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***Employer attitudes towards people
with a psychological disability***

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Abstract

Only ten percent of people with disabilities in Sweden hold a salaried employment and one of the main barriers in hiring these individuals is employer attitudes. Using a correlational approach, the aim of this study was to investigate employer attitudes towards hiring people with a psychological disability.

Two hundred questionnaires were distributed to headhunters and employers with hiring responsibilities and 68 participants (37 women, 31 men) completed the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 34%. The mean value of the dependent variable measuring employer attitudes was 5.04 on a scale of 1-7, with high values indicating that employers are interested in hiring people with disabilities. The results showed that the independent variables “previously employed someone with a disability”, “interested in hiring someone with depression”, and “employers in the businesses of computer/IT, social work/pedagogy and sale/retail” contributed significantly in predicting employer attitudes.

The results support previous findings that employers generally hold positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and that if an employer has previously hired someone with a disability they are more interested in doing so again.

Keywords: employer, psychological disability, employment, attitudes, disability,

Preface

This study is a part of a research thesis for a master's degree in psychology at Lund University and was conducted in collaboration with the organization Misa AB. With a version of the Supported Employment method, Misa AB helps find practical vocational training and hopefully an employment for people with different kinds of disabilities under the Social Services Act (*SoL* in Swedish) and the Swedish Act Concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (*LSS* in Swedish). The aim of this study for the organization was to obtain a clearer theoretical and empirical basis for their future work.

The author of this thesis came in contact with Misa AB by an advertisement on a website allocating organizations to students in the process of writing their thesis. The student has done all the work with the study while a contact person from Misa AB has assisted with any questions from the student and with feedback concerning types of diagnoses, email to the employers, and the questionnaire. After completing the study, Misa AB will receive the thesis and can use it for their future work. They will not receive any of the participants' email addresses for any potential recruitment purposes in order to comply with the research ethical code of anonymity.

Introduction

Despite immense efforts from the Swedish government to implement people with a disability into the labor market, it remains a fact that for these individuals a regular employment is a rarity (Socialstyrelsen, 2010). It is important to clarify employer attitudes concerning hiring people with a disability since it is often the employer who decides over recruiting new staff. The aim of the present study was to establish attitudes that employers have towards hiring people with psychological disabilities. Using a quantitative approach, an online questionnaire was distributed to employers who were currently in the process of hiring new staff. There have been some studies done previously in the field; however, the research has been rather sparse. No quantitative study in a Swedish setting was found which highlighted the employer's view and focused on psychological disabilities. Therefore, the aim of the study was studied exploratively, focusing on prejudice towards people with disabilities, economical aspects and knowledge of different diagnoses among other variables.

There are many benefits of identifying employer attitudes towards hiring people with disabilities. The Swedish government spent 15 billion SEK in 2010 on efforts to assist people with

disabilities in entering the labor market (Socialstyrelsen, 2010). Much of this money took the form of government subsidized benefits (known as *lönebidrag* in Swedish) for employment of people with disabilities. Yet, research has actually found that many of the people participating in "daily services" (*daglig verksamhet* in Swedish) and other government implemented establishments under the Act Concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments, are actually capable of working in the open labor market (Socialstyrelsen, 2010). By establishing employer attitudes, future research can develop strategies and implement programs directed towards employers so more people with disabilities can successfully gain regular employment.

A review of previous theory & research

The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen*) reported in 2010 that only ten percent of people with disabilities between the ages of 20-64 hold a salaried employment whereas that percentage for people without a disability is 80 percent. Employing people with disabilities not only provides extensive societal economic benefits but also gives an individual increased health status (Chou, Pu, Kröger, & Fu, 2010), pride (Tschopp, Perkins, Hart-Katuin, Born, & Holt, 2007) and an improved quality of life (Beyer, Brown, Akandi, & Rapley, 2010).

So why are so many people with disabilities unemployed? There appear to be many reasons including financial aspects, potential loss of government subsidized benefits and poor job seeking services among others, but Copeland, Chand Bezyak and Fraser (2010) state that the main barrier is the attitudes of employers towards people with disabilities. Paradoxically, research indicates that employers generally hold a positive attitude towards employees with disabilities; however, individuals with a disability are still less likely to be hired (see for example: Hernandez, & Keys, 2000; Zissi, Costas, Papagerorgiou, Pierrakou, & Chtouris, 2007).

Several rehabilitation and employment programs have been implemented in recent years in order to try to increase the employment rate for people with disabilities. A part of the success of these programs is the change in employers' attitudes. Most employers have a positive view concerning how these programs work and benefits have been reported where supported employment programs appear to be most favorable (see for example; Conley, 2006). The organization Misa AB, which this study is working with, believes that all people are capable of taking part in the labor market given the right support. Misa AB offers assistance to people with

disabilities and aids in finding practical vocational training that will hopefully lead to a paid employment. The organization uses ISA (*Individuellt Stöd i Arbetslivet*: "individual support in working life") which is based on Supported Employment. Supported Employment is a method in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and is used for people who have a disability in order for them to gain access to employment in the open labor market (European Union of Supported Employment Toolkit, 2010). It is comprised of five steps including client engagement, establishing work profile, job search, employer commitment, and support at and outside work. Although these programs have received some positive feedback it is important not to forget that the employers are still responsible for hiring new staff.

One of the main barriers to employment of people with psychological disabilities is prejudice, social acceptance and stigma in the workplace, where stigma refers to applying a negative trait to groups or individuals (Sheid, 2005). There are several theories concerning prejudice in general, yet prejudice research in social psychology concerning disability is considerably more sparse (Gervais, 2011). One model that has received some attention is the dual models of person perception (Mellers, 1990; Fiske, & Neuberg, 1990). This model suggests that when initial person perception occurs, attention will first go to the defining features of a person, for example, the typical appearance of a person with Down's syndrome with a flat face and oblique eyes. This attention to people's physical features will provide a basis for social categorization which lays the ground for prejudice. Once categorization has been made, thoughts might occur such as "people with Down's syndrome are helpless and slow", these thoughts may be inaccurate, but the categorization and prejudiced thoughts have already been made. Categorizing people allows us to simplify and elaborate our social worlds, by assuming that *all disabled people are similar, with similar personalities, goals, and behaviors and so forth*. Since people are often initially characterized by their physical features, people with a psychological disability are less likely to encounter this type of immediate stigma; a person with Borderline personality disorder is less likely to be categorized compared to someone who is paralyzed and uses a wheelchair. However, any features relating to psychological disabilities can also be used for categorization. Even though a psychological disability may take longer to appear and is therefore less prone to stereotypes, people with psychological disabilities experience more difficulty in that they are often not considered impaired enough to be called disabled (Blanck, 2011). Another fact concerning people with psychological disabilities is that they often

undertake immense efforts to conceal their disability since this often leads to stigmatization for the individual. It is not only that the individual with psychological disabilities will experience prejudice if their disability is known; it is also possible that he or she will experience stereotype threat (Passer, Smith, Holt, Bremner, Sutherland, & Vliek, 2009). Hence, the individual may live up to the "expectations" of the disability and therefore expect rejection from other people and might try to cover up the disability, thereby inadvertently creating even more stigma (Link, 1987). The stigma of disability will affect social interaction and can lead to insecurities in how to interact with an individual who has a disability or it may produce pure discrimination (Sheid, 2005). Positive discrimination can also occur, although not nearly as frequently. Cooper (1995) reported in her study that one employer mentioned that even though they were open to and were working with people with epilepsy, they could not write in a job advertisement that 'they were looking for someone with epilepsy' since this would be positive discrimination. Whether people with a disability experience positive or negative discrimination, it is still a fact that prejudice exists and continues to be one of the main barriers to employing these individuals. Often, people with psychological disabilities are labeled as being unpredictable, dangerous, 'they have to blame themselves' and are warm but incompetent (Björkman, Angelman, & Jönsson, 2008; Louvet, Odile & Dubois, 2009) and people that are described in this way are not very likely to be the first pick candidate for a job.

