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Systematic Adaptation of the JOBS Program for Use with Adults with Visual Impairments


Jennifer L. Cmar, Ph.D., COMS

Associate Research Professor

The National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision

Mississippi State University

jcmar@colled.msstate.edu

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7619-7773>


Karla Antonelli, Ph.D.

Research Scientist I

The National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision

Mississippi State University

kantonelli@colled.msstate.edu

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4018-8760>

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Correspondence concerning this manuscript should be addressed to Jennifer L. Cmar, The National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision, P.O. Box 6189, Mississippi State, MS 39762. Email: jcmar@colled.msstate.edu

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Abstract

Introduction: The purpose of this study was to use a systematic process to adapt the JOBS program, an evidence-based job search intervention, for use with unemployed adults with visual impairments and implementation via videoconferencing.

Method: The Planned Adaptation approach, an established framework for adapting evidence-based practices, guided the adaptations. The four-step Planned Adaptation process comprised examining the program's theory of change, identifying population differences, adapting the program content, and adapting the evaluation strategy.

Results: The original JOBS program has five key components, two critical causal mechanisms, and several potential moderators. Differences between the original and new target populations include needs, experiences, and employment barriers. Adaptations included activity changes, new processes to enhance outcomes, and changes to the implementation procedures. The evaluation plan for the adapted program includes a pilot study to test the updated activities, processes, and procedures, followed by an efficacy study to assess outcomes.

Discussion: The JOBS program was a strong candidate for systematic adaptation due to its theoretical foundation, thorough documentation, and established active ingredients. Stakeholder input increased the relevance and feasibility of the adaptations. Future research is needed to evaluate the adapted program and its outcomes.

Application for Practitioners: After completion of the evaluation plan, the new JOBS adaptation will be available for practitioners to use with adults with visual impairments.

Practitioners may find the Planned Adaptation approach useful for adapting other programs to better meet the needs of the population they serve.

Systematic Adaptation of the JOBS Program for Use with Adults with Visual Impairments

People with visual impairments have had lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates than people without disabilities for numerous years (McDonnall & Sui, 2019). The unemployment rate for people with visual impairments aged 16 to 64 in the United States was 12.3% in 2020, compared to 7.9% of this same age group without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Unemployment has a negative impact on many aspects of people's lives, including financial security, physical health, and psychological well-being (Brand, 2015; Wanberg, 2012). Recognition of the adverse effects of unemployment led to the development and evaluation of job search interventions (i.e., programs that help job seekers find employment), many of which had positive effects on participants' employment outcomes (Liu et al., 2014). However, few existing programs for adults with visual impairments include intensive instruction in job-seeking skills (Cervenka, 2020), and the effectiveness of those programs has not been documented in the literature.

The JOBS program, developed in the 1990s by the Michigan Prevention Research Center, is a job search intervention for unemployed adults designed to promote high-quality reemployment and prevent poor mental health associated with unemployment (Curran et al., 1999). This intensive intervention focuses on teaching job-seeking skills while addressing participants' emotional needs, emphasizing their strengths, and boosting their confidence (Price & Vinokur, 2014). It consists of five 4-hour group sessions covering various topics related to searching for employment, including identifying and presenting skills, finding job leads through networking, thinking

like an employer, interviewing, and anticipating job search barriers and setbacks (Curran et al., 1999). JOBS is an evidence-based practice (EBP) that has substantial support for its efficacy in increasing job search self-efficacy, promoting reemployment, and reducing depressive symptoms (Caplan et al., 1989; Price et al., 1992; Vinokur et al., 1995, 2000). JOBS has been disseminated widely and implemented in several countries, including the United States, Finland, South Africa, China, and Ireland, and it has evidence of effectiveness across contexts (Price & Vinokur, 2014). It has been adapted for various populations, including welfare recipients (Lee et al., 2008), vocational college graduates (Nykänen et al., 2012), and transition-age youth with visual impairments (Cmar & McDonnall, 2019). Although the JOBS program has not been adapted for or tested with adults with visual impairments, its characteristics, focus, and empirical support indicate it may be a promising intervention for this population.

The use of videoconferencing and other distance technologies for vision rehabilitation services has become widespread in recent years, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic's onset (Groszew & Zavoda, 2022; Jones et al., 2022). Job search interventions, including JOBS and previous JOBS adaptations, have been typically delivered in person (Curran et al., 1999; Liu et al., 2014). Other group interventions have been implemented successfully through videoconferencing, with outcomes comparable to face-to-face interventions (Banbury et al., 2018; Lu et al., 2023; Margherita et al., 2022). The advantages of using a synchronous distance format include reducing costs, eliminating travel requirements, and increasing access to people in rural areas, thus reducing transportation barriers and facilitating the participation of individuals from a wider geographical area (Banbury et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2022).

