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Angela Marie Mai

Walden University, tinnestadhe@hotmail.com

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# Beliefs Influencing Hiring Agents' Selection of Qualified Autistic Candidates

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.

## Public Policy Significance

### Knowledge

- Public policy cannot be effective unless it addresses the foundation of the issue
- EEOC, ADA, ADAAMA, and other demand-side legislation were implemented without identifying the demand-side causes of the problem
- These research findings provide new knowledge useful in developing effective public policy

### Practice

- Current policy remains ineffective
- Scientific identification leads to potential solutions
- The resulting reduced unemployment rate reduces related governmental expenditures

## 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).

## Theoretical Framework

The **theory of planned behavior** (TPB) conceptually crystalized 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.

## 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.

## 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 ( $\approx 90\%$ ) 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 ( $F(45, 73) = 36.067, p < .001, \text{adj. } R^2 = .930$ ).

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

## 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.

## Recommendations

### Practice

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

### 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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