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Employer Willingness to Accommodate for Individuals with Disabilities

Shelby Flanagan

University of Minnesota - Morris, flana064@morris.umn.edu

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Presented by: Shelby Flanagan
Project Adviser: Chris Dallager

Introduction

- Individuals with disabilities, even those with college degrees, have vastly higher rates of unemployment and underemployment than the general population.
- In spite of the intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to protect the rights of individuals with disability, the employment picture has worsened in the last 25 years, in part due to concerns of the cost of implementing accommodations.
- Past research has shown that employers in the United States will rate individuals with certain disabilities as easier to hire than others.
- Although there are numerous possible causes for the problem of unemployment, one factor may be that employees aren't sure when and how to reveal a disability in the process of starting a job, or when and how to ask for accommodations. They may not know how to approach these situations, specifically without first knowing what factors will impact employers' decisions on these matters. These unresolved questions can make the job-seeking process far more taxing than it is for an individual without a disability.
- The primary research question of the present study is: how do the factors of disability type and accommodation cost impact employers' decisions? Answers to that question could have implications in helping individuals with disabilities entering the workforce to navigate the process of requesting accommodations, as well as helping disability advocates and other professionals in the field of disability studies address issues of employment and accommodation, with added knowledge of the variables affecting these issues.

Methods

Participants: 25 Human Resources employees (adults, at least 18 years of age), response rate was roughly 67% from those who received study materials.

Apparatus and Materials: The survey was composed of six hypothetical scenarios involving employees with different disabilities. Six accommodations were listed in each scenario, and participants were asked to rank their willingness to provide each accommodation on a scale from 1 (not at all willing) to 6 (very willing)

Procedure: Participants were contacted through a preliminary email and were sent study materials if they indicated interest in the research. The survey was sent as an attachment to an email containing a description of the study, and the voluntary and confidential nature of the study.

The first page of the study involved informed consent information, the risks (minimal everyday) and benefits (none) of the study, and contact information for any questions or concerns. The following pages contain the six scenarios and accommodations.

After indicating how willing they would be to provide each accommodation, participants submitted their results, which were then recorded and stored securely and contained no identifying information.

Abstract

This study's purpose is to examine factors that influence willingness to provide accommodations. This was achieved by administering a survey to human resources employees at various companies. The factors examined include accommodation cost and disability type. Previous research shows that employers view some types of disabilities as "easier to hire" than others (for example people with chronic illness are seen as easier to hire than people with intellectual disabilities). Therefore, there were 3 segments of the survey, each with two scenarios concerning disabilities considered by past research to be "easy to hire," "moderately difficult to hire," and "difficult to hire". We found some significant differences between responses for the distinct types of disabilities, and between responses for high and low cost accommodations, showing that disability type has an impact on willingness to provide accommodations, and that employers will be more willing to provide low-cost accommodations than expensive ones.

Results

Each response of willingness to provide an accommodation for each scenario was coded with numbers 1-6, with 1 representing "very willing," 2 representing "mostly willing," and so on to 6 representing "mostly unwilling." T-tests were conducted on the mean of the responses for the low-cost and high-cost accommodations in each scenario. The hypothesis concerning high and low-cost accommodations was that participants would be more willing to provide low-cost accommodations than high-cost ones. The t-tests confirmed this, with p-values 0.007 and lower for each scenario, indicating that the means of the responses for low-cost accommodations were significantly lower (closer to "very willing" to provide the accommodation) than the responses for high-cost accommodations. T-tests were also conducted on the means of responses from each scenario, to determine if there was a difference in willingness to provide accommodations between the different disabilities featured in each scenario. The hypothesis was that there would be significant differences between the responses for the scenarios, indicating different levels of willingness to accommodate for different types of disabilities. This hypothesis was supported by significant results on several of these t-tests. The following are the results of these tests, with green text indicating those with a **significant p-value**. Of those with a significant result, magenta text indicates the scenario that received **scores closer to "very unwilling"** to provide accommodations.

Kerry and Macy	Jeremy and Natalie	Collin and Rachel	Kerry and Jeremy	Kerry and Natalie	Kerry and Collin	Kerry and Rachel	Macy and Jeremy	Macy and Natalie	Macy and Collin	Macy and Rachel	Jeremy and Collin	Jeremy and Rachel	Natalie and Collin	Natalie and Rachel
p-value = 2.32e-07	p-value = 0.5156	p-value = 0.4281	p-value = 0.0001739	p-value = 0.001321	p-value = 0.01478	p-value = 0.08736	p-value = 0.03602	p-value = 0.008058	p-value = 0.001321	p-value = 7.81e-05	p-value = 0.1583	p-value = 0.0259	p-value = 0.4276	p-value = 0.107

KEY: "**Kerry**"- scenario with visual impairment, "**Macy**"= scenario with traumatic brain injury, "**Jeremy**"=scenario with ASD, "**Natalie**"= scenario with hearing impairment, "**Collin**"= scenario with respiratory impairment, "**Rachel**"=scenario with breast cancer

The mean willingness scores for each scenario were as follows (remember that 1 represents "most willing" and 6 represents "most unwilling")

Macy: mean=1.750000, sd=0.9520969

Natalie: mean=2.106061, sd=1.199603

Jeremy: mean=2.014493, sd=1.107279

Rachel: mean=2.378788, sd=1.521

Collin: mean=2.234848, sd=1.424217

Kerry: mean=2.742424, sd=1.900668

Conclusions

- The results indicate that employers are more willing to accommodate certain types of disability, and to provide accommodations that are less costly. Despite limitations, such as a fairly small sample, convenience sampling and voluntary response, there was a fairly even distribution of small, local businesses, small-to-medium businesses around the state, and large nation-wide businesses, resulting in adequate representation from different types of companies. These results add perspective to the existing research on disability and employment. One previous study found that employers rated people with chronic and physical illness to be the easiest to hire, hearing and visual impairments in the middle, and mental illness and learning or developmental disabilities as most difficult to hire. The ratings from the present sample are quite different, shown in the table below, which shows most to least willingness to accommodate from top to bottom:

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)	
Hearing Impairment	Autism Spectrum Disorder
Breast Cancer (Chronic Illness)	Respiratory Impairment
Visual Impairment	

- This could be due to different standards for hiring than for providing accommodation, or simply difference in samples. One limitation was that the high-cost accommodations listed for visual impairment all involved hiring another person, the cost of which was not matched by the high-cost accommodations in any other scenario. But in any case, it helps demonstrate interaction between type of disability and employer decisions.
- It could also reflect changing attitudes toward different types of disability, since the previous study was done in 2000.
- One reason there may be more willingness to accommodate traumatic brain injury is a recent increase in focus on concussions and other TBI in areas such as school and professional sports that have caught public attention.
- The mean willingness scores for every scenario indicate that employers in general are willing to accommodate for disability. However, businesses are more willing to provide accommodations that do not involve ongoing outlay of expense (as would be the case with the hiring of additional staff).

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