

TEN-YEAR CHANGES IN ATTITUDES TOWARD DIFFERENT TYPES OF HANDICAPS

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ABSTRACT. Increased recognition of and concern for the plight of handicapped workers in the Americas makes timely an investigation of possible changes in attitudes toward different types of handicaps. Using data collected in the early 1960's concerning employer acceptance of handicapped workers as a baseline, a ten-year follow-up study of employer attitudes was conducted. Using the same measurement instrument and sampling procedures involved in the earlier studies, current employer attitudes toward different types of handicaps were compared for possible changes. There were significant improvements in attitudes toward workers with physical or organic types of handicaps (e.g., amputation, mental retardation, epilepsy), and slight but nonsignificant improvements in attitudes toward workers with social or behavioral types of handicaps (e.g., emotional disturbances, delinquency). More employers had knowingly hired handicapped workers in the 1970's than in the 1960's. It appears that during the last decade employers have become more accepting of handicapped workers.

RESUMEN. El acrecentamiento de interés en, y reconocimiento de la condición de los trabajadores incapacitados en las Américas hace oportuna una investigación de cambios en actitudes hacia diferentes clases de incapacidades. Se hizo uso de datos compilados en los primeros años de los 1960 sobre la aceptación de trabajadores incapacitados por los empleadores como línea base para realizar un estudio de las actitudes de los empleadores diez años después. Se utilizó el mismo instrumento de medición y el mismo procedimiento de muestreo como en el estudio anterior para comparar las presentes actitudes de empleadores hacia diferentes incapacidades. Se observó mejoramiento significativo en actitudes hacia trabajadores con incapacidades físicas u orgánicas (por ejemplo, amputación, retardo mental, epilepsia), y poco mejoramiento, no significativo, en actitudes hacia trabajadores con incapacidades sociales o de comportamiento (por ejemplo, disturbio emocional, delincuencia). Un mayor número de empleadores habían empleado personas incapacitadas, sabiendo que estaban incapacitadas, en los primeros años de 1970 que durante los primeros años de 1960. Parece que durante la última década los empleadores han llegado a ser más receptivos a trabajadores incapacitados.

Within the last decade there has been increasing awareness of and concern for the plight of handicapped workers in the Americas. An area of special concern has involved public attitudes toward the handicapped worker, and this variable has been studied in Colombia (Friesen, 1966), Costa Rica (Feltz, 1965), Peru (Jordan & Friesen, 1968), and the United States (Jordan, 1968). One area of special importance concerns the attitudes of employers toward handicapped workers since the ultimate determinant of whether such workers ever become vocationally rehabili-

tated depends to a considerable extent on the willingness of employers to hire them. Although there is increasing recognition of the problem of the handicapped worker, there is no available evidence to indicate whether receptivity to such individuals may be improving. This study represents a ten-year project, in which employer attitudes toward specific types of handicapped workers were studied during the early 1960's and were subsequently reassessed ten years later.

METHOD

Over a two year period in the early 1960's, a sample of 1220 employers were studied for receptivity toward different types of handicapped workers, including amputees, mental retardates, former mental patients, juvenile delinquents, and epileptics. Stratification was accomplished by taking the directory of all employers in a midwestern state who employed four or more workers, and dividing the employers into the four Department of Labor major categories (manufacturing, nonmanufacturing, agricultural, and clerical & sales), and into size-by-category units, and then randomly choosing from each size-by-category unit the number of employers proportionate to their distribution in the total state. Attitudes toward handicapped workers on variables such as their reliability, need for supervision, work tolerance, co-worker relationships, absenteeism, ability to tolerate job pressures, and to adjust to new work situations were recorded on a five-point scale, with a rating of 5 indicating a very favorable attitude, a rating of 3 neutral, and a rating of 1 indicating a very unfavorable attitude (Hartlage, 1965; 1966). Half the employers were contacted by personal interview, and the other half were questioned on the same items by mailed surveys. Employers were assured of anonymity in that no identification other than company size and type was included on any response sheet. Ten years later, using the same stratification and combination of personal interview and mail survey procedures, a follow-up ten percent random sample ($N_2 = 122$) of employers was conducted, using the same questionnaire. A *t* test for correlated groups was computed for each separate attitude variable, and for overall receptivity measures toward each type of handicapped worker.

RESULTS

Employer receptivity toward handicapped workers of all types was consistently higher in the 1970's than it was a decade earlier. There was significant improvement in receptivity to workers with amputations ($p <$

.02), epilepsy ($p < .01$), and mental retardation ($p < .05$), with slight but nonsignificant improvement in receptivity toward juvenile offenders and workers with a history of mental disturbance. The major factors involved in increased receptivity were employers' increasing beliefs that handicapped workers would not require more supervision ($p < .0001$), and that they would not have trouble adjusting to new work situations ($p < .05$). (See Table 1.)

It was of particular interest to note that in the early 1960's fewer than 5% of all employers had knowingly hired a handicapped worker, whereas ten years later more than 11% of all employers had knowingly hired a handicapped worker ($p < .02$). The improvements in employer receptivity did not appear to be related to having actually hired a handicapped worker, however, since there were no significant differences on any receptivity measures between employers who had and who had not hired handicapped workers.

It appears that attitudes of employers toward hiring handicapped workers have shown improvement over the last decade. Although attitudes toward all types of handicapped workers studied were slightly less favorable than attitudes toward a nonhandicapped worker ("average" is represented by a rating of 3), the substantial and significant improvement in attitudes toward amputees, mentally retarded, and epileptic workers bring them very close to employers' perceptions of the nonhandicapped worker. It was of interest to note that employers appear to be more receptive toward workers with physical or organic types of problems (that is, amputation, retardation, epilepsy), than toward social problems (that is, history of juvenile delinquency, emotional disturbance). The fact that there was improvement in attitudes toward all types of handicapped workers does offer promise and hope that perhaps within the next decade handicapped

TABLE 1

Specific Attitudes Toward Handicapped Workers

Variables	1962 Index	1972 Index	P
Need for supervision	4.52	2.96	.001
Work tolerance	3.70	3.65	—
Reliability	3.60	3.51	—
Adjusting to new situations	4.00	3.12	.05
Tolerating pressure	3.71	3.67	—
Co-worker relationships	3.25	3.24	—
Absenteeism	3.33	3.28	—
Overall	3.73	3.35	.05

Note: 1 = favorable, 5 = unfavorable

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workers may be viewed by employers in much the same way as are non-handicapped workers.

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