Beliefs Influencing Hiring Agents’ Selection of Qualified Autistic Candidates

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Angela M. Mai, PhD

Problem
United States unemployment rate year end 2017:
• General populace = 4%
• Employable autistics = 83%
Many scholars inferred the beliefs of those responsible for hiring but lacked research.

Purpose
The purpose of this mixed methods study was to understand the nature of the relationship between hiring agents’ beliefs and their selection of qualified autistic candidates.

Theoretical Framework
The theory of planned behavior (TPB) conceptually crystallized with ambivalence amplification theory; elaboration likelihood model of persuasion, expectancy value theory, Fay’s critical theory, and Pratkanis’ altercasting theory.

Relevant Scholarship
Autism was first diagnosed in 1908 and included in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) as a unique disability in 1980.

The research on autism and employment from 1957 through 2017
• was primarily conducted from a medical or supply-side perspective;
• mostly ascertained the percentage of the population diagnosed and their level of employable functionality;
• and unemployment rates dominantly referred to the wider category of general disabilities.

From 2010 to the end of 2017,
• only three studies pertained to autistic employment from a demand-side perspective.
• no study inquired why those responsible for hiring do not hire autistics from a non-biased generalizable participant sample.

In the broader category of disabled employment throughout 60 years of study, one commonality was continually inferred: The beliefs of those doing the hiring.

Participants
Social media was the primary solicitation method
Targeted parameters: Hiring agents (n = 212)
• Serving medium-sized organizations
• In any industry or organization type
• Throughout the contiguous United States

Procedures
Design
• Quantitatively weighted (≈ 90%) mixed method multiple regression analysis

Instrumentation
• Hiring Agent Survey regarding Selection of Qualified Autistic Candidates (HASSQAC; Mai, 2015)

Procedures
• Completed by participants via the Qualtrics Survey Hosting website.

Analysis
Quantitative analysis consisted of four regressions: The main TPB model and one post-hoc for each taxonomy. Qualitative reflection added depth and insight.

- 45 IVs consisting of 15 control, 15 normative, and 15 behavioral beliefs identified in existing literature
- 1 percentage-based continuous DV predicted through concepts of TPB
- 6 qualitative fields for added understanding

Findings
The regression model was statistically significant (F(45, 73) = 36.067, p < .001, adj. R² = .930).

- Needed comprehensive organizational diversity inclusion (B = 0.266, p < 001)
- Stereotypical associations (B = 0.195, p < 001)
- Fear of embarrassment (B = 0.187, p < 001)

Practice
Update and enforce public policy related to (a) mandated organizational diversity, (b) continual education, and (c) employment screening processes.

Recommendations
Correlational, longitudinal, and comparative research and meta-analysis relevant to
• Organization demographics
• Hiring agent demographics
• Geographical demographics
• Candidate demographics

Interpretation
Hiring agents believe:
• Mandated organizational diversity must be enforced.
• Effective policy must include continual training.
• Autism education should address autism, altercasting, and stereotypes.
• Public policy must overcome employment screening processes eliminating candidates relative to their disabilities.

Limitations
Potential limitations include:
• Generalizability: Internet, English, United States.
• Homophily and transitivity influenced participation.
• Higher participation in regions with increased sensitivity to equality and disability.
• No qualitative clarifying follow-up inquiry.

Future Research
Correlational, longitudinal, and comparative research and meta-analysis relevant to
• Organization demographics
• Hiring agent demographics
• Geographical demographics
• Candidate demographics

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Social Change Implications
Reduction of the autistic unemployment rate would...
• Improve quality of life of autistic individuals through increased independence and societal contribution
• Improve socioeconomic health of the nation by reducing social service related costs increasing and increasing disposable earnings
• Drive increased respect for human rights in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Research Question
What is the relationship between the beliefs of hiring agents and their selection of qualified autistic candidates?
Post-hoc analysis investigated each taxonomy of TPB individually: control, normative, or behavioral.