

Brief Report

Assessing employers' stigmatizing attitudes toward people with disabilities: A brief report

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Abstract.

BACKGROUND: People with disabilities are one of the most marginalized groups in society, and having a disability significantly increases the likelihood of unemployment or underemployment. The reluctance to hire individuals with disabilities is significantly influenced by the longstanding, negative stereotypes of people with disabilities.

OBJECTIVE: To better understand employers' negative attitudes toward individuals with disabilities, assessment tools must properly capture factors contributing to this stigma.

METHODS: The *Employers' Stigmatizing Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities Scale (ESATPD)* was validated in the current study.

RESULTS: Results of the exploratory factor analysis indicate a strong, unidimensional structure of the scale accounting for 47.14% of the total variance with a sample. The single *ESATPD* factor was labeled employment stigma. In addition, higher levels of employers' stigma were related to negative attitudes toward disability, decreased support of recruitment efforts, as well as decreased intentions of hiring people with disabilities.

CONCLUSION: Results support the implementation of tailored interventions directed at specific areas of concern for employers and employees in hiring positions.

Keywords: Employment, stigma, attitudes, disability

1. Introduction

Work is an integral part of modern life. It offers social legitimacy to people's lives and is a major part of people's identity (Fryers, 2006). Having a good job allows people to provide for themselves and their families, live with dignity, and contribute to society

(Fryers, 2006). There is strong empirical evidence to indicate that individuals who are employed are healthier and happier than people who are excluded from the labor force (Waddell & Burton, 2006). Conversely, persons who are unemployed are at elevated risk for depression, anxiety, alcohol and substance use disorder, domestic violence, low self-esteem, and poor mental and physical health (Compton et al., 2014; Linn et al., 1985).

People with disabilities are one of the most marginalized groups in society, and having a disability

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significantly increases the likelihood of unemployment, underemployment, and poverty (Yaghmaian et al., 2019). In 2014, the United States Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) mandating state vocational rehabilitation agencies to accentuate their capacity for local labor market analysis, employer engagement, customized training, and postsecondary education in order to improve employment quality and opportunity for people with disabilities. However, the employment rate of people with disabilities is still strikingly low. Employment statistics indicated the employment-to-population ratio for working-age people with disabilities was 28.3 percent in September 2020, which is significantly lower than the 69.7% employment rate of working-age adults without disabilities (Kessler Foundation and University of New Hampshire, 2020). In 2019, even with a record low unemployment rate and managers reporting a high demand for workers, employers are still not hiring large numbers of people with disabilities (National Organization for Disability, 2019). Employers' reluctance to hire individuals with disabilities is significantly influenced by the longstanding, negative stereotypes of people with disabilities (Yaghmaian et al., 2019).

Ambivalence related to recruiting, hiring, and retaining persons with disabilities is supported by several demand-side employment studies, which highlight the impact of negative stigma. For example, the U. S. Department of Labor conducted a focus group study with employers in 13 major metropolitan areas representing a range of businesses and company sizes to identify major reasons employers are not hiring people with disabilities (Grizzard, 2005). The most common response was employers needed more accurate and practical information to dispel preconceptions about work behavior of people with disabilities. Domzal, Houtenville, and Sharma (2008) completed a large-scale employer survey ($N = 3797$ companies) to complement the focus group study by conducting 15-minute telephone surveys with a sample of senior executives representing 12 industries by company size. Approximately 73% of the companies in their study indicated a major challenge to hiring people with disabilities is that they cannot effectively perform the nature of the work required.

Similarly, Kaye et al. (2011) conducted a focus group study with employers who do not hire individuals with disabilities. They identified three themes for not hiring people with disabilities: (1) lack of awareness of disability and accommodation issues, (2) concern over costs, and (3) fear of legal liability.

