Mentoring strategies and their impact on social workers' attitudes

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Abstract

● *Summary:* This study explored different mentoring strategies: simulations and case studies regarding ethical dilemmas involved with employment of intellectual developmental disability workers in supported employment using questionnaires of psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward employing intellectual developmental disability workers in the free market. Participants were 83 social workers and 60 employers and were divided into simulations, case studies, and control groups. All participants in the simulations and case studies groups attended nine mentoring sessions throughout one year, where they completed questionnaires at the beginning, the end, and six months after mentoring.

● *Findings:* The level of employers' psychological empowerment and their positive attitudes toward employment of individuals with intellectual developmental disability in their organizations were higher than among the social workers, but the social workers' self-efficacy level was higher. In addition, we found that mentoring using simulations had more influence than the case studies. The study findings showed that the more dynamic the mentoring, the greater the changes in psychological empowerment perceptions, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward employing intellectual developmental disability workers, both during the study and subsequently.

● *Applications:* There is considerable importance in developing in-service training and active mentoring for all those involved in the challenges of supported employment. Simulations with participation of actors among social workers and employers, regarding

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ethical challenges in supported employment are the recommended mentoring methods, as compared to the case studies tested in the current study. Therefore, the study findings encourage the development of advanced mentoring processes among social workers and employers based on simulations, for coping with ethical challenges in supported employment.

Keywords

Social work, case study, disability, empowerment, mentoring, social work education

Introduction

Previous studies indicated that for disabled individuals, a work position in the free market is considered very important (e.g., Ali et al., 2011; Araten-Bergman, 2016; Jenaro et al., 2002). Work enables reduction of social isolation and increased financial independence (Carvalho-Freitas & Stathi, 2017; Nota et al., 2014). Nevertheless, disabled individuals experience difficulty and unequal employment due to psychological obstacles in society and prejudice regarding their occupational performance (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2018). Therefore, throughout the world (e.g., Australia, Germany, Britain, United States), social workers are employed by Ministries of Welfare and Social Services (Bond et al., 2012; Jenaro et al., 2002; Rogowski, 2011). Their role is to find appropriate employment for individuals with intellectual developmental disability (IDD), to prepare the worker for the workplace (e.g., traveling to and touring the workplace), accompanying (during a day of work, at the beginning of an extended stay in which the individual with IDD reaches optimal integration in the workplace), including support and mediation between the worker with IDD and the open market employer (Weston, 2002).

The present study focused on mentoring processes regarding ethical dilemmas involved with employment of workers with IDD which the American Association has defined as significant limitation of intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, as expressed by conceptual, social, and practical skills (Schalock et al., 2010).

This study's goal was to examine the effect of different mentoring strategies: simulations and case studies on the psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward employment of an individual with IDD among employers and social workers. In addition, we used control groups that did not participate in the intervention process (simulations, case studies) but just filled out at similar points of time the same questionnaires as the experimental groups. In line with the above, we discuss the following main questions: What changes occurred in the experimental control groups during the study, regarding psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward employment of individuals with IDD, among employers and social workers?

The following sections provide an overview of the following subjects: advantages of supported employment, ethical aspects of supported employment, the importance of mentoring among social workers, mentoring through team-based simulations and case studies, and the relationship between these mentoring strategies and a variety of perceptions and attitudes such as psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and positive attitudes toward employment of individuals with IDD. All these subjects are relevant to the main goal of the study: to explore the effect of different mentoring strategies on employers and social workers in dealing with ethical dilemmas of supported employment.

Advantages of supported employment and ethical aspects

Employment is considered one of the important areas in forming policy concerning disabled individuals, since failure to integrate them fully in the employment market not only hurts them, but also affects the entire society, due to loss of human resources in the work market and the burden on the social system (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2018). In recent years, progress has been observed in legislation according to which every person, including those with disabilities, has the right to be integrated into supported employment programs that provide professional mentoring and guidance for individuals with IDD. Furthermore, those with IDD have the right to participate fully in the community, which also includes the employment market (Araten-Bergman, 2016).

