

SPECIAL FEATURE

The Job Club Method for the Job Handicapped: A Comparative Outcome Study

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In their article, Azrin and Philip compare the Job Club method with an alternative method, using 154 clients who had job-finding problems, such as physical, emotional, intellectual, and social handicaps, or long-term unemployment. In six months, 95% of the Job Club clients obtained jobs versus 28% of the comparison group. The jobs of the Job Club clients paid 22% more (median), were obtained sooner (a median of 10 days vs. 30 days), were maintained, and required a median of five sessions and five interviews. The results suggest that virtually all handicapped or "hard-core" unemployed persons can obtain and retain a job under an intensive Job Club program.

The Job Club method was recently found to be an effective method of helping persons obtain employment (Azrin, Flores, & Kaplan, 1975). After three months, 93% of the Job Club clients had obtained full-time employment compared to 60% of the clients in a randomly assigned control group (the comparison group) who did not receive the Job Club counseling. The Job Club program was subsequently applied specifically to welfare recipients of the federal program, Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), who were enrolled in the Work Incentive Program (WIN) placement phase of that program (Azrin, 1978; Azrin, Philip, Thienes-Hontos, & Besalel, in press). In that large-scale field study of about 1,000 welfare clients in five cities, the Job Club program resulted in an 85% placement rate, compared with 59% for the continuing control clients, at the 12-month follow-up. In both of these studies, the job salary and job type were comparable or better for the Job Club clients, and the jobs were obtained sooner.

The Job Club method is an intensive behavioral counseling program based on the view of job finding as involving interpersonal skills, a social information network (Jones & Azrin, 1973), motivational fac-

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tors, and the obvious need for job skills. The method derives from the conceptualization of behavior as being governed in large part by the nature of the operant consequences and stimulus antecedents of behavior (Skinner, 1938; 1953). The method is part of the newly emerging field of applied learning theory, alternatively known as applied behavioral analysis (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968), behavior modification (Bandura, 1969; Ullmann & Krasner, 1969), behavior therapy (Wolpe, 1958), or learning therapy (Azrin, 1977).

The first objective of our study was to evaluate the job Club method with job seekers who had special difficulty in obtaining employment. The second objective of the study was to compare the job Club method with an alternative method of job counseling. Experimental comparisons between two specified programs have not previously been made; comparisons with unspecified methods have been rare (McClure, 1972). Because no other standardized method has been sufficiently evaluated against a control group to warrant inclusion as a method of demonstrated effectiveness, a method was selected for comparison that embodied the common format of lecture, discussion, and interview taping and rehearsal for one or two sessions.

METHOD

Unemployment Rate

The clients in this study resided in a southern Illinois area with relatively little industry. The study took place primarily during 1974-75, at which time the mean unemployment rate was 7.5% for the counties served.

Clients

The study included 154 job seekers, the criterion for inclusion being that the client desired a full-time job, attended two or more sessions, and had a clear job-finding problem, or had been unsuccessfully seeking a job for at least two months. Referrals were solicited from a state hospital for the mentally ill and retarded, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Office, the local General Assistance Program, the Department of Public Aid, a community mental health center, a women's group, drug and alcohol treatment centers, an early-release house for prisoners, probation officers, community workshops for the handicapped, and a Veterans Administration hospital. Also, a newspaper advertisement invited persons with severe employment problems to apply.

Experimental Design

After the end of the intake session, the clients who were found eligible as hard-core unemployed were given a brief description of job-seeking techniques, and were told that some clients would be randomly as-

signed to a 2-day lecture/discussion/role-play program, and the other clients would be assigned to a continuous supervision program. Clients were told that both programs used similar job-seeking techniques and both programs were believed to be effective. Counselors informed clients that after two months, anyone who wanted to transfer to the other program could do so. A coin flip determined the assignment of the clients, each of whom was given an appointment to begin within three days. The data analysis included all clients who returned for the first and second session. Because participation was entirely voluntary, some persons probably had little motivation to seek a job and inquired only at the suggestion of an agency or because of their own curiosity. No records were kept of the number of such persons. The minimum attendance requirement of two sessions for both groups was designed to provide assurance of some minimal level of motivation.