Likewise, Amir et al. (2009) conducted several focus groups with employers in Chicago and Milwaukee and identified six disability employment stigmas: 1) people with disabilities often require extra time to learn new job tasks, 2) people with disabilities require accommodations to do the job, 3) people with disabilities have trouble getting their work done on time and often need help from others, 4) co-workers are uncomfortable, 5) people with disabilities tend to call in sick more, and 6) people with disabilities have trouble getting along with others on the job. In order to better assess the willingness of employers to hire individuals with disabilities, Strauser and Chan (2007) developed a measure of employers' explicit, stigmatizing attitudes toward people with disabilities, as stigma serves as a primary barrier to employment for individuals with disabilities (Livneh et al., 2014; Yaghmaian et al., 2019). The scale was validated by Tu et al. (2018), as an assessment tool of employers' stigmatizing attitudes toward cancer survivors in Taiwan.

1.1. Purpose of the present study

To further explore employers' explicit, stigmatizing attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in the United States, the *Employers' Stigmatizing Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities Scale (ESATPD Scale)*, must be validated in additional populations. The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the psychometric properties of the *ESATPD Scale* in a sample of HR professionals in the United States. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the measurement structure of the *Employers' Stigmatizing Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities Scale*?
2. What is the internal consistency reliability estimate of this measure?
3. Is there a relationship between employers' explicit, stigmatizing attitudes and intention to hire people with disabilities?

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

One hundred and eighty employers and employees who were in hiring or management positions participated in this study. Thirty six percent of participants' job titles were manager, followed by human

Table 1

Participant demographic and companies characteristics (N = 180)

Variables	N (%)	M (SD)
Age		46.59 (11.48)
Number of people supervised		7.2 (11.17)
Race/ethnicity		
White	127 (70.6%)	
Hispanic	17 (9.4%)	
Black	15 (8.3%)	
Other	21 (11.7%)	
Gender		
Female	121 (67.2%)	
Male	59 (32.8%)	
Job title		
Manager	64 (35.6%)	
Human resource staff person	45 (25%)	
Supervisor	40 (22.2%)	
Human resource director	17 (9.4%)	
Assistant director	6 (3.3%)	
Executive director	5 (2.8%)	
COO	2 (1.1%)	
CEO	1 (0.6%)	
Company size		
250 or more persons employed	127 (70.6%)	
50 to 249 persons employed	27 (15%)	
10 to 49 persons employed	20 (11.1%)	
Fewer than 10 persons employed	6 (3.3%)	
Fortune 500		
Yes	4 (2.2%)	
No	176 (97.8%)	
Federal contractor		
Yes	98 (54.4%)	
No	82 (45.6%)	
Authority to hire		
Yes	101 (56.1%)	
No	40 (22.2%)	
Can influence	39 (21.7%)	

resource staff person (25%), supervisor (22.2%), human resource director (9.4%), assistant director (3.3%), executive director (2.8%), and CEO/COO (1.7%). Additional information regarding the participants' authority to hire employees, supervision of employees, company size, and demographic characteristics is in Table 1.

2.2. Instrumentation

2.2.1. Employers' stigmatizing attitudes toward people with disabilities scale

The *ESATPD* was developed to assess employers' attitudes towards people with disabilities (Amir et al., 2009). The *ESATPD* is comprised of seven items assessing themes related to employers' stigmatizing attitudes (i.e., need for extra time, need for accommodations, trouble getting work done, discomfort of

co-workers, calling in sick often, being litigious, and trouble getting along with others). Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' A mean score is calculated, and higher scores are indicative of higher levels of stigma.

Positive and accepting attitudes. The scale used to assess positive and accepting attitudes toward people with disabilities in the workplace was developed and validated by the Rehabilitation and Research Center on Employer Practices (Chan & Tansey, 2019). It consists of seven items assessing accepting attitudes in the workplace. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' A mean score is calculated, and higher scores are indicative of increased acceptance.

Recruitment strategies. The scale used to assess recruitment strategies and efforts for employees with disabilities was also developed and validated by the Rehabilitation Research Center on Employer Practices (Chan & Tansey, 2019). It consists of six items assessing the likelihood of using specific recruitment strategies. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'disapprove' to 'approve'. A mean score is calculated, and higher scores are indicative of increased likelihood of use.

Hiring intention. The scale used to assess intention to hire individuals with disabilities based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2006) consists of five items assessing the extent to which employers intend to, are ready to, have decided to, plan to, and will hire individuals with disabilities (Fraser et al., 2011). Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'disagree' to 'agree.' A mean score is calculated, and higher scores are indicative of higher levels of intention to hire people with disabilities.