Another aspect to consider is the emotions that we experience at work and elsewhere, how they will influence work and non work behavior and the effects they can have on employing people with disabilities. This is important because employing a person that has a disability will inevitably force a change to occur within the organization. The organizations that can embrace change will thrive and survive, whereas organizations that are reluctant to change will disappear. This type of change is more successful when it is continuous rather than episodic, i.e. changes that are infrequent and discontinuous, compared to a continuous change that will persist (Landy & Conte, 2010). Barriers in organizational change often reside in both the individual and the organization. Lewin's model (1951, referred to in Landy & Conte, 2010) in organizational change involves *unfreezing*: where the individuals in the organization become aware of the values and beliefs that they have. In the next stage, *changing*, the individuals adopt new beliefs, values and attitudes and the final process is *refreezing* which involves stabilizing the new attitudes and beliefs within the organization.

On a more individual level, one well-known theory on behavioral change in humans is the transtheoretical model which includes six major stages in the change process (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984). The six steps include *pre-contemplation* (problem unrecognized or unacknowledged), *contemplation* (recognition of problem; contemplating change), *preparation* (preparing to change behavior), *action* (implementing change strategies), *maintenance* (behavior change is being maintained) and *termination* (permanent change; no maintenance efforts required). These stages are not done smoothly; rather one moves distinctively between the stages. Resistance to change among organizations can be an issue of both individual as well as organizational factors: from an organizational perspective, the employees worry whether their position will be threatened within the company, whether the change might increase their workload or wonder “what is in it for me?”. Reluctance to change also comes from a fear of the unknown and of being pushed outside the comfort zone where the individual will have to move between the stages in the transtheoretical change model.

In addition to prejudice theory and processes of change, previous research has also examined business type and size to see if there is a correlation between these differences and the employment of people with disabilities. Erickson, Bruyére and VanLooy (2006) found that small businesses (with less than 500 employees) are less likely to hire people with disabilities, discussing that this might be a result of a more informal recruitment process and the fact that larger businesses are more experienced and have more resources in order to meet the accommodations of working with people that have a disability. Contrary to this finding, Nesbitt (2000) surveyed 69 organizations and found that there were no significant differences between employers hiring people with Asperger syndrome related to business type or size. Unger (2000) reports inconsistent findings regarding business type and employer attitudes.

More consistent results have been found regarding employers who have previously employed people with disabilities. A myriad of studies report findings that these employers generally hold more positive attitudes and are more likely to employ a person with a disability again (see for example: Unger, 2002; Copeland et al., 2010; Ozawa & Yeada, 2006). Nesbitt (2000), however, is critical to many of the studies within this particular field since they often focus on employers who have used supported employment or have experienced working with employees who have a disability compared to employers who have not done so. This limits the overall understanding of employers’ attitudes since employers who have not worked with people

with disabilities are less likely to hire these individuals. Nesbitt (2000) found in her study that organizations that do not hire people with Asperger syndrome place more emphasis on the individual to adjust to established organizational norms. In contrast to organizations that have employees with disabilities were more open to information and adaptable to changes that were potentially required by the organization. Many of the studies within this field have focused on managers who have the capacity to hire and fire people (Unger, 2000) and little research has been done on employers who work with employees that have a disability on a daily basis. This is important to investigate since even though managers are responsible for hiring and firing staff, frontline supervisors are the ones who are capable of assessing the work that the employee is executing and can assess the needs and accommodations needed for the employee. Also, headhunters are increasingly responsible for allocating staff to employers and may have different attitudes since they will not spend any further time working with the new employees.

The purpose of the Discrimination Act (SFS 2008:567) § 1 in Sweden (*Diskrimineringslagen* in Swedish), is to combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age (Gabinus, Göransson, Slorach, & Flemström, 2011). So even though businesses must comply with current laws and regulations and cannot discriminate against people because of a disability, it is still hard to overlook the fact that organizations are also driven by profits. Therefore, another aspect concerning the employment of people with disabilities is the potential increased financial cost. Cooper (1995) interviewed five employers concerning hiring people with epilepsy and one of the employers expressed that people with epilepsy might need more time off work, which would result in more costs for the organization. If people with disabilities work less hours or have more sick-leave requiring back-up such as substitute workers, it is inevitable that more costs will be incurred for the organization. Hornberger and Milley (2005) surveyed employers and found evidence supporting previous findings that employers have a strong negative view on economic aspects concerning people with disabilities. Results showed that financial reasons were a strong determinant in not hiring these individuals.

As presented so far, much of the previous research concerning employing people with disabilities covers a wide array of fields and one more important field is what *type of disability* the individual has and how this influences employment rate. The term disability is broad and, in

this study, refers to a congenital or acquired impairment that substantially limits an individual's daily activity, work possibilities, or social life (Socialstyrelsen, 2009). The complexity of this definition is that a disability can range from a minor inconvenience to a major one in an individual's life (Gervais, 2011). Therefore it is difficult to identify all the possible attitudes, opinions and prejudice towards people with disabilities. A great deal of research supports the finding that employers are less likely to hire people that have a mental or emotional disability as opposed to a physical disability (see for example: Zissi et al., 2007; Unger, 2002; Gouvier, Sytsma-Jordan & Mayville, 2003). This indicates that individuals with more of a "hidden" disability may meet more challenges. However, in Cooper's (1995) study, one employer stated that the hidden nature of epilepsy could be advantageous in that the employee need not reveal the diagnosis unless necessary. Nevertheless, individuals with psychological disabilities are less frequently employed compared to people with physical impairments. When comorbidity of psychiatric symptoms are accompanied by an individual's disability, the employment rate is even lower compared to when there is only one disability present (Schaller & Yang, 2005). There are many disabilities, however, and to limit the scope of the present study, psychological diagnoses have been selected to meet the wishes of Misa AB and the diagnoses they most commonly work with. One of these diagnoses is personality disorder (such as Borderline personality disorder) where the individual has difficulties with social adjustment in maintaining relations with other people. People with this disorder often have difficulties with emotion regulation (Egidius, 2008). Beth and Weissenborn (2010) found that 50% of people with Borderline face challenges when it comes to employment.

Another diagnosis chosen for the study is affective disorder, including depression, in which an individual experiences an intense state of sadness, misery and loneliness which leaves the individual unable to function effectively in daily life (Egidius, 2008). No studies were found concerning employment rate and the prevalence of depression, however, Birnbaum, Leong and Greenberg, (2003) found that female employees with depression have particularly high work absence and higher total costs for the employer. The third diagnosis that will be addressed in this study is neuropsychological disorder, including attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD) and Asperger syndrome. In ADHD/ADD, problems include deficits in attention, hyperactivity/impulsivity or a combination of the two. Asperger syndrome is a part of Autism Spectrum Disorder and includes difficulties with social interaction, the ability to attribute other

people's mental states and reactions and capacity to plan and change activities (Egidius, 2008). There is a rather large amount of research that has been done on Asperger syndrome and work-related issues. Attwood (2007) found that it is generally more difficult for individuals with Asperger syndrome to gain and, more importantly, to maintain employment. Attwood (2007) also states that the ideal work place for people with Asperger syndrome is structured and clear to the individual and most people with this disorder most likely need extra instructions suited for them. Another diagnosis used in the study is intellectual disabilities, such as Down's syndrome. Intellectual disabilities include deficits in cognitive abilities with an IQ level below 70 and can range from mild to severe where the individual most often needs some assistance in daily life (Egidius, 2008). Individuals with Down's syndrome, which is a genetic disorder, display a range of capabilities, from rather well functioning in daily life to very disabled. Individuals with intellectual disabilities are often underrepresented in the paid workforce even though research indicates that many of these individuals can take part in the open labor market (Trembath, Balandin, Stancliffe, & Togher, 2010).

