Sheltered Employment Centers: A study of their characteristics and the way in which they are perceived by those who use them

F.B. Jordán de Urríes* and M.A. Verdugo
Instituto Universitario de Integración en la Comunidad INICO, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain

Received 23 March 2009
Accepted 30 July 2009

Abstract. Objective: To know the situation of Sheltered Employment Centers (CEE) in the Autonomous Community of Madrid. Method: A quantitative approach was developed by using a questionnaire which was sent to all the CEE. With this questionnaire we got information about the performance level of CEE. A qualitative approach was developed too by using an interview applied to a representative sample of users. With the interview we got information about users' perception and satisfaction. Participants: 73 centers from 175 (41.71 %) participated in the quantitative approach. For the qualitative approach, 60 workers were selected from 1,899 (3.16 %) in a randomized and stratified sample by age and gender. Results: Users of CEE have most of them physical (38.41 %) or intellectual (26.88 %) disabilities, between 25 and 44 years old (65.44 %) with permanent and full-time contract (64.17 %). Satisfaction is very high (93.33 %), mainly with the task (41.76 %) and their coworkers (30.00 %), and emphasizing that money is the least attractive feature (35.59 %). Conclusions: CEE need to give careful thought to some of the key aspects of their makeup and practices. We would point out the need to make clear use of the personal and social adaptation services, act as routes for the transition to normalized employment.

Keywords: Sheltered employment, disability, quantitative research, qualitative research, quality of life

1. Introduction

A special type of protected employment developed in Spain is that provided by so-called Special Work Centers (CEEs), which help a significant group of people with disabilities to get jobs. According to data furnished by the government and published in the periodical Cermi.es [2], there were 30,833 workers in CEE's in 2001. This figure can be related to the last valid nationwide reference available to date on the employment of people with disabilities, this being the Active Population Survey (APS) module for the second quarter of 2002 [7]. This module clearly shows that 666,900 people with disabilities were employed in Spain at that date. Thus, 4.6% of the population with disabilities was employed in CEEs. The position of these centers is unique in Spain, since at least 70% of their staff are people with disabilities and they are given special support since regulations began to be applied to them in 1982 under the Act on Social Integration of the Disabled (LISMI) [10-14]. Amongst other things, this aid provides 50% of each worker's Guaranteed Minimum Wage and 100% of the Employer's Contribution to Social Security, in addition to other aid and grants for each position created.

The studies and observations that have been carried out on these centers in our country are very few, whether concerning their legal framework and labor relations [1], comparing them with integrated employment alternatives such as supported employment with regard to quality of life or results achieved in terms of employment [3,6,8,18], looking deeper into ethics

*Address for correspondence: F.B. Jordán de Urríes, Instituto Universitario de Integración en la Comunidad INICO, Universidad de Salamanca, Avenida de la Merced 109-131, 37005 Salamanca, Spain. Tel.: +34 923 286693; E-mail: hjordan@usal.es.

1051-9815/11/$27.50 © 2011 – IOS Press and the authors. All rights reserved
or on current practices [9,16,17], concerning the satisfaction of their users within the general framework of an organization [5], or undertaking a qualitative study on them [4]. This is why we consider it very necessary to carry out an in-depth study combining a quantitative approach with a qualitative one, and a further qualitative one on the structure of the centers and the perception of their users.

This study was carried out as a result of long-standing collaboration in this area between Jardines de España, as the organization that makes the request and the Instituto Universitario de Integración en la Comunidad (INICO) as research developers. The objective of this collaboration was to carry out evaluative research by a survey on the structure of the Sheltered Employment Centers (from the Spanish Centros Especiales de Empleo or “CEEs”) in the Autonomous Community of Madrid and how they are perceived by those who work in them. This study forms part of the objectives to be developed by the DESeQUAL project (in EQUAL European Program) in which Jardines de España participated alongside Directorate General for Work, Work and Women’s Dept. for the Autonomous Community of Madrid, Council of Villanueva de la Cañada (Madrid), Caja Duero (Savings Bank), University Camilo José Cela, ONCE Foundation and Verdecora.

In summary the objectives set for carrying out this study were as follows:

- To examine the situation of the CEEs in the Autonomous Community of Madrid.
- To examine the perception and level of satisfaction of the users of the CEEs in the Autonomous Community of Madrid.