Considering the JOBS program's strong evidence of effectiveness across contexts and populations, the lack of job search intervention research for adults with visual impairments, and the potential advantages of using a distance format, the purpose of this study was to adapt JOBS for use with unemployed adults with visual impairments and implementation via videoconferencing. Using a systematic process, we tailored aspects of the program's content and delivery for people with visual impairments while preserving the key program elements (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2022). This article describes the systematic process of adapting the JOBS program for this new population and format.

Method

Adaptation Framework

We utilized the Planned Adaptation approach (Lee et al., 2008) to plan and implement the JOBS program adaptations. Planned Adaptation is an established framework developed to guide practitioners who wish to adapt EBPs for new populations. This approach involves examining the theory behind an EBP to ensure that adaptations are consistent with the core mechanisms of change. The core mechanisms of the EBP must be implemented with fidelity, but aspects of the program unrelated to theory or core mechanisms can be adapted for different populations.

Procedure

A research team (led by the authors) coordinated the adaptation process, which incorporated input and involvement from practitioners and other stakeholders to ensure that adaptations meet the needs of the target population and are feasible to implement. The Planned Adaptation approach includes four steps: (1) examine the program's

theory of change, (2) identify population differences, (3) adapt program content, and (4) adapt the evaluation strategy (Lee et al., 2008). The following sections describe the steps and how we implemented them.

Step 1: Examine Theory of Change

Step 1 involved reviewing the original JOBS program's conceptual framework (Price & Vinokur, 2014), implementation guidelines (Curran et al., 1999), and research evidence to determine the key elements of the program theory (Lee et al., 2008). We identified the underlying causal mechanisms that promote positive outcomes, identified moderators that may enhance or diminish outcomes, and differentiated between the core mechanisms of change (i.e., direct links between theory and activities) and secondary pathways (i.e., elements that may relate to core mechanisms but are not main targets of activities).

Step 2: Identify Population Differences

Step 2 comprised reviewing research evidence and practice knowledge to identify differences between the original and new target populations that may interact with the mechanisms of change and moderators identified in Step 1 (Lee et al., 2008). We also identified changes to the job-seeking process since the JOBS program's development that would be relevant to adults with visual impairments.

Step 3: Adapt Program Content

Step 3 involved using an iterative process to adapt the program through a collaborative effort between the research team and stakeholders. We reviewed the original JOBS program manual, the adapted version of JOBS for youth with visual impairments, and findings from Steps 1 and 2. We consulted with agency

representatives, service providers, and colleagues to obtain input about content, accessibility, and logistics. Then, we used that information to identify potential program adaptations for adults with visual impairments that would not affect the core mechanisms of change (Lee et al., 2008) and drafted the program materials for the new JOBS adaptation.

The research team established an advisory board (Table 1) for the study to review the adapted program. The advisory board comprised four vocational rehabilitation counselors, one representative from a state employment organization, and one adult with low vision who worked in a non-rehabilitation field. We provided the advisory board with the draft program materials incrementally and asked them to review and provide feedback. The advisory board assessed each section and responded to queries on whether the materials were accurate, were up-to-date, adequately addressed blindness and low vision, including accessibility of the activities, and whether they had any overall suggestions. Then, we made additional changes to the program in response to the advisory board's feedback and recommendations. Finally, the trainers assigned to implement the adapted program reviewed the materials and held practice sessions, which led to additional recommendations for changes that the research team then implemented.

Step 4: Adapt Evaluation Strategy

In Step 4, we identified new measures that align with the adaptations from Step 3 in consultation with agency representatives, service providers, and colleagues. Then, we developed an evaluation plan that included those new measures (Lee et al., 2008).

Results

The next sections describe the outcomes of each step in the adaptation process, including the original JOBS program's theory of change, differences between the original and new target populations, the program adaptations, and the evaluation plan for the adapted program.

