Disability Disclosure in the Workplace:
What Employers Should Know

Results of a survey by the Cornell University ILR School and the American Association of People with Disabilities.

Research conducted under the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities at Cornell University funded by the U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (Grant No. H133B040013)
Presenters

Sarah von Schrader, Ph.D.
Assistant Director of Research
Employment and Disability Institute

Susanne M. Bruyère, Ph.D., CRC
Director
Employment and Disability Institute
Webinar Sponsors

Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employer Practices Related to the Employment Outcomes Among Individuals with Disabilities (Employer Practices RRTC)

Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN)
• Presentation is based on a survey report entitled: *Emerging Employment Issues for People with Disabilities: Disability Disclosure, Leave as a Reasonable Accommodation, Use of Job Applicant Screeners* by Sarah von Schrader, Valerie Malzer, William Erickson, and Susanne Bruyère, Cornell University, Employment and Disability Institute. Available at: [http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/edicollect/1288](http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/edicollect/1288)

• This project was funded by the U.S. Department of Education National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. The contents of this presentation do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education or any other federal agency, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government (Edgar, 75.620 (b)). The views presented are not necessarily endorsed by Cornell University or the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR).
Presentation Overview

• Background
  – Employment and disability
  – Importance of disability disclosure to employers

• Survey methods and findings
  – Perspectives of individuals with disabilities on disclosure

• Implications
  – Employers: improving workplace culture and inclusion
Employment and Disability

• Large employment disparities between people with and without disabilities
• Current issues around employment for people with disabilities:
  – disability disclosure
  – leave as a reasonable accommodation
  – use of job applicant screeners
Importance of Disclosure for Employers

• Increase awareness of where accommodations may improve employee productivity
• Indicator of employee comfort level with sharing personal information
• Federal Executive Order 13548 -- Increasing Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities
• Proposed Rule to revise Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act
Survey Development and Distribution

• Survey development
• Survey dissemination
  – American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) listserv, newsletter, Facebook and Twitter
  – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) listserv, newsletter
Data Analysis

• Descriptive statistics

• Open-ended items
  – Thematic analysis of open-ended responses
  – Corrected spelling and removed all identifying information from quotes
## Respondent Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percent of persons with a disability (N=599)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability advocate</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability service provider</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 or older</td>
<td>67.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently employed</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental/emotional health condition</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Very important” factors, when deciding to disclose a disability to an employer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for accommodation</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive supervisor relationship</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability friendly workplace</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active disability recruiting</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing of other successes</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability in diversity statement</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in new opportunities</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Persons with a disability (N=598)
Choosing to Disclose: Other Important Factors

- Company offers flexible work opportunities
- Disability awareness/anti-stigma training offered to all employees
- “HR personnel who are familiar with disabilities, accommodations and understand it is a goal for companies.”
- “Knowing the employer has a fair system in place to resolve complaints.”
Choosing to Disclose: Other Important Factors (cont.)

- Accessible workplace building and facilities
- Organization supports diversity more generally
- “Data presented on hiring and promotion of people with disabilities”
- “Participation and support by employers in community awareness events/activities”
“Very important” factors when deciding to **NOT disclose a disability to an employer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk of being fired/not hired</td>
<td>73.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer may focus on disability</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk of losing health care</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of limited opportunities</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor may not be supportive</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk being treated differently</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk being viewed differently</td>
<td>53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No impact on job ability</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for privacy</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Persons with a disability** (N=598)
Percent who disclosed in current or most recent job

- Not Apparent: 74.1%
- Somewhat Apparent: 80.1%
- Very Apparent: 88.1%
Percent who disclosed at different points in the employment process

- During recruitment: 39.3% not/somewhat apparent, 50.6% very apparent
- During interview: 24.9% not/somewhat apparent, 34.1% very apparent
- After being hired: 35.8% not/somewhat apparent, 15.3% very apparent
Percent who experienced negative consequences of disclosure

Immediate consequences
- Not/somewhat apparent: 10.6%
- Very apparent: 6.9%

Longer-term consequences
- Not/somewhat apparent: 26.9%
- Very apparent: 19.8%
Deciding to Disclose in the Future

