position to assist survivors of IPV in rebuilding their lives and careers through counseling and facilitating the development of contextual skills. Future research clarifying the role of the DWPS in relation to this population and employment will shed additional light on these variables.

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