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Exploring the impact: Attitudes toward disability among employers and co-workers of people with an intellectual disability

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Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, along with other provincial and global initiatives, recognize social inclusion as a poverty/deprivation index. While this association is to some extent moderated by low levels of employment among people with intellectual disabilities, it is also noted to be a result of social inequalities and exclusion. Such discriminatory attitudes may explain the limited employment profile of people with disabilities, as it may reflect employers' low expectations of employees with disabilities. However, some high-performance organizations are countering these assumptions as they pursue employees with intellectual disabilities for solid business benefits, explaining that the profile of a worker with an intellectual disability reads like that of an ideal employee: dependable, engaged, motivated, exemplary attendance, attention to work quality, and high productivity. Therefore, through the employment of people with a disability in the workplace, it was hypothesized that there would be increased social inclusion of people with disabilities as measured by improved attitudes toward disability among employers and co-workers. This was assessed by a quasi-experimental design with comparison groups, and the administration of the Attitudes Towards Employees with Disabilities Questionnaire. This design required data to be collected from employers and co-workers who work with an employee with a disability to be compared to data from a control group of employers and co-workers who had not experienced a workplace that employed people with disabilities. One-way between-subjects ANOVAs (condition: employers/co-workers of employees *with* an intellectual disability vs. employers/co-workers of employees *without* an intellectual disability) were conducted for each subscale of the Attitudes Towards Employees with Disabilities Questionnaire. These four subscales included items that compared employees with and without intellectual disability on: (1) teamwork and costs, (2) training, (3) characteristics, and (4) skills. There was a significant effect of being an employer/co-worker of an employee with an intellectual disability on attitudes toward the 'characteristics' of employees with an intellectual disability, $F_{(1,46)} = 5.06$, $p = 0.029$, $\omega^2 = 0.08$. Specifically, employers/co-workers of employees with an intellectual disability had more positive attitudes towards the characteristics of employees with an intellectual disability ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.92$) compared to employers/co-workers of employees without an intellectual disability ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.52$). These employee characteristics related to identifying employees with an intellectual disability as being more dependable, cooperative, and loyal than employees without an intellectual disability, as well as being absent less often than employees without an intellectual disability.