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Assessment revision of 'perceptions of disabled veterans in the civilian workforce'

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Assessment revision of 'perceptions of disabled veterans in the civilian workforce'

Abstract

As there continues to be limited research related to perceptions of disability status in the workforce, specific to the veteran population, the importance of employer understanding as well as willingness to provide accommodations is necessary to help promote change. This study carefully reviewed the assessment tool used by Reed (2016) to measure perceptions towards hiring disabled veterans as they enter the civilian workforce. To help support validity and/or reliability of the tool previously used, two professional experts were interviewed to provide feedback on the data tool in support of revisions. The vignettes, job attainment questionnaire, and demographics questionnaire were revised for future pilot sample collection.

Keywords

disabilities, veterans, employability, veteran transition, workforce, perceptions

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Introduction

Employment can be impacted by multiple faucets such as societal influences, economic shifts, technology, and even worldwide healthcare. Across the United States, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, employers have been forced in many ways to encompass health safety by promoting more innovative methods to accommodate employees. It is imperative to consider whether societal perceptions of disability status towards job attainment have been impacted overtime, possibly in part by this national change to promote workplace safety in the last few years.

Prior to the pandemic, a study conducted by Reed found through descriptive survey design, disability status had significantly influenced job attainment versus qualifications [1]. Veteran job candidates with physical disability were perceived more favorably than those with a mental disability or who were non-disabled. At the time of the study, there had been limited research focused on these specific variables and did not account for a non-disabled/no experience variable for true comparison. Another concern was the context of the vignettes and questionnaire. Review of current literatures with criteria of perceptions, veterans, disability status, and job attainment were explored for any new relatable evidence. In addition, the assessment tools used in the previous study were reviewed for any proposed changes for readiness of study replication for comparison.

Current Veteran Statistics

According to the United States' Census Bureau, "6.9% of the population are veterans" with "30% having a Bachelor's Degree or higher" [2]. Many veterans are increasingly being offered educational opportunities paid for by the government directly after their military service,

such as the GI bill or Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) programs. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, otherwise referred to as the GI bill, was passed in response to helping World War II veterans realign into the civilian workforce and has continued to be funded [3]. Veterans whom have acquired a disability related to their active military service known as a service-connected disability, whom are rated by the Department of Veterans Affairs at a 20% disability status or higher can apply for extended educational benefits under Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) [4]. In having such programs available likely helps to explain the higher rate of veterans having educational degrees.

Nearly "80 percent of post-9/11 veterans were employed" compared to only "75 percent of civilians" from 2014-2018 per Gumber [5]. Such a result suggests further job attainment by veterans compared to those who have not served in the military. This could imply our current society has become more acceptable of veterans' inclusion into the workplace. However, it is unclear if disability status of veterans has been identified in this rate of employment.

Hiring Decisions Related to Veterans

A unique model was created to assess the treatment of disabled persons across agency settings per its inclusion of a wide array of qualities related to employer selection [6]. Use of environmental and organizational factors, such as legislation and norms, were compared with treatment of disabled persons. The viewers' cognitions had been found as the main attributed cause, which led to detailed discussion of stereotypes. Later, this existing tool had been adapted to encompass veterans with disabilities, in order to better explain the power of characteristics used to determine job candidate selection [7]. Researchers had added to the pre-existing tool by inclusion of depth of military skills perceived, differences between civilian or military roles, and agency structure [7]. From this more current adaptation it allowed for ability to propose

hypotheses if future researchers might use the design. Both of these studies were not referenced in Reed's original work, yet appear to be the closest research topic specific to disabled veterans and societal perceptions within the workforce [1]. While the research by these two scholarly sources may help to predict outcomes, they do not gather data from participants to test for validity.

Another study was reviewed that studied combat-exposed veterans through neuropsychological assessment and questionnaires to determine if perception of one's ability to work was linked to employment status [8]. Findings suggested implication of one's perception of ability to work to be affected directly by specific combat experiences as well as if psychiatric or behavioral symptoms were being actively reduced. This study's strength can be found from the research design using a healthcare assessment as well as a survey method for contrast to help reduce ambiguity, but there was potential. Overlap in variables examined and a wide array of traumas experienced from combat. In reference to perception of disabled veterans and employment, this work addresses the candidate's personal awareness rather than the employer, but is applicable to job candidates with mental disability status.

Disability and Discrimination

The extent of discrimination across employment for those with a hearing disability was studied in regards to ethnicity, gender, and place of residence [9]. In this study, job applications were sent to both private and public sectors for two differing roles, administrative manager and caregiver assistant. Discrimination was determined to be associated twice the amount for the position of caregiver assistant for the candidate with a hearing disability. The role of caregiver assistant was perceived as having more interface with the public and suggests belief those with hearing disabilities as being incapable of performing the task. Gender and ethnicity did not show

any significance. Such research suggests perceptions of disability status as being viewed negatively due to discrimination. The study did not represent various types of disabilities or discuss veterans, however relative to disabilities being viewed negatively in the workforce.

Summary of Current Literature

Within the past several years, there has remained to be limited research with focus on studying the relationship between disabled veterans and perceptions in the workplace. Some progress has been made on obtaining greater knowledge on types of assessment tools that could be useful, understanding of combat-veterans' perception of themselves for employment, and disability as viewed negatively across workplaces. Current veteran statistics have shown some growth of veterans obtaining employment and higher education. Disabled veterans were not identified as part of these statistics, though may be likely.