The final diagnosis in this study is anxiety disorders such as social anxiety, panic disorder and compulsive disorder. In anxiety disorders, the frequency and intensity of the feeling of anxiety is disproportional to the situation in which it is triggered and interferes with daily life (Egidius, 2008). Anxiety disorders can differ immensely so it is difficult to generalize this to work situations, but Tolman, Himle, Bybee, Abelson, Hoffman and Van Etten-Lee (2009) found that social anxiety disorder will reduce an individual's job success and thus affect economic self-sufficiency.

Another aspect concerning type of diagnosis and employment rate is how aware of the diagnosis the employer is. Diksa and Rogers (1996) reported that employers had more favorable attitudes towards people with a certain disability if they had previously employed people with the same disability. However, employing someone with the *same type of diagnosis* does not mean that you employ the *same type of person* – it is important not to forget that people with a certain type of disability are not a homogenous group, but rather individuals. Nesbitt's (2000) study revealed that among other variables, differences between employers who employed and did not employ individuals with Asperger syndrome depended on awareness and/or understanding of the disorder. In contrast, one employer in Cooper's (1995) study who mentioned that having some sort of "information on the diagnosis" is not beneficial since willingness to hire someone

probably depends on previous experience. Also, what appears to be important is whether the employer holds the view that someone with a disability *should be able to participate* in the open labor market (Scheid, 2005). Evidence shows that the attitudes of employers concerning people with disabilities are crucial to understanding why so few of these individuals hold a regular paid job. If employers do not believe that these people should take part in the open labor market they will probably not expend much effort on employing them. The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen, 2010) claims that the importance for people with disabilities of being part of working life has been highlighted in many aspects. Employment is an important barrier to break when it comes to segregation and inequalities in life for people with disabilities and this type of research is imperative.

Logic of the present study

The purpose of this study is to examine employer attitudes toward hiring people with psychological disabilities. Psychological disabilities include a wide range of conditions and in this study refers to impairments influencing the individuals' daily activity, work possibilities, or social life (Socialstyrelsen, 2009) and includes personality disorders, affective disorders, neuropsychological disorders, intellectual disorders and anxiety disorders.

Unger (2000) stated that there are ambiguous and inconsistent results concerning previously conducted research within the field of employer attitudes and reasons for this could include different methodological approaches. Discrepancies may also be due to the complexity of the phenomenon.

In previous studies exploring employer attitudes, the term *attitude* is used inconsistently. Some studies identify attitude as "an internally consistent relationship between the components of an individual's attitudinal system – cognition, feelings and operational tendencies" (Ozawa & Yeada, 2006, p.106). Copeland et al. (2010) states that the construct of attitude often contains more than one component, and the cognitive component encompasses the individual's ideas and beliefs and the affective component captures the feelings and reactions of the individual. Also, *employer* has been inconsistently used in previous research, sometimes referring to business owners or senior level managers with hiring and firing responsibilities (see for example: Copeland et al., 2010). The current study defines employer attitudes as: the ideas and feelings a headhunter or employer with hiring responsibilities has and is operationalized to how interested the employer/headhunter is in hiring an individual with a disability.

This study tries to cover a wide range of areas in order to establish employer attitudes in a complete way. It is difficult to capture all aspects of this field since much of the previous research has been inconsistent. This study should be seen as explorative since a quantitative study highlighting the employer's view has not been conducted in a Swedish setting or with this sample. Therefore the present study can be used as a pilot study for future in-depth research. By building upon previous research that has been presented, it is reasonable to assume that one or more of these many areas are likely to predict employer attitudes. The primary research question of this study is thus:

what are the attitudes of employers and headhunters concerning hiring people with psychological disabilities?

The hypothesis suggests as follows:

* There will be one or more independent variables that will predict the dependent variable (employer attitudes).

Since this study is explorative, three qualitative interviews were conducted with employers with hiring responsibilities to get a better and deeper understanding of the field and to provide suggestions for future research. It is important to clarify that these interviews are not analyzed and not used as results in this study. They should merely be seen as anecdotal narratives in order to broaden and give more depth to the current study.

Method

Participants

In this study there were 68 participants (37 women, 31 men), who all participated on a voluntary basis. Two hundred surveys were distributed and 85 were answered, yielding a response rate of 42.5%. Sixteen participants were deleted since they had several missing values, indicating that they had not finished the questionnaire. They were not included in the analysis since not finishing the survey is every participant's right according to research ethical codes. One participant was excluded in the analysis since he answered "no" to the dichotomous control question if they were employer or headhunter with hiring responsibilities.

In the final sample of 68 participants, an additional three participants were included. The three participants were added to the sample to answer the questionnaire and also participate in a short interview with some follow up questions.

Inclusion criteria for the participants were as follows: the participants needed to be either headhunters or employers with hiring responsibilities in the process of recruiting new personnel. Testing both employers and headhunters allowed for a representative sample comprising large government owned businesses as well as small firms with only a few employees. Also, the participants needed to be a part of the sample chosen for the study, i.e. have an advertisement on the Swedish Public Employment Service website.

Organizations using a separate database for recruitment and thereby having no contact information in order to receive an e-mail with the survey were excluded from participation.

Organizations that only had a phone-number as contact information were excluded in the study. Also, if an organization had several advertisements (and therefore the same contact e-mail) it only received one e-mail with the study, and if the advertisement was in English no e-mail was sent.

Participants were recruited by non probability sampling via the Swedish Public Employment Service website (www.platsbanken.se) which is Sweden's largest employment agency. On platsbanken.se there are several categories for different job types and eight types of businesses were chosen:

Sale/retail,

Finance/administration/law,

Healthcare,

IT/computer,

Tourism/hotel/restaurant,

Construction/handicraft,

Social work/pedagogy,

Industrial manufacturing.

These types of businesses were chosen since they had the largest number of available jobs at the time. Social work and pedagogy and construction and handicraft businesses were combined to represent one type of business to simplify analysis.

After the type of business was chosen on Platsbanken.se, all jobs in this category were selected and this generated somewhere between 800-2000 available jobs for each category. The first 25 organizations that met the inclusion/exclusion criteria then received an e-mail with the online survey. This was repeated for all eight types of businesses, yielding a sample of 200.

After completing the questionnaire, participants received the option of taking part in a lottery of a gift box with a value of 450 SEK as compensation.

The three additional participants that were added to the study in order to complete the questionnaire and to partake in a short interview were recruited by convenient sampling via the researcher's social network and this sampling technique was utilized due to time limitations. The three participants had to meet the criteria of being either employer or headhunter with hiring responsibilities.

Measure

Because there was no instrument available that specifically addressed the research question in the current study, a questionnaire was constructed.

The dependent variable of this study was employer attitudes towards people with disabilities.

This was measured by an item on a 7 point Likert scale: "How interested are you in hiring a person who meets the criteria for the job you have advertised and has a disability?". (In Swedish: "hur intresserade är ni av att anställa en person som uppfyller de kompetenskrav ni har för den utannonserade tjänsten och har en funktionsnedsättning?"), where 1 on the scale indicated "not very interested" to 7 "very interested". The reason a 7 point scale was used was to get a middle point and three opposite response choices (such as 1-7, 2-6, 3-5).

The independent variables were:

- * *Gender*: male/female.
- * *Type of business*: see under "participants".
- * *Size of business*: defined by the European Commissions recommendation of defining small and middle sized companies: 0-10, 11-50, 51-250, 250+ employees (European commission, 2003/361/EC).
- * *Type of employer/headhunter*: defined as employer with hiring responsibilities who would have daily contact with the new employee or more sporadic contact, or headhunter who would continue the contact or would no longer have any contact with the new employee.
- * *Corporate Social Responsibility company*: whether the organization was a corporate social responsibility company, which was a trichotomous variable with "yes", "no", and "do not know" answers. Corporate social responsibility concerns the company's responsibility for the environment, consumers, employees and the community.
- * *Previously employed people with disabilities*: a trichotomous variable with "yes", "no", and

"do not know" answers asking whether the organization had previously employed people with a disability.

