

Breaking down Barriers: Exploring the Factors of Discrimination for the Disabilities in Workplace

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Abstract: The issue of excluding those with disabilities from gainful work has always been a longstanding challenge. The significance of employment in facilitating social engagement underscores its potential to favorably impact human health and well-being, particularly among disadvantaged populations. The majority of research in the field has mostly concentrated on the topics of sex and racial discrimination, resulting in a dearth of studies examining the issue of disability discrimination within recruitment and selection processes. This study will include a comprehensive review of pertinent literature pertaining to the prejudice experienced by those with disabilities in the workplace. Additionally, the report will include parts dedicated to results and processes. Upon the conclusion of this study, an examination of the strategies used to enhance the employment rate will be conducted, followed by an analysis of the constraints encountered throughout the research process. Additionally, suggestions for potential avenues of investigation in future studies will be provided.

Keywords: discrimination, disabilities, equal work chance

1. Introduction

The exclusion of disabled people in paid employment has always been a persistent problem. As Employment is essential in societal participation, work can affect positively for human health and well-being, especially the vulnerable people. There are many benefits for a company to hire disabled people, for example, it can establish a reputation and increase their competitive advantage, for customers prefer companies with good reputations. However, as the minority groups, disabled employers have low attention in the labor market. There are 35 million people with disabilities engaged in economic activities in China, however, only 9.42 million can get paid work, which means the employment rate is 26.99% [1].

Similarly, according to Hulsege, the employment rate of disabled people remains extremely low in comparison to the general public [2]. Ge also states that disabled people are more likely to face poor treatment and work quality in the workplace [3]. Most of the research is focused on sex and racial discrimination, there is limited study on disability discrimination in recruiting and selection [4]. The equal work chance is a fundamental value in many countries. So this study aims to find the factors that affect the low employment of disabled people in China, and also find methods to estimate the discrimination against them in the workplace to increase the employment rate. At the beginning of this study, there will be relevant literature related to the discrimination of disabled workers. Secondly,

there will be findings and process sections. At the end of this study, the methods to increase the employment rate, and the limitations of this research will be discussed, and also make recommendations for future study.

2. Literature Review

It is noteworthy that although numerous studies concentrate on how vulnerable workers might engage in the labor market for a long time, the majority of them only focused on supply-side variables, thus people should be ready for employment. For instance, evaluating the success of social integration. The success of active labor market policies depends on employer participation, thus it is vital to consider the demand-side factors [2]. Although the majority of companies favor hiring vulnerable individuals, they frequently refuse to do so. The decisions made by product sellers, customers, and production variables are also based on rationality from the standpoint of rational economics [4]. Thus, by making sensible decisions, the corporation can maximize revenues or minimize costs in the public and nonprofit sectors. Employers always believe it is more cost-effective to choose candidates based on the group they belong to when it comes to the average productivity traits because the information on each applicant's abilities is incomplete and it costs them money to find it [4]. This indicates that firms refuse to hire disabled individuals because they believe those groups are less productive from a logical economic standpoint. Additionally, companies believe that persons with disabilities are more prone to suffer diseases and accidents at work; for instance, they believe that people with mental problems may not be fully aware of the risks they face there. Additionally, people who have physical limitations might not be able to react to harmful situations quickly or escape them. Because some illnesses and diseases are also deemed disabilities, employers may associate the serious illnesses of disabled applicants with extended absences, which could raise the cost of health and accident insurance.

However, Østerud states employers' default perceptions of the perfect worker go beyond simply evaluating productivity to also take into account applicants' capacity for social commitment [5]. The ability to employ professional skills is the main factor in productivity concerns. Employers, for instance, will allow wheelchair users if the position requires desk work while seated. On the other hand, productivity will become a significant issue if there is a significant discrepancy between the ideal worker's image of employers and the ideal worker. The idea of the ideal worker is related to social ideals, which states that people favor those who they believe to be like them. Employers therefore consider potential members of the social group in addition to the candidate's potential job performance. Disability-related stereotypes contribute to a low employment rate. For instance, due to inadequate infrastructure, certain workplaces are difficult for disabled persons to enter. Employers believe that disabled workers cannot participate equally in social activities. For instance, it is challenging for disabled persons to take part in corporate outings, which makes it challenging for them to integrate into the group. This participation is especially crucial in small businesses.