Merrells et al. (2018) claim that about 0.5% of the general population worldwide are individuals with IDD, at various functional levels that require lifelong support and guidance. Disabled individuals are less likely to integrate into the free market, as compared to the non-disabled. Thus, for example, Hall (2010) found in England that in 2007, only 10% of individuals with IDD were employed in the free market. In the Netherlands, it was found that individuals with IDD had three to four times poorer chances to be employed compared to non-disabled people. According to Ali et al. (2011), there are signs of a tendency that demand is increasing among individuals with IDD to integrate into the community through employment in the free market, whereby disabled individuals are interested in working in supported employment, which provides more financial independence and emotional welfare.

Workplaces that employ disabled workers enjoy advantages such as variation of human resources which leads to creating a positive social climate, strengthening trust, and increasing commitment of all workers in the workplace; assimilation of values of tolerance; social responsibility values; and creating a positive image of the workplace among its clients and suppliers (Santuzzi et al., 2014). Nevertheless, alongside the advantages related to employing individuals with IDD, employers discover difficulties and a variety of ethical dilemmas accompanying such employment, which are likely to decrease employers' willingness to employ them in the organization (Mor-Barak, 2016).

These ethical dilemmas are defined as existence of values issues that are difficult to decide, since they have more than one appropriate solution (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2013). For example, the requirement to meet the organization's

standards and objectives versus the benefit of a worker with IDD who does not manage to meet them. According to the ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), interactions between the individual with IDD and his/her environment create ethical dilemma situations. In the current study, mentoring relates to a variety of ethical situations with regard to the social workers' relations with the IDD individual, his/her parents, and his/her employers.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a process of instilling ability and content-based skills in an organization while creating motivation to act with the aid of a coach (Brown, 2002; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2014). The goal of mentoring is to develop the organization's worker personally and professionally, to be able to express uniqueness and independence of thought, along with openness and flexibility toward attitudes that differ from his/her own, to the point of changing his/her attitudes (Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2018).

Workplace support for professional development and mentoring is very important, since it is a resource that enables coping with ethical dilemmas, and influences the worker's coping with work assignments (Carson et al., 2011). Mentoring has been found to be significant in empowering the worker and in moderating the pressure to which the worker is subjected, particularly in supported employment, where their employers and social workers are required to be active in a variety of roles (Chaverri et al., 2018).

Empowerment of a worker in an organization is founded upon the belief that people have talents and abilities but need mentoring processes to bring them to fruition (Sosik & Jung, 2018). Mone and London (2018) argued that the workplace is responsible to protect the worker's emotional welfare. Therefore, mentoring will help to create a stable work environment characterized by ethical behavior rules, thus enabling workers to remain at their job and to execute it effectively.

Mentoring strategy through team-based simulation

The mentoring process through team simulations is based on role-play, which enables participants to experience together authentic events from the field occurring in the workplace in an artificial supporting environment (Benckendorff et al., 2015). Additional studies emphasize the fact that mentoring through simulations exposes the learners to alternative action strategies that enable participants to experience varied possible results and to create deep insights regarding central aspects and ethical dilemmas in the real world while understanding the causes of these dilemmas and reinforcement of social awareness (Olejniczak et al., 2016).

Moreover, it was found that the simulated mentoring process has many advantages, such as studying ethical events, freed from time restraints that characterize daily work, and the experiential mentoring that leaves an impression on the

mentees, so that the learning content is assimilated by the participant over time. In addition, raising emotional aspects that are sometimes not conscious influences the process of making decisions when coping with ethical dilemmas (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2012).

Analysis of videoed simulations during simulated process is one of the most effective tools for mentoring in organizations. Analysis provides varied learning opportunities and in addition enables colleagues to learn about their skills and those of others (Chan et al., 2017). Mentoring through analysis of videos describing interactions occurring in the organization, helps mentees to sharpen their world-view and professional vision, leading to testing strategies for solution (Hollingsworth & Clarke, 2017).