* *Previously worked with a company that employed people with disabilities*: whether the company had previously employed a person with disabilities through an organization like Misa AB, this variable was trichotomous and measured by "yes", "no", and "do not know" answers.

* *Chance of participating in working life*: assessed by two statements on a 7 point Likert scale: "I think that everybody deserves a fair chance to participate in working life" and "our organization thinks that everybody deserves a fair chance to participate in working life".

* *Previous experience of the diagnoses*: if the participants had previous experience (such as personal illness, friends or family) with any of the five diagnoses used in the study. The different diagnoses were defined:

‘Personality disorder, such as Borderline personality disorder’,

‘Affective disorder, such as depression’,

‘Neuropsychological disorder such as ADHD, Asperger syndrome’,

‘Anxiety disorder, such as social anxiety, panic disorder, compulsive disorder’.

‘Developmental disorder, such as Downs syndrome’,

The items were dichotomous with "yes" and "no" options.

* *Knowledge of diagnosis*: measured using a 7 point Likert scale how much knowledge the participant had of the different diagnoses.

* *Interest in hiring people with a certain diagnosis*: assessed by one item for each diagnosis, measured by a 7 point Likert scale.

* *Economic aspects and prejudice*: economic aspects were measured by two items in a statement format and the prejudice variable was assessed by seven statements. Both variables used a 7 point Likert scale, where the prejudice scale had a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.626.

Measuring the dependent variable and the independent variables resulted in a 30 item questionnaire. The first item was a dichotomous control question asking if the participants were employers or headhunter with hiring responsibilities. Thirteen items consisted of multiple choice questions with one forced answer. Fourteen items were statements and these were measured by a 7 point Likert scale. The two last items were multiple choice and allowed for more than one response. These last items were not used in the analysis of the results; instead they were used for directions of future research and for Misa AB, where item 29 was “what do you think the main

reasons are for employers not to hire people with disabilities” and was multiple choice. The last item was open ended and asked "are there any aspects of employing people with disabilities that you think need to be highlighted?". (For more detailed information on the questionnaire please see appendix (i)).

Concerning the order of the items in this study, the dependent variable was used as item 6. The information the participants were given in the beginning of the study was that the questionnaire assessed "employer attitudes toward recruiting new staff" not "employer attitudes toward recruiting people with disabilities" (this deception is discussed further in the following section). The reason for the dependent variable to occur so early in the questionnaire was to avoid too much social desirability in the answer.

In order to increase the validity of the questionnaire, a simple, straightforward language was used so that all participants would understand the items. The items were made short (less than 25 words) and as clear as possible and avoided leading and double-barreled questions (Shaughnessy, Zechmesiter, & Zechmeister, 2006). Two reversed items were used to reduce response bias.

Since the questionnaire was specifically constructed for the purpose of this study, it was decided that a pilot study would be conducted using five participants. One of the participants had fairly good knowledge of research methods in psychology, three participants came from Misa AB and therefore had excellent skills in the field of employing people with disabilities and the final participant had no knowledge of either psychological research methods or the field of study. The respondents were asked to fill out a paper-based questionnaire and to comment on the design (such as clarity of instructions and items) and also the time it took for them to complete it (5-7 minutes). After comments from the respondents, the questionnaire was revised. Comments included clarifying a few items, changing the definition of the diagnoses and some grammatical errors.

The online survey was constructed in and launched by a website called www.surveymonkey.com. It was impossible to track the participants' IP address, making the participation anonymous unless the participants gave their e-mail address.

Design and Procedure

Because of the sparsity of quantitative research within this field, a descriptive and explorative design with a correlational approach was used to assess employer attitudes towards

people with psychological disabilities, measured by a questionnaire. The dependent variable was employer attitudes toward recruiting people with psychological disabilities and included several independent variables such as prejudice, type of diagnosis, and types of businesses among others. The survey was distributed on April 25th and 26th, 2012, and the closing date for answers were May 4th, 2012.

The questionnaire was sent to the respondents via electronic mail with a web link to the survey. The e-mail to the participants included a brief presentation of the researcher's name and that the study was a part of a master's thesis at Lund University. A short explanation of the aim of the study was given as "the study is assessing employer attitudes toward recruiting new staff". It did not include the actual purpose, i.e. employers' and headhunters' attitudes toward recruiting people with psychological disabilities. The reason for this was to eliminate any potential social desirability in the answers from the respondents, considering it is quite a sensitive subject. It is important to note that this is deception and could be considered unethical. However, it was concluded that this type of deception was minimal and it would not leave the respondents feeling insulted or exposed and would not harm them in any way. Information was also given concerning confidential results and that the results would solely be used for research purposes. The results were not completely anonymous since, if the participants wished, they could sign up with their e-mail address. However, the results were only available to the researcher. The e-mail to the participants also stated that it was important that the person answering the questionnaire was a headhunter or employer with hiring responsibilities. Finally, contact information for the researcher was given. For a detailed view of the e-mail, please see appendix (ii).

When the participant had clicked on the web link to the questionnaire, the first page repeated much of the information in the e-mail and gave further instructions such as "you will be asked to fill out a set of questions and statements". Respondents were also informed that they had the right to end the participation in the study at any time. The questionnaire was then started by clicking on a button and was expected to take approximately 5-7 minutes to finish, based on the pilot study.

After completing the questionnaire, participants were thanked and debriefed about the purpose of the study. If respondents wished, they could write their e-mail address to participate in a lottery for a gift box.

After approximately a week, 186 reminder e-mails were sent out to the participants in order to increase the response rate. The reason it was sent to almost all participants was because it was impossible to track which participants had answered the questionnaire and which had not unless they had left their contact information. Some participants had communicated with the researcher and said that they had completed the questionnaire or that they did not wish to participate so they did not receive a reminder e-mail. The e-mail repeated the same information that was sent out the first time, apart from the introduction which stated "a week ago you received an e-mail about participating in a study which is a part of a master's degree in psychology". For more information on the reminder e-mail, see appendix (iii).

Three shorter qualitative interviews were also conducted in order to get a better understanding of the field. After agreeing to participate in the study, the three participants received the same e-mail as other participants and conducted the study. Shortly after, a telephone interview was conducted asking five follow up questions. Participants were informed about their rights during the study, that their name or company name would not appear in the essay and that the only person taking part of the interview was the researcher. The questions asked are available in appendix (iv).

Results

A standard multiple regression analysis was performed to evaluate which independent variables could predict the dependent variable employer attitudes. After a preliminary analysis in SPSS Explore (version 20), 16 participants were deleted since they had several missing values, indicating that they had not completed the questionnaire. One participant was deleted since he did not meet the inclusion criteria of being headhunter or employer with hiring responsibilities. After removal of participants, 68 remained (37 women and 31 men).

Initially, the two reversed items in the questionnaire were reversed in order to be able to calculate the total score for the prejudice scale. After the prejudice items had been calculated into a new total score scale, the descriptive analysis of the new scale showed satisfactory scores for normal distribution. An analysis was made to assess the reliability of the prejudice scale and the results showed that the scale had an acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.626. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient should preferably be above 0.7 but considering it was constituted of less than 10 items it is acceptable (Pallant, 2007). The item total

correlation between the items on the scale showed that item 27, "people with a disability are reliable" could be excluded in the scale. Calculations were made with and without the item and there was no statistical difference; therefore it was decided to keep the item in the scale based on theoretical grounds.

A descriptive analysis was performed on all the independent variables and the dependent variable and a visual inspection of box plots and histograms indicated some outliers in the variable "previously worked with a company like Misa AB" and "do you have any previous experience from Downs's syndrome". Since these variables were categorical, the outliers could not be replaced and were therefore excluded in the regression analysis.