2. Methodology and participants

Two different strategies were used for implementing the objectives referred to above. With regard to the first, analyzing the situation of the CEEs in the Autonomous Community of Madrid, an online questionnaire was designed which all the CEEs registered in the Autonomous Community of Madrid were asked to complete. With regard to the second objective, analyzing the perception and level of satisfaction of the users of the CEEs in the Autonomous Community of Madrid, a form of closed interview was designed aimed at a selected sample of people working in the CEEs.

The tools were designed between June and July 2006. Fieldwork was carried out between September and November 2006. Finally, the data were analyzed and a report drawn up between January and March 2007.

For the first part of this study, it was decided to put the questionnaire to all the CEEs as a whole registered in the Autonomous Community of Madrid, a total of 175. To do this, an introductory letter to the study was prepared and an invitation to take part sent to all centers from the Work and Women’s Dept. for the Autonomous Community of Madrid. 73 centers (41.71% of the total) provided data via the questionnaire, although there was a lack of consistency since some centers did not reply to all the questions. The questionnaire could be completed online in one or a number of sessions by assigning personal passwords to each center, which made it possible, during different sessions, to access the data stored in a database. Once the period for collecting data was over, these underwent a percentage analysis with the objective of describing the structure of the centers.

For the second part of the study, it was decided to select a sample of the total available population. The selection was broken into representation by age groups and gender in a random selection of centers and workers.

Details were taken from current CEE contracts for the Autonomous Community of Madrid according to INEM [National Employment Agency] data for 2001, which were the most recent available, and they were distributed by age brackets and gender (Table 1).

By applying this distribution for the population, the selection for the sample was broken up as shown in the following table (Table 2):

For this stage, from a possible total number of 175 centers, 20 were selected at random, which represents 11.42% of all centers. Of the entire population (1,899 workers), 60 workers were selected for interview, which represents 3.16% of the total. The interviews were carried out by two psychology graduate interviewers with post-graduate training in disabilities, who were given an instruction session on the procedure and how to break up the selection. The selection procedure for the sample was established as follows.

- Center sample: 20 centers chosen at random were selected. A random number from 0 to 175 was chosen and this was the first center selected. Using this as the basis, centers were selected by taking every 9th number on this list.
- Worker sample: The selection was made at random. Three workers were requested from each center selected, in order of the list obtained. The first one from the first center belonging to group A
Table 1

CEEs contracts by age brackets and gender 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autonomous community of Madrid</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>&lt; 25</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-44</th>
<th>≥ 45</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN</td>
<td>1,066</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOMEN</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1,899</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Questionnaires to be used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autonomous Community of Madrid</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>&lt; 25</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-44</th>
<th>≥ 45</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(G) 7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(C) 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOMEN</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(B) 4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(H) 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(see table above), the second belonging to group B and the third belonging to group C. From the second center selected, one worker was requested from D, another from E and another from F, and so on.

- If a center did not have any worker from the required group, a worker was requested from the next group.
- As workers for each group were finally selected, that group was eliminated from the process and a worker requested from the next incomplete group.
- In the event of reaching the end of the list of 20 selected centers and any group still being incomplete, further centers would be chosen as from the last of those selected, starting the general list again at every 9th place.
- In the event of there being various options in terms of workers for the group requested at a center, they were selected at random from those possible.

With regard to the procedures to be followed by the interviewers both in contacts with the centers and during the interviews, it was decided that the interviewer would follow the guidelines below.

- Telephone contact with the director, manager or person in charge following an outline with: 1. Structured introduction. 2. Brief launch of the study and the supporter institutions. 3. Request for collaboration and explanation of sampling selection. 4. Gratitude for cooperation and willingness to help. 5. Clarify meeting day and time. 6. Politely farewell.
- Visit to the center following an outline with: 1. Structured introduction. 2. Clarify how workers are selected (apply criteria). 3. Review the location where the interview will take place (the most appropriate possible). 4. Make sure the right candidate has been selected and that they have agreed to be interviewed.
- Putting the questionnaire to them following an outline with: 1. Structured introduction. 2. Brief launch of the study and the supporter institutions. 3. Guarantee of anonymity. 4. Explanation of interview procedure to ensure that the person interviewed understands it. 5. Application of the questionnaire. 6. Response to any doubts or questions. 7. Gratitude for cooperation and willingness to help. 8. Politely farewell.

Once the interview period was over, the data were entered into a database and subjected to a percentage analysis with the objective of describing the perception of the people who work in the centers. In this analysis, we broke data up according to a gender point of view which we considered especially relevant.