Chi square and t tests of statistical significance showed that assignment to the two samples did not differ from randomness ($p > .05$) for any of the job-relevant demographic variables, such as age, sex, presence of alcoholism, physical disability, and amount of education, except for a greater number of previous mental-hospital patients in the Job Club sample. The results, however, were analyzed separately for each of the subgroups. The Job Club sample included 80 clients; the comparison sample included 74 clients. The same counselors served both programs.

Job Club Procedure

The Job Club procedure was basically the same as had been described in earlier studies (Azrin, et al., 1975). Some of the specific procedures were as follows: The job-seekers met in a group of 8 ± 4 persons every day, until a job was obtained, for about 2½ hours. The program emphasized obtaining job leads from friends and relatives, the telephone directory, other Job Club members, and previous employers. Most of this activity occurred in the counselor's office, with the counselor supervising by observing or listening, for instance, to phone calls to obtain leads and interviews. The sessions were structured with a lesson plan and with standardized scripts, forms, and charts specifying in detail what clients should say. Support was given by other group members, including an assigned buddy, and by contacting the members' families. The creation of job leads was emphasized, as well as the usual emphasis on successful competition for existing or publicized openings. The personal as well as the usual vocational attributes of the client were emphasized.

A new group was initiated every 2 to 3 weeks, depending on a sufficient number of participants. After the first two afternoon sessions, the new clients met in the morning with the clients from the previous

groups. If the clients lost a job, they were encouraged to return immediately to the next morning session.

Details of the Job Club procedure and its overall strategy are given in a *Job Club Counselor's Manual* (Azrin & Besalel, 1979) and in the aforementioned previous Job Club studies.

Lecture, Discussion, and Rehearsal Procedure

The comparison procedure was slightly modified from a job-placement program designed for rehabilitation agencies (Minneapolis Rehabilitation Center, 1971). The Minneapolis program consisted of informational lectures to a group of clients on how to obtain a job, accompanied by discussion, videotapes, and rehearsal of interview behaviors. A major change in our procedure was that an audiotape recorder was substituted for the videotape. The lecture included some of the suggestions to clients that were given in the Job Club program (e.g., contacting friends, preparing resumes, identifying relevant employment skills, scheduling the job-seeking efforts, dressing properly, having a friendly attitude, diligently searching for a job).

A principal difference between the two programs was that the comparison clients were informed of the need for such actions; the Job Club clients were required to perform them under supervision. The comparison program emphasized interview role-playing, instilling confidence, discussions, and filling out application forms. As in the Job Club procedure, the comparison clients met in groups of about eight clients.

Follow-Up and Data Retrieval

Letters and telephone calls were used to determine the employment status of the clients at least once per month during the first four months after the client had started in the program. Thereafter, follow-up contacts were attempted less frequently and less regularly up to a duration of 12 months for some of the clients. The data analysis considered only full-time jobs (over 20 hours per week). To measure job retention, the follow-up contact recorded how many days the client worked each succeeding month, whether or not the job was the same as the initial job.

Of the 154 job-seekers, 39% were female, 20% were 21 years of age or younger, 64% were single, 22% were veterans, 13% were non-white, and 15% were high school dropouts. The average length of employment was 9 months, and 25% had been unemployed for a year or longer. Almost all (86%) were receiving financial aid from some public agency; 12% received this aid from the Department of Public Aid, and 16% from the local General Assistance program, which provided emergency aid for those not qualifying for aid from other agencies. Again, almost all (86%) were clients of another helping agency; 23% were clients of the DVR (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation);

21% had been in a community mental health program, and 58% were in a community workshop. Thirty-six percent had mental problems for which treatment had been received, 10% had physical handicaps, and 8% had a serious drug or alcohol problem. Many had been institutionalized, including 16% who were inpatients in a mental hospital and 5% who had a police or prison record. The mean age was 29 years, and the mean number of years of education was 13 years.