It is important to highlight that hiring disabled individuals may depend on the company's size. Although Acker claims that bureaucratic organizational structures and procedures merely formalize and legitimize employer practices that are harmful to women and racial and ethnic minorities, this does not mean that the regularization of large corporations limits discrimination [6, 7]. As formal personal practices are more frequently followed in large organizations due to their increased bureaucracy, this formalization might lessen the influence of preconceptions and bias on decision-making, which can reduce discriminatory actions. Bielby and Reskin, are both mentioned in Bjørnshagen, respectively. In a similar vein, Bjørnshagen asserts that, even though few companies actively seek impaired candidates, larger firms are more likely to do so than smaller ones, and they also establish explicit policies and procedures to promote disability equality [8, 9]. Small business hiring is more casual and flexible because owners often make snap decisions about new hires based

on gut instinct and arbitrary judgment. The first is that major businesses typically have human resources departments or staff, which expands the potential for setting up a system of accountability for achieving particular goals, including programs to boost workplace diversity. And because of the external pressure to conform to societal standards, large firms are more likely to employ organizational measures to avoid discrimination to preserve a respectable public image that is responsive to the social and legal context. Such are those that foster labor diversity in policy and practices. In a small firm, one person can have a big impact, so the employers there might believe the danger of a job mismatch is higher. They might also be more concerned about possible financial losses, expenses, and their ability to provide housing and training, in addition to being more concerned about potential financial losses [10]. Many firms have never considered barrier-free access, so if they hire disabled workers, they need to renovate the workplace, but small and medium companies may not afford the costs [3].

The utilitarian social policy in China believed that the interests of the majority should take precedence over those of the minority, and the paternalistic social policy in China also highlighted the need to protect the underprivileged groups rather than emphasizing that they have equal rights as other groups, institutional bias and social exclusion in a particular social structure may be the cause of workplace discrimination and exclusion [11]. It is indicated that productivism has been the priority in China since China reformed, which not only influences the society but also influences individual thinking [2]. As efficiency is the benchmark of productivism, it leads people with disabilities to always be perceived as 'inefficient' and so on. In addition, people always expect the people they helped can repay gratitude as the society in China highlights the social relationships and mutual benefits. The social network of disabled people is limited, so their social resources are fewer, which means that they will get fewer benefits.

It is crucial to carry out additional research to determine why firms choose not to hire the disabled and to identify solutions to this issue. Because hiring individuals with impairments has numerous advantages for businesses. For instance, a company's hiring of disabled people has a beneficial impact on its revenue, profit, and brand image. It can also draw in a variety of customers and increase their brand loyalty and satisfaction [4].

3. Research Process

This research has interviewed one owner of a small- to medium-sized business that focuses on the retail and wholesale of clothing in China (pseudonymously Steele). Additionally, he has experience with China's public functionary system, which can offer a distinctive viewpoint on the research subject. The interview lasts for about 30 minutes and is performed through a video conversation using WeChat. After getting his approval, it is recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams. Following an explanation of the interview in the findings section, the literature review and the interview will be connected in the discussion and conclusion part.

4. Findings with a Spectrum of Varied Perspectives

As the employer of a small and medium-sized business, Steele has never hired anyone with a disability; the situation is comparable to that of another small and medium-sized business. The primary factor keeping his organization from hiring disabled persons is concern over the additional expenses and missed productivity. And because the business is focused on the retail and wholesale of apparel, he thinks that the company's employee image is crucial, thus this is the second reason he doesn't hire people with disabilities. The third reason the company does not hire disabled people is that there are no positions that are suitable for them. This is because the main tasks in his company

require asking employees to try on various outfits to demonstrate the clothing details and also necessitate traveling to various cities.

4.1. The Rational Economic Perspective

‘Even when the disabled employees meet the hiring requirements, our business will nonetheless select the regular people based on the same standards. If hiring disabled persons cannot result in any noticeable benefits, the organization will still employ normal people. His company does not hire persons with disabilities for the concerns of additional expenditures and lost productivity. In his viewpoint, Employees with disabilities are less capable than average workers, and they will also incur higher costs. ‘The increased expenses and decreased productivity are complementary’, For instance, he believed that the physically impaired workers need more time to find solutions and that the lost production results in higher expenses. In addition, he noted that although the public functionary system in China employs disabled workers, they only ask to perform basic tasks, which makes it difficult for persons with disabilities to find acceptable employment in both private and state-owned businesses.

4.2. The Ideal Worker Perspective

Contrary to the literature, Steele claimed that social variables have no bearing on the recruitment of persons with disabilities. His employer does not view the inconvenience of disabled people attending the workplace party as a serious issue. According to him, ‘our company only concentrates on how much profit can be generated and how workable the employees are’. According to him, all businesses want to maximize profits, and if their employees can do so in a major way, the social aspect is irrelevant. The intention to hire disabled persons is influenced by the size of the organization.

The intention to hire disabled persons may be influenced by the size of the organization. According to Steele, The market rivalry in China is fierce, ‘The company’s survival is the most crucial issue we as small- and medium-sized business owners need to think about’. Due to their comparative advantages, major corporations can take the organization’s reputation into account. And having a good reputation can benefit them much more. Unlike major corporations, his business’s reputation is not important because his clients simply care about the profit. He thought that the pandemic also influenced the hiring decisions for the unfavorable economic conditions. He emphasized that the profit is primary in small and medium businesses, ‘ If the market environment is good, there will be more small and medium companies would hire disabled employees’.

