

## Occupational Barriers for Adults with Disabilities

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to examine perceptions about people with disabilities on Millersville campus. This study determined if there was a significant difference between students and faculty/staff attitudes pertaining to employment experience with a disability. Students, faculty, and staff who participated had to have a visible or invisible disability. The study took place during the summer of 2018. A total of 100 participants completed a survey ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The statements reflected on whether the individual felt supported or not in their work environment. Five individuals were interviewed for a deeper dialogue about the topic. Three questions were asked during the interview process. The results indicated a significance with role and sexual orientation, but not race or gender.*

Adults with disabilities may have the education and skills to be successful in a work position, but are overlooked because of their disability (Jackson, 2018). Lack of support and understanding from employers tends to promote an uncomfortable work environment (Baldwin, Costley, & Warren, 2014). Persons with disabilities are forced to change jobs more than the non-disabled workforce. Very often, this is because work settings fail to meet their special need (Cook & Burke-Miller, 2015). Disabilities can be defined as visible or invisible such as a physical and mental impairment that limits one or more major life activities (Wylonis, Wylonis, & Sadoff, 2017). Not all persons with a disability are blind, deaf, or utilize a wheelchair. A disability does not define or limit a person's capability in the workplace. Individuals should be properly recognized for their achievements and acknowledged with promotions when deserved (Victor, Thacker, Gary, Pawluk, & Copolillo, 2017).

Society has developed a stigma towards people with disabilities as being less than they are (Montez, Zajacova, & Hayward, 2017).

Approved by the Institutional Review Board, all participants completed an informed consent for this study. A total of 100 individuals completed an electronic quantitative survey. The measurement tool scored with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 6 strongly agree. Higher scores represented acceptance in work environment. All participants had the option to be fully anonymous. To participate, all individuals had to identify with a visible or invisible disability. Participants were not asked to disclose any information about their disability in efforts in completing the survey. Five individuals were recruited from the quantitative survey and participated in a qualitative interview. Three questions were asked:

- What support and/or resources have been provided to you in current or previous positions?
- How accepting or not is your current job?
- What can employers do to be more supportive of employees with a disability?

A diverse group of participants enhanced the level of results for this study. Demographics like gender, race, and sexual orientation were analyzed. With gender, the two groups were male and female. Race was collapsed into two categories, whites and people of color due to not having enough groups. For sexual orientation the options were 100% heterosexual and not 100% heterosexual. The study analyzed the role of the individuals whether the participant identified as faculty, student, or staff.

Results expressed that there was no difference between race and gender, but role was significant. Staff felt less accepted in their work environment. Sexual orientation was a factor that was eye opening from this study. Individuals who identified as not 100% heterosexual felt less supported in their work environment. Common themes

were shared from each question during the interview process. Most did find support from their employer, but recommendations included:

- More accountability from management.
- Providing sensitivity trainings and workshops to make employees more aware.
- To encourage inclusive environments.
- Educating all on the importance of ethics and respect for diversity.
- Companies should be aware of the ADA laws and take responsibility.

Individuals with disabilities are fully capable and willing to be successful in their occupation. If our society provided trainings and reasonable accommodations, then employers could witness how one's work is as good as anyone else's (Katz, 2015). Effective results in a profession can be created from all people. Educating employees on disabilities and how to properly interact will enhance inclusiveness. A cultural shift is needed to reflect our new awareness that adults with disabilities are unique and not limited (Jackson, 2018).

## References

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