2.3. Procedure

Participants were invited to take part in the current study prior to attending a training on stigma against individuals with disabilities in the workplace provided by the Rocky Mountain ADA Center. The Rocky Mountain ADA Center advertised the training opportunity to HR professionals, hiring managers, and supervisors in two metropolitan areas of Colorado. Multiple trainings were held, and each training was one and a half hours long and held onsite of interested organizations. Although hiring professionals were recruited for the training opportunities, other interested employees were able to participate. Prior to registering for the trainings, individuals were

informed that data was being collected as part of the training, and participation in the research portion of the training was voluntary. Participants received an email invitation one week prior to the training to complete online survey instruments on employer stigma, positive and accepting attitudes toward disability, recruitment strategies, and intention to hire people with disabilities.

2.4. Data analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 26.0) was used for statistical analysis. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), a common statistical technique for examining measurement structures of clinical assessment instruments (Floyd & Widaman, 1995) was used to examine the factor structure of the *ESATPD Scale*.

3. Results

3.1. Exploratory factor analysis

The 7×7 correlation matrix of the *ESATPD Scale* was subjected to a principal components analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .82, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 [21, N=180]=385.01, p<0.0001$), indicating that correlations in the data set were appropriate for factor analysis. Kaiser-Guttman's eigenvalues greater than one criterion indicated a

two-factor measurement structure, while Cattell's scree test (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) indicated a one-factor measurement structure. After examination of the items, the one-factor model's label fit better than the two-factor model, and the one-factor model was adopted. The final solution accounted for 47.14% of the total variance. Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of each item, as well as the scale total, factor loadings, eigenvalues, percentage of variance explained, and internal consistency coefficient for the scale.

Items on this factor reflect employers' stigmatized attitudes toward employees with disabilities (e.g., "In my opinion/experience, people with disabilities tend to call in sick more often than other workers due to health or personal problem"), all items loaded significantly onto this factor (loadings ranging from 0.40 to 0.78). The internal consistency reliability coefficient was estimated at 0.79, indicating good reliability of the items constituting this factor. The mean rating for this scale was 2.24 ($SD=0.82$).

3.2. External correlates

To evaluate the construct validity of the *ESATPD Scale*, the *ESATPD Scale* was correlated with scales of positive and accepting attitudes toward disability, recruitment strategies, and hiring intentions. The *ESATPD Scale* scores was negatively associated with positive attitudes toward disability ($r=-0.54, p<0.01$), recruitment strategies ($r=-0.48, p<0.01$)

Table 2
Exploratory factor analysis using principal component factoring analysis with oblimin rotation (N = 180)

Items	Factor loading	Mean (SD)
5. In my opinion/experience, people with disabilities tend to call in sick more often than other workers due to health or personal problem.	0.78	1.82 (1.10)
6. In my opinion/experience, people with disabilities tend to be litigious.	0.77	1.99 (1.17)
3. In my opinion/experience, people with disabilities have trouble getting their work done on time and often need others to help them finish the job.	0.75	1.86 (1.08)
7. In my opinion/experience, people with disabilities have trouble getting along with others on the job.	0.74	1.59 (0.95)
2. In my opinion/experience, people with disabilities often require costly reasonable accommodations (e.g., specialized equipment, facility modifications, adjustments to work schedules or job duties) to do their job.	0.66	2.61 (1.38)
1. In my opinion/experience, people with disabilities often require extra time to learn new work tasks.	0.62	2.91 (1.45)
4. In my opinion/experience, co-workers are not very comfortable working with people with disabilities.	0.40	2.87 (1.43)
Eigenvalues	3.30	
Variance (%)	47.14	
Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)	0.79	
Mean (SD)	2.24 (0.82)	

Table 3
Correlations between the Employers' Stigmatizing Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities Scale (the ESATPD Scale) and related constructs

	1	2	3	4
1. The <i>ESATPD Scale</i>	–	–0.54**	–0.48**	–0.44**
2. Disability inclusion attitude		–	0.50**	0.43**
3. Disability inclusion effort			–	0.48**
4. Hiring intention				–

** $p < 0.001$.

and hiring intentions ($r = -0.44$, $p < 0.01$). The *ESATPD* correlated with the external correlates in the expected directions. These findings provide empirical support for the construct validity of the *ESATPD Scale* (see Table 3).

