

Long-Term Outcomes for Transition-Age Youth with Mental Health Conditions Who Receive Postsecondary Education Support

Priyanka Anand
Mathematica Policy Research

Todd Honeycutt
Mathematica Policy Research

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1. Introduction

State vocational rehabilitation agencies (SVRAs) are joint federal-state programs that help individuals who are eligible for rehabilitation services achieve their employment goals by giving them specific vocational support, including funding for higher education. Honeycutt et al. (2017) showed that youth with mental health conditions (MHCs) were less likely to receive vocational rehabilitation (VR) supports than youth without MHCs and, in particular, were less likely to receive college supports. Providing support for college or vocational training (which we refer to here as postsecondary education), including payments for tuition, books, and supplies, to youth with MHCs has the potential to increase their long-term employment and earnings and decrease the amount of federal disability benefits they receive from the Social Security Administration (SSA). However, only a limited number of studies have examined these relationships, and the findings, which are sometimes contradictory, are hard to interpret because of inherent limitations in the available data.

Given this context, this paper explores two main research questions:

1. How do long-term employment and earnings outcomes vary by receipt of VR services (particularly postsecondary education support) for transition-age youth with and without MHCs?
2. How do federal disability benefits vary by receipt of VR services (particularly postsecondary education support) for transition-age youth with and without MHCs?

2. Data and methods

This analysis is based on data from the Rehabilitation Services Administration case service reports (known as RSA-911), which are the administrative data that each SVRA provides to RSA on the entire population of individuals who exit from an SVRA for a given fiscal year (October through September). We identify applicant cohorts for the 2002, 2003, and 2004 fiscal years using 10 years of closure data from fiscal years 2002 through 2013. We restrict our sample to first-time VR applicants who were between ages 16 and 24 (inclusive) at the time of application and were later determined to be eligible for VR support by the SVRA. The final sample for our descriptive analysis consists of 436,883 youth who applied for VR services, and the final sample for our regression analyses consists of 303,112 VR youth clients who received services. We link the RSA-911 files to the 2013 Disability Analysis File (DAF), which allows us to identify VR youth who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits, determine the timing and amount of benefit receipt, and calculate the dollar amount of benefits forgone by people who have their benefits suspended due to work. We then link the combined RSA-911 and DAF files to the SSA Master Earnings File (MEF), which contains the earnings for the entire U.S. population each year.

Our analysis begins with descriptive statistics that show the average long-term outcomes for youth with and without MHCs by year and by the type of VR support they received. We are interested in three main outcome areas: employment (defined as having annual earnings of \$1,200 or more), amount of annual earnings, and receipt of federal disability benefits. We use regression analyses to examine the associations between receiving VR services and realizing given long-term outcomes for youth with and without MHCs. In these regression analyses, we include only youth who receive services in order to avoid having the decision to receive VR

services confound the estimated relationships. We estimate separate regressions for individuals who were and were not receiving disability benefits at the time of VR application.

3. Results

Earnings and employment

Figures 1 and 2 show the associations between the receipt of VR services and long-term employment and earnings, respectively, for youth with MHCs. For these youth, there seems to be a strong relationship between postsecondary education services and employment and earnings outcomes. A higher percentage of those who receive these services (either college or vocational training support) are employed each year and have higher earnings compared with youth who received services other than postsecondary education support. This relationship appears to be stronger for college support than for vocational training, particularly as the timeline since initial VR application gets longer. However, the direction of causality for this strong relationship between postsecondary education support and outcomes is unknown. It could be that the support they receive helps these VR youth find employment and higher paying jobs, or it could be that VR youth who are predisposed to finding employment and high-paying jobs are signing up for postsecondary education support.