3. Questionnaire and interview

For the most part, the following sources were used for making up the questionnaire:

- DESDE data collection form developed by PSI-COST [15].
- Occupational Center for the Autonomous Community of Madrid questionnaire developed by FEAPS.
- The assessment and registration application form for CEEs for in the Autonomous Community of Madrid.
- Royal Decree 2273/1985 of December 4, which approves the Regulations for Sheltered Employment Centers defined in article 42 of the LISMI Act [Act on Social Integration of the Disabled] [11].
- Royal Decree 427/1999 of March 12, which amends RD 136/1985 governing the special employer-employee relationship with people with disabilities who work in the CEEs [13].
- Royal Decree 290/2004 of February 21, which governs work enclaves as a means of encouraging the employment of people with disabilities [12].
- Royal Decree 469/2006 of April 21, which governs the vocational activity support units within the framework of the personal and social adaptation services provided by the CEEs [14].

The questionnaire contained 64 questions. The online access system allowed workers the possibility of accessing their own center’s data, stored in a database during each work session, by logging on more than once (using passwords). The questionnaire was broken up into the following sections:

- CEE identification data (to be used exclusively for research purposes, with privacy and anonymity guaranteed)
- Personnel and recent changes
- Contracts
- Personal and social adaptation services
- Work enclaves
- Economic data
- Economic assistance received
- Organizational processes
- Personalized planning and professional development
- Complementary services and external relations
- Assessment of the relationship with the administrations

The suggestions and procedure proposed by Verdugo and Vicent [19] and Del Río [4] were the ones mainly used for carrying out the interview. The questionnaire for the interview contained 52 questions grouped into the following 7 sections: Socio-demographic data, Personal development, Material wellbeing, Self-determination, Interpersonal relations, Social integration, and General questions on work and quality of life.

4. Results and conclusions drawn from the questionnaire

This study enabled us to get an overall view of the CEEs in terms of aspects of major importance for understanding their composition, structure, functioning, organizational processes, personal and social adaptation services, personalized planning, complementary services and relations with other external public and private bodies. Following are the main conclusions drawn from the results.

88% of the total number of center personnel is made up of disabled people, mainly people with physical (38.41%) and intellectual (26.88%) disabilities, with a percentage of disability (handicap) between 33% and 65%, and in the main (65.44%) between 25 and 44 years old.

The workers’ contracts are, for the most part, permanent and full-time (64.17%) and steady (71.77%). However, it is worth examining the trend in the rise in redundancies in recent years (from 1.99% in 2004 to 6.35% in 2006), although the situation is not yet alarming.

The profile of the professionals who work in the centers is not known (90.11%), nor is that of the majority in the posts that they hold (51.24%). With regard to posts held, 22.97% are production specialists and 12.72% support specialists. Learning about these aspects would require carrying out a follow-up study. The average salaries of the professionals are low, with an average monthly salary of €887.93 for support specialists and €1,844.71 for directors.

An essential, necessary feature in the functioning of the CEEs, given their particular nature for which they receive public aid, is that they carry out personal and social adaptation services, as referred to in their regulations. The results, however, show that only a quarter of them (24.66%) have employment support units. Where such services do exist, they are generally run by personnel without the qualifications to do so (an uncorroborated percentage of 58.62%), being just one of a number of jobs those people are tasked to carry out. The activities performed scarcely register in the transition towards more inclusive alternatives. Given the crucial importance of these services, it is pertinent to suggest the need for a study and close analysis of these activities.

Enclaves exist in only 9.59% of centers, mainly in the services sector (60.71%). From the answers obtained to the questionnaire, we can say that, up till now, the enclaves are failing to encourage access to ordinary employment (carried out by only 3.88% of workers in enclaves and 0.14% of the total number of center workers).

The balance between income and expenditure reported by the centers is negative, although the trend is towards reducing the deficit. The main source of income is production (79.32%), with aid having an important impact (16.79%) and enclaves a lesser one.
Finally, with regard to expenditure, 24.45% benefits the workers themselves in terms of personal and social adaptation services (15.04%), training activities (5.32%) or complementary services (3.99%).

With regard to economic aid, it is still not appreciated that the centers are thought to have applied for the sort of aid which relates to the development of units supporting recently-established professional activity. Most of the aid received comes from Employment Generation Projects, and we obtained contradictory information on the annual fall in Job Retention subsidies, despite the number of jobs having increased substantially during the period under study. Genuine awareness of the centers’ financial situation requires another type of study enabling more specific conclusions to be reached than the ones reached at present.