4. Discussion

The WIOA requires state vocational rehabilitation agencies to increase their efforts to engage and assist employers with creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Despite the legislative efforts to improve vocational rehabilitation to support people with disabilities to find meaningful employment, barriers to employment still persist. One of the major barriers to disability employment and inclusion is employers' stigmatizing attitudes toward people with disabilities (Tu et al., 2018; Yaghmaian et al., 2019), and as a result, it should be assessed as a major component of workplace culture and disability inclusion climate. Rehabilitation researchers have previously validated assessment tools to help companies assess their disability inclusion climate, including human resource managers' attitudes toward hiring people with disabilities (Iwanaga et al., 2020; Tu et al., 2018), and employers' and human resource managers' stigma were found to be negatively associated with willingness to hire people with disabilities.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the psychometric properties of the *ESATPD Scale*, and findings of this study supported the reliability and validity of the unidimensional structure of the *ESATPD Scale* with a sample of 180 employers and employees in hiring or managing positions. The exploratory factor analysis revealed a one-factor measurement structure accounting for 47.14% of the total variance. The internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for the *ESATPD Scale* was estimated at .79, lending additional support to the unitary factor model. These results also suggested that the *ESATPD* scale measured employers' stigma as a unitary construct. Moreover, higher levels of employers'

stigma were related to negative attitudes toward disability, decreased support of recruitment efforts, as well as decreased intentions of hiring people with disabilities.

4.1. Implications

Conceptualizing stigma as a unitary construct is beneficial as it allows for the identification of employer stigma toward hiring people with disabilities at a broad level. In addition, it promotes the implementation of tailored interventions directed at specific areas of concern for employers and employees in hiring positions. The mean of the *ESATPD* scale was 2.24, which means, participants in this study had lower stigmatizing attitudes toward people with disabilities. However, examination at the item level revealed discrepancies regarding employers' concerns for hiring people with disabilities.

Among the seven items that comprised this scale, the lowest mean score was "In my opinion/experience, people with disabilities have trouble getting along with others on the job ($M = 1.59$, $SD = 0.95$)." while the highest mean score was "In my opinion/experience, people with disabilities often require extra time to learn a new work task ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.45$)." These findings indicate that employers believe people with disabilities need extra time to learn new tasks. In addition, results also found evidence of employers' concern regarding the cost of reasonable accommodations ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.38$). Employers also endorsed concern about how co-workers of employees with disabilities feel about working with them ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.43$); however, they reported less concern about whether people with disabilities had trouble getting along with others on the job ($M = 1.59$, $SD = 0.95$). Overall, examination of the item level scores suggest that employers tend to be less concerned with work ethic, such as presenteeism and absenteeism or efficiency while working. On the other hand, employers are more concerned with providing initial supports for learning a new task and the cost of providing reasonable accommodations. Targeted interventions providing education to employers regarding reasonable accommodations and/or functional limitations of specific disabilities can reduce areas of primary concern for employers (Social Security Administration, 2017). Educations efforts provided by organizations such as the Rocky Mountain ADA Center can use these findings to tailor trainings for employers and HR professionals (Rocky Mountain ADA Center, 2019).

4.2. Limitations

The present study has a few limitations to consider. A convenience sample was used in data collection, which impacts the generalizability of the results. In addition, the use of self-report surveys is subject to social desirability, particularly as it relates to employment of marginalized groups including people with disabilities.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study provided a psychometric validation of the *ESATPD* scale for the use of measuring the employers' stigma toward persons with disabilities, supporting a one-factor measurement structure for the scale. Examination of the individual item level scores also provided some insight into specific areas of concern for employers regarding hiring people with disabilities. This assessment tool is intended to support the capacity of rehabilitation counseling professionals, researchers, and employers to conceptualize stigma of hiring and retaining persons with disabilities. It can contribute to identifying and implementing tailored interventions to promote employment and job retention of people with disabilities.

Conflict of interest

None to report.

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