

## Demographic Factors and Attitude toward Disable Employees: Empirical Evidence from Ghana

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### Abstract

The study investigated the effect of demographic factors on attitude towards disable employees in public and private sector organizations in Ghana. Using cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 188 participants within the Greater Accra Metropolis with reliable questionnaire. Independent t-test was used to test each of the hypotheses in the study. It was observed that, older employees demonstrated significantly more positive attitude towards disable employees than younger employees. Similarly, employees with higher level of education showed significantly more positive attitude towards disable employees than their counterparts with lower level of education. However, irrespective of sector of employment of the employee, attitude towards disable employees was not significantly different. The implications of the findings and limitations are discussed.

**Keywords:** Attitude, disable employees, demographic factors, public sector, private sector, Ghana

### Introduction

Persons living with disabilities are faced with a major discrimination relative to employment or job-seeking. However, the dearth of empirical literature about the apparent treatment of disable minority is particularly worrying. There seem to be interplay of stereotype, discrimination and prejudice on the said minority before or during recruitment and even after gaining narrow entry into the work setting. Stereotype, discrimination and prejudice are issues that could be observed in every existing human society. A major reason for the interest in attitudes among early social psychologists was their relevance for stereotypes and prejudice (Fernald, 1997). Stereotype could be described as something or someone without knowing the in-depth factors relating to that person or thing, thus it is an oversimplified perception of a person or group. These quick conclusion or judgments make them to base their views on an oversimplified perception or rigid generalization, without seeking in-depth information on that phenomenon. People who are negatively stereotyped are usually prejudiced against. As an attitude, prejudice is the negative feelings experienced on the part of the prejudice when they are in the presence of, or merely think about, members of the groups they dislike (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Attitudes are relatively lasting organizations of beliefs which make you respond to things in particular ways. Attitude as defined by Myers (1989) is the beliefs and feelings that may predispose our responses to objects, people and events. The central idea running through these definitions is the fact that, attitude is not inborn or inherited genetically, but is acquired from the society through experience or learning from the socialization process. The definitions also suggest that attitude has a direct bearing on behaviour.

Dwelling on the idea that attitude is learned or acquired from the environment or society through the socialization process; one could argue that attitude can be similar among people who belong to a particular society from which those attitudes were acquired. Thus, when the people of a particular society have a negative attitude or believe towards something, they are more likely to behave negatively towards that thing.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) the term disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. It also encompasses impairment in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction refers to a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. In other words persons with disabilities are persons with physical or mental impairments who are significantly restricted in their ability to perform daily living activities either continuously or periodically for extended periods and, as a result of these restrictions, requires assistance with daily living activities.

### *Disability- The Ghanaian Background*

Day in day out disable employees just like any minor group are looked down upon and discriminated against which in one way or the other is not their fault but an unfortunate instance of nature or accidents. Disabilities can be permanent, temporary, or episodic. That is, disabilities can affect people from birth, or could be acquired later in life through injury or illness. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that approximately 650 million people, or 10% of the world's population, have a disability. In the same vein, the disability welfare groups in Ghana estimate that there are between 7-10% Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), representing about 1.55-2.2 million people and 600,000 of these have very severe mental conditions. Clearly, then, it is inexcusable for society to sideline the disabled in the nation building, notwithstanding the fact that, one does not become disabled volitionally or chooses to have no eyesight for instance. Just as any other person, negative attitudes

toward employees with disabilities can result in discrimination.

In Ghana, persons living with disabilities are faced with a major discrimination relative to employment or job-seeking. Companies, agencies, and organizations are composed of individuals with their own attitudes and beliefs about people with disabilities. Co-workers will draw conclusions regarding the people they work with. Supervisors and management staff make decisions that affect general employees. The individual choices that people make regarding the hiring of people with disabilities can be guided by their attitudes (Hernandez, Keys & Balcazar, 2000). However at the workplace, employees are expected to live in harmony and tranquility in order to achieve the organizational goals.

