

Employer Concerns About Hiring Persons With Psychiatric Disability: Results of the Employer Attitude Questionnaire

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The Employer Attitude Questionnaire (EAQ) was created to assess employer attitudes toward hiring persons with psychiatric disability. A total of 373 employers representing various industries in the Boston metropolitan area were interviewed by telephone to assess their concerns in four major areas: symptomatology, work personality, work performance, and administrative concerns. The results were arranged according to 8 employer sectors derived from the Department of Employment and Training's 10 Standard Industry Classifications (SICs) for employers (Sum & Harrington, 1996). Results suggested that employers differ in their level of concern by industry type. The implications of these findings for vocational programs for persons with psychiatric disability are discussed.

Estimates suggest that there are between 2 and 3 million people in the United States with psychiatric disabilities (Jones, Gallagher, Kelley, & Mas-sari, 1991; Tashjian & Hayward, 1989). Many of these people have major functional and work limitations (Anthony & Blanch, 1987; Anthony, Cohen, & Vitalo, 1978; Bolton, Roessler, Greenwood, Hinman, & Little, 1983; Kielhofner, 1985; Murray, 1990; Rogers, Anthony, & Jansen, 1988; Tashjian & Hayward, 1989). Although work is considered a major source of stability in people's lives (Gatti, 1991), providing a sense of identity and enhancing feelings of self-worth (Florian, 1982), as many as 85% of persons with psychiatric disabilities remain unemployed (Anthony & Blanch, 1987).

Some researchers argue that vocational programs for persons with severe psychiatric disabilities have fallen short because they have not helped clients achieve high levels of employment (Lang, 1991; Rabin, 1991). Others argue that it is employer bias that keeps a large pool of potential workers out of the workforce (Feldman, 1988; Rochlin, 1987). Several authors have explored the attitude of employers toward hiring people with psychiatric

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disabilities (Feldman, 1988; Jamero, 1979; Landy & Griffith, 1958; Lasden, 1982; Olshansky, Grob, & Malamud, 1958; Wheatley, 1959). However, much of the research in this area was qualitative in nature, focusing on concerns such as absenteeism (Fuqua, Rathbun, & Gade, 1983; Johnson, Greenwood, & Schriener, 1988; Lyth, 1973), poor coworker relationships (Hartlage & Roland, 1971; Hartlage & Taraba, 1971; Johnson et al., 1988; Lyth, 1973), or the need for extra supervision (Fuqua et al., 1983; Hartlage & Roland, 1971; Hartlage & Taraba, 1971; Johnson et al., 1988). The Americans With Disabilities Act (1990) may heighten employers' concerns as they grapple with apprehensions about hiring people with psychiatric disability and with how to determine if a person with a psychiatric disability is "otherwise qualified" to perform the job, with or without reasonable accommodations.

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of empirical information regarding the specific concerns of employers about hiring persons with psychiatric disabilities (Hedley, Smart, & Young, 1982; Rochlin, 1987; Young, Rosati, & Vandergoot, 1986). Because little empirical data exist about the concerns of employers toward hiring persons with psychiatric disability, counselors are limited in their ability to help clients identify potentially hospitable work environments, to develop job-specific competencies in advance, and in general, to make a successful match between the client and the employer. Existing studies often describe the global or overall attitudes of employers and do not provide information about the specific concerns of employers (Bolton et al., 1983; Perlman, 1983). Although other studies do differentiate between concerns, such as task or safety-related issues and coworker relations, they treat employers as a homogeneous group (Cole & Shupe, 1970; McCue & Katz-Garris, 1983) and thus shed little light on differences among employers or work settings.

In response to the lack of empirical information, this study sought to gather information about employers' concerns by collecting and correlating those concerns with a variety of employer characteristics, such as industry type and prior experience in hiring persons with psychiatric disabilities. In addition, the study was designed to identify employer attitudes that are barriers to employment and to determine whether concerns differ by industry.

METHOD

Sample

The geographic sampling area was limited to Suffolk County, Massachusetts. The principal city in the county is Boston and the area is 100% urban. The 1990 Census recorded the total population of Boston as 663,906.