RESULTS

Data were available from the follow-up for all (100%) clients for the first two months after counseling began, for 99% for the third month, and for 94% for the fourth month. Thereafter, the follow-up data were less complete: 56% for the fifth month, 32% for the sixth month, 12% for the ninth month, and 8% for the twelfth month. The experimental design permitted clients to change treatment groups after two months; thus follow-up efforts were designed to be intensive for the first months but less intensive thereafter, because the two treatment groups were not expected to be strictly comparable thereafter. Only three

TABLE 1
Job-Finding Success by Client Characteristic During
6-Month Follow-up From the Start of Counseling

Client Characteristic	n	Job Club Program		Comparison Program		
		Number Em- ployed	Per- centage Em- ployed	n	Number Em- ployed	Per- centage Em- ployed
Total clients	80	76	95	74	21	28
Female	33	31	94	27	6	22
Nonwhite	8	8	100	12	1	8
Single	52	50	96	47	14	30
Receiving aid:	66	62	94	63	20	32
In another program	69	65	94	63	18	29
Was in mental institution	19	17	90	6	2	33
DVA	21	19	91	14	4	29
Community mental health	20	18	90	13	3	23
Drug or alcohol	6	6	100	7	4	57
Public aid	8	8	100	11	3	27
General assistance recipient	15	14	93	10	2	20
Police or prison record	3	3	100	4	0	0
In community workshop	3	3	100	4	1	25
Had mental problems	31	29	94	24	7	29
Had physical problem	12	11	92	4	0	0
Military veteran	11	9	82	23	8	35
Failed to complete high school	9	9	100	14	3	21
21 and under	17	17	100	15	2	13
Unemployed 1 year or more	20	20	100	18	5	28

clients chose to change treatments, however. Two clients changed after four months, and the third change after six months. Their data were included in the analysis only for the period preceding the moment of transfer.

Table 1 shows the number and percentage of clients who obtained a full-time job in the two programs. Because the last recorded job was obtained at six months, the data represent a 6-month period. Of the Job Club clients, 95% obtained employment, as compared with 28% of the comparison group. Each Job Club subgroup was 90% to 100% successful in finding a job. In contrast, almost all subgroups of the comparison sample had less than 35% job-finding success. Chi-square tests showed that for every subgroup in Table 1, the differences between the Job Club and comparison clients regarding job-finding success were statistically significant ($p < .05$), as was the overall difference between the two program samples ($p < .0001$).

Figure 1 shows the cumulative percentage of clients obtaining employment after receiving counseling. Job-finding success was substantially greater for the Job Club clients at all of the follow-up durations. Little change occurred for the comparison group with the passage of

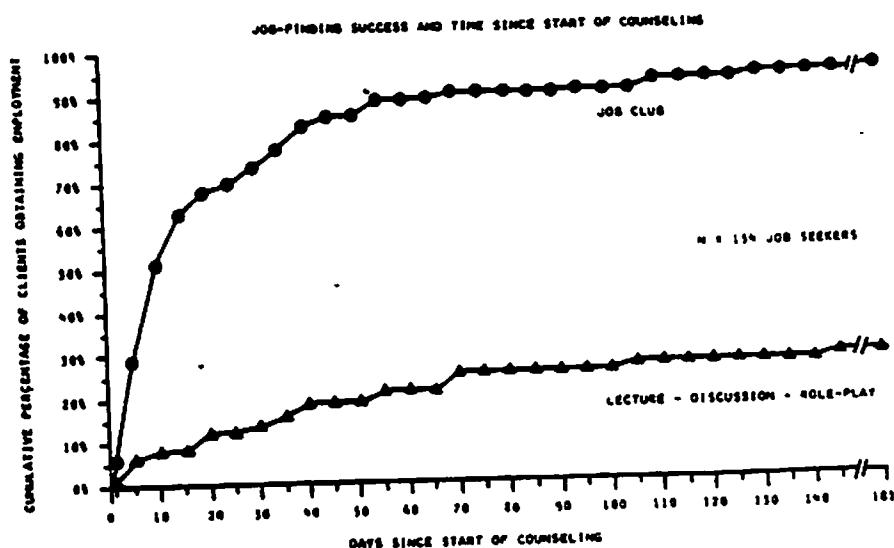


FIGURE 1
Cumulative Percentage of Clients Who Obtained Employment During the First Six Months Since the First Day of Counseling

Solid circles represent clients in the Job Club. Triangles represent clients in the comparison program, which consisted of lectures, discussion, and interview role-playing. Part-time jobs (less than 20 hours per week) are excluded. The last job obtained by any client was on the 181st day.

time. Of the jobs obtained, the median time to obtain the jobs was 10 days for the Job Club versus 30 days for the comparison jobs.

