



Exploring Opportunities and Barriers to Employment for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ID): Perspectives of Parents and Mentors

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Abstract

The U.S. hotel industry continues to face critical labor shortages despite enhanced wages and benefits. This study explores the untapped potential of individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) as a viable labor pool, focusing on the perspectives of parents and mentors who support them. Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and a qualitative design, the study integrates thematic analysis with Natural Language Processing (NLP) to analyze interviews with nine participants. Findings reveal multi-level employment barriers and opportunities across individual, relational, organizational, and societal domains. Key themes include emotional and cognitive challenges, inaccessible hiring systems, inadequate job matches, and systemic gaps in inclusive hiring policies. Participants emphasized the importance of tailored training, strong interpersonal support, and hotel-IPSE partnerships. The study highlights the need for coordinated action across ecological levels to foster inclusive hiring practices in hospitality. Implications are offered for employers, educators, and policymakers to better integrate individuals with ID into the hospitality workforce.

Key Words *Intellectual Disabilities, Hotel, Ecological System Theory, Employment, Inclusive Workplace*

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