The Department of Employment and Training (DET) divides employers into 10 major industry divisions using the Standard Industry Classifications (SICs; Sum & Harrington, 1996). These divisions are standard through-

out the country and part of a large database. The divisions are as follows: (a) Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing; (b) Mining; (c) Construction; (d) Manufacturing (durable and nondurable goods); (e) Transportation, Communication, and Utilities (TCU); (f) Wholesale Trade; (g) Retail Trade; (h) Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate (FIRE); (i) Services; and (j) Public Administration. The categories were then rearranged to fit the needs of the survey. The first three SICs (Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing; Mining; and Construction) were eliminated from the survey, because within the targeted area, only a small number of people were employed in these industries. The services sector is enormous both in terms of the number of people employed and in the range of businesses. Because one of the aims of this survey was to assess specifically the not-for-profit social services sector, the social services sector, which falls under the SIC division of Service, was analyzed as a separate division from services. Thus, eight employer sectors were studied in this survey: (a) Manufacturing; (b) Transportation, Communication, and Utilities; (c) Wholesale Trade; (d) Retail Trade; (e) Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate; (f) Services; (g) Social Services; and (h) Public Administration.

A commercial database that lists businesses by geographic area and by SIC was used to identify employers with 20 or more employees. A random sample of employer listings was generated using a computer selection process based on a scrolling table of random numbers.

A protocol was developed to replace businesses or employers when the information provided by the database was inaccurate (e.g., disconnected telephone numbers and companies no longer in business). For example, in some instances the database would list a company and its divisions as separate businesses, even though the divisions lack independent hiring procedures. When inaccuracies were found, interviewers spoke with the personnel director of the company involved to eliminate branch operations from the sample and to resolve the inaccuracies.

Adequate sample size is usually determined by an estimate of variance that is derived using variance calculations from past research. Because there were no comparable studies in which variance was reported, we began the data collection process and calculated the variance for the first 250 interviews. This variance was used to determine the final sample size. The sample size was determined in the following way: The first 250 surveys were conducted with respondents representing every SIC. Variance was computed for each item within each SIC. The final sample size of 373 participants was computed by determining the minimum number of respondents needed to satisfy a 95% confidence level in sampling error across all items.

Instrument

The major dependent variable of this study was the attitudes or concerns expressed by employers about hiring persons with psychiatric disabilities.

These concerns were measured by the Employer Attitude Questionnaire (EAQ), an instrument developed for this study. An extensive review of the literature was used as the basis for developing the items of the EAQ. The 39-item questionnaire was factor analyzed (see Results section for a discussion of the factor analysis) and four subscales emerged: Work Personality, Work Performance, Symptomatology, and Administrative Concerns. Table 1 provides the questionnaire items, subscales, and factor loadings that resulted from the factor analysis. Persons surveyed were asked to rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *not a concern when compared to hiring a nondisabled person* to 5 = *great concern when compared to hiring a nondisabled person*.

The employer characteristics to be studied were identified from previous research and incorporated into the EAQ. Several of these employer characteristics have been found to relate to employer attitudes, such as the size of the business (Combs & Omvig, 1986; Craig & Boyd, 1990; Emener & McHargue, 1978; Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, & Levy, 1991); the profitability of the business (Kirszner, Baron, & Rutman, 1992); the business' prior experience in hiring persons with psychiatric disability (Emener & McHargue, 1978; Florian, 1982; Hartlage & Taraba, 1971; Kirszner et al., 1992; Landy & Griffith, 1958; Lyth, 1973), and an established policy toward hiring persons with a disability (Levy et al., 1991). The items included to measure employer characteristics include (a) the type of business as categorized in the SIC, (b) whether the company had or did not have a policy toward hiring persons with disabilities, and (c) the company's prior experience hiring persons with disabilities.

After the initial list of employer characteristics and items measuring attitudes toward hiring persons with psychiatric disability was compiled, content validity and comprehensiveness were examined using the responses of five key informants who were directors of supported employment programs. In addition, concerns identified by the program directors were incorporated into the questionnaire. The program directors were asked to identify one or two employers who had hired persons with psychiatric disabilities. The employers identified were then contacted and interviewed in the same manner as the program directors, and additions or changes were incorporated into the final draft of the EAQ.

On completion of the informant interviews, the survey was piloted with 10 employers randomly selected from the SIC lists. The results of the pilot test did not require changes to the instrument.

PROCEDURE

Interviewer Training

All interviewers attended a briefing session on the project and role-played interviews using a script developed by the senior author (Diksa). The senior

author supervised the interviewers' telephone calls to employers until the interviews were performed satisfactorily.

Interviewers were also trained in the proper and careful recording of employer responses. A comprehensive interviewer protocol was developed for a disconnected telephone line, a refusal, or an employer who did not meet the criteria for participation in the study. When a replacement was needed for an employer, the next employer on the random list was contacted.