Figure 2 shows the mean percentage of days worked each month after starting the counseling program. This calculation provides a measure of labor force use and job retention. A client who changed jobs received the same score as one who did not if both were employed for the same number of days. Labor use increased progressively for both groups, with no decrement occurring at later dates. During the fourth month, Job Club clients worked 89% of their available time versus 23% for the comparison clients; these percentages are similar to the job-acquisition percentages seen in Figure 1 for the same period. Because the data for the fifth month and after were less complete, those data are not shown in Figure 1; Job Club clients contacted up to the 12-month follow-up continued to be employed at least 90% of the time. At all follow-up durations shown in Figure 2, greater labor use

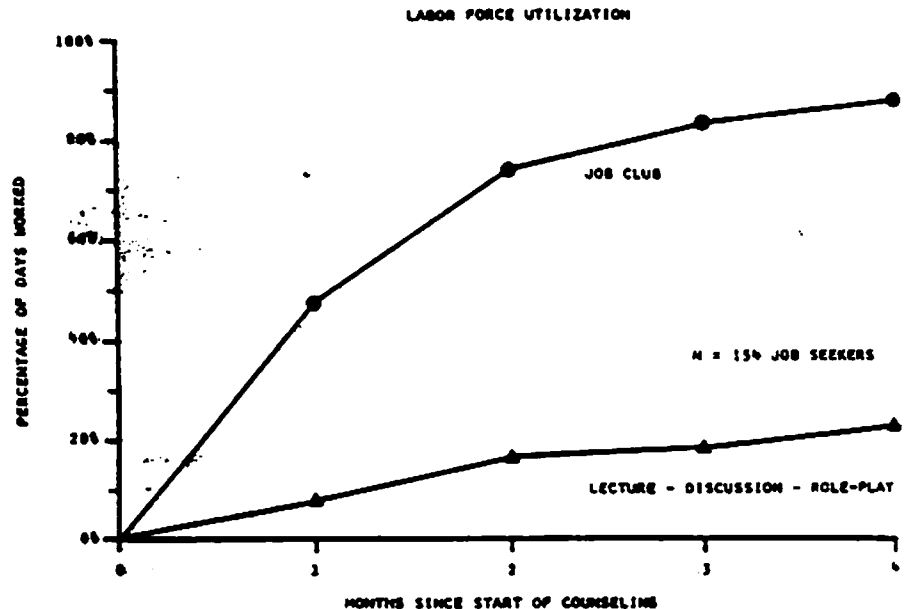


FIGURE 2
The Labor Force Use by the Clients at
Different Times Since the First Day of Counseling

Each data point designates the percentage of days worked by the clients during consecutive months since the start of counseling and reflects both the acquisition and maintenance of employment. Solid circles represent Job Club clients. Triangles represent the comparison clients who received lectures, discussion, and interview role-playing. Data after four months is not included because the questionnaire returns were not as complete after that time. (See text for data on the partial returns.)

occurred for the Job Club clients, and the difference at each duration was statistically significant ($p < .001$) according to the t test of statistical significance.

Figure 3 shows that the proportion of Job Club clients obtaining employment increased with the number of sessions attended. About half (49%) of the Job Club clients obtained employment after attending 5 sessions; 90% had jobs within 15 sessions. The largest number of sessions attended was 23 by one client. The median number of sessions attended was 5. The correlation between the percentage of scheduled sessions attended and the number of days required to find a job was $r = -.62$.

Analysis of the Job Club data regarding interviews showed that the Job Club clients obtained employment after a median of 5 inter-