These negative attitudes towards disabled employees can be based on myths (Unger, 2002), misperceptions (Smart, 2001), stereotypes (Blanck, 1996), and fear (Diksa & Rogers, 1996, Peck & Kirkbride, 2001). These emotional responses can foster discrimination in the workplace and can contribute to unemployment and poor working conditions. Ghana Society of the Physically Disabled (GSPD) for about three decades has been championing for people with physical disabilities to have equal access to all parts of society, including healthcare, education, employment and cultural activities. The Ghanaian Parliament also passed the Mental Health Act and came into effect in June, 2012 and also endorsed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in July, 2012. In spite of these paper works people with mental disabilities continue to suffer severe abuses even in places such as psychiatric institutions and other private centers where trained professionals are meant to provide succour for such ones (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Even in the political arena People with Disability (PWD) are excluded. The individual choices that people make regarding the hiring of people with disabilities can be guided by their attitudes (Hernandez, Keys & Balcazar, 2000). However the issue being addressed here is about the kind of attitudes co-employees or co-workers have towards their fellow workers who are categorized in the group known as disabled. But to what extent are employers and employees alike adjusting their attitudes to these new dimensions aimed at improving the total life's of employees with disability in Ghana and the global scene?

Few studies, most of which are unempirical, have considered studying disabled employees and prejudice and discrimination towards them. The few however, do not address the influence of gender, age and tenure of service of the employee on attitude towards disabled employees. The present study submits meaningfully to this paucity in this area of research.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

- To ferret out whether there is a difference in attitude among public and private sector employees towards disabled employees in the Ghanaian setting
- To ascertain whether the educational level of an employee influences his/her attitude toward disabled employees.
- To examine whether older employees differ in attitude towards disabled employees compared to younger employees.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theory and Related Studies**

Attitude comprises of the affective, behavioral and cognitive components (Feldman, 1996). External factors may be learned from the society and shape people's behavior (Bandura, 1973). Thus, our attitudes are not innate but are rather influenced by the society and that we learn or develop attitudes based on what we experience from the environment. Others may also act on self perception theory where they infer attitudes and emotional state from our behavior.

Believe in myths are also factors that greatly influences one's attitude towards someone or an object (Unger, 2002). Myths are theories that are not necessarily facts. Myths are traditional stories concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events. These stories are not necessarily based on empirical evidence, thus, may not reflect fact. The misunderstanding of disability through myths usually elicits negative response from society towards disabled persons. For instance, in some parts of Ghana, there is the belief that blind and crippled person's lacks completeness and some disabled minorities are mentally sub-normal. It is interesting to say that in most traditional communities in Ghana, people deemed disabled are not considered or recommended for traditional leadership and are deemed flabby to even become enthroned or 'enskinned' as chiefs or opinion leaders.

The perception that one will be stigmatized can lead to social isolation and lack of employment. Modified labelling theory posits that negative labels lead to negative outcomes for the recipient of the label. The greater the belief people have that they are or will be stigmatized by others, the more they will withdraw from social contact (Link, Struening, Cullen, Shrout, & Dohrenwend, 1989). Link et al. (1989), studied mental disorders and found a relationship among the level of belief of rejection, coping responses adopted and social networks of the mental patients. Modified labelling theory and the effects of perceived and experienced stigma have been

supported in many studies. Stigmatized interactions were found to complicate the lives of mental patients with a dual diagnosis of substance abuse, even after an improvement in their health had been achieved (Link, Struening, Rahav, Phelan & Nuttbrock, 1997). The negative reactions included an increase in depression and an increased sense of burden for both patients and caregivers.

From the perspective of modified labelling theory, we would expect that the greater the degree of perceived stigma toward people with disabilities, the less likely an employee with a disability would be engaged in the interactions at the workplace that lead to workplace friendships. The placement of people with disabilities into the workplace is thought to create points of contact for social interactions to occur, thereby normalizing the interactions (Allport, 1954). Contact would change the attitudes held by people and attitude change would lead to behaviour change. One of the intended benefits of moving persons with a disability into the mainstream workplace was to create more fulfilling lives for them, by increasing opportunities for friendship development. The underlying assumption is that people with disabilities have less of a support system in general and at the workplace compared to the social support systems of coworkers without disabilities. Study among university students revealed that physically disabled students can be expected to find difficulty in forming close associations with non-disabled students, particularly with male non-disabled students (Stovall & Sedlacek, 1978). Furnham and Pendred (1983) showed consistent differences between people's attitudes towards the physically as opposed to the mentally handicapped, with the former being seen more positively than the latter. As to whether the intended idea of integrating the disabled into the work stream has yielded results remains incongruous.