Data Collection

Telephone interviews were conducted in the spring of 1993. Interviewers were instructed to survey the person who was in charge of hiring for each company contacted. For smaller businesses, the respondent was often the company owner; for larger businesses, the respondent was typically the head of personnel. Refusal rates ranged from a low of 9% in Social Services, to a high of 21% in FIRE. The overall refusal rate was 15%; 57 employers explicitly declined to participate, and 373 surveys were completed. The refusal rate was within the range (5% to 15%) commonly found in telephone surveys as reported by Dillman (1978) and Alreck and Settle (1985). Reasons for not responding to the survey included (a) the respondent was too busy, (b) participation was against company policy, (c) the survey addressed too sensitive a topic, and (c) various other reasons. Nonresponse rates (for those employers who could not be contacted) ranged from a low of 14% in Social Services, to a high of 36% in FIRE, with an overall nonresponse rate of 25%.

Composite rates of refusals and nonrespondents, which can be compared with refusal rates in mail surveys, ranged from 21% in Social Services to 40% in TCU, with an overall refusal rate of 32%. Of the seven mail surveys of employers identified in the literature review, only Hartlage and Roland (1971), with a reported 79% response rate, exceeded the response rate in this survey. Thus, the response rate for this study compares favorably with other employer surveys conducted during the past 30 years.

RESULTS

Analysis of the Questionnaire

A factor analysis was conducted on the original 39 questionnaire items of the EAQ. The purpose of this analysis was to reduce the number of individual item analyses and to confirm the categories of concerns found in previous studies. A factor analysis using principal components extraction and varimax rotation identified four factors using 38 of the original 39 questionnaire items (see Table 1 for explanation of items, factor loadings, and percentage of variance). A factor loading of .30 was used as a minimum to consider an item eligible for inclusion in a factor. For instances in which

TABLE 1
EAQ Items and Their Factor Loadings

EAQ Item	% of Variance Explained	Factor Loading
Symptomatology Factor	45.9	
Becoming violent		.73
Withdrawing into his or her own world		.72
Having a poor memory		.70
Showing poor judgment		.70
Having poor grooming skills		.68
Exhibiting bizarre behaviors		.68
Lacking enthusiasm		.68
Paying attention to detail		.66
Maintaining emotional stability		.66
Lacking initiative		.64
Tolerating work pressure and stress		.61
Having poor physical coordination		.60
Leaving personal problems outside work		.54
Responding to criticism		.51
Work Personality Factor	6.0	
Being on time		.79
Taking pride in his or her work		.76
Showing up for scheduled shifts		.76
Respecting authority		.73
Being reliable		.70
Getting along with coworkers and supervisors		.61
Communicating with others		.56
Keeping the job		.55
Seeking assistance to perform his or her job better		.41
Administrative Concerns Factor	4.3	
Being able to discipline or fire the person once hired		.63
Being able to advance in your organization		.57
Needing time off for medical appointments		.55
Being accepted by coworkers		.54
Benefiting from standard supervision		.52
Adjusting to the work environment		.51
Incurring unknown costs		.49
Being accepted by the public or customers		.46
Work Performance Factor	3.4	
Being able to perform job tasks		.78
Being able to produce an acceptable quality of work		.72

TABLE 1 (Continued)
EAQ Items and Their Factor Loadings

EAQ Item	% of Variance Explained	Factor Loading
Being able to produce an acceptable quantity of work		.69
Possessing adequate problem-solving skills		.58
Being able to tolerate the working conditions		.53
Possessing adequate academic skills		.46
Being able to perform job tasks safely		.43

Note. EAQ = Employer Attitude Questionnaire.

an item loaded on more than one factor, two criteria were used to decide the factor to which it would be assigned: (a) the factor on which it loaded higher and (b) whether the thematic content was consistent.

The four factors identified from the factor analysis were labeled as follows: Symptomatology, Work Performance, Work Personality, and Administrative Concerns. These factors accounted for almost 60% of the variance in responses and were consistent with previous studies that have identified three categories of employer concerns regarding persons with psychiatric disabilities: symptomatology, work performance, and work personality. However, the factor analysis also identified a fourth area of concern not previously discussed in the literature: administrative concerns. Symptomatology refers to the symptomatic and behavioral manifestations of the psychiatric disorder and the effects of medication. Work performance encompasses actual skills needed to perform the job. Work personality concerns the general deportment of the person in the job setting, apart from the skills needed to accomplish job tasks. Administrative concerns address organizational components of running a business and how these might be affected by hiring a person with a psychiatric disability. Coefficients alpha for each of the subscales were very satisfactory and suggested a high degree of internal consistency. Standardized coefficients alpha were .95 for the Symptomatology subscale ($n = 365$), .86 for the Work Performance subscale ($n = 367$), .94 for the Work Personality subscale ($n = 372$), and .81 for the Administrative Concerns subscale ($n = 362$).