The answers relating to the centers’ organizational processes reveal some contradiction between the significant importance (between 7 and 9 out of 10) they contribute towards organizational improvement (in terms of the use of quality assessment tools and in terms of worker and customer satisfaction) with a low proportion (19.15%) of centers stating that they offer documentary accreditation for the personalized service provided and a low proportion of standardized quality assessment and management procedures (20.83% have ISO certification and 6.25%, EFQM certification). In order to amend this situation, in line with the interest shown by the centers themselves, it might be desirable for the administration to encourage and create incentives for a process of incorporation and spread of the quality culture. To this end, it should be promoted in the person-centered planning processes, with personal results sought in the individual’s quality of life.

Personalized planning, on the one hand, and professional development, on the other, are also very much valued by the centers that replied to the questionnaire (between 7 and 9, on the whole). Many centers (73.23%) state they are implementing personalized plans, although only 35.62% include the worker himself or herself in them or regularly review them (43.84%), and the levels of professional improvement and transition to ordinary employment are very low (12.15% and 2.91% respectively). The reason for this situation may be the low incidence (30.14%) of a work integration program connected to other services stated by most of the centers. And it is precisely here that it must impact in the immediate future to facilitate gradual access to more inclusive alternatives.

Complementary services are seldom offered, the most common being medical checks (57.53%) and a dining-room (32.88%). Leisure (20.5%), cultural and travel services (19.18% in both cases) are others provided, and, very rarely now, bus services (10.96%) and sports facilities (15.07%). It is recommended that centers speed up and increase their connections with other centers, programs, and services, especially if they are exclusive or current, to improve the supply of comprehensive services they provide at present.

The centers’ assessment of their relations with the central and autonomous administrations is normal. The autonomous administration is rated more highly than the central administration, except insofar as the delay in payments is concerned, where the central administration gets rated slightly higher. The autonomous administration gets marks in the higher ranges with regard to technical support, procedures to be carried out and assistance. The data suggest that the administrations need to endeavor to improve relations and reduce the delay in payments, as this makes the centers’ work difficult.

\[5. \text{Results and conclusions of the interview}\]

This qualitative study, based on personal interviews, paid special attention to selecting a population sample representative of the whole, since it is precisely this criterion that best guarantees the potential wider application of the conclusions drawn. The sample is identical to the total population with regard to gender and age brackets. The data analyses of the results obtained were carried out from a gender perspective.

Access to employment takes place mainly through an association (53.53%), although women resort more to the family (18.52%) than men, who more often use other means (30.30%). Fewer women are found to have previous work experience, since 40.74% state that they are working for the first time compared with 30.30% of men.

The percentage of those who state that work satisfaction is very high (93.33%), singling out the task (41.76%) and their fellow workers (30.00%) as what they most like about work, and emphasizing that money is the least attractive feature (35.59%). 61.02% do not want to change job, and those who do (a high percentage, 39.98%) give as reasons the chance to learn new tasks and to earn more money (23% in both cases). In the answers given to the interview, we see the need to carry out different tasks in the job (71.67%) especially to learn new things (61.36%), and the wish to occupy positions with greater responsibility (55.00%
overall: 60.61% of men and 48.15% of women). These results indicate a certain statism in terms of work, both in potential mobility between centers and in positions in ordinary jobs that remain unchanged at their own center. This result needs to be confirmed in greater depth through further studies. At any event, the CEEs should actively raise the issue of external and internal mobility of employees in jobs, since it would contribute to increased satisfaction for the users of the CEEs.

A number of relevant aspects can be highlighted with respect to the perception of workers regarding work. They have a good degree of independence in the tasks relating to their jobs whilst acknowledging and being glad of assistance and supervision: 93.33% state that they need little help with work and 76.67% do not think they need more help than they are getting, but say that they are glad of help (88.33%). Gender differences are seen in the length of the working day, 69.11% of men working an average of 8 hours compared with 49.29% of women, who have a greater wish to increase their hours, and there are also differences with regard to pre-job training, which is found to be low in all cases as 58.33% have not received any (although 85.00% consider it important), the ratio being 62.96% of women compared with 54.55% of men. Their appraisal of the prior training they were given is, on the whole, negative (54.55%) and they think it should have been done differently (65%). Slight gender differences are also seen in terms of length of time in the job, it being women who have less permanence of position.