#### ***Sector of Service and Attitude towards Disable Persons***

Staniland (2009) conducted a research on the relationship between employment sector and attitudes with a sample size of 1821. He found that in general a higher proportion of people in the public sector than private sector report being very comfortable interacting with disabled people. Differences are most marked with regards to attitudes towards people with physical or sensory impairments. Attitudes are less positive and vary less towards people with learning disabilities or mental health conditions (Staniland, 2009). 68% of those in the public sector reported being very comfortable as compared to 55 percent of those in the private sector. However, just 13 percent of people in both the public and private sector said they would be very comfortable if a person with a learning disability was appointed their Member of Parliament.

#### ***Educational Levels and Attitude towards Disable Persons***

Increased exposure by way of knowledge is strongly linked with increased comfort and familiarity (Brown, Griffin, Keen, Lehman, Forbus & Crow, 2011). A major way of controlling prejudice or promoting tolerance is through higher learning or education (McClosky, 1964). Education is strongly related to tolerance (Bobo & Licari, 1989). Hogan and Mallott (2005) revealed that diversity courses in higher education were effective in improving students' intergroup tolerance. In addition, since the essence of higher education is to promote pragmatism and empiricism, as an individual moves through the educational ladder, he learns to be skeptical and attempt to question the old order of doing things. Hence, in cases of myths and cultural norms of prejudices towards any minority group like albinos, the individual, out of curiosity, will attempt to find pragmatic reasons behind the diversity and will not passively accept those suggestions basically because it is the norm.

#### ***Age and Attitude towards Disable Persons***

Burkhardt and Haney (2011) designed a study to evaluate whether participants' age influences their attitudes toward individuals with physical disabilities. Participants completed an online survey consisting of three assessments of their attitudes toward disabled individuals: a projective measure of explicit attitudes (the Multidimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities), a self-report measure of explicit attitudes, and an Implicit Associations Test to measure their implicit attitudes. They expected to find main effects for age, with younger adults possessing more negative explicit and implicit attitudes toward people with physical handicaps than older adults. Results of the study confirmed the hypothesis that younger adults had more negative implicit and explicit attitudes toward people with physical disabilities than did older adults; however, the age effect was not moderated by participants' experience with people with disabilities. The present study aimed at studying the influence of demographic factors affect employees' attitude toward disabled employees.

### **Statement of Hypotheses**

1. Public sector employees will exhibit significantly more positive attitudes toward disabled employees than Private sector employees.
2. Employees with higher educational backgrounds will have a more positive attitude towards disabled employees than employees who have lower educational backgrounds.
3. Older employees will put up significantly more positive attitude toward disabled employees than younger employees.

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

- *Disabled employees:* Employees who are blind, deaf, dumb, without either a fore limb or hind limb, having unequal limbs in terms of length or physically challenged
- *Attitudes:* beliefs, values and feelings of an individual which influences their behaviour negatively or positively.
- *Negative attitudes:* unfavourable evaluations based on ones beliefs that affect behaviour negatively measured by a below average score on the Attitude towards Disable Persons Scale.
- *Positive attitudes:* favourable evaluations based on ones beliefs that affect behaviour positively measured by an above average score on the Attitude towards Disable Persons Scale.
- *Public sector:* governmental organisations that are used to provide goods and services for the general welfare of the public.
- *Private sector:* organisations owned by private individuals that employ both able and disabled.
- *Old employees:* Employees who are between the ages of 40 years and above.
- *Young employees:* Employees who are between the ages of 18 and 39 years.
- *Higher education:* Employees with university, diploma, polytechnic and any form of post-senior high educational backgrounds.
- *Lower education:* Employees with at least primary/junior high/senior high schools educational backgrounds.

## METHOD

### Research Design

Cross-sectional survey design was employed to investigate differences in attitude towards disable persons from employees with different educational levels, sector of employment and age with data collected at a single point in time using questionnaire. The research was purely quantitative.

### Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A two-stage sampling procedure was adopted in the study. The first stage involved selection of organizations while the second stage involved selection of participants. Non-probability sampling strategies were employed in the study. The researchers purposively selected the organizations from both private and public sectors of Ghana in the Greater Accra and Kumasi regions (the industrial and most developed regions of Ghana) as many private and public organizations with parity was to be found to facilitate the testing of the variables. This sampling technique allowed the researchers to home in on the targeted interest group for the study. However, the selecting of participants for the study was done using convenience sampling method. With this sampling technique, the researchers were able to get the opinions of the target population that are more readily accessible and willing to be involved were selected for the study (Aron & Aron, 1999). The participants for the study comprised only permanent workers from both private and public sector employees who were either in a supervisory or non-managerial rank. A total of 188 respondents were involved in the study. 93 of them were females representing 49.50% and 50.50 % of the total respondents respectively. Of the 188 respondents, 50.5 % (95) were sampled from the public sector employees and 49.5 % (93) were sampled from the private sector employees. It was also observed that majority of the respondents representing 60.60 % (114) of all the respondents had higher educational backgrounds while 74 of the respondents who represented 39.40 % had lower educational backgrounds. Again 49.5 % (93) of the sample were older employees (40 years and above) while 50.5 % (95) were younger employees (18-39 years old). This shows that most of the employees within the public and private sectors of Ghana are young.

### Instrument and Scoring of Data

Yuker, Block and Campbell (1960) 20-item Attitude towards Disable Persons Scale was adapted and modified for the current study. The items on the scale were anchored on a 6-point likert format with responses ranging from 6 "I agree very much" to 1 "I disagree very much". The minimum and maximum scores on the scale range from 20 to 120 respectively with higher scores reflecting a more positive attitude and lower scores negative attitude. Alpha values of the scale ranged from 0.79 to 0.89. Relevant demographic data utilized in the study included sex, sector of employment of the employee and level of education of participants.

### Procedure for Data Collection

Permission was sought from the human resource departments of selected public and private organizations of interest. Once permission was granted, the researcher sought specific demographical information about employees from the Human Resources Departments of the organizations. This was to purposively select only those that met the criteria for inclusion. Research agents who were colleagues of the prospective respondents were identified and briefed about the rationale for the study in each organization. The research assistant's role became very important since the respondent's main concern was trust; whether they could trust the academic

purpose for which the information was collected. Hence, employees were contacted and briefed about the research, and their voluntary participation was sought. The questionnaires were accompanied with information sheet which outlined the purpose of the study as well as instructions for completing and returning the questionnaire as suggested by Babbie (1998). Ethical considerations observed included the researcher seeking informed consent from all participants before the questionnaires were administered, and respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

## RESULTS

Data collected were screened, coded and entered into statistical software to facilitate the analysis. Specifically, the Statistical Product and Services Solution (SPSS) version 20.0 was used to facilitate the analysis. The researchers employed the Independent t-test to test each of the hypotheses in the study.

### *Hypotheses Testing*

**Table 1: Summary of Means, Standard Deviation scores and Independent t-test results Attitude toward Disable Employees classified by Sector of Employment**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	t	sig.
Public	95	68.22	9.42	186	.052	.48
Private	93	68.29	8.81			
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>132.51</b>	<b>18.23</b>			

As shown in **Table 1**, no statistically significant difference in attitude towards disable employees was observed between public and private sector employees [ $t_{(186)} = .052, p = .48$ ]. This implies that, public sector employee's did not demonstrate significantly favourable attitude ( $M = 68.22, SD = 9.42$ ) towards disable employees compared to their counterparts in the private sector ( $M = 68.29, SD = 8.81$ ).

**Table 2: Summary of Means, Standard Deviation Scores and Independent t-test Results of the Effect of Level of Education and Attitude toward Disable Employees**

Level of Education	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Higher Level of Education	114	71.92	8.02	186	7.90	.000
Lower Level of Education	74	62.61	7.70			
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>					

The result indicates that, level of education significantly determined employees attitude toward disable employees [ $t_{(186)} = 7.90, p = .000$ ]. Employees with higher level of education were found to demonstrate significantly favourable attitude toward disable employees ( $M = 71.92, SD = 8.02$ ) than their counterparts with low level of education ( $M = 62.61, SD = 7.70$ ).

