



OSLO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY
NOVA – NORWEGIAN SOCIAL RESEARCH

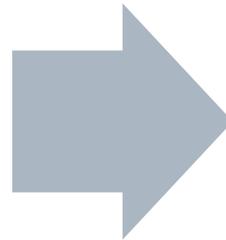
Employer attitudes and hiring practices towards disabled jobseekers in Norway

Kaja Larsen Østerud, senior researcher

NOVA – Norwegian Social Research, Oslo Metropolitan University

The HIRE project

Field experiment



Follow-up
interviews

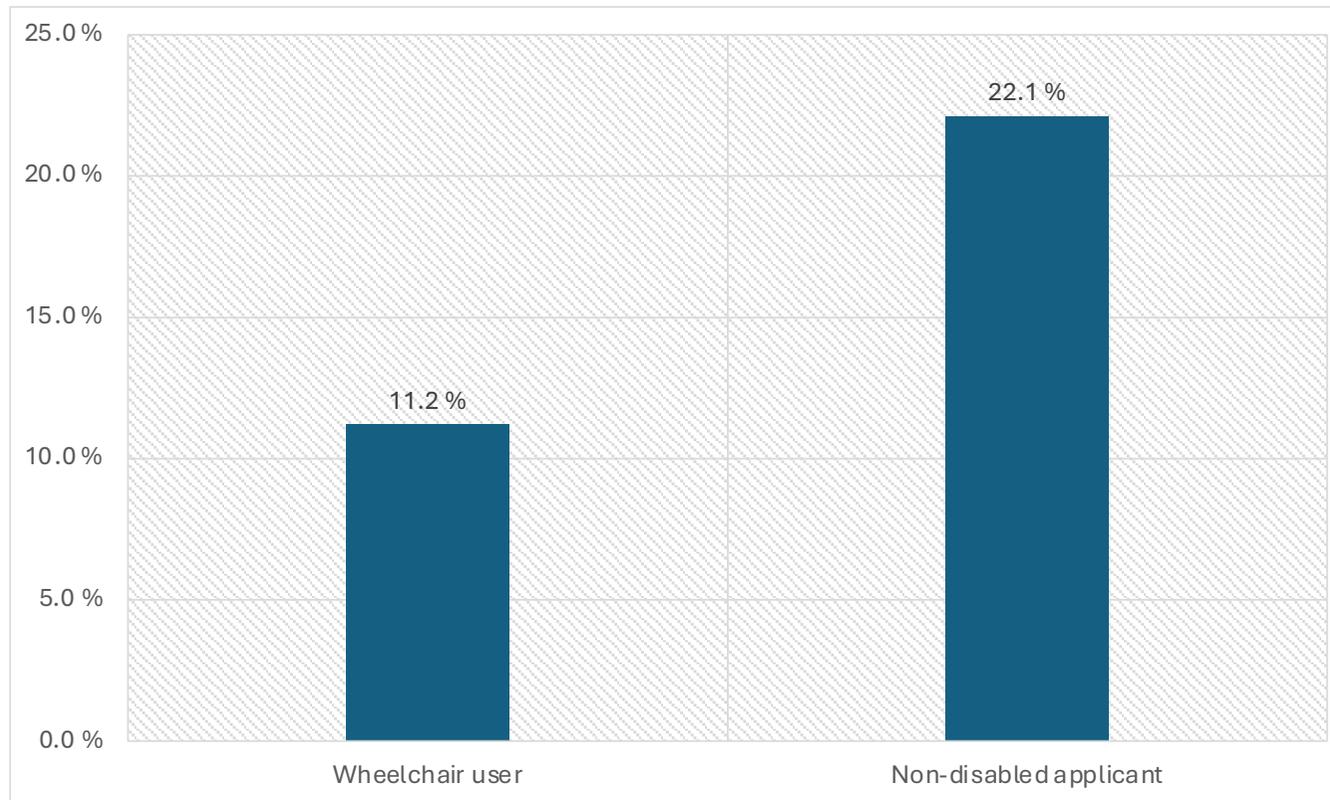
Two correspondence studies

- Wheelchair user experiment
 - 1200 applications to 600 jobs
- Mental health experiment
 - 1400 applications to 700 jobs