Industry Type Effects

One major impetus for this study was to determine if different industries (as identified by the SIC) expressed different levels of concern about hiring persons with psychiatric disabilities. Therefore, an analysis of variance

(ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences by industry type in levels of concern about the symptoms, work performance, work personality, or administrative concerns involved in hiring persons with psychiatric disabilities. Results suggested that the eight industries investigated differed significantly on the Symptomatology, Administrative Concerns, and Work Performance subscales. Table 2 contains the means for each subscale of the EAQ by industry group and the results of the ANOVA.

Post hoc analyses were conducted to determine among which industries the significant differences occurred. Results of a Scheffé multiple range test conducted on all possible pairs of industry types on the Symptomatology subscale found only that employers in Social Services differed from those in TCU, with Social Services employers expressing lower levels of concern about Symptomatology. Post hoc analysis did not reveal significant differences on the Work Performance subscale or on the Administrative Concerns subscale.

In addition to examining differences in the EAQ among industries, we wanted to know whether past experience in hiring persons with disabilities was associated with more positive attitudes among employers toward hiring persons with psychiatric disabilities. To conduct this analysis, respondents were classified according to their answers to the following EAQ item: "Knowingly have hired a person with mental illness" (see Table 3). On the four subscales of the EAQ, one-tailed *t* tests were conducted to determine whether there were significant differences between employers with a history of hiring persons with disabilities and those without such a history.

Results of one-tailed *t* tests on the Work Performance and Administrative Concerns subscales revealed significant differences between employers with a history of knowingly hiring persons with disabilities and ones without such a history: Work Performance, $t(365) = 1.65, p = .05$; and for Administrative Concerns, $t(360) = 1.63, p = .05$. However, *t* tests failed to confirm a significant difference on Symptomatology $t(363) = 1.36, p = .17$; or on Work Personality, $t(370) = .34, p = .73$. For both significant results, employers who had knowingly hired a person with a psychiatric disability in the past had lower levels of concern.

One-tailed *t* tests were also conducted to determine whether representatives of companies with a written policy toward hiring persons with disabilities expressed lower levels of concerns in relation to persons with psychiatric disabilities (Table 3). Results revealed differences on the Symptomatology subscale, $t(363) = 2.20, p = .01$; the Work Performance subscale, $t(365) = 2.31, p = .01$; the Work Personality subscale, $t(370) = 2.24, p = .01$; and the Administration subscale, $t(360) = 2.89, p = .002$. In each case, those companies with policies concerning hiring persons with disabilities expressed lower levels of concern.

TABLE 2
Means and Standard Deviations of the Four Subscales of the EAQ
for Each SIC Category and Results of ANOVA

Subscales	SIC Category												F	df				
	Manufacture		TCU		Wholesale Trade		Retail Trade		FIRE		Social Services				Public Admin			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			M	SD		
Symptomatology	44.50	12.85	49.17	10.06	41.74	10.70	41.85	12.30	45.78	14.70	39.23	14.80	34.24	14.84	40.77	12.89	3.62***	7,357
Administrative Concerns	20.71	7.61	23.84	5.86	20.25	5.09	19.41	6.29	23.00	7.15	19.79	6.66	17.66	7.33	19.97	5.52	2.96**	7,361
Work Performance	20.54	7.46	22.92	6.12	19.67	5.55	18.73	6.27	20.90	7.17	18.49	6.76	18.09	7.09	20.10	6.94	1.98*	7,366
Work Personality	24.60	11.35	27.20	11.09	24.24	9.75	23.38	9.52	27.41	10.30	23.70	10.87	19.90	9.55	25.75	11.04	1.84 ^{ns}	7,364

Note. See Table 1 Note. Manufacture = Manufacturing; TCU = Transportation, Communication, and Utilities; FIRE = Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate; Public Admin = Public Administration. The minimum and maximum scores for each subscale are as follows: Symptomatology 14-70; Administrative Concerns 8-40; Work Performance 7-35; Work Personality 10-50. In all subscales, lower scores represent less concern. Degrees of freedom varied slightly across subscales due to missing data. SIC = Standard Industry Classification.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .005$. *** $p < .001$. ^{ns}Nonsignificant.

TABLE 3
**Results of Questions Regarding Employment of
 Persons With Psychiatric Disability by SIC**

SIC	% Answering Yes to "Having company policy toward hiring persons with disabilities"	% Answering Yes to "Knowingly have hired a person with mental illness"
Manufacturing	51.40	37.1
Transportation, Com- munication, Utilities	48.00	28.0
Wholesale Trade	33.30	27.3
Retail Trade	27.00	60.3
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	65.90	22.0
Services	64.40	32.7
Social Services	77.44	35.5
Public Administration	90.20	51.2

Note. SIC = Standard Industry Classification.