Mentoring through case studies

In a mentoring framework based on case studies, the participant analyses authentic events that bear a learning message from daily organizational life. Case studies require the participant to understand the event fully and to analyze methods of action leading to solution of the ethical dilemma (Yazan, 2015). Using case studies enables profound understanding of the events while transferring the learned material to the mentee's personal and professional world. Experiential mentoring of case studies encourages independent, critical thought development skills, raising questions, and taking a stand that are necessary for solving problems and taking decisions (Gentles et al., 2015).

Psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and positive attitudes toward individuals with IDD in the mentoring process

Psychological empowerment

Workers with high psychological empowerment tend to feel that they possess knowledge to improve their actions and to solve problems efficiently (Spreitzer, 1995). They tend to see themselves as free to take decisions and feel that they are empowered by the workplace and capable of bringing about change. The theory of psychological empowerment is based on the idea that people can fashion their role in their workplace, and that the worker's psychological empowerment, for example, in mentoring processes, contributes to a sense of his/her significance in the workplace and to organizational effectiveness (Appelbaum et al., 2015).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as a person's expectation to succeed on the job after investing effort and constitutes a mechanism that motivates the person

toward goal achieving behavior (Bandura, 1997). This mechanism relies on the person's belief in himself/herself and his/her abilities and influences cognitive and emotional aspects that drive motivation (Schwarzer & Luszczynska, 2016).

In mentoring processes, too, self-efficacy is likely to support the dynamic cognitive process people undergo when they consider their ability to perform, through their perception of the relationship between their skills and the job demands (Consiglio et al., 2016). Previous studies found that among employers and mentors, self-efficacy is based on perception of their ability to cause learning, development, and growth in different areas among all workers and mentees in the organization (Copeland et al., 2010; Duvdevany et al., 2016; Miraglia et al., 2017).

Positive attitudes toward individuals with IDD

The literature relates to five main factors that influence attitudes toward individuals with IDD and toward their integration in society:

1. *Socio-demographic traits*. Nota et al. (2014) found that a person's age and degree of attitude maturity toward others have a decisive influence on positive attitudes toward individuals with IDD. Another trait is gender (Shpigelman et al., 2016). Women hold more positive attitudes toward individuals with IDD than men. Similarly, educated people hold more positive attitudes toward individuals with IDD than people with less education.
2. *Social culture*. The social stature of individuals with IDD and attitudes toward them are influenced by social values rooted in society toward abnormal individuals (Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 2016).
3. *Acquaintance and contact with a population of individuals with IDD*. Studies (Vaz et al., 2015; Wilson & Scior, 2014) indicate the positive influence of acquaintance and contact with IDD individuals on treatment and attitudes toward them. This influence is a result of acquaintance with a disabled person and the resulting emotions and behavior toward him/her.
4. *Knowledge about a population of individuals with IDD*. It was found that a positive relationship exists between knowledge of IDD individuals' skills and positive attitudes toward them (Murch et al., 2018).
5. *Socialization*. It was found that socialization of parents considering the social environment of children has a decisive influence on their attitudes toward disabled people. Children of parents who hold positive attitudes toward individuals with IDD also develop positive attitudes toward this population (Cohen, 2008; Zychlinski et al., 2016). Nota et al. (2014) found in their study that exposure to workers with handicaps and understanding the abilities concealed within them resulted in positive attitudes toward them.

In a later study, Shapira-Lishchinsky (2018) indicated that a mentoring process that focuses on these dimensions may promote positive attitudes toward individuals with IDD.

The relationship between mentoring strategies and psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and positive attitudes toward individuals with IDD

Social workers and employers cope with a variety of ethical dilemmas in supported employment in the workplace. In order to cope with these ethical dilemmas and help them to take decisions effectively, they need to be empowered in the workplace (Gee et al., 1996). This empowerment is based on the belief that people have skills and abilities but needs experience and mentoring in order to realize them. Mentoring should include information and experiences required in order to achieve the organization's goals, for example, through simulations and case studies of dilemmas, and analysis of the relevant incidents discussed in the simulations and case studies.