Interviews with hiring managers,
recruited from the field
experiment recipients

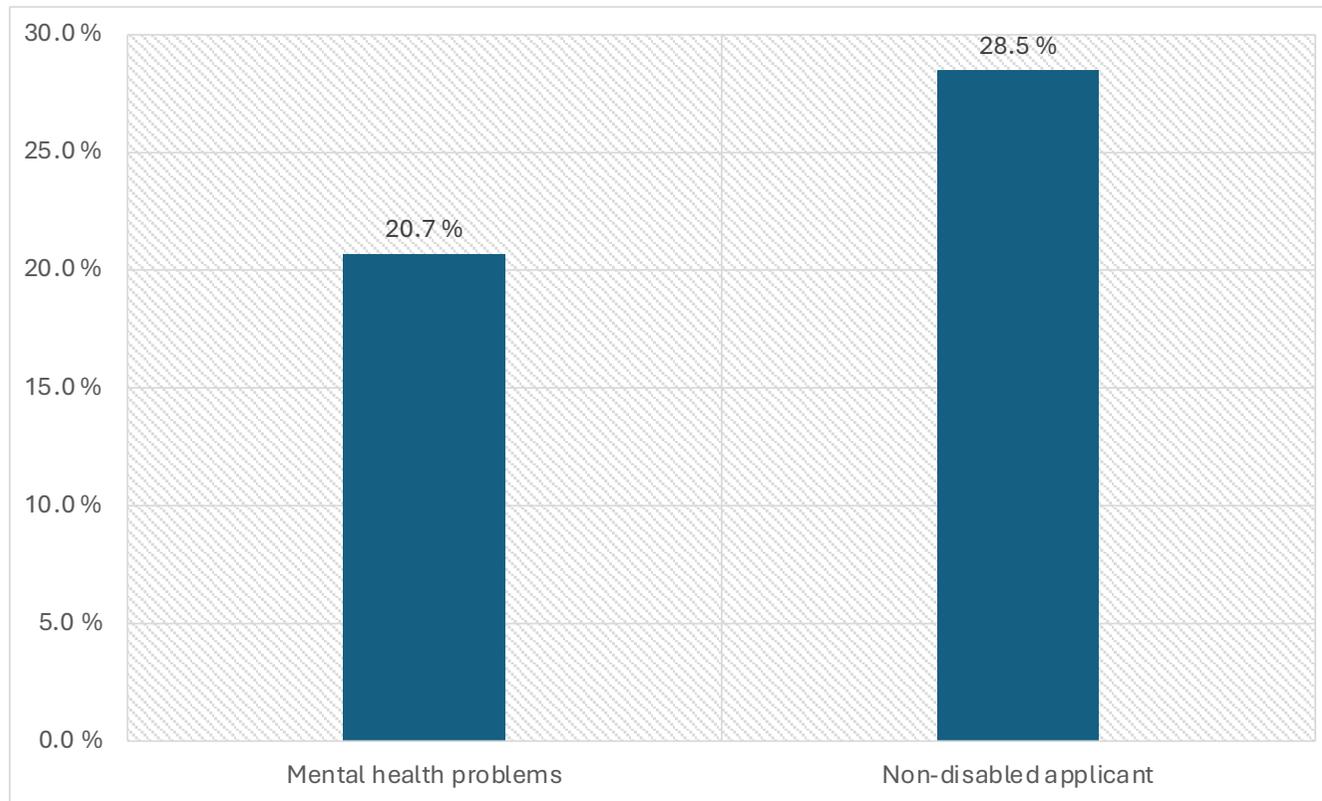
- 18 interviews from wheelchair
user experiment
- 20 interviews from mental health
experiment

The wheelchair user experiment



Bjørnshagen and Ugreninov (2021)

The mental health experiment



Bjørnshagen (2021)

The wheelchair experiment - findings from follow-up interviews

Article

WES

Disability Discrimination: Employer Considerations of Disabled Jobseekers in Light of the Ideal Worker

Work, Employment and Society
1-17
© The Author(s) 2021
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/09500170211041303
journals.sagepub.com/home/wes