DISCUSSION

We predicted that there would be significantly different levels of concern expressed by representatives of various industries on all four subscales of the EAQ. Overall, results revealed that three of four subscales differed significantly: Symptomatology, Administrative Concerns, and Work Performance. Concerns examined by the Work Personality subscale were not significantly different by industry type. When pairwise differences between employers in different industries were examined, lower levels of concern for the Symptomatology subscale were found on the part of Social Services employers relative to those in TCU.

For the one instance in which pairwise differences were found, results suggest that the Social Service sector offers the most hospitable work environment for persons with psychiatric disability among all employment sectors studied. One reason for this finding may be that many employers in the Social Service sector are oriented toward helping others both through their education and through experience. Furthermore, because of the nature of social science work, social service employers are more likely to be exposed to people with various disabilities. The values driving social service organizations are likely to emphasize benevolence instead of profit, which may also account for employers' attitudes. Conversely, employers in the TCU sector are more concerned with the consequences of hiring

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persons with psychiatric disability and probably receive minimal education regarding the needs of persons with disabilities. In addition, job demands within the TCU may also be very different from those in the social service sector.

Our analyses also suggest that employers with a past history of hiring persons with disabilities express significantly lower levels of concern on the Work Performance and Administrative Concern subscales. Consistent with previous research, our interpretation of these data suggests that previous experience in hiring persons with psychiatric disabilities may lower employers' concerns. For example, Levy et al. (1991) found that employers with previous experience in hiring persons with disabilities expressed more favorable attitudes toward that experience than employers without previous hiring experience. Similarly, Florian (1982) found that employers who had experience hiring persons with disabilities were more willing to hire persons with disabilities again. Furthermore, Kirsznner et al. (1992) found that employers without a history of hiring persons with psychiatric disabilities expressed higher levels of concern about violence and strange behaviors.

Although cause and effect cannot be discerned using the EAQ, results suggest that experience in hiring persons with disabilities may lead to a lessening of employers' concerns regarding persons with psychiatric disabilities. It is possible that fears about psychiatric symptomatology are allayed when persons with disabilities are successfully employed. When fears are allayed, it can be acknowledged that workers with psychiatric disabilities do not necessarily create excessive burdens.

Similarly, results indicate that employers with an existing policy toward hiring persons with disabilities express significantly lower levels of concern across all subscales than do employers who do not have an existing policy toward hiring persons with disabilities. Taking the time to develop a policy shows some awareness of the issue. Employers unaware of the issues related to hiring persons with disabilities—especially since the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act—might be less sensitive to and react more negatively toward persons with disabilities.

The only previous research found to address the issue of hiring policy was conducted by Levy et al. (1991). Levy and his colleagues found that two thirds of the corporations who responded to their Fortune 500 survey had hiring policies regarding persons with disabilities. Of corporations with such hiring policies, 64% had hired at least one person with a disability. In contrast, of corporations without such hiring policies, only 40% had hired at least one person with a disability. Our results are consistent with those of Levy and his colleagues.

Our study was limited to Suffolk County, Massachusetts, an urban county located in the northeastern section of the United States. Therefore, generalization beyond urban New England settings is questionable. Fur-

thermore, the industry base comprises a greater number of financial, insurance, and government employers than the national average. Therefore, these results might not generalize to the entire United States. In addition, the northeastern section of the country experienced a dramatic recession during the 3 years prior to the study, with many businesses closing and many others at risk for closure. Studies such as these, conducted in a more economically favorable climate, could yield different results. Nonetheless, these results are consistent with studies conducted in different settings and times.

Results of this study suggest that employers may be particularly concerned about the symptomatology of workers with psychiatric disabilities. Results also suggest that employers want to know that an applicant with a psychiatric disability will not be disruptive to the ongoing functioning of the workplace. These findings suggest that vocational programs must develop cooperative relationships with employers and take steps to reduce employer concerns, particularly about psychiatric symptomatology.

Furthermore, to find placements for job seekers with psychiatric disabilities, our findings suggest that vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs may wish to target industries with low levels of concern about psychiatric disabilities and avoid industries with high levels of concern about psychiatric disabilities. This strategy may lead to more successful job development and placement efforts.

If persons with psychiatric disabilities are to enter the workforce in greater numbers and achieve greater work successes, the advice of employers is important. If cooperation from employers in hiring persons with psychiatric disability is the goal, then at least part of the burden should be on vocational programs to acknowledge and attend to the concerns of employers.

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