With regard to material wellbeing, the questions asked focused exclusively on salary and how the available it was to the worker, yielding critical responses with very clear gender differences. Half the workers stated dissatisfaction with the salary they earned, this being more marked in the men (57.58%) than the women (40.74%), with 63.64% of men and 37.04% of women considering it unfair. However, the amount of salary is discriminatory against the women, as they earn an average of 548.70 a month compared with 680.12 for the men. These data need to be compared in relation to each person’s working day, which might explain these differences. The positive fact gleaned lies in the answer as to the availability of their salary, since 83.33% state, without gender differences, that they are freely able to use it for whatever they want. This result contrasts with others obtained by the research team from workers with intellectual disabilities in ordinary employment (ALSOI project), where the reply was the opposite. Given the importance of this topic in terms of quality of life (and also from a self-determination point of view), it should be researched in greater depth in other studies at a later stage.

The results obtained in the area of self-determination are very revealing. 86.67% think that their life has changed since they have been working, 96.43% believing it has improved and 98.33% (100% of women) saying that they feel better. All the answers relating to this area (deciding to make small purchases, big purchases, having greater independence, possibility of going on vacation) lead in the same direction: the percentage of people in work has risen and in all cases, the increase in terms of women is much greater than that of men. Despite the comments above, there continues to be a high percentage (41.67%) of people who need help in managing their money. Bearing this in mind, it would be fitting, in future research, to be able to break down the data by disability or carry out specific studies to this end.

On looking at interpersonal relations, interviewees were asked if they had more friends since they were working (66.67%), if they had made new friends (85%), and if they spent time with their friends after work (50%). We saw that people have a wider circle of friends when they work, although there has not been as much progress in decision-making with regard to carrying out some activities together. Similarly, they show good levels of social integration. 95.00% replying that they like their work companions and that the opinion they have of them is mainly good (80%), although this result is slightly lower with women. On the whole, they get help from their work companions, and almost everyone considers that such help is very important. Two-thirds (always a slightly higher proportion of women in this case) state that they spend leisure time with their work companions and consider this important, and they would like to do it more often. These results suggest the need to schedule or increase opportunities for leisure-time spent with those people preferred by the users.

Finally, participants gave their opinion as to the relationship between quality of life and work in general. All the participants said that it is important to have a job as doing so makes them happier (95.00%) and feel better (96.67%).

6. General conclusions

The study presented initially gives a partial view of the functioning of the CEEs. The first conclusion we can draw refers to the urgent need to carry out similar
studies in all the autonomous communities and on a statewide scale, going beyond the limitations encountered in this one. The CEEs have existed for a number of decades, and studies on how they function are few and far between, knowledge lacking about essential aspects of the way in which they operate and how this impacts the individual.

A second conclusion is the advisability of improving the design of the present study. It will probably be necessary to rework the first part, introducing changes and shades of meaning in what is asked in the questionnaire for the centers. With regard to the second part, it may be crucial to create other techniques for a qualitative approach to the workers' reality such as, for example, the development of discussion groups.

With regard to the structure of the CEE, it appears that the centers need to give careful thought to some of the key aspects of their makeup and the practices they carry out. Of these, we would point out the need to make clear use of the personal and social adaptation services, act as routes for the transition to normalized employment, carry out an in-depth economic study of the cost-benefit ratio, design plans that focus on the individual, create synergies with other services, and set in motion quality assessment and management systems, not only in terms of processes and products, but also of individual- and quality of life-related results.

Finally, regarding those workers with disabilities who work at the centers, they show high levels of satisfaction and describe a string of positive results as a consequence of work in their lives, such as greater financial independence, greater self-determination and more social relationships. However, they also think that some aspects need to be improved, such as low salaries, too much routine and too little variety in jobs and tasks. We believe it important to point out that in approaching the workers' perception from a gender perspective, we encounter a number of aspects that reveal a situation disadvantageous to women in terms of pay, social relations, and length of service in the job. Moreover, and in all likelihood derived from the global situation of women with disabilities being doubly marginalized, the beneficial effects of access to employment in terms of self-determination, and access to activities and independence are more striking for women than for men.

References


[11] Real Decreto 2273/1985 de 4 de diciembre, por el que se aprueba el Reglamento de los Centros Especiales de Empleo definidos en el artículo 42 de la LISMI.

[12] Real Decreto 290/2004 de 20 de febrero, por el que se regulan los enclaves laborales como medida de fomento del empleo de las personas con discapacidad.

[13] Real Decreto 427/1999 de 12 de marzo, por el que se modifica el RD 1366/1985 por el que se regula la relación laboral de carácter especial de las personas con discapacidad que trabajen en los Centros Especiales de Empleo.

[14] Real Decreto 469/2006 de 21 de abril, por el que se regulan las unidades de apoyo a la actividad profesional en el marco de los servicios de ajuste personal y social de los Centros especiales de Empleo.