Maddux (2016) claimed that individuals develop high perceptions of self-efficacy, for example, through mentoring processes. Their sense of self-efficacy is a significant component of motivation and job success. Thus, for example, it was found that experiencing simulations brings about an improvement in the worker's sense of self-efficacy and the worker's professional development in the workplace (Buckley & Gordon, 2011).

McBride et al. (2015) claim that employers are prejudiced regarding individuals with IDD in general and their functioning as employees in particular, thus posing many ethical challenges. Nelissen et al. (2016) argue that employers' attitudes toward workers with IDD stem from beliefs, stereotypes, and prejudices about their ability, and those negative attitudes toward the employment of workers with IDD present an obstacle to employment. Therefore, in order to improve their attitudes, they need guidance within the workplace.

Schur et al. (2017) show an improvement in the business performance of organizations that have adopted a moral policy and integrated individuals with IDD. One of the explanations for this improvement is that the challenge of dealing with ethical issues concerning integrating individuals with IDD, which brings about an improvement in their attitudes regarding these issues. Noe et al. (2017) argue that management systems are very important concerning guidance of employees because they contribute to changes of attitudes, values, and beliefs that will lead to changing their behavior and attitudes toward employing disabled individuals.

In light of the preceding review, the main research hypothesis in this study is as follows:

Significant relationships will be found between mentoring strategies, such as simulations and case studies, and perception of psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and positive attitudes toward employing individuals with IDD, among social workers and employers over time.

Method

Sample

The research team received a list from the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services of all Israeli social workers working in supported employment at different workplaces. About 83 social workers were chosen randomly. In addition, the research team approached social workers who were closely connected with employers and requested that they encourage employers' participation in the study. Similarly, through publication in the media and social networks (e.g., Facebook), the research team found businesses that employ individuals with IDD. Finally, 60 employers were chosen randomly whose workplaces employ workers with IDD and who are in daily contact in the workplace. In the present study, employers from large workplaces participated (Israel Electric Company, a pharmacy chain, a coffee house chain, hotels, old age homes, hospitals) as well as small, private employment organizations (such as restaurants, garages, bakeries).

Ethical consideration

Permission to perform the study was obtained from the authors' university's review board and from the Israeli Ministry of Welfare and Social Services. The participants signed an informed consent form after they understood the study goals, process, and their ethical rights. In addition, they were guaranteed anonymity upon publication.

Research procedure

Phase A, a preliminary field trial: interviews were conducted with social workers and employers in the different workplaces, with the goal of understanding the background, characteristics, and reasons for ethical dilemmas in supported employment. At the conclusion of this process, a "bank" of scenarios in supported employment was compiled, including different ethical dilemmas such as equal treatment of all employees in the factory versus considering the special needs of the worker with IDD; the interests of worker with IDD, who wishes to continue working, versus the interests of the shop manager to increase productivity and dismiss him; and complying with the wishes of the worker with IDD and his family versus protecting him from unlawful employment.

Stage B, actors were trained to portray various characters, according to written dilemma scenarios, with the goal that the performance would be believable and authentic.

Simulations groups—the research team randomly divided social workers into simulation groups with 14 participants in each group. Each group was allocated a different photo studio and workshop mentor, who led all nine simulation workshop meetings, averaging once a month throughout the year.

Case study groups—The same mentors went to workplaces, met with groups of two to three social workers or two to three employers at each workplace for nine meetings (an average of once per month throughout the year) in order to study the same scenarios discussed in the simulation research groups.

Control groups included employers and social workers, who did not undergo research intervention, but completed questionnaires at intervals similar to the experimental research groups.

Quantitative research tools

Psychological empowerment questionnaire based on a 12-item questionnaire by Spreitzer (1995), which tests the belief of the individual in the workplace in his/her ability to execute actions requiring skills, while relating to aspects such as meaning in work, personal efficiency and influence, and freedom to take decisions ($\alpha = .84$).