Outcome 1: Original JOBS Program Theory of Change

The five key components of the original JOBS program are (1) job search skills training, (2) active teaching and learning methods, (3) inoculation against setbacks, (4) trainer referent power and skills, and (5) a supportive learning environment (Curran et al., 1999; Vuori et al., 2005). Participants develop job search skills through a learning process based on social learning theory. The program's active learning and teaching methods rely on participants' knowledge and skills. Activities include small-group discussions, large-group discussions, brainstorming, and role-play exercises. Inoculation against setbacks is an adaptation of stress inoculation training (Meichenbaum, 1988) that emphasizes group problem solving to help participants anticipate, prepare for, and overcome barriers (Curran et al., 1999). Two skilled trainers convey their expertise when leading the group sessions and build referent power by self-disclosing their experiences with job-seeking and unemployment, having unconditional positive regard, and providing specific positive feedback. The trainers express empathy, model and reinforce supportive behaviors, and create a learning environment in which participants support each other.

The two critical causal mechanisms that promote positive outcomes are job search self-efficacy and inoculation against setbacks, both of which mediated the original JOBS program's effects on mental health and employment outcomes (van Ryn

& Vinokur, 1992; Vinokur & Schul, 1997; Vuori & Vinokur, 2005). Moderators that may enhance or diminish outcomes include depression, personal mastery (a composite measure of internal locus of control, self-esteem, and self-efficacy), motivation, and duration of unemployment. People at high risk for depression benefited the most from the original JOBS program (Vinokur et al., 1995), particularly from inoculation against setbacks and trainers' skills (Vuori et al., 2005). This program had greater long-term benefits for people with low baseline levels of personal mastery and job search motivation than for people with high mastery and motivation (Vinokur et al., 2000). JOBS participants with a moderate duration of unemployment (i.e., 3-12 months) had higher reemployment rates and more stable employment than participants with shorter or longer durations of unemployment, but recently unemployed participants had the largest reductions in psychological distress (Vuori et al., 2002). The core mechanisms of change are (a) acquisition of job search skills leading to increased job search self-efficacy and (b) inoculation against setbacks that may occur during the job search process. The main secondary pathway is effective, persistent job search behavior that improves outcomes.

Outcome 2: Population Differences

The original target population for the JOBS program was adults who experienced a recent job loss and were seeking services from a state employment office in southeastern Michigan (Vinokur et al., 1995). Members of the original JOBS sample had previous work experience and worked at their last job for an average of 4 years (Vinokur et al., 1995). The target population for our new JOBS adaptation is unemployed adults with visual impairments from the United States who are "job-ready" (i.e., completed any

necessary education and training, have the skills needed to work in their field of interest), interested in employment, and ready to begin the job search process.

Compared to the original JOBS population, adults with visual impairments access information differently (e.g., non-visually) and will likely be more heterogeneous in terms of additional disabilities, health conditions, and previous work experience. Within the population of adults with visual impairments, needs and experiences will vary by age at onset of visual impairment (i.e., congenital versus adventitious). Adaptations for job seekers with visual impairments should address disability disclosure, job accommodations, and non-visual aspects of self-presentation for resumes and interviews, including resume formatting and nonverbal communication. Additionally, inaccessible program activities and materials (e.g., flipcharts, print handouts) must be converted to accessible formats. Adults with visual impairments and little or no previous work experience will have few employment experiences to draw from when preparing job application materials and interviewing. Accordingly, the adapted JOBS program content should target individuals with varying characteristics and amounts of work experience.

The primary barriers to employment for the original JOBS population were lack of job-seeking knowledge and skills and reduced motivation to engage in sustained job search behavior. Those employment barriers also apply to people with visual impairments; however, this population faces additional barriers, including inaccessible job applications, transportation difficulties, discrimination, negative employer attitudes, and work disincentives (Crudden et al., 2005; Crudden & McBroom, 1999; Silverman et al., 2019; Steverson, 2020). Inaccessible job applications may increase frustration,

reduce job search self-efficacy, and impede effective job search behavior for applicants with visual impairments. Unlike the original JOBS population, most adults with visual impairments do not drive and therefore use other methods for transportation to job interviews and work. Transportation methods vary by location, but many require pre-planning, are time-consuming, and lack reliability, which may affect applicants' job search behavior and cause them to restrict the scope of their job search. Job seekers with visual impairments must anticipate and prepare to address negative employer attitudes and discrimination proactively. Financial support (e.g., federal disability benefits) may be a work disincentive, resulting in reduced motivation to begin the job search process and engage in persistent job search behavior, particularly when encountering setbacks. The new JOBS adaptation for adults with visual impairments should address these barriers to employment.

