

Public Library Staff Experiences of Accommodation in the Workplace



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Introduction

Identifying as having a disability in the workplace can be a complicated proposition. There can be some significant stresses in contemplating whether or not to seek accommodation (Dong, Warner, Mamboleo, & Zalles, 2017). In the best circumstances, disclosure results in accommodations that create a more accessible environment for the employee. In less than positive outcomes, disclosing can result in significant push back or delays in getting accommodation (Pionke, 2019; Gewurtz, Langan, & Shand, 2014; House, 2021; Schomberg, 2018).

People with disabilities are severely underrepresented within library staffs. The Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians (CAPAL) found in their most recent census that just under 6% of their members identify as having a disability (2018). No specific statistics are available for Canadian public libraries, but the American Library Association (ALA) reported an even smaller representation of disability with only 2.9% of their members identifying as having a disability (2017).

Accommodations

the most common accommodations sought in the workplace include adjustments to the job interview, a special chair or ergonomic workstation, flexibility of scheduling (including work from home), modified training or supervision, modified job duties, modified work environment (lighting, quiet), changes in workplace culture and the procedures in the accommodation process itself (Statistics Canada, 2019; McDowell & Fossey, 2015; Lindsay et al., 2021; Padkapayeva, et al, 2017). There are challenges to deciding to disclose including fear of stigmatization, they may want to maintain certain barriers that disclosure would dissolve, they may want to retain confidentiality of their situation, and fears of developing negative work situations due to disclosure (Toth & Dewa, 2014; Prince 2017).

Defining Disability

There is a saying in the disability studies literature that non-disabled people are only temporarily so (Hughes, 2007). Through age or accident, we will all be disabled at some point. Bichenbach et al. (1999, p 1184) note that disablement “is an intrinsic feature of the human condition, not a difference that essentially marks one subpopulation off from another.” As such, this research takes a purposefully broad understanding of disability. Disability or impairment may consist of a wide variety of phenomena that may be permanent or temporary (such as a broken limb) or it may be dynamic – where periods of lack of impairment are followed by periods of impairment.

Terminology

There is flux in the disability community and in society as to whether one uses person-first language (i.e. “person with a disability”) or identity-first language (i.e. “disabled person”) (Dunn, 2015; Laura [@eponinetaire], 2020; Evans, D. [@dominickevans], 2019; Michele [@RebelWheelsNYC], 2017; Jamie [@BlindFury_5428], 2019; k. [@mutant_robot], 2017). Both phrases are used in the community and thus, both are used in this research.

Research Question

What is the experience of disabled Canadian public library workers who seek accommodation?

Method

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with public library staff from libraries across Canada via Zoom. Interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Nvivo software. The data will be subjected to an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The goal of IPA is “to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (Smith & Osborn, 2003 p.53).

Findings

Interviews are currently in progress

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