Figure 1. Employment rate of VR youth clients with MHCs, by type of service received

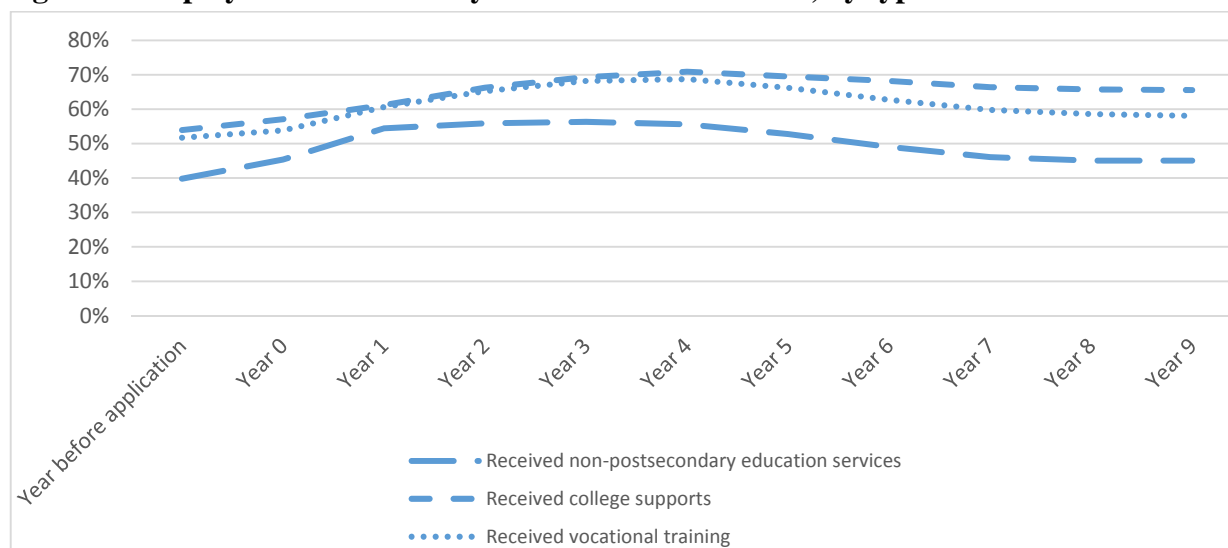
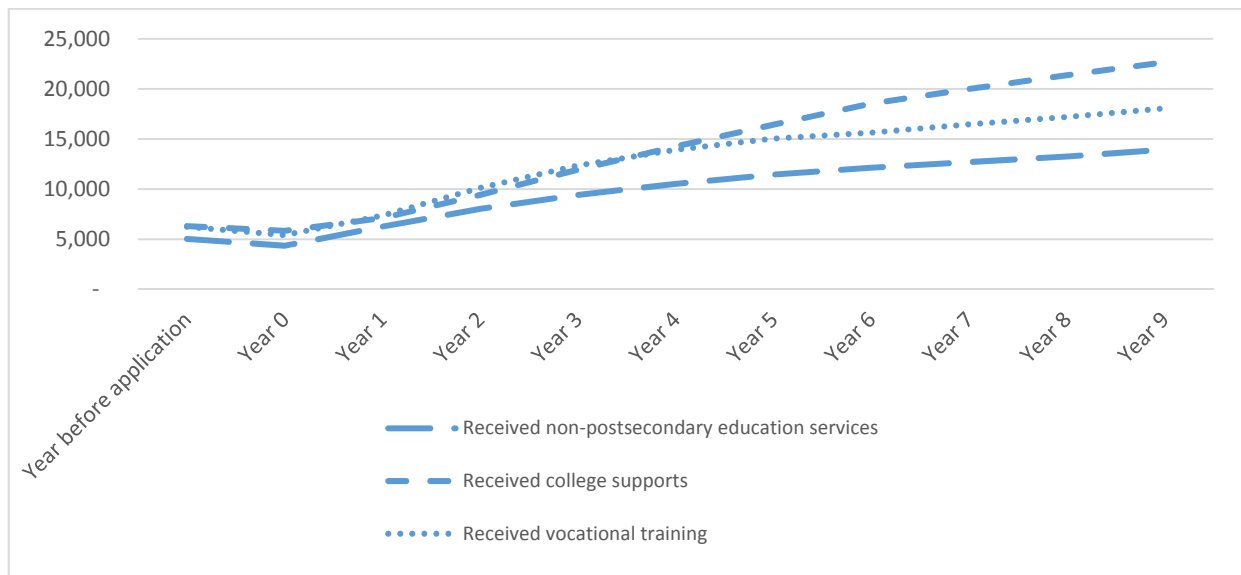


