**RESEARCH SUMMARY**

# Assessing College Life Adjustment of Students with Disabilities: Application of the PERMA Framework

## A Quick Look

The clearest career path to the middle class generally involves access, and completion, of postsecondary education. However, persons with disabilities are less likely to enroll or graduate from college compared with their same-age peers without disabilities. Seligman developed the Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA) model that may be useful in understanding the wellbeing of individuals. The factorial structure of the PERMA model was used in a sample of college students with disabilities to examine the model’s relationship with outcomes important to college adjustment.

## Key Findings

* PERMA was negatively associated with perceived stress, academic problems, and relationship problems.
* PERMA was positively associated with life satisfaction, self-esteem, and locus of control.
* The simultaneous regression results indicated a strong relationship between functional disability and life satisfaction.
* The unstandardized regression coefficient between functional disability and PERMA was statistically significant, as well as between PERMA and life satisfaction.
* When controlling for functional disability, functional disability was no longer a significant predictor of life satisfaction.
* These factors were found to be significantly associated with lower levels of employers’ stigmatizing attitudes toward people with disabilities in the workplace.
* The *Abbreviated Disability Inclusion Scale* is a brief, 6- item questionnaire that can quickly be completed by employers and key hiring decision-makers to gauge their disability inclusion preparedness and general disability inclusion climate, as a means to assess the effectiveness of demand-side interventions aimed at improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

## Putting It Into Practice

* Develop evidence-based postsecondary education interventions to improve the educational and vocational outcomes of college students with disabilities.
* Rehabilitation professionals can use PERMA to identify students who might be in danger of experiencing psychological distress, poor health, or academic problems, and to assess the college climate.
* PERMA can also be used in identifying students' personal assets and strengths.
* Rehabilitation professionals may benefit from understanding the benefits of PERMA model and how best to tailor services to promote flourishing for students with disabilities.

## Learn More

* Ninety-seven college students with disabilities receiving educational and career development services from the Minority-Disability Alliance (MIND Alliance) in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) project were recruited from Hunter College, City University of New York. All students were majoring in a STEM field. Twenty-seven items were selected from several empirically validated scales relevant to the five elements described in Seligman's (2011) PERMA model of well-being and happiness. Scales included: Inventory of Common Problems; Perceived Stress Scale; Satisfaction with Life Scale; General Self-Efficacy Scale; Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; University of Washington Locus of Control Scale; and World Health Organization Disability Assessment Schedule.
* Seligman, M. (2011). Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being. Free Press. [Professor Martin Seligman discusses his formula for wellbeing: PERMA (YouTube Video)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iK6K_N2qe9Y)
* [The Wellbeing and Resilience Centre, SAHMRI Overview (pdf)](https://www.wellbeingandresilience.com/sites/swrc5/media/pdf/permaandcentreoverview.pdf)

## Source

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