Self-efficacy questionnaire based on the measure developed by Bandura (1997). This measure tests self-efficacy of the participant relative to work skills and belief in his/her ability to cope with challenges at work. The questionnaire contains 10 items that relate to work achievements, development of skills at work, and social interaction ($\alpha = .79$).

Positive attitudes questionnaire toward employing workers with IDD in the workplace—this measure is based on the work of Hazarika and Choudhury (2016). The questionnaire contains 32 items, relating to aspects such as the influence of the work of an individual with IDD on the workplace and the workers, viewing a person with IDD as having vocational skills, and his/her ability to be integrated at work ($\alpha = .77$).

Data collection

This study focused on examining changes in perceptions of social workers and employers after undergoing mentoring with simulations and case studies, over about one year, during which they met nine times. Participants (social workers and employers) received an explanation of the study goals and research procedure while maintaining research ethical standards (American Psychological Association, 2002). Questionnaires were completed prior to mentoring, after mentoring ended, and one half year after mentoring had concluded at identical periods in time. By means of this longitudinal study, we were able to test the change in perception of mentees due to the different types of mentoring.

Findings

In order to examine whether there were differences between the social workers and the employers on the study's psychological variables, three *T* tests (for psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and positive attitudes toward employment of an individual with IDD) were run for the two independent samples (social workers

Table 1. *T* tests for the two independent samples (social workers and employers) on the psychological variables.

Measure	Research group	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*t*(141)
Psychological empowerment:	Social workers	83	4.19	0.38	−5.27***
	Employers	60	4.47	0.25	
Self-efficacy:	Social workers	83	4.12	0.35	5.05***
	Employers	60	3.84	0.28	
Positive attitudes toward employment of a worker with IDD:	Social workers	83	4.07	0.22	−8.11***
	Employers	60	4.42	0.28	

Note: IDD: intellectual developmental disability.
***$p < .001$.

and the employers). It was found that psychological empowerment among employers was significantly higher than among the social workers, self-efficacy among the social workers was significantly higher than among the employers, and employers' attitudes toward employing an individual with IDD were significantly higher than among the social workers (Table 1).

Since differences were found between social workers and employers in their attitudes toward the psychological variables, the differences between social workers and employers regarding these perceptions were tested as being dependent on monitoring type and on time of measurement.

Perception of psychological empowerment

Analysis found a statistically significant interaction between mentoring type and time of measurement for measuring perception of psychological empowerment, $F(4, 274) = 18.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.212$. In order to test the source of interaction, three one-way repeated measures analyses of variance were conducted to test the differences between the three types of groups of each sample (social workers and employers). The analysis found a statistically significant interaction between groups of participants, type of mentoring (simulation and case studies), and time of measurement for psychological empowerment, $F(4, 274) = 3.72$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.051$. For social workers and employers, it was found that with the three groups, there was a significant increase in psychological empowerment between the different research stages. However, among employers, psychological empowerment was found to be higher than among social workers (Table 2).

Figure 1 shows that prior to beginning the research intervention, the degree of employers' psychological empowerment was higher than among the social workers for all research groups, and it continued to arise during all study stages. At the end of the research intervention, it was found that the greatest change took place among the social workers who had undergone simulations. It was shown that

Table 2. Psychological empowerment (means and SD) among social workers and employers by mentoring type and measurement period.