Several aspects of the job-seeking process have changed since the early 1990s when the JOBS program began. These changes include sources of job leads, job-seeking methods, networking avenues, resume and cover letter guidance, and technology (e.g., email, Internet). Updating outdated information will ensure that the adapted program addresses current job-seeking methods, increasing its relevance for all job seekers, including those with visual impairments.

Outcome 3: Program Adaptations

The iterative adaptation process resulted in a new adaptation of the JOBS program designed for implementation in a synchronous distance format with unemployed adults with visual impairments. Feedback from the advisory board was generally positive; for example, "I am excited about this curriculum! Great content so far

– exactly what our consumers need.” In addition to recommended adaptations, the advisory board suggested edits for clarity and comprehensiveness. One example comment was, “You probably need to define disclosure. Most clients do not know what this is, how to approach or what is legal. May need to add information for trainers to accurately discuss.” Table 2 includes additional examples of the advisory board’s feedback. Table 3 provides a summary of the program adaptations and their origins. The adaptations included activity changes that do not affect core mechanisms, new processes to enhance outcomes, and changes to implementation procedures. They focused on increasing relevance for people with visual impairments, incorporating updated job-seeking guidance, structuring group activities for videoconferencing, and making activities and materials accessible.

Outcome 4: Program Evaluation Plan

The evaluation plan for the new JOBS adaptation includes a pilot study and an efficacy study. The pilot study provides an opportunity to test the updated program activities, processes, and implementation procedures. Key pilot study measures are cognitive load, engagement, acceptability, and feasibility. Pilot study results will guide further program adaptations and facilitate identifying and addressing implementation challenges before the efficacy study. The efficacy study will focus on program outcomes, assessed through a two-group randomized controlled trial. Efficacy study measures include (a) primary targets of the original JOBS program (depression, employment), (b) constructs that align with its core mechanisms of change (job search behavior, job search self-efficacy, problem solving), and (c) new measures related to the program adaptations (job search knowledge, resume quality).

Discussion

This study aimed to adapt the JOBS program, an evidence-based job search intervention, for implementation in a synchronous distance format with unemployed adults with visual impairments. We achieved that aim by following an established framework for adapting EBPs consisting of a systematic, multi-step process with involvement from stakeholders, which is preferable to unplanned, spontaneous adaptations (SAMHSA, 2022). In addition, careful planning and documentation of the adaptations facilitated the identification and preservation of the original program's core mechanisms of change.

The original JOBS program's strong theoretical foundation, thorough training materials, and established active ingredients made it a good candidate for systematic adaptation. The program's active ingredients may also provide a valuable foundation for interventions targeting other outcomes (Price & Vinokur, 2014). The well-documented understanding of *how* the program works provided a blueprint for adaptation (Price et al., 1998). Obtaining input from practitioners and other stakeholders throughout our adaptation process was critical for increasing relevance, promoting feasibility, and facilitating future adoption of the adapted program in practice settings (Lee et al., 2008). Importantly, an adaptation of an EBP is not automatically an EBP (SAMHSA, 2022); therefore, future research will be instrumental in evaluating the adapted program and its outcomes.

Our new adaptation of the JOBS program targeted job seekers with visual impairments from the United States, which may limit the generalizability of its content. Additional cultural or local adaptations may be necessary before implementing the

program with other populations (Lee et al., 2008). Another limitation relates to the advisory board's composition; members were predominantly male and from the South, and some did not provide demographic data on age and race/ethnicity.

Application for Practitioners

This article illustrates the systematic process we used to adapt the JOBS program for use with people with visual impairments. Once we complete our evaluation of the new JOBS adaptation and release it for use in practice settings, practitioners can use it with adult job seekers with visual impairments. This program and other existing programs will not always be a perfect fit for all contexts “out of the box” and may require further adaptations. Practitioners can apply the Planned Adaptation approach described in this article to adapt programs to be more relevant for their organization and the population they serve. This approach may be particularly useful for practitioners because it was developed to help practitioners adapt and implement EBPs in practice settings with the goal of bridging the research-to-practice gap (Lee et al., 2008). SAMHSA (2022) provides an overview of other common adaptation frameworks, adaptation resources, and additional examples of program adaptations for other populations. Practitioners can also use these frameworks to convert face-to-face interventions to a distance format, as demonstrated through our example.

When using an established or adapted program with a new population or in a different setting, it is essential to avoid changing its active ingredients. Practitioners can review implementation guidelines and research to identify and preserve the program's core elements. During this process, practitioners may benefit from collaborating with researchers and seeking technical assistance from the program's creators when

necessary (Lee et al., 2008). Finally, collecting data during and after the program is important for assessing whether it was implemented as intended, aspects that did and did not work well, potential changes for future implementation, and whether participants achieved the expected outcomes (SAMHSA, 2022).