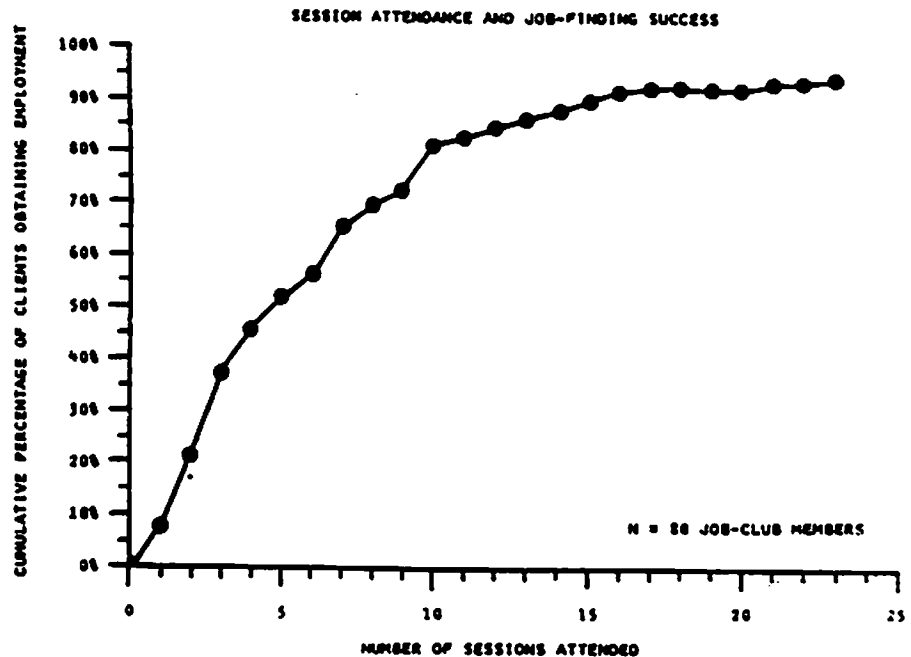


FIGURE 3
Job-Finding Success as a Function of the
Number of Sessions Attended by Clients in the Job Club.

Each data point is the cumulative percentage of the 80 clients who had obtained a job. Part-time jobs (less than 20 hours per week) are not included. The maximum number of sessions attended was 23.

views. The maximum number of interviews was 24, and the mean number of interviews was 6.

The source of information that led to a job for participants in the two programs is presented in Table 2. A greater number of Job Club clients obtained jobs from every source of information except from "another public agency," which led to more jobs for the comparison program clients. The major source of information for the Job Club clients was the yellow pages of the telephone book, a source not used at all by the comparison group for successful job-finding. Friends were the major source of information for the comparison clients. Information from past clients was a source of information for 11 Job Club jobs, but was not a source for any of the comparison clients, who had little or no contact with previous clients.

The salaries for the jobs were comparable or somewhat higher than the Job Club clients.

The median salary was 22% higher for the Job Club (\$2.61 per hour vs. \$2.20 per hour). The mean salary for the two programs differed by only 2% (\$3.01 per hour vs. \$3.08 per hour), largely because one comparison client had an unusually high salary.

The experimental design permitted clients to transfer to the other program after two months, and three clients in the comparison program did change after 4 to 6 months. All three of these clients obtained a job shortly after transferring to the Job Club program. None of the Job Club clients chose to transfer.

TABLE 2
Source of Information That Resulted in Employment

Source of Information for Job	Job Club Program		Comparison Program	
	Number of Clients	Percentage of Clients	Number of Clients	Percentage of Clients
Telephone book (yellow pages)	27	34	0	0
Leads list from past clients	11	14	0	0
Friend	10	13	8	11
Newspaper help wanted ads	10	13	5	7
Another client	5	6	1	1
Referred by another employer	5	6	0	0
Former employer	2	3	0	0
Another public agency	2	3	5	7
Work wanted ad	2	3	0	0
Walking into personnel office	1	1	1	1
No job obtained	5	6	54	73
Total	80	102 ^a	74	100

^aTotal percentage came to more than 100 because of rounding.

DISCUSSION

The Job Club method resulted in full-time employment within six months of almost all (95%) of the handicapped clients who attended at least two sessions. This nearly certain probability of employment was obtained for each of the specific subpopulations: DVR clients, alcoholics, drug addicts, physically handicapped, mentally handicapped, long-term (one year or more) unemployed, youths under 22 years of age, women, ex-mental hospital patients, clients with a police or prison record, clients in a community workshop, and those receiving welfare or public aid. Only 4 of the 80 clients failed to obtain a job. Ninety percent or more of the clients in almost all of the above categories obtained employment. None of the jobs was subsidized (CETA jobs or jobs in a sheltered workshop); the jobs were obtained competitively and paid by the employer. The median time to obtain a job was 10 days; a median of 5 sessions were attended. These results suggest that the Job Club method may offer a partial solution to the problem of unemployment among the handicapped.