**Table 3: Summary of Means, Standard Deviation Scores and Independent t-test Results of the Effect of Age on Attitude towards Disable Employees**

Age	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Older employees	93	70.19	8.19	186	2.95	.002
Younger employees	95	66.36	9.58			
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>					

As shown in **Table 3**, age was significantly associated with attitude towards disable employees [ $t_{(186)} = 2.95, p = .002$ ]. Specifically, older employees demonstrated significantly favourable attitude towards disable employees ( $M = 70.19, SD = 8.19$ ) than younger employees ( $M = 66.36, SD = 9.58$ ).

## Discussion

Industrial and organizational psychologists have always emphasized competencies instead of disabilities in recruitment and selection especially when the disability would not have any negative consequences on the performance of the disable employee. Despite this, not all employees view disable employees with positive mindset. The researchers sought therefore to determine the extent to which demographic factors such as level of education, sex, and sector of employment of the individual influence attitude towards disable employees. Contrary to the expectation of the researchers, public sector employees did not demonstrate significantly positive attitude towards disable employees than their counterparts in private sector organization. This Ghanaian based

empirical finding contradicted previous outcome (Staniland, 2009). In the opinion of Staniland (2009), public sector employees demonstrated significantly positive attitude such as being very comfortable interacting with disable employees than private sector employees. The outcome observed in the Ghanaian business environment clearly shows that employees evaluate people from *'the angle of ability and not disability'*. Similarly, the religious nature of the average Ghanaian could be a significant contributory factor for this non-significant difference in attitude towards disable employees. In particular most Ghanaians tend to admire disable people who engage in productive activities and view those who resort to begging as a source of work as lazy and indeed 'disable'.

As expected, employees with higher level of education were found to demonstrate significantly positive attitude towards disable employees than those with lower level of education. This finding corroborated previous findings (Brown et al., 2011; Bobo & Licari, 1989; Hogan et al., 2005). This finding is not surprising at all as education has the capacity to help people appreciate people more. With higher level of education, people tend to understand that physical disabilities do not necessarily mean inability. Similarly, people tend to understand that it is not proper to discriminate against people on grounds of disability, sex, race and others in the world of work. The need for tolerance and acceptance of all manner of persons is ideal and should be advocated to be a core part of the curriculum to impress upon the minds of students.

Age was also found to significantly relate with attitude towards disable employees with older employees demonstrating more positive attitude compared to younger employees. This finding is in agreement with findings reported by other researchers (Burkhardt & Haney, 2011; Staniland, 2009). By virtue of their experience and contact with several different people in their life, older people tend to demonstrate 'an all-embracing attitude' towards people than younger people who most at times have a narrower view of life. It is also possible that, older people showed positive attitude because with age people tend to be more religious and therefore tend to accept people irrespective of their situation. The present findings provide an empirical basis aimed at encouraging research in this humanitarian area.

#### **Limitations**

Despite the significant findings obtained in this study, it is not possible to draw cause-effect links between age, level of education and attitude towards disable employees. This is because the cross-sectional survey design employed in the study lacks the capacity to produce cause-effect relationship. It is also important to note that, variables such as religiosity and personality could be responsible for the relationship between age, level of education and attitude towards disable employees.

#### **Recommendation for Future Studies**

It is important than experimental studies are considered in future studies to determine specific causes of attitude towards disable employees. This would provide absolute evidence regarding the real causes of negative attitudes toward disable employee thereby guiding the development of concrete measures to deal with them. The need to investigate variables such as religiosity and cynicism, positive and negative affectivity and their link with attitude towards disable employees would expand the scope of understanding of attitude towards disable employees.

#### **Conclusion**

Attitude towards disable employees is influenced. The present study revealed that, level of education and age significantly determines the kind of attitude employees demonstrate towards disable employees. Older and highly educated employees were found to show positive attitude towards disable employees than younger and people with lower level of education. However, the sector of work of the employee did not produce differences in attitude shown to disable employees. The implications of these findings to human resource practitioners are enormous. Industrial and organizational psychologists and organizational behaviour specialist have always maintained that the workplace is capable of housing different categories of people with different attitudes towards events and people they work with. The creation of a workplace environment in which people respect others irrespective of their disability status is vital for organizational harmony and progress. As specialist mandated to create a competent pool human resource for organizations, it behoove on industrial and organizational psychologists to let the rank and file of the organization understand that each employee has a role to play in achieving the total organizational goal. The human resource policies should clearly discourage discrimination against disabilities.

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