The criteria of normality was not met which means that several of the variables deviated from the normality of distribution. However, in most social science research this is often the case and does not necessarily indicate a problem with the measure but rather a problem with the nature of the construct (Pallant, 2007). Even though the test of normality was violated, skewness and kurtosis values were satisfactory (no higher values than $\pm 1,4$) and therefore normal distribution is accepted although not optimal.

The dependent variable mean was 5.04 (on a scale from 1-7) which indicates that participants are "interested in hiring people with disabilities", see table 1.

Table 1

Table Showing Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent Variable

Dependent variable	1. Not at all interested	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Very interested
Number of participants responded	3	4	10	12	11	14	22
Percent	3.9	5.3	13.2	15.8	14.5	18.4	28.9

Before a regression analysis could be performed, the categorical variables needed to be dummy coded in order to evaluate these variables with a nominal approach. The variables type of business, size of business, type of employer/headhunter and previously employed people

with disabilities were coded into '0' and '1', with '1' as reference group. The categorical variables that were dichotomous did not need to be coded.

After the preliminary analysis and dummy coding was done, a standard multiple regression analysis was performed and the first group was the reference group for the dummy coded variables (first and last group are most common to use as reference groups, Tabachnick, & Fidell, 2007). The analysis showed no multicollinearity with VIF values under 10 and tolerance values below 0.10 (Pallant, 2007). Results also showed that there was no violation of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity or residuals since the scatterplot showed the residuals centered around the '0' point and were in a rectangular shape and the values of the normality probability plot (P-P) were not too deviated from the linear line.

To investigate for any multivariate outliers, Mahalanobis distance was inspected where the highest value was 42.8 which did not exceed the χ^2 value of 52.6 ($df=25$, α level <0.001). The Cook value was also inspected and was satisfactory since it did not exceed the value of 1 (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007), so there were no multivariate outliers.

The model was significantly different from 0, $F(27, 40) = 2.07$, $p=0.018$, with the total variance for the dependent variable explained by $R^2 = 0.582$. The adjusted R^2 value was 0.30 which is a better estimate of the true population value when there is a rather small sample like in this study and should therefore be used as the value that the independent variables can predict the dependent variable (Pallant, 2007). There were a few independent variables that contributed significantly to the model and thereby predict employer attitudes the most and this means that the research hypothesis is accepted. The significant variables were (ranked after Beta-value):

- * Interest in hiring people with a certain diagnosis: ($\beta=0.526$, $p=0.001$)
- * Type of business: computer/IT ($\beta=0.449$, $p=0.019$)
- * Type of business: social work/pedagogy ($\beta=0.431$, $p=0.039$)
- * Previously employed someone with a disability ("do not know") ($\beta=-0.227$, $p=0.049$)

To determine how much these variables uniquely contribute to the model their semi partial correlation was calculated, with the following results:

Interest in hiring people with a certain diagnosis contributed with 14.9% (Part value: 0.387),
Type of business: computer/IT with 6.25% (Part value: 0.250),

Type of business: social work/pedagogy: 4.75% (Part value:0.218)

Previously employed someone with a disability: do not know: 4.32% (Part value: -0.208). This is a total variance of 30.2% which does not equal the total R^2 value of 58.2%. This is because in semi partial correlation, only the variables' unique contribution to the model is evaluated and their overlap or shared variance with the other variables in the analysis is not accounted for.

An additional standard multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the results when the reference group for the dummy variables were changed. The analysis used the last group as reference group and it yielded the same results for the model variance as the first analysis. All assumptions for regression analysis were met and $R^2=0.582$ and the adjusted $R^2=0.30$, $F(27, 40), = 2.07, p=0.018$). The independent variables that contributed significantly to the model were interest in hiring people with a certain diagnosis ($\beta=0.558, p<0.000$) and previously employed someone with a disability: "yes" ($\beta=0.353, p=0.039$).

Yet another multiple regression analysis was performed where the dummy coded variable "type of business: computer/it" was used as reference group. The results were as follows: all assumptions for the analysis were met and $R^2= 0.573$ and adjusted $R^2=0.286$, $F(27,40), =2.07, p=0.02$, where the independent variables "interest in hiring someone with a certain diagnosis" ($\beta=0.511, p=0.01$), "type of business: sale/retail" ($\beta=-0.305, p=0.031$) and "previously employed someone with a disability: yes" ($\beta=0.356, p=0.04$) were significant.

A follow up regression analysis was conducted to see which type of diagnosis for the variable "interest in hiring someone depending on diagnosis" was significant in contributing to the model. All the assumptions were met for the analysis and the type of diagnosis that best predicted the value on the dependent variable was depression ($R^2=0.208$ and the adjusted $R^2=0.145$, $F(5,62), = 3.27, p=0.011$, with a beta value of 0.419, $p=0.027$).

After the initial regression analysis, the model was replicated on the significant (independent) variables where the goal was to see how well the independent variables would explain the dependent variable excluding the other insignificant variables. All assumptions of regression analysis were met and the total variance for the dependent variable was explained by an R^2 value = 0.328 ($F(4,63)=7,7, p<0.000$) and adjusted R^2 value of 0.286 where all the variables contributed significantly to the model.

The results indicate that participants with a high value on the dependent variable "employer attitudes" are interested in hiring someone with a disability.

The model showed that the variables that best predict the dependent variable is interest in hiring people with depression, type of business: computer/IT, type of business: social work/pedagogy, type of business: sale/retail and if you have previously employed someone with a disability: 'yes' and 'do not know'.

This indicates that those interested in hiring someone with depression will score high on the dependent variable. Also, those who work in the industries of computer/IT or social work/pedagogy will be more likely to be interested in hiring someone with a disability. Those who work in sale/retail are not likely to be interested in hiring people with disabilities.

Participants who have previously employed someone with a disability are more likely to be interested in hiring someone with a disability. Those who do not know if they have hired someone with a disability will score significantly lower on the dependent variable compared to those who have done so.

Discussion

Result discussion

The aim of the present study was with a quantitative investigation establish attitudes that employers have towards hiring people with psychological disabilities. The dependent variable was employer attitudes and there were several independent variables expected to predict employer attitudes. Statistical analyses showed that the research hypothesis could be accepted since several of the independent variables significantly contributed to the model. The significant variables were 'interest in hiring someone with depression', 'previously employed someone with a disability: yes, do not know', 'type of business: social work/pedagogy, computer/IT and sale/retail'.

The mean value on the dependent variable 'employer attitudes' was 5.04 on a scale from 1-7 and this implies that the participants in the study are interested in hiring people with a disability. This result is consistent with previous research that employers hold favorable attitudes toward people with disabilities (Hernandez & Keys, 2000; Zissi et al., 2007). However, it is evident that these individuals do not get employed; across the world, the employment rate for people with disabilities range from 0.5-34.6% (see for example: Ozawa & Yaeda, 2007; Socialstyrelsen, 2010; Copeland et al., 2010). Hernandez and Keys (2000) and Zissi et al., (2007) report that employers have positive attitudes toward employees with disabilities but are more conservative and less positive when it comes to employing these individuals in their own

companies. This is an important issue – if employers hold favorable attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, why are so many disabled persons unemployed? There is obviously something here that is missing. One of the reasons for this discrepancy could be that according to laws and regulations, employers and headhunters are not allowed to discriminate against any person on the grounds of a disability. This could be why many of the participants answered that they "are interested in hiring a person with a disability". Although this study uses real employers and not a student sample, thereby yielding a higher external validity, this study was not experimental and it is therefore impossible to know if any of the employers or headhunters in the study would actually employ someone with a disability. One of the questions of the qualitative interview was "what are your opinions concerning employing people with a disability?" and relates to the dependent variable. (To repeat, these interviews are not analyzed and should merely be seen as anecdotal narratives). Interview person C, an employer with hiring responsibilities who would have daily contact with the new employee, working at a company size of 0-10, answered: "There is nothing wrong working with someone who has a disability. But in our business you need to know so much. You cannot have someone with a depression and things like that". This supports the findings that people are positive to the concept of employing people with disabilities, yet when it comes to actually hiring someone in ones own company, employers are not as positive. So how can this critical issue be addressed empirically? How can we account for the fact that employers have positive attitudes, yet are hesitant to employ individuals with disabilities? There is obviously a substantial need for rigorous research concerning employer attitudes and methods of interventions and implementations.