A high degree of success in job-finding is, of course, theoretically possible for the handicapped if other factors are favorable, such as a period and locale of low unemployment, or preselection of clients with favorable employment possibilities ("creaming"), or placement in subsidized jobs reserved for such clients. The evidence indicates that such factors did not operate because the jobs were not subsidized, the local unemployment rate was relatively high, and all clients with the predesignated handicaps were included. Most relevant to the issue of comparability is the comparison group. The clients in the two groups were statistically comparable in terms of unemployability; the local economic climate was identical for all. The results showed that the comparison group was far less successful (28% vs. 95%), and their jobs had a lower median salary (22% less) and required a longer median time to obtain (30 days vs. 10 days).

The differences in results between the two programs may reflect differences in enthusiasm conveyed by the counselor rather than in counseling technique. The present data do not affirm or negate this possibility, but gross observation indicated that the comparison clients were somewhat more motivated and optimistic during their two scheduled informational sessions than were the Job Club clients, who were actively job-seeking, with an indefinite termination date. The lecture, discussion, taping, and role-playing activities seemed far more "fun" than did the supervised job-seeking.

Because the experimental design did not include a no-treatment control group, the results should not be interpreted as a demonstration of the ineffectiveness of the comparison procedure, which might have had more success than a no-treatment control procedure. This low rate

of job-finding by the comparison clients is more reasonably interpreted as evidence of their problems.

The source of information leading to the jobs reflects the different strategies of job-seeking. The Job Club clients obtained more jobs from almost each of the sources of job leads, reflecting the greater intensiveness of the Job Club strategy. Only the agency-supplied leads were greater for the comparison clients, reflecting their greater dependence on the efforts of others. The yellow pages listing of the telephone directory, leads from previous clients, leads from former employers, and help-wanted ads were effective sources of job leads for many Job Club clients, but were sources for none of the comparison program clients, which reflects the emphasis on these sources in the Job Club treatment.

As found by Jones and Azrin (1973), Sheppard and Belitsky (1966) and Granovetter (1974), the usual job-hunt relies heavily on friends job leads. This result was confirmed by the present finding that the source was used by many clients in both programs.

Once the clients obtained employment, they seemed to maintain employment. The job acquisition data and the labor use data were fairly comparable at all follow-up durations, differing by less than 10%. No evidence exists, therefore, for substantial loss of employment after the initial success.

The rapidity of obtaining jobs seemed dependent on, and correlated with, the consistency of session attendance and the number of interviews obtained. About 90% of the Job Club clients obtained jobs after 15 sessions and 15 interviews. In Azrin et al. (1975) this same general degree of correlation was obtained between the percentage of sessions attended and speed in obtaining a job ($r = .80$). The intensive job-seeking during the sessions, resulting in an average of one interview per session, seems to adequately account for the rapidity of obtaining employment in contrast with the comparison clients, who had only two scheduled sessions and arranged interviews without counselor supervision.

The degree of success resulting from the Job Club program can easily lead to overly optimistic expectations of its use in subsequent applications. Conversely, the initial reaction to such favorable results with such a difficult population may be one of skepticism. Neither conclusion is probably justified. The program was found superior to an alternative program, but the salaries were not extraordinary, and some clients required weeks and months of continued diligent supervision and guidance.

Counselors should expect many clients to be reluctant to participate in a program that requires intensive effort; yet the high continued attendance and effort were essential. Similarly, many clients were initially reluctant to use such unfamiliar and often nonpreferred job lead sources as the yellow pages, or to approach friends and relatives. Yet these sources accounted for most of the effective job

leads. The counselor was intensively occupied during the sessions in constantly guiding and encouraging, and equally busy between sessions in compiling information, calling discouraged clients, and arranging for the subsequent sessions. Little success seemed likely from a casual nondirective, discussion-oriented approach with handicapped clients, who can easily become too discouraged to even attend a session or to attempt the required procedures. Both the skepticism and the optimism regarding the results should be tempered by the recognition of the intensive nature of the effort and its consequent demands and promise for those clients despairing of competitive employment.

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