It is uncertain whether views towards hiring disabled veterans have changed in part by the national movement following COVID-19, as there has been no research explicit to this study topic. In replicating research data to try to produce similar results, it might be difficult to attribute any findings to current times. On a broad viewpoint one can make presumptions if successful job attainment of disabled veteran candidates is determined.

Methods

The main purpose of this study was to examine the assessment tools used by Reed to measure perceptions of disabled veterans across the workforce, with the plan to propose revisions to help improve reliability and/or validity [1]. To strengthen support of revisions, two professionals having research experience related to the topic are to be interviewed for feedback on changes. Vignettes of potential job candidates as well as job attainment and demographics questionnaires are to be revised as necessary.

Design

Two separate interviews were conducted to contain the following questions:

1. What are your thoughts on the three specific vignettes (physical disability/qualified, mental disability/qualified, and no disability/not qualified)?
2. What would you change per your experience on the topic? Or not change?
3. Any other feedback to note for a future pilot test?

Results

The following data set is composed of recommendations provided during interviews with two professional experts, across the studied subject matter of disabled veterans in the civilian workforce. Reed's previously used assessment tool of vignettes, job attainment questionnaire, and demographics questionnaire were carefully modified to help authenticate the tool in preparation for a future pilot sample [1]. The two professional experts chosen were intended to provide a veteran perspective as well as an experienced researcher in the field of disabilities and the workforce.

Interview #1: veteran perspective

A subject matter expert in physician assistant/associate studies, who previously served in the United States Army as a Medic was interviewed [10]. Much of his studies have included involvement in education and promotion or inclusion of the veteran community. The veteran perspective was sought to determine if the vignettes used military-specific language and portrayed veteran job candidates effectively for determination on level of likability for hiring.

Change mental disability/qualified vignette

In reviewing the mental disability/qualified vignette, the mental health disability used of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was thought to have posed biases from heavy media

attention. With PTSD often associated with severe hostility and hypervigilance, it has been found a stigmatized reference of veterans linked to gun violence. As there has been an increase number of gun violence incidents in the community, predisposed feelings might be inferred while reading about a veteran with this disorder. For this reason, the vignette will now list anxiety disorder.

Military roles described & gender

Signal officer, military police, recruiter, and artillery mechanic were positions shared to describe each veteran candidate's prior experience. Non-military participants may have difficulty interpreting these terms in accordance to level of job attainment for the position being applied for and how roles transfer into the civilian workforce. For this reason, the subject matter expert shared the importance of setting the stage for the reader and considering inclusion of other jobs more easily understood to job equivalency in the civilian context. Changes were made from military police for mental disability/qualified, to an office personnel position as "supply officer". Some predispositions could have been made for participants in reading about a military police position, due to current highlight in the media with violence and power. For the non-disabled/unqualified vignette, the sentence about being a recruiter in the military was removed per irrelevance and could have posed confusion with two positions shared.

Lastly, it was confirmed the need to have a vignette inclusive of gender since each vignette describes a male candidate. This detail could suggest specific responses and inclusivity would help to remove such criticism. The physically disabled/qualified candidate will now list a name associated with females, "Sarah". Please be advised with not all vignettes tailored towards a specific gender it could be hard to rule out gender as the contributing factors, whereas the variable was controlled with each vignette sharing this detail in common.

Sample population geared towards employers

This first subject matter expert advised future studies to sample higher leveled students per more likely to have hiring experience, though ideally sample hiring managers [10]. If the study were to sample hiring managers, it might be beneficial to use small organizations due to larger corporations more educated on veteran inclusion. Use of this sample could offer more insight to disparities from the viewpoint of those actually making hiring decisions. It was recommended this tool could eventually be sampled at job fairs for review of multiple employers. Another mention had been students may have less perceptual biases compared to life experiences. For purpose of replicating the study, sampling another set of students seems most appropriate at this stage for a pilot study with these changes of the assessment tool. The demographics questionnaire will have the following question added in response.

Select below what level of hiring experience best describes you.

Unexperienced Minimally Experienced Somewhat Experienced Experienced Very Experienced

Description of interview before selection

Participants may feel incompetent to answer job attainment questions without knowledge of the candidate's interview. For this reason, a general statement for all vignettes is to be listed, however not list whether they did good or bad for predispositions; see below.

“An interview took place, in which the candidate was found to fulfill each of the questions asked.”

Interview #2: researcher of disabilities perspective

As an Associate Professor and board member of the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the second subject matter expert was selected per a researcher in the area of

disabilities in the workforce to include assessing need for inclusion. This interviewee also has an original survey design in the process of being published, used to focus on learning gaps in resource management for those with disabilities related to the workforce. While this survey has been found to measure what was intended and a reliable source, suggestions from a researcher studying similar variables can be advantageous.

Key terms to include career services & veterans

A suggestion was to consider inclusion of terms offering information about career services and veterans for hiring, perhaps through expansion to the key terms section on disability specifications along with literature gaps since the last study.

Future research

No specific additions were mentioned for the vignettes, rather to have a higher evaluation of the assessment tool. For additional measurement of validity, it had been proposed consideration of conducting a delphi study