Kaja Larsen Østerud 
Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

Abstract

Labour market stratification and discrimination of disabled people remains a less researched topic compared to other minorities despite being a notably disadvantaged group. This article explores the employer side of discrimination against disabled jobseekers by using a field experiment conducted in Norway as its point of departure. Through qualitative follow-up interviews, this article investigates employers' assessments of equally qualified mobility-impaired candidates in a field experiment. The article employs the theoretical perspective of the ideal worker to shed light on how employers evaluate disabled jobseekers against an able-bodied ideal. Although previous literature on disability and the ideal worker has shown the imperative of asserting productivity, the findings in the current article reveal a stronger emphasis on social considerations as grounds for exclusion. The findings show how tacit constructions of the ideal worker not only relate to productivity but also to the creation of the socially integrated workplace.

Keywords

ableism, disability, discrimination, employment, hiring, ideal worker, recruitment

Introduction

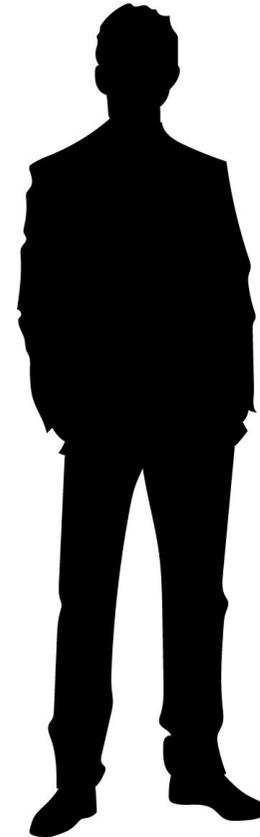
Discrimination against minorities is a topic of long-standing interest in labour market research within sociology and adjacent fields. However, disability disadvantage in the labour market remains an area that has received less attention compared with other minority groups (Barnes and Mercer, 2005; Jones and Wass, 2013). This is despite the fact of disabled people's marginalised employment conditions (Foster and Scott, 2015). Disabled people have been routinely shown to face considerable disadvantages, such as

Corresponding author:

Kaja Larsen Østerud, Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), Oslo Metropolitan University, Pb. 4 St Olavs plass, 0130 Oslo, Norway.
Email: kajalar@oslomet.no

The ideal worker

- An abstract person
- Puts work first
- A male norm (Acker, 1990)
- A non-disabled norm (Foster and Wass, 2013)



Productivity considerations

Efficiency when visiting customers

Accessibility in an outside of the office

“I think that a person with an impairment in the form of a wheelchair, in relation to certain work tasks, would not work unfortunately. Because of the competitive situation out in the market, we’re extremely dependent on being efficient [. . .] And obviously now I’m speaking from a place of ignorance, that a person in a wheelchair will not get out of a car as quickly, into a shopping centre, through a store and back into the car to write a report”

Social considerations

Difficult to include in social gatherings outside of the office

Prejudice: Demanding people who do not contribute

“Since we’re so small, we have these gatherings every two or three months, where we visit our cabins and country houses and such. So, we thought it would be tricky to have someone in a wheelchair. That was really the only reason for not calling him in, because my first thought was that it looked good”

“I’m afraid that they could be a cripple who doesn’t contribute and that they draw energy from the group instead in a way”

The mental health experiment – findings from follow-up interviews

Received: 24 May 2022 | Accepted: 12 August 2022

DOI: 10.1111/1467-9566.13544

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH & ILLNESS

Mental illness stigma and employer evaluation in hiring: Stereotypes, discrimination and the role of experience

Kaja Larsen Østerud 

Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway

Correspondence

Kaja Larsen Østerud, Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), Oslo Metropolitan University, Pb. 4 St. Olavs plass, 0130, Norway.
Email: kajalar@oslomet.no