| Measurement period	Activity	Social workers			Employers		
		n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Control	Begin intervention	28	3.90	0.23	20	4.25	0.26
	End of intervention	28	3.98	0.21	20	4.44	0.26
	6 months later	28	4.02	0.27	20	4.49	0.27
Case study	Begin intervention	27	4.15	0.44	20	4.27	0.27
	End of intervention	27	4.34	0.38	20	4.49	0.25
	6 months later	27	4.50	0.30	20	4.57	0.24
Simulations	Begin intervention	28	4.02	0.52	20	4.36	0.29
	End of intervention	28	4.27	0.46	20	4.57	0.23
	6 months later	28	4.49	0.36	20	4.76	0.23
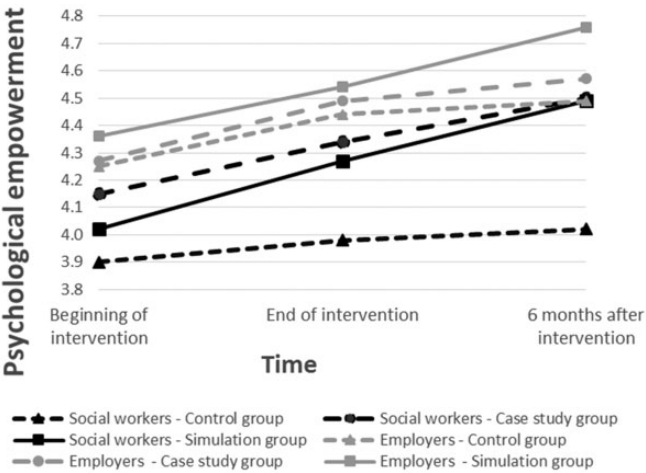
Figure 1. Changes in perceptions of psychological empowerment among employers and social workers.

even half a year after the research intervention was concluded, the influence of simulations continued to increase.

Perception of self-efficacy

Analysis of findings indicated a significant interaction between type of intervention and time of measurement for self-efficacy, $F(4, 274) = 102.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.600$. In order to test the source of interaction, three one-way repeated measures analyses

of variance were executed to examine the differences between the three groups in each sample (social workers and employers). The analysis showed a significant interaction between groups of participants, mentoring type, and time of measurement for self-efficacy: $F(4, 274) = 71.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta2 = 0.511$.

For social workers, it was found that in the control group, self-efficacy at the end of intervention was significantly higher than self-efficacy six months after the intervention ended, whereas in the case studies group and the simulations group, self-efficacy increased significantly between the different research stages. For social workers and employers, in the three mentoring types, a significant increase was found in degree of self-efficacy between the different research stages. However, among the social workers, self-efficacy was higher than among employers (Table 3).

Figure 2 shows that prior to beginning the research intervention, the degree of self-efficacy of social workers was higher than among employers. In the test carried out at the conclusion of the research interventions, it was found that for social workers who underwent mentoring in the simulations workshops, the greatest change was found. In both social workers and employers' groups, it was found that the influence of simulations meetings and case studies continued even half a year beyond conclusion of the research intervention.

Positive attitudes toward employment of a worker with IDD in the workplace

Our analysis found a significant interaction between type of intervention and time of measurement, for positive attitudes toward employment of a worker with IDD in the organization, $F(4, 274) = 317.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.822$. To test the source of interaction, three one-way analyses of variance with repeated measures were conducted to check the differences in attitudes between the different research stages. The test found a significant interaction between participant groups, type of

Table 3. Self-efficacy (means and *SD*) among employers and social workers by mentoring style and time of measurement.

Measurement period	Activity	Social workers			Employers		
		n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Control	Begin intervention	28	3.94	0.38	20	3.51	0.33
	End of intervention	28	3.91	0.39	20	3.83	0.24
	6 months later	28	4.00	0.41	20	3.94	0.24
Case study	Begin intervention	27	4.00	0.40	20	3.61	0.31
	End of intervention	27	4.19	0.38	20	3.90	0.26
	6 months later	27	4.51	0.30	20	4.05	0.29
Simulations	Begin intervention	28	3.51	0.40	20	3.62	0.36
	End of intervention	28	4.35	0.38	20	3.93	0.26
	6 months later	28	4.68	0.30	20	4.91	0.28

intervention, and time of measurement: $F(4, 274) = 120.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.637$. For the social workers, it was found that in the simulation group, there was a significant increase between the different research stages. For employers, with all three types of mentoring, there was a significant rise between the different research stages (Table 4).