Figure 2. Average earnings of employed VR youth clients with MHCs, by type of service received



Our regression analyses show that youth with MHCs who receive college or vocational training support or employment services are about 5 percentage points more likely to have been employed at any point in the nine years after VR application than are those who received other types of VR services. Furthermore, those who received postsecondary education support and were employed at any point are likely to have more years of employment during the nine years after VR application compared with employed youth with MHCs who received other types of supports. Youth with MHCs who receive college supports are also much more likely to be employed in the ninth year after VR application than are those who received other types of VR services, and the average earnings of those who are employed that year are significantly higher than the earnings of employed youth with MHCs who received other types of VR services. Receiving vocational training has a lesser effect on employment and earnings in the ninth year after VR application, but it is still larger than the effect of receiving other VR services besides college support.

Federal disability benefits

Table 1 shows how many of these youth received SSA federal disability benefits (SSDI and/or SSI) according to the type of VR services they received. We observe a relationship between postsecondary education supports and the receipt of federal disability benefits for youth with MHCs. A smaller percentage of those who did not have benefits at the time of application and received postsecondary education support collected federal disability benefits in the nine years after applying for VR services compared with those who received other types of services that did not include postsecondary education support. Among those who did have benefits at the time of application and had their benefits suspended in later years, those who received postsecondary education support had a higher amount of benefits forgone for work over the nine-year period compared with those who received other types of services that did not include postsecondary education support.

Table 1. Receipt of SSA federal disability benefits by VR youth clients with MHCs, by type of services received

Variable	VR youth clients with MHCs			
	Among those who applied for VR services	Among those who received non-postsecondary services	Among those who received college supports	Among those who received vocational training
No SSA benefits at application				
Sample size	78,847	31,663	12,394	9,330
% receiving benefits in the 9 years after application	16.1%	18.9%	12.3%	13.5%
Average number of years benefits were received	6.4	6.4	6.4	6.2
SSA benefits at application				
Sample size	27,286	13,021	2,169	2,088
Average number of years benefits were received	7.8	7.9	7.4	7.6
% with BFW in the 9 years after application	56.9%	61.6%	61.2%	62.2%
Average benefits forgone in the 9 years after for those with BFW	\$9,288	\$8,666	\$15,938	\$11,699

Note: BFW = Benefits forgone for work

The regression analysis, based on youth with MHCs who received a VR services and were not receiving federal disability benefits when they applied for those services, shows that those who received postsecondary education supports were much less likely to receive benefits in the next nine years compared with those who received any other type of VR service, including employment services. Regardless of whether the youth were getting benefits at the time of VR application, receiving college support was associated with receiving fewer years of benefits than youth who received other types of services, and for those who were receiving federal disability benefits at the time of VR application, the benefits forgone for work over the nine-year period were 59 percent higher than they were for youth receiving other types of services. This translates to an additional \$5,113, given that the average amount of benefits forgone for work for those receiving services other than postsecondary support was \$8,666. Finally, VR youth with MHCs who had disability benefits at the time of application and received vocational training were more likely to have their benefits forgone for work in the next nine years than those who received most other types of services, and the first group also had a higher amount of benefits forgone for work over the same time period (23.9 percent, which is an additional \$2,071).

Reference

Honeycutt, Todd, Anand, Priyanka, Rubenstein, Max, and Stern, Steven. 2017. "Public provision of postsecondary education support for transition-age youth with mental health conditions." *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*. 40(2): 183–196.