A League of Their Own

Children’s laughter and shouting filled the air as forty special needs students from the Anderson area ran onto the baseball field. It was the beginning of a normal Wednesday afternoon for me as a volunteer with Challenger Baseball. Challenger Baseball is a volunteer organization that meets every Wednesday afternoon where special needs children can all get together and play an organized sport. Because each of these students has acquired the ascribed and master status as a child with a disability they are not allowed to participate in other leagues in the area, therefore we provide them with a place that allows them to play and encourages them to have fun and be positive. In this program, each volunteer is paired up with one of the children and is their “buddy” for the season. Because each child is then individually accounted for, though we have forty volunteers, there is no diffusion of responsibility in the group and every volunteer is held responsible for their child. This program is overall an incredible experience for both the volunteers and the children. It allows the volunteers to have a great time and work with an incredible group of people, and gives the children a unique socialization environment in which they can interact with others they may be similar to and not be judged for their behavior or mannerisms. Though the environment we provide at Challenger Baseball is a welcoming one, the outside world is often not so kind. Many of these children will most likely face a form of discrimination in their life due to institutional discrimination against those with disabilities in our country and may even encounter poverty if they are unable to acquire a job.

The social problem those in the minority group of having a disability experience is the discrimination they face, specifically in the job market. In the United States the *Americans with
Disabilities Act passed in 1990 and is supposed to require employers to not discriminate against individuals who are qualified for a position but have a disability (“Disability Discrimination”). Unfortunately many qualified applicants find themselves without a job simply because employers are hesitant to hire them for the following reasons; the cost of possible accommodations for the individual, negative attitudes from other employees, and the potential problem of poor productivity (Roessler 159). The overall concern for employers is the idea that their company or business may decrease in productivity if this individual is hired and thus go against society’s core values of efficiency and hard work. Going against these values would not result in any form of social punishment, but in the eyes of the employer he may fear that his business would be affected financially thus decreasing its success. Because success is a highly esteemed value in society, employers are less likely to hire an individual that they think may negatively impact their success. Thus society’s values directly impact this minority group and have imparted a discriminatory stigma to them. Due to this institutional discrimination, it is more difficult for those with disabilities to find and hold jobs, which then increases their chance of entering the working poor or underclass thus potentially putting them at or below the poverty line.

According to the United Nations for Human Rights, “Persons with disabilities make up the world’s largest and most disadvantaged minority” (“Combating Discrimination”). Meaning a physical or intellectual disability has the potential ability to define which social class an individual enters. The United Nations states, “20% of the world’s poorest people are with disabilities” and the U.S Census Bureau informs “28.8% of people aged 18 to 64 with a disability live in poverty” (“Combating Discrimination”; DeNavas-Walt). Though those in poverty usually only remain in poverty “for one, two, or three years, then manage to get above the poverty line,”
those with disabilities are usually at greater risk for entering poverty initially (Rank 41).

Individuals with disabilities are typical of most in poverty in that they usually have a lower level of education, with around 32% receiving a post-secondary education (Roessler 158). This can be compared to the 65.9% of students without physical or intellectual disabilities that enrolled in college and universities in 2013 (“College Enrollment”). Because of the higher possibility of poverty, those with disabilities may experience a lower level of physical or mental health because they are unable to afford the medical care they need. This can then cause them to be unfit to work and thus increase the possibility of them entering poverty.

The research question I would pose then would be, what is the probability of one of the children I volunteer with to enter poverty at some point in their lives? Because there is a possible correlation between having a physical or intellectual disability and potentially falling below the poverty line, it would be sad but interesting to know if one of the children I knew personally would end up in this position.

In order to answer this research question, one first should utilize documents in order to properly define poverty and understand what the expected number of those entering poverty would be. Collecting statistics concerning those living at or below the poverty line would be helpful and exploring the typical range of how long one remains in poverty would be useful knowledge as well. This information would allow for expected ranges of poverty to be determined and would lay the foundation for exploring the particular topic. Once this is determined, another method that would be beneficial to use would be secondary analysis. In doing so, a researcher would be able to analyze statistics of those with a disability and in poverty from specific research done investigating the relationship between the two, and possibly develop a trend line of those with a disability entering poverty within the next few years. After a trend
line is established, the researcher could apply the number of children that are involved in the Challenger Baseball program to get a rough estimate of those potentially entering poverty in the future. If one wanted to receive an exact calculation, unobtrusive measures could be used and each of the children could be tracked into their adulthood in order to observe the social class they ultimately enter. This last measure would be difficult to undertake as following the lives of forty different individuals for the next ten or so years would pose a few problems and doing so could be considered unethical. Therefore, using a combination of studying documents and exercising secondary analysis to develop a trend line would be the most efficient way to go about answering the proposed research question.

Altogether this group of individuals is a very special group and it saddens me to know that they will one day face potential discrimination if they have not already encountered it in their school system. I believe the only way we would be able to end discrimination against this minority group is to educate the general population, especially potential employers, on the strengths these individuals have and what beneficial qualities they can bring to aid in success.
Works Cited