Figure 3 shows that prior to the beginning of the research intervention, attitudes toward employment of a worker with IDD in the workplace were higher among employers than among social workers. A test run at the conclusion of the research intervention indicated that among social workers in the simulations group, a greater positive change occurred compared to the other groups, even a half year after
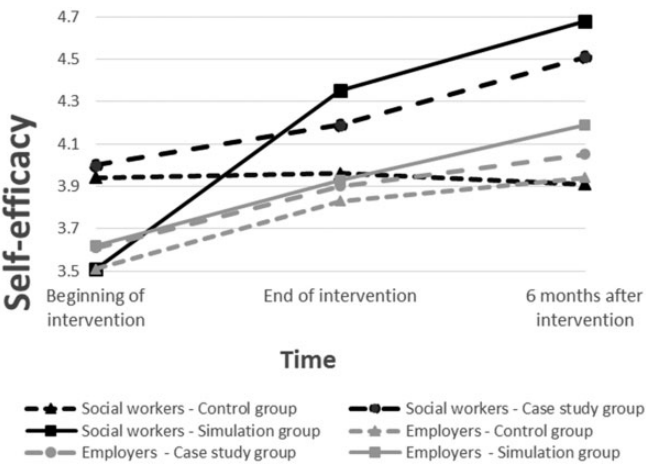

Figure 2. Changes in perceptions of self-efficacy among employers and social workers.

Table 4. Means and *SD*'s for attitudes among employers and social workers, by mentoring type and time of measurement.

| Measurement period	Activity	Social workers			Employers		
		n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Control	Begin intervention	28	3.96	0.21	20	4.28	0.30
	End of intervention	28	3.97	0.21	20	4.41	0.30
	6 months later	28	3.96	0.21	20	4.51	0.22
Case study	Begin intervention	27	3.99	0.14	20	4.26	0.35
	End of intervention	27	3.97	0.17	20	4.42	0.30
	6 months later	27	3.95	0.14	20	4.55	0.21
Simulations	Begin intervention	28	3.63	0.13	20	4.16	0.43
	End of intervention	28	4.53	0.13	20	4.46	0.29
	6 months later	28	4.64	0.14	20	4.70	0.13
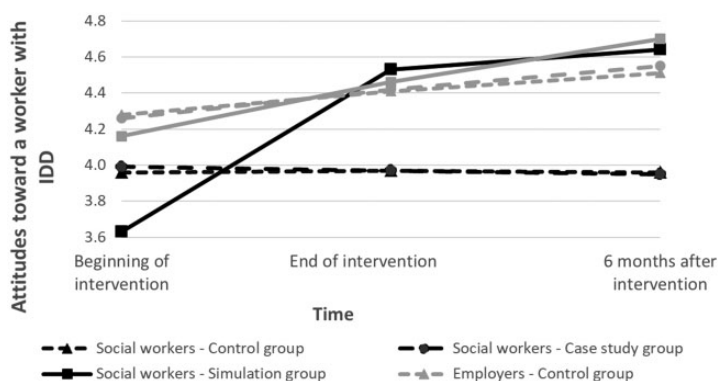
Figure 3. Changes in attitudes toward a worker with IDD in the workplace among employers and social workers. IDD: intellectual developmental disability.

concluding the research intervention. For the employers' group, it was found that the influence of the simulations workshops and viewing videoed dilemmas continued to increase across all stages of the study.

Discussion

The study goal was to explore the effect of different mentoring strategies such as simulations and case studies on employers and social workers in dealing with ethical dilemmas of supported employment by measuring participants' psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and positive attitudes toward employment of with IDD. Analysis of the data has indicated that psychological empowerment among employers was found to be significantly higher than among social workers. This finding may be explained as due to the fact that employing workers with IDD in the workplace has caused employers to have a feeling of significance and efficiency in work, since they have trained workers with IDD to be essential and effective in the workplace.

The latter activity has even raised their self-perception, as possessing the ability and inner strength to take decisions and influence the level of employment and its extent. All these constitute elements of psychological empowerment, which increased during and even after the intervention to a higher level than for social workers. It seems that the social workers' complex roles and the job load they bear (having to accompany a great number of workers with IDD, each with varying complexity) contributes to their lower perception of psychological empowerment.