One of the significant independent variables in predicting employer attitudes was if 'you have previously employed someone with a disability: yes and do not know'. The results showed that if you do not know if you have previously employed someone, you will score significantly lower on the dependent variable and if you have previously employed someone with a disability you are more likely to be interested in hiring someone with a disability. This result also supports previous findings that employers who have worked with an individual with a disability have fewer concerns about their work and are more likely to hire a person with a disability in the future (Unger, 2002; Copeland et al., 2010; Ozawa, & Yeada, 2006). Reasons for this could include that organizations that have previously employed someone with a disability may be more open to change, making the process of change easier. This is supported by Nesbitts (2000) study

where employers who have employed someone with Asperger syndrome were more open to meet the accommodations needed by the organization in order to employ someone with a disability. Also, organizations that have previously employed a person with a disability have gone through the organizational and individual stages of change which means that they have already been pushed out of their comfort zone and now are familiar with the 'unknown' (Landy & Conte, 2010). Since they have gone through the process of change, they are not reluctant to change and are therefore willing to employ someone with a disability again. These employers may also be more familiar with the practical aspects of hiring someone with a disability such as what support you can get from the government or companies like Misa AB.

Another independent variable that was significant in predicting employer attitudes was what type of business the participants worked in. Participants working in the sectors of social work/pedagogy or computer/IT scored high on "interest in hiring someone with a disability", whereas people working with sale/retail scored significantly lower on the dependent variable. These results are somewhat unclear, since previous research is ambiguous concerning whether type of business influences employers' attitudes toward people with disabilities. Also, the pattern of results in this study is a bit difficult to interpret. One perspective is that successful employees in sale/retail jobs rely heavily on social skills in order to make money and for example people with Asperger syndrome have difficulties with social interaction. Therefore, employers may be reluctant to hire these individuals for this type of job. However, the dependent variable was not specific, it just stated 'disability' and not 'psychological disability' or 'Asperger syndrome' so it is still not a satisfying reason for this industry's averse attitudes to employing people with disabilities. Further research needs to be conducted to answer this question.

Regarding the industries of social work/pedagogy and computer/IT, results are also rather mixed. Why people in the computer industry are more likely to be willing to hire individuals with disabilities compared to the construction industry, for example, is unclear, as is the discrepancy between employers in social work/pedagogy and those in the field of health care. One reason could be that health care jobs often include highly qualified jobs such as doctor, nurse, etcetera, and the respondents may have reasoned that if you have a disability you may not be able to hold these positions. However, this is just speculation. It still does not make any sense that people within some of these industries are more interested in employing people with disabilities compared to other industries, but it does support previous findings of inconsistent results

concerning the relationship of type of business and employing people with disabilities (Unger, 2000).

The final significant variable predicting employer attitudes was "interest in hiring someone with depression". This showed that if participants hold positive attitudes towards people with disabilities (high score on the dependent variable) they were most interested in hiring people with depression. Since this study did not control for any physical disabilities it is impossible to conclude that people with psychological disabilities are less employed over people with a physical disability. What it does tell us, however, is that employers have positive attitudes to potential employees with depression. An interesting aspect of this result is that people with clinical depression are often incapable of working, at least when the depression is most severe (Socialstyrelsen, n.d.). In contrast, a person who suffers from an anxiety disorder, which can often be treated, is more likely to be able to work. In this study, the only diagnosis that was significant in predicting employer attitudes was depression, which indicates that employers were not interested in hiring people with personality disorder, neuropsychological disorder, intellectual disorder or anxiety disorders. A reason for this can be that depression is a better known diagnosis than for example personality disorder and, once again, probably goes back to influence of ignorance and fear of the unknown.

Research shows that employers are more likely to hire a person with a physical disability over a person with a psychological disability (see for example: Zissi et al., 2007; Unger, 2002; Gouvier et al., 2003), one factor may be physical disabilities being viewed as more "stable" over time. Consider a person with a spinal cord injury who is a paraplegic and thus assigned to a wheelchair. With this person one 'may know' that he or she might need a doctor's appointment occasionally but the disability is stable – it will most likely not progress or improve. Concerning psychological disabilities, this might be a reason why employer are more reluctant to hire these individuals – apart from not being familiar with the diagnosis, employer may be unsure as to how the employee will feel throughout the employment. With some psychological disorders, the individual's wellbeing can fluctuate and thus can affect work performance. Since depression was the diagnosis that was significant in the study, one reasoning could be that if a person is 'cured' from a depression they are likely not to recess into depression again and can therefore perform more at work compared to a person with a remission with his or her anxiety for example. Note that these statements are not medically based, merely an attempt in trying to understand why

depression was the significant variable compared to the other diagnoses.

One perspective to be discussed is that in order for an employment to work between a person with a disability and the employer, it is important to be open about what the employee need so these needs can be met. As Attwood (2007) stated concerning employment of individuals with Asperger, many of these individuals need individually suited instructions and set routines and it is important that this gets discussed before an employment. As one of the respondents said in the open-ended item: "It takes a great deal of openness between the employer and the employee for a situation like this to work". It is also of importance to bear in mind that not all organizations have the possibility or desire to meet these accommodations; "with some disabilities one cannot do all work tasks required, and few employers are interested or have the ability to tailor tasks to fit the individual. Often it is difficult just to arrange things like maternity leave!" - as one of the participants responded concerning other aspects of employing a person with a disability.

The adjusted R^2 value for the results in predicting employer attitudes was 0.30 which is not considerably high. That means that the model is lacking 70% in explaining employer attitudes which means that future research needs to incorporate more variables (suggestions are given under the heading 'future studies') for a more complete understanding of the field. However, the replication of the model yielded an adjusted R^2 value of 0.286 which is similar to the initial model's adjusted R^2 value of 0.3, indicating that the model's variables can explain employer attitudes well.

Even though some of the variables in this model did not contribute significantly, there still needs to be a discussion concerning some of these. Many of the insignificant variables do not have any theoretical ground and will therefore not receive any further discussion (such as: gender, Corporate Social Responsibility company, previously worked with company like Misa AB). However, concerning the variable size of business, in line with Nesbitt (2000) no effects were found between size of business and employer attitudes towards people with disabilities. Contrary to this finding, Erickson et al. (2006) found a difference where smaller companies were less likely to hire people with disabilities. Reasons for this inconsistent result can be due to different definitions of company sizes: Erickson et al. (2006) used <500 employees as a small company whereas in this study the *largest* company had an employee number of >250. It is therefore difficult to compare the different results.

Also, the insignificant variable of ‘knowledge of the different diagnoses’ is difficult to interpret since previous research is inconsistent in this field (see for example: Cooper, 1995; Scheid, 2005). The conclusion in this study is that previous knowledge of the diagnoses does not influence the interest in hiring people with disabilities.

The variable of economic aspects did not reach significance in the study in contrast to previous research (see for example: Diksa & Rogers, 1996; Nesbitt; 2000; Cooper, 1995). This is believed to be caused by a methodological limitation in the present study. The economic variable was only measured by two items and this could be a reason as to why a significant result was not found for this variable. As interview-respondent A (employer with hiring responsibilities who would have daily contact with the new employee, company size: 0-10) said; “The financial aspect is definitely important, it concerns a lot of money [employing someone with a disability]”. Suggestions for future research include adding more items to test this variable since a considerable amount of research has shown that this is an important issue when it comes to employing people with disabilities. As interview respondent C said: “If the employee is gone a lot, the employer should not have to pay for it, it costs too much for the company”.