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Table 1
Advisory Board Demographics

Variable	<i>n</i>
Age	
45-50	1
50-55	3
Not reported	2
Gender	
Male	5
Female	1
Race/Ethnicity	
Black, non-Latino	1
White, non-Latino	3
Not reported	2
Vision level	
Sighted	3
Blind	2
Low vision	1
U.S. region	
Midwest	1
South ^a	5

^aFour states represented.

Table 2

Example Advisory Board Feedback

Topic	Comment
Role-play example	Often as the VR counselor, I have to recommend or strongly encourage job seekers, specifically those who have low vision to take and use their cane to the interview. Several of my clients have bumped into the corner of a wall, flowerpot or tripped while walking back to the interview with the employer.
Portraying visual impairment	Great example! I want participants to know that it's ok to talk about their blindness and/or alternative technology and skills they use to perform tasks – as long as they are described POSITIVELY.
Disclosure	I really like the Day two homework Disability Disclosure Script. It is very clear and gives the participant a clear guide for developing their disclosure statement. Be sure to keep the differences between job seeker's obstacles and employer concerns clear.
Networking	I know calling to speak directly with people is always the best, but young people these days and most of my clients are much more comfortable with texting and using social media for all kinds of networking. I think this class needs to acknowledge that and build into the discussion some of these ways to network and reaching out to others they know.
Resume formatting	I think going over formatting of resumes is important. Many of our clients have been out of the employment world for some time and this is something that has changed
Ice-breaker activities	I would encourage this to be very informal to create a fun, inviting, welcoming tone for each day. If we are successful in making participants feel at ease, the entire program will be more successful.
Accessibility	You will probably have already addressed this, but may want to suggest that participants have these docs in accessible formats and that they take notes to collect and recall information throughout this program.

Table 3
JOB Program Adaptations

Category	Adaptation	Source
Activities and content		
Visual impairment-specific changes	Edited role-play examples, case-study personas, and other examples to portray job seekers with visual impairments ranging from blindness to low vision who experienced vision loss at different ages	RT, AB
	Edited case-study personas and sample resumes to reflect various experience levels ranging from entry-level to upper management	RT, AB
	Added Narrator to role-play examples to describe physical action and body language	OC
	Added content on resume layout and formatting	RT
	Added content on nonverbal communication for interviews (e.g., eye contact, handshake, body language)	RT
	Addressed additional employment barriers, including transportation, inaccessible job applications, and employer attitudes	RT, AB
	Added three dedicated activities and other content to address disclosure and accommodations	RT, AB
Content updates	Updated information about job lead sources and job-seeking methods, including job boards, employers' websites, and social media	RT, AB
	Addressed additional networking avenues, including social media and LinkedIn; included content on creating a LinkedIn profile	RT, OC, AB
	Updated resume and cover letter guidance and addressed applicant tracking systems	RT, AB
	Added guidance for describing skills in quantifiable ways for interview preparation	AB
	Addressed STAR method for responding to behavioral interview questions	OC, AB
	Addressed technology use for job-seeking (e.g., email, Internet, online presence)	RT, AB
	Updated examples to reflect a broader selection of modern jobs and industries	RT

	Created new resume and cover letter examples with updated dates, skills, and experience; followed updated guidelines, used accessible templates, and incorporated email and social media information	RT
New processes	Added informal ice-breaker activities	AB
	Added optional virtual networking sessions	T
	Added homework assignments and time to discuss them	RT
Implementation procedures	Modified activity instructions for clarity and delivery via videoconferencing	RT, T, AB
	Reduced maximum group size from 20 to 12	RT, T
	Adjusted the daily schedule to reduce fatigue (i.e., 2-hour AM session, 2-hour break, 2-hour PM session)	T
	Used breakout rooms for small-group activities	RT, T
	Eliminated flipcharts for activities and replaced with trainers typing notes into a shared electronic document and reading them aloud, so participants could access information “live,” review it later, or take their own notes	OC, AB
	Converted printed handouts to accessible electronic format	OC, AB
	Used virtual polls to replace hand-raising in group activities	RT, AB
	Converted in-person mingle activity to virtual group format	RT, AB
	Replaced in-person graduation ceremony with virtual graduation roll call	T, AB

Note. RT = research team; AB = Advisory Board; OC = other consultants; T = trainers.