Perception of self-efficacy was found to be significantly higher among social workers than among employers. This finding may be explained by the fact that they are equipped through training, professional tools, and experience, in accompanying and placing workers with IDD in the free market, whereas employers lack

professional and practical training, so that it is difficult for them to cope with the challenges involved with employment of individuals with IDD, which is reflected in their lower level of perceived self-efficacy.

In the current study, positive attitudes toward employing a worker with IDD were found to be higher for employers compared to social workers. This datum may be explained by the fact that employers who participated in the study employ workers with IDD in their workplaces based on the vision, choice, and belief in the ability of these workers to integrate and succeed, and therefore their perception is greater regarding these employees. By contrast, social workers interact with a wide variety of workers with IDD and their employers so that their experience, given the difficult challenges this employment creates vis-à-vis a large number of those involved (employer, managers, parents, and workers with IDD) and the difficulty of integration into the work place, including resistance arising due to their employment, makes social workers less optimistic and less positive toward employment of workers with IDD, as compared to their employers.

The study findings supported the research hypothesis, which argued that there would be a relationship between mentoring type and perception of psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward employment of individuals with IDD in the workplace, among social workers and employers in the framework of supported employment. The study's findings revealed that the influence of simulations among social workers and employers continued even a half year beyond the period of intervention, with the greatest influence coming from simulations mentoring among social workers.

Case study analysis among social workers and employers was also found to influence these perceptions but more moderately as compared to participation in simulations by social workers or their analysis by employers. In addition, in the control group, we found that almost no significant change was observed throughout the study, which may be explained in light of the fact that its participants did not undergo any sort of mentoring process. Therefore, in general, we may conclude that the research findings indicate that active mentoring aided by simulations and their examination among social workers and employers are likely to influence the increase in level of psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward employment of workers with IDD over time, even beyond the actual intervention experience.

Study findings showed that the more dynamic the mentoring, the greater the change of perceptions throughout the study and afterward. Therefore, simulations mentoring is effective not only in its analysis but also in role-playing and has a greater effect than case studies. These findings support the study by Schweisfurth (2013), who advocates the use of simulations as an effective mentoring tool, emphasizing the effectiveness both for those participating in the simulation role-play, the reflectiveness of observers asking questions, dialogue between participants, and development of critical, creative thinking skills.

In general, the research findings showed that the control group, which did not undergo any mentoring process during the study, also showed a minor, very moderate increase. We may assume that the fact that social workers or employers

devoted time and thought to reading the questionnaires and reflected on their attitudes in order to complete the questionnaire, brought about change, albeit minor.

To summarize, in light of the fact that in all three psychological variables examined an increase occurred during active mentoring (simulations and case studies), and even after conclusion of the intervention, there is considerable importance for mentoring employers and social workers with active mentoring methods such as simulations.

Limitations of the study

The employers who participated in the study were from various organizations, at different levels in the organizational hierarchy, so that their interaction with workers with IDD was not uniform. Similarly, the social workers who participated in the study were from different workplaces, with varying work seniority in associations. It is possible that experience in work influenced their coping with solving dilemmas. It may be that this heterogeneity sometimes created gaps in the research perceptions examined. An additional limitation is that the three psychological variables tested showed a tendency toward change throughout the research period. It is possible that some of the variables showed a trend toward change for reasons other than mentoring.

Conclusions and implications of the study

The research findings indicate the importance of developing active mentoring for social workers and employers; our expectation is that the more active the mentoring, the more we could expect a greater increase in psychological variables such as psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and positive attitudes toward workers with IDD. Therefore, there is considerable importance in developing in-service training and active mentoring for all those involved in the challenges of supported employment. Simulations with participation of actors among social workers and employers regarding ethical challenges in supported employment are the recommended mentoring methods, as compared to the case studies tested in the current study.

Ethics

Ethical approval for the study was given by the Israeli Ministry of Welfare and Social Services.

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