Today, many countries have established regulations to protect the rights of people with disabilities; however, discrimination based on disabilities still occurs (Sheid, 2005). The final variable that was not significant was the prejudice variable, which was rather surprising based on previous findings. The reason no significant result was found in this study is most likely due to methodological limitations. It is extremely difficult to measure prejudice in a quantitative manner, especially when the respondents know that, by law, they are not allowed to discriminate against anyone with a disability. Even though anonymity in the study is assured, it is still difficult to measure explicit stereotypes. Because employers generally hold favorable attitudes towards people with disabilities yet are less likely to hire these individuals, the social norm that exists for people with a disability could be related to stereotypes related to the job market - that is, there is a discrepancy between the normative characterizations of a person with a disability and the requirement an organization has for the work performance (Taylor, Peplau & Sears, 2003). If people with disabilities are described as unpredictable, dangerous, ‘they have to blame themselves’ and are warm but incompetent (Björkman, et al., 2008; Louvet, et al., 2009) yet employers are positive in hiring people with disabilities, there is obviously an inconsistency and this could be due to simple social psychological theory of social identity. Social theory of

identity is a part of self-concept deriving from belonging to one or more social groups and, in relation to prejudice, individuals with disabilities belong to an out-group. Members of ones in-group are described more positively and favorably and people belonging to an out-group are described as more of a homogeneous group with stereotyped personality and traits (Taylor et al., 2003). This out-group homogeneity effect is based on ignorance and can occur even if we have no experience of the out-group members. This goes back to the previous discussion: even if one has not employed someone with a disability, one might not want to simply because of fear of the unknown, particularly fear of employing someone that is not a part of the in-group. As one of the respondents stated in the open-ended question in the questionnaire: "think it is the same reason people react to foreigners – fear of the unknown, why take the chance when you can get a ‘safe bet’?".

Cultural aspects must always be addressed in psychological research since they have great impact on society and individuals. One thought concerning the results is that most of the studies presented have been conducted in countries other than Sweden where there might be different laws, social acceptance and views of disabilities. In the US, employing a person with disabilities would include health benefits for that person which would cover medical issues, whereas in Sweden we have a different health care system and the reason to seek employment is not primarily based on the ability to pay medical bills. In Greece, for example, Zissi et al. (2007) found that the majority of employers in their study did not believe that people with mild to moderate learning disabilities were capable of gaining a successful employment and the situation might be different in Sweden. Here, there are no more institutions for people with disabilities and they are rather integrated in ‘regular life’. Even though there is a rigorous amount of research suggesting discrimination towards people with disabilities is dependant on what type of disability it is and other variables, there is also evidence that social context and disability type will affect the attitudes towards people with disabilities (Gouvier, et al., 2003). This implies that different contexts can lead to different attitudes, which is something important to bear in mind when attempting to generalize the results.

Methodological discussion

In psychological research there are numerous methodological and statistical approaches to choose from and all include strengths and limitations. For the purpose of this study, a correlational design was chosen as appropriate to explore which variables can predict employer

attitudes. It is important to note that with correlational data it is not possible to determine the cause of the relationship. However, since this study is so explorative it was decided that before continuing with experimental research it is essential to establish which attitudes employer actually hold and correlation research is an excellent method for describing and predicting scientific queries (Shaughnessy et al., 2006).

Concerning the construction of the questionnaire that was used in this study, the general notion of survey research is that it involves reactive measurement which could have a massive effect on the construct that is being measured (Shaughnessy et al., 2006). This is especially true in this study since it concerns prejudice, which is quite a sensitive matter. Also, since this study uses a self-report measure, it is important to discuss the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The consistency of the questionnaire was rather satisfactory with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.626. However, since it was constructed specifically for this study it is not certain that the results will be replicated in another sample or population. Concerning the validity, the items in the questionnaire were carefully selected in order to make sure that the nature of the construct was measured and to achieve a good construct validity. However, previous research within the field of employer attitudes has had many different definitions and operationalizations of the term 'employer attitudes' and included many measures. This study defines it as "the ideas and feelings a headhunter or employer with hiring responsibilities has" and is operationalized to how interested the employer/headhunter is to hire an individual with a disability. This definition could be seen as quite limited and in order to improve the construct validity in future studies, more measures could be added.

The item measuring the dependent variable was "how interested are you in hiring a person who meets the criteria for the job you have advertised and has a disability" and was not directed to 'psychological disabilities'. Perhaps the study would have yielded different results if the item stated "how interested are you in hiring a person who meets the criteria for the job you have advertised and has a psychological disability". However, the reason the term 'disability' was used was to try to capture the diversity and ambiguity of the term.

In terms of statistical conclusion validity, the rejection of the null hypothesis is based on significance testing with an alpha level of 0.05. The choice of data analysis method was standard multiple regression analysis since this is the most commonly used multiple regression analysis and evaluates each independent variable in terms of its predictive power compared to all the

other independent variables (Pallant, 2007).

Threats to statistical conclusion validity in this study would be a low statistical power based on a rather small sample size. However, the sample used in this study is considered representative and it is extremely difficult to obtain a truly representative sample. The current sample constitutes a good distribution of men and women, and a response rate of 34%. This is not particularly high, but is the same or better than to previously conducted studies within the field, in which the response rate has been around 17,2-36,5% (see for example: Wood, & Marshall, 2010, Cooper, 1995; Ozawa & Yeada, 2006). The questionnaire was distributed to all parts of the nation and represents smaller and larger cities and the external validity can be said to be relatively high. Another fact supporting a strong external validity is the use of a nonstudent sample. The participants in this study were actual employers who work with recruiting people. It should be noted however that this study did not include a 'real situation', where an employer had to employ a person, so it is impossible to know if the employer would have responded any differently in such a situation. However, the study has fairly good generalizability since the sample is constituted of 'real employers', small and large organizations, and employers and headhunters. To summarize the strengths of this study, a high response rate (34%) reflects a representative sample and contributes to statistical conclusion validity. The study uses real employers and not a student sample, increasing external validity over other studies. Another strength is that this study is explorative and covers a wide range of topics in order to establish the construct of interest, namely employer attitudes.

There are also some limitations to the study, including the three participants who were recruited for the qualitative interviews being included in the total analysis. It would have been better not to include them in the original sample. Also, a variable 'brain damage' was not analyzed in the study because of unexpected human error in the construction of the questionnaire. Also, in correlational research it is possible for spurious relationships to arise and for confounding variables to affect the results. There were also many independent variables in comparison to the sample size which limits generalizability. Nonetheless, this should be seen as a pilot study in this field and a follow up study should be conducted on a larger sample to support the findings.

Future studies

Future studies within this field could focus on differences between temporary/trial employments and permanent employment. Many companies are open to trial employments for

people with disabilities and are more reluctant to hire them permanently. It would be beneficial to investigate reasons for this phenomenon. Perhaps it relates to some organizations being more open to episodic change (Landy & Conte, 2010). As interview person A said in the qualitative interview:

I think it is about giving good will to a certain extent, until it is about a large amount of money, as it is to hire someone [...]. People are willing to take one step but not two. Then I think that one might look for work opportunities and when it comes to hiring the person you realize that there might not be such a big need for a person to actually do these tasks.

- which could imply that companies are willing to change for a while but not in the long run. Interview respondent C, reflecting upon the reason the employers are not willing to hire people with disabilities for a permanent employment, stated:

I think it is because they are sick so often or gone, which costs a lot of money for the company. I think that is why. If it is a large company you are one in the crowd, but in a little company it really has an effect. We are four people and if one is absent it is expensive.

