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Title

Integrate Disabled People into Society: Lessons from Work-integration Social Enterprises

Abstract

Social entrepreneurship (SE) has emerged as an alternative solution to disabilities in both SE and SW fields. Existing research acknowledges that social enterprises (SEs) are generally more efficient and effective in delivering services than non-profits (Defourny & Nyssens, 2006; Linton, 2013) and human services organizations (Gray, Healy & Crofts, 2003; Savaya, et al., 2008). Given the fact that SE practices are closely aligned with those of SW practices, mission and values (Frank & Muranda, 2016; Gray & Croft, 2002; Gray, Healy & Crofts, 2003), we could argue that SE is an extension of SW practice and research in an innovative and entrepreneurial way.

One of the areas of great interest to SW research and practice but least researched in the SE field is how SEs address the problems faced by people with disabilities (PODs). Despite the promise of SE to address the problems faced by PODs via work-integrated SEs, we do not know if the SE model generates better outcomes compared to the conventional SW approach, and if so, how. Therefore, this article seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) Are social entrepreneurs’ interventions similar to or different from conventional SW practice, and if so, how and why? 2) Are SE interventions more effective than conventional SW services longitudinally, and if so, how and why? 3) Which SE interventions better improve the well-being and quality of life of the disadvantaged population compared to conventional social work services?

To answer the questions, we first employ a qualitative inductive approach to understand how SE and SW have been helping the disabled people and in what way(s) they may be similar or different. Secondly, longitudinal studies are conducted to assess the efficacy of SE interventions. Disabled clients from selected social enterprises are recruited (n=20) and are compared with clients from human services agencies (n=20). We use a before-and-after research design (Creswell, 2013; Kothari, 2004) to measure the quality of life (QOL), well-being and social inclusion of persons with disabilities. Lastly, a quantitative survey is used to test factors that influence the efficacy of SE interventions versus SW practices by drawing insights from results from previous studies.
Overall, this article makes several new contributions to the SE and SW literature. It is one of the first studies that makes a systematic comparison between SE’s SW practices and the conventional SW practices using actual data collected from practitioners dealing with PODs from both fields. The findings provide new contributions to the SE’s social value creation concepts and the SW literature. Secondly, this article could provide new empirical evidence to the claim that SE offers an effective alternative employment pathway that focuses on both social and economic empowerment for PODs. Finally, it offers new contributions on the mechanisms and factors that explain and predict the efficacy of interventions from the SE and SW fields for PODs, and provide useful advice for social workers and social entrepreneurs in designing interventions and for policy makers and social investors in developing support programs for SEs and SWs.

Keyword

Work integration; Social enterprises; Social work; Disability