4.3. The Institutional Bias in a Particular Social Structure

From Steele’s perspective, government policy plays an important role in the low recruitment of disabled people instead of the social issues (the utilitarian disclosure and the paternalistic social policy). He pointed out that firms prefer to hire disabled persons to avoid paying fines. But in practice, the benefit is minimal, employers need to undertake the salary, benefits, social insurance contributions, and so on, which means the costs of hiring disabled people may exceed the fines. Obtaining a disability certification is an extremely complicated and challenging process for those with disabilities. Without the certification, businesses cannot escape the fines, and they are less likely to hire disabled persons due to concerns about additional expenses or lost productivity. Additionally, because there is no legal requirement to hire disabled people, many businesses may fabricate evidence to support this claim. He said ‘If the restrictions are strictly enforced, we will be more likely to hire disabled workers’. By contrast, he agrees that the society in China emphasizes social relationships and mutual benefits, but disabled people are less likely to receive the resources as their social network is limited. Steele said ‘ If you are a weak person, there are few people who would help you’.

5. Discussions

According to the literature study, there are four reasons why businesses do not want to hire disabled persons. The research sought to identify these factors. The first reason is based on the rational economic perspective, which implies that businesses prioritize profits and may believe that disabled persons will drive up expenses and lower production. The interviewee also stated that this is the key justification for why he does not want to hire disabled personnel. The second reason is that from the viewpoint of the ideal employee, it was underlined that disabled persons must be socially integrated when employers analyze the hiring process. Steele, on the other hand, has a different viewpoint. He said that employers simply prioritize maximizing profits and that social issues will not affect the selection and recruiting of disabled persons. Steele agreed that the intention to hire and select disabled persons will be influenced by the size of the organization. Even though hiring and selecting disabled individuals can have a beneficial impact on a company's reputation, small and medium-sized businesses place more importance on competing successfully than maintaining a good reputation. However, major firms can benefit from a strong reputation because their risk of job mismatch is lower, which will boost their ability to hire impaired individuals. The economic environment after the pandemic also affected the low employment of disabled people. As most small and medium-sized companies are owned by individuals, they are less likely to undertake the low production risk and additional costs for disabled employees. Cooke and Zhao state that institutional bias in a specific social structure leads to discrimination and exclusion. However, Steele believes that government policies, rather than issues with the social structure, influence the recruitment and selection of disabled people. For instance, the difficulty for disabled people to obtain disability certification and the lax enforcement of regulations will reduce the number of disabled people hired in China. Since the company is clothing industry, the negative stereotypes around disabled labor and improper employment opportunities also lead the zero employment of workers with disabilities. The interviewee agreed that as the society in China prioritizes social relations and mutual benefits it is hard for disabled people to receive resources for their social network is restricted.

There are four ways to promote the hiring and selection of handicapped individuals. The first method is for governments to make the certification process for disabled individuals simpler so that everyone with a disability can obtain the certification. The second method is that the governments need to formulate policies related to disabled people's employment support and include the employment rate of disabled workers in performance evaluation. According to Ge, the government staff may lack motivation, implement improperly, lack supervision, and shift the responsibility for the employment rate of disabled people is not included in the performance evaluation [2]. The third strategy requires the guarantors to strictly enforce the policy for the businesses to abide by the requirements. Organizational policies and practices are influenced by institutional influences as well as rational pressures. However, Organizational practices only seem to be impacted by coercive institutional constraints. So strong and proactive enforcement measures can affect positively the policy. Poor regulation will lead to high employment for disabled people, such as the irregular contract, and arbitrary dismissal [12].

The government must also improve the survival conditions for small and medium-sized businesses, and ensure the barrier-free infrastructure is enough, which can reduce the costs for employers to hire disabled workers. So that these businesses can hire disabled workers.

6. Conclusion

This study reviewed relevant literature related to the relevant topic and interviewed one manager of a small and medium-sized clothing company to find the factors that firms refuse to hire disabled people. And also states four solutions to estimate the discrimination of disabled employees to improve

the employment rate. Both government and companies must cooperate to increase the employment rate of disabled people. However as there was only one respondent and he is the boss of a small and medium-sized company related to the clothing industry, the information may influence the objectivity and validity of the results and it may not be suitable for other industries. The vast majority of the literature was written about Western nations, the research topic could not be adequately answered in China. Future studies must conduct more research in this area in China to find out whether the reasons are similar in different regions and industries, and how future recruiting and selection decisions for disabled individuals would be impacted by the diverse policies in various countries.

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