

# Employment, Social Capital, and Community Participation among PWD

Tal Araten-Bergman, *PhD*  
*School of Social Work, Social  
Welfare & Health Sciences,  
University of Haifa, Israel*

# Background

- Legal recognition of the human rights of PWD has significantly evolved over the past three decades
- Active participation in both economic and community life is a key marker of human rights realization and considered essential for ensuring that PWD experience quality lives

## But....

- A growing body of research demonstrates that a higher level of economic well-being is not itself sufficient to attain a full range of positive personal and community outcomes
- Leading scholars to recognize the vital role that **social networks and social structure** play in promoting successful societal **integration and** well being

# Social capital - Definition

- **Social capital:** Networks of social relations characterized by norms of trust and reciprocity that, in turn, lead to mutually beneficial outcomes
- This definition addresses
  - family relationships
  - kinship networks, friendships and acquaintances
  - civic attachments and institutional ties

# Social capital

- Social capital is the primary means by which individuals integrate with others and in the broad social environment
- The theory of social capital highlights the value derived from social structures, which enable individuals to serve their personal and communal interests.

# Social capital

- It is important to distinguish between various forms of social networks when assessing their respective potential contributions to any given individual, and/or more broadly, to society as a whole.

# Social capital

- The theory of social capital can potentially explain how and why relational networks are important for the production of outcomes at the individual and collective level
- social capital may facilitate access to social connections, knowledge and opportunities that helps to gain and retain employment, as well as to access leisure and civic engagement.

# Types of social capital

## Bonding social capital

- Current social capital theory distinguishes between two sub-types of social capital
- **Bonding social capital** refers to ties between members of a network who see themselves as similar - “natural” relationships such as family, co-workers, neighbors, and friends.
  - Characterized by relatively stronger social ties, and may provide individuals with emotional or tangible supports necessary for daily living.
  - Bonding capital is associated with social support and well-being
  - Relationships may exclude individuals who do not qualify.



# Types of social capital

## Bridging social capital

- Bridging social capital refers to links across heterogeneous societal networks.
  - involves overlapping networks in which a member of one group can gain access to the resources of another group due to cross membership.
  - contact with those in authority where those connections in turn might be used to garner resources or power.
- Bridging ties tend to be fragile, but have been associated with social mobility, effective mobilization of power, and promoting social justice and equality

# Social capital - outcomes

- Research on non-disabled individuals demonstrates the relationship between social capital and a range of positive outcomes, including health status, employment and subjective well-being.
- Scant attention has been paid to the effect of social capital on PWD.
- Research tends to describe PWD as heavily dependent on support networks of friends and family members.

# Social capital - outcomes

- Social capital theory has been utilized to address a wide variety of personal outcomes such as subjective well-being and health status
- The role of social capital on employment status and earnings has been identified empirically as one of the driving forces of individual disparity

# Social capital and disability research

- Incorporating social capital as an organizing construct in disability research
- Exploring its relation with social and economic integration offers an alternative for discussion around community inclusion and human rights issues
- Social capital, as a universal term, may bridge between personal characteristics and social conditions

# Research Goals

- Our study contrasted employed and non-employed PWD in order to more fully explore the relationship between employment status, community participation and subjective well-being. In order to:
- To explore how and to what extent gainful employment affect different aspects of the lived experiences of PWD
- To explore the impact of social capital on the participation of PWB in economic life
- To explore the unique contribution of social capital to the well-being and integration

# Research design

A sample of 274 working age adults with self-reported disabilities was recruited

- Employment status:
  - Employed (n=131): Participants who reported engaging in gainful employment (defined as no less than 15 hours per week) for at least 60 days prior to the survey's administration
  - Non-Employed (n=132): Participants who did not hold a paid job and had not actively sought work for at least the last two months
- Participants who reported looking for a job or working in sheltered settings, or working less than 15 hours a week, were excluded from the statistical analysis (n=14).

# Research instruments

- Community participation NOD/Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities.(NOD, 2010)
- Individual social capital: Personal Social Capital Scale (Chen, Stanton, Gong, Fang, Li, 2009)
- Well-being: satisfaction with life scale (Diener , Emmons, Larsen, Griffin ,1985)
- Control variables gender age group, self-report of disability type , date of the onset of disability.

# Core findings

- Employed and non-employed respondents did not differ significantly on most demographic characteristics (age, disability type and marital status)
- The employed sample reported significantly more years of education
- Significant differences were also obtained for disability severity, with the employed individuals perceived their disabilities as more severe than those in the non-employed sample



# Core findings

Employed participants reported on:

- Richer social participation patterns ( $t = 2.73$ ,  $df = 131$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ),
- Greater bridging social capital ( $t = 4.25$ ,  $df = 130$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).
- Greater feeling of subjective well being
- No significant differences were found between the groups in regard to bonding social capital

# Employment as a pathway to inclusion

- Core findings support the notion that engagement in gainful employment can serve as a pathway for community participation.
- Employed individuals reported
  - Higher levels of engagement in civic and community activities
  - Higher levels of well-being.

# Employment as a pathway to social participation

- Gainful employment provides individuals with **financial resources** needed for participating in community events and social activities
- Employment might facilitate better access to assistive technology or personal assistance needed for participation in activities outside the home

# Employment as a pathway to social participation

- Employment represents a desirable social role and an activity through which an individual may affirm his or her own identity.
- Employment can facilitate a wider range of opportunities for individuals to interact with others and to develop and enhance social networks. These can contribute to social integration within and outside the workplace

# Employment and social capital

- Information flowing through informal social networks could enhance job prospects, as well as access to social groups and activities.

# Reciprocal relations between employment and social participation

- The reciprocal relations between employment status and social participation is especially distressing since it demonstrates how social disadvantage in one sphere of life might serve as a risk factor to social isolation in another

# Conclusions

- Findings demonstrated the important role that employment and social capital play in promoting individuals with disabilities, well-being, and social inclusion
- Expanding the social relationships of PWD and connecting them to important social structures can lead to increased choice, independence, and community integration

# Conclusions

- PWD with significant amounts of bridging social capital also have opportunities to leverage their capacity and achieve greater integration in economic, social, and civic life.
- Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the differential effect of the two types of social capital.
- Only a balanced distribution of the two forms of social capital can provide PWD adequate resources for good quality community living



# Conclusions

- Social networks and the knowledge of how to best utilize them are not common knowledge—they require effort and must be constructed through multiple investment strategies. These strategies usually arise from social opportunities and life experiences within heterogeneous social contexts such that marginalized populations, including PWD often lack these opportunities.

# Conclusions

- It is crucial to acknowledge the reciprocal relationship between social capital, employment, and community participation, and their ability to facilitate access to equal opportunities, choice, and inclusion.

# Conclusions

- Awareness to the importance of bonding and bridging relations
- Skills development: how to build bonding and bridging relations, and how to use these skills to access opportunities in order enhance human rights realization



Thank you  
for your time  
and attention

[talaraten@gmail.com](mailto:talaraten@gmail.com)