- Open-ended question: “If presented with a similar situation in the future, would you disclose? Please explain…”
- Further description and resulting understanding of factors.
- Past experiences impact future decision to disclose
Themes that we found in responses

1. Timing of Disclosure
2. Supportive Workplaces
3. “Disability is Part of Who I Am”
   a. Gauging Employer Acceptance
   b. Desire for Honesty
   c. Educating Others
4. Not Being Hired Or Being Fired
5. Workplace Harassment and Bullying
6. Losing Promotion Opportunities
1. Timing of Disclosure

Many respondents reported that they preferred to wait until hired to disclose

– “I waited until after being offered the position to disclose”

– “I tended to let employers see my work before letting them know that I am hard of hearing.”

– “I waited until after being offered the position to disclose. I was hired for my extensive abilities, not my disabilities.”
2. Supportive Workplaces

Respondents noted progressive policies are not enough, how are how employees with disabilities actually treated?

- “I would only disclose if there was clear evidence of being supportive of the disabled across the board at all levels.”
- “I would be wary of disclosing until I saw how the employer actually treated employees with mental health issues, not just their stated policy.”
- “I typically disclose, but if and when depend on my rapport with the interviewer / supervisor”
3a. Gauging Employer Acceptance

- “I prefer to disclose my disability, then I would be able to detect any body languages, reactions, or type of vibe by the interviewers or supervisors. It gave me the idea of what kind of environment that I would be risking myself if I got hired…”

- “I do not want to be viewed as a disabled person and then as an employee… I want to ensure that I am viewed as a valued employee who happens to have a disability.”
3b. Desire for Honesty

– “Disclosing makes life simpler - I am who I am and I am a person with a disability. Trying to cover that or pretend takes way too much energy.”

– “It is certainly less stressful to have it out in the open than to be concerned about having to hide it and not wanting anyone to find out.”
3c. Educating Others

– “Because I am not ashamed of my disability, and I would hope that my disclosure would help someone else with a disability in seeking employment.”

– “Disclosing allows me to serve as an example of successful employment and promotions.”

– “I … am proud to show that people with "disabilities" are competent, valued employees.”
4. Not Being Hired Or Being Fired

“Company policies are worthless if discriminatory behaviors are not curbed and the disabled are seen as too unreliable and costly. There is enormous ignorance and fear … by non-disabled coworkers, so denial and avoidance is rampant. Disability is still being treated like acute disease. Until this changes, there is still too high a risk of losing one's job if you disclose.”
5. Workplace Harassment and Bullying

– “[Disclosure] makes it harder to get fair and equal treatment in the workplace and results in being bullied, either by coworkers or by employers.”

– “In the beginning [my employer] was supportive but as the years went on I was bullied, harassed, belittled, written up and eventually fired.”

– “I was harassed daily, denied further training and eventually fired.”
6. Losing Promotion Opportunities

– “I was marginalized and alienated from the agency's mainstream development. I was deprived promotion and treated as levity by both supervisors and employees.”

– “Once you disclose your disability it can affect your long term promotions. The employer will always be aware of this no matter how hard you work.”
Conclusions and Implications

• Important for employers to understand issues around disability disclosure

• Employers play an important role in creating an environment where individuals are comfortable disclosing
Creating an Environment that Encourages Disclosure

Demonstrate disability inclusiveness through:

– Actively recruiting people with disabilities
– Conducting disability awareness training for staff
– Enacting flexible workplace policies
– Having fair systems to address complaints
– Creating accessible workplaces
– Fostering supportive supervisor-staff relationships
– Including disability in the diversity statement
Creating an Environment that Encourages Disclosure

Avoid:

– Focusing on disability
– Treating employees with disabilities differently in relation to:
  • Interpersonal interactions
  • Opportunities for advancement
  • Performance reviews
  • Hiring/termination
Resources for Employers

- Employer Resource and Assistance Network (EARN) -- askearn.org
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN) -- askjan.org
- National ADA Network Centers – adata.org
- HR Tips – hrtips.org
- Employment and Disability Institute (EDI) – www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi
Emerging Employment Issues for People with Disabilities:

http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/edicollect/1288

Further information: Sarah von Schrader, Cornell University, sv282@cornell.edu