Funding information

The Research Council of Norway, Grant/Award Number: 273745

Abstract

Mental illness stigma can constitute a significant barrier to entering employment. Drawing on 20 interviews with Norwegian employers, this article investigates how mental illness stigma affects employer evaluation of jobseekers who disclose a history of mental illness. It also explores how employers use accounts of their previous experience with employees with mental illness in their evaluations. Prior to the interviews, the employers received pairs of fictitious applications in which one of the candidates disclosed a history of mental illness. Thus, the interview data were paired with behavioural data on how the employers responded to mental illness disclosure in a genuine recruitment situation. The analysis reveals common stereotypes of people with mental illness as fragile and unreliable. Furthermore, discriminating and inclusive employers are juxtaposed in their approach to mental health stigma, characterised by either taboo and avoidance or empathetic dialogue. The findings indicate how negative experience is coupled with negative attitudes and behaviour and how positive experience is coupled with positive attitudes and behaviour. A central argument is that experience is something that employers play an active part in constructing by

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/), which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes.

© 2022 The Authors. *Sociology of Health & Illness* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of Foundation for the Sociology of Health & Illness.

Sociol Health Illn. 2022;1–19.

[wileyonlinelibrary.com/journal/shi](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9566.13544) | 1

Stigma

- Tied to shame and taboo
- The stigma process (Link and Phelan, 2001)
 - Labeling
 - Stereotyping
 - Separation
 - Status loss
 - Discrimination

The stigma process in hiring

- Negative reaction to openness
- Stereotypes: fragile, unstable and unreliable
- Discrimination
 - Generalization from stereotypes and negative experience

“I remember thinking that this was a bit too much. I kind of thought, oh, is this one of those people who doesn't understand boundaries, like whoa, who's always unloading”

“I think that it's easier to accommodate if you have a job where you work mostly by yourself. It's easier to make adaptations for mental instability than if you're going to be in direct contact with others”

Stigma and the role of experience

- Employers use their previous experience with employees with mental health conditions in their evaluation
- More experience – more positive evaluation?
 - Contact hypothesis (Allport, 1958)
- Negative experience – invokes stigma and discrimination
 - Superficial, little dialogue, sickness absence
- Positive experience – challenges stigma and boost inclusionary practices

“And you know, as an employer, the sick note you get doesn’t state the cause of the absence. And then you’re supposed to provide adaptations and all that, so that’s a bit difficult”

**What do inclusive employers
say and do?**

Inclusive employers

- A relational perspective on disability
 - Acknowledges the role the workplace play in creating work capacity
 - More open to adaptation
- Empathetic dialogue
 - Daring to initiate an empathetic dialogue with their employees

Summary

- Disabled job seekers face stigma, prejudice and discrimination in the Norwegian labour market
- Employers use both productivity considerations and social considerations as grounds for discrimination
- Mobility impaired job seekers
 - Are considered hard to include because of an inaccessible world, impacting both formal and informal gatherings
 - Must face stereotypes about being demanding people
- People with mental health problems
 - Must navigate norms of taboo and silence
 - Must face stereotypes about fragility and instability
- Inclusive employers
 - See past the standard worker and are open to providing individual adaptations and engaging in a dialogue to contribute to employees' work capacity



Publications

- Bjørnshagen, Vegar ; Østerud, Kaja Larsen (2021). Diskriminering av funksjonshemmede i arbeidslivet – funn fra et felteksperiment og oppfølgingsintervjuer. *Søkelys på arbeidslivet*. Vol. 3.
- Bjørnshagen, Vegar ; Ugreninov, Elisabeth (2021). Disability Disadvantage: Experimental Evidence of Hiring Discrimination against Wheelchair Users. 15 s. *European Sociological Review*. Vol. 37.
- Bjørnshagen, Vegar (2021). The mark of mental health problems. A field experiment on hiring discrimination before and during COVID-19. *Social Science and Medicine*. Vol. 283.
- Østerud, K.L. (2022). Disability Discrimination: Employer Considerations of Disabled Job Seekers in Light of the Ideal Worker. *Work, Employment and Society*.
- Østerud, K. L. (2022). Mental Illness Stigma and Employer Evaluation in Hiring: Stereotypes, Discrimination and the Role of Experience. *Sociology of Health and Illness*.
- Østerud, K. L. (2022). A Balancing Act: The Employer Perspective on Disability Disclosure in Hiring. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*.

Thank you!

Kaja Larsen Østerud, NOVA – OsloMet

kajalar@oslomet.no