As indicated by the qualitative responses, there are several factors that could influence employing people with disabilities with a regular permanent employment, and further research can investigate this in both qualitative and quantitative manners.

Another direction for future research would be to focus more on specific diagnoses. Since this study included both personality disorders and intellectual disorders, among others, it would be wise to narrow a future study to focus on a specific disorder such as "employment attitudes towards people with Borderline personality disorder".

A study replicating this one and using a larger sample would be valuable to validate these findings. To elaborate on the current study, further statistical analysis can be made such as stepwise and hierarchical regression analysis in which variables are entered into the equation based on statistical or theoretical grounds.

A final suggestion for future research is to do a study evaluating what employers *know* about hiring people with disabilities. As one participant said in the open ended item "it is difficult to say [anything] since one is so little informed on the issue" - indicating that some employers may not be aware of what it actually means to employ someone with a disability. Intervention studies can be made in which one condition is educating employers on issues related to hiring people with disabilities and one condition serves as control in order to measure how interested employers are to hire employees with disabilities as a result of having relevant information.

Conclusion

There are several benefits of identifying employer attitudes towards people with disabilities since the employer decides in hiring new staff. Allowing more people to take part in the open labor market will provide several benefits such as societal profits along with positive effects for the individual. The results of this study are supported by previous findings, namely that employers hold favorable attitudes towards people with disabilities. This is interesting given a myriad of evidence suggesting otherwise – that individuals with disabilities are a group of people that often are excluded when it comes to regular employment. This demonstrates the importance of continuous research within this field. If only one employer in the current study reconsidered their recruitment process because of their participation in this study, that is at least one step. It is important continue striving to improve the work situation for people with disabilities and as interview respondent *B* (employer with hiring responsibilities who would not have daily contact with the employee, company size: 11-50) said: "I think it is a basic right for all people to be able to partake in work life whether you have a disability or not".

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Appendix (i)

The English translation of the questionnaire:

Are you working as a headhunter and/or is an employer with hiring responsibilities?

Yes No

Man or woman?

Man Woman

What type of business are you looking for people?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> sale/retail | <input type="checkbox"/> Finance/administration/law |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare | <input type="checkbox"/> Computer/IT |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tourism/hotel/restaurant | <input type="checkbox"/> Construction/handicraft |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social work/pedagogy | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial manufacturing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

How many employees do you have?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0-10 | <input type="checkbox"/> 11-50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 51-250 | <input type="checkbox"/> 250+ |

You have an advertisement on Platsbanken.se and are therefore recruiting new staff. What kind of role do you have in the recruitment process?

- Employer with hiring responsibilities -who would have daily contact with the new employee
- Employer with hiring responsibilities – who would have more sporadic contact with the new employee
- Headhunter - who would continue the contact with the new employee
- Headhunter – who would no longer have any contact with the new employee

How interested are you in hiring a person who meets the criteria for the job you have advertised and has a disability?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not very interested Very interested

Do you think that your company is a Corporate Social Responsibility Company? That is the company's responsibility for the environment, consumers, employees and the community.

Yes No

Have your company previously employed someone with a disability?

Yes No

Have your company previously worked with a company like Misa AB in employing a person with disabilities?

Yes No Do not know

Our organization thinks that everybody deserves a fair chance to participate in working life.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not true at all Very true

I think that everybody deserves a fair chance to participate in working life.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not true at all Very true

How familiar are you with the following diagnoses?

Developmental disorder, such as Downs syndrome

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not interested at all Very interested

It is more probable that it includes an increased financial cost if one hires a person with a disability.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Do not agree at all Very much agree

It is more probable if you have an employee with a disability that person will be more absent compared to other employees, which will lead to increased financial costs.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Do not agree at all Very much agree

It is more probable that the work place will have to be reorganized if you hire someone with a disability

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Do not agree at all Very much agree

If you hire a person with a disability the other employees will not like it.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Do not agree at all Very much agree

An employee with a disability is just as independent in work tasks as other employees.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Do not agree at all Very much agree

It is more probable that an employee with a disability will not execute the work tasks as well as other employees.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Do not agree at all Very much agree

A person with a disability is reliable.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Do not agree at all Very much agree

I think it is frightening to hire a person with a disability.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Do not agree at all Very much agree

Why do you think so few employers want to hire a person with a disability?

- Financial aspects
- There are no work tasks that suits the employee
- Prejudice
- Ignorance of what it means to have a disability
- It takes extra time to have an employee with a disability
- There is a responsibility in hiring a person with a disability, and a responsibility you cannot drop so easily
- Other _____

Is there any aspect concerning employing people with a disability that you think needs to be highlighted:

Appendix (ii)

The English translation of the email to the participants:

Hello!

My name is Jennie Andersson and I am actually not applying for the job you have advertised for! Instead I am writing to you as a master student in psychology at Lund University. I am currently writing my thesis and it involves a study about what opinions employers and headhunters have concerning employing new staff.

The thesis is based on a short online survey (see further down the page) with 30 multiple choices questions and takes about 5-7 minutes to answer. I would be grateful if you would participate and by doing so, you can sign up for a lottery of a gift box with a value of 450 SEK. (Click on the link for more information on the gift box http://se.smartbox.com/mvc/page.jsp?ref=smartbox_b2b).

The study is completely confidential and will solely be used for research purposes! Your name and the company's name will not be tied to the thesis in any way. It is important that the person answering the questionnaire works as a headhunter or employer with hiring responsibilities since this is the population chosen for the study. The last day to respond is May 4th, 2012.

If you wish for more information concerning the study or want to talk to me or my supervisor do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,
Jennie Andersson, Lund University

CLICK ON THE LINK TO GET TO THE SURVEY:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/studie_arbetsgivarattityder

Supervisor: Per Johnsson, associate professor, lecturer and chartered psychologist, Lund University

Jennie.andersson.psychology.lu@gmail.com

Phone number: X X

Appendix (iii)

The English translation of the reminder email:

Hello!

About a week ago you received an email about participating in a study concerning how employers and headhunters reason when employing new staff, a study which is a part of a master's thesis in psychology at Lund University.

Considering it is almost impossible for us to track which participants have answered the questionnaire this email is sent to all participants. Please disregard this email if you have already answered the questionnaire or have been in contact with me for other reasons.

You have been chosen to participate and for the results to be reliable, it is important that we get many answers.

Note that the survey only takes 5-7 minutes to respond to and you can participate in a lottery of a gift box to the value of 450 SEK. (for more information on the box :http://se.smartbox.com/mvc/page.jsp?ref=smartbox_b2b).

The study is completely confidential and will solely be used for research purposes! Your name and the company's name will not be tied to the thesis in any way.

It is important that the person answering the questionnaire works as a headhunter or employer with hiring responsibilities since this is the population chosen for the study. The last day to respond is Friday, May 4th at 18,00. We thank you for your participation!

If you wish for more information concerning the study or want to talk to me or my supervisor do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,
Jennie Andersson, Lund University

CLICK ON THE LINK TO GET TO THE SURVEY:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/studie_arbetsgivarattityder

Supervisor: Per Johnsson, associate professor, lecturer and chartered psychologist, Lund University

Jennie.andersson.psychology.lu@gmail.com

Phone number: X X

Appendix (iv)

The questions for the qualitative interview:

- * "Having prejudice thoughts is something that we all have and is something that is difficult to talk about. What are your opinions concerning employing people with a disability?"
- * "One question in the survey was 'how important do you think it is for everyone to participate in working life?' – what are your thoughts about employing people with disabilities?"
- * "Another question was 'if you have an employee with a disability that person will be more absent from work compared to other employers', when you read this question, what were you thinking?"
- * "Many times, employers say 'yes' to people with disabilities to trial employment but 'no' to a regular employment – why do you think that is?"
- * "Is there anything else you think needs to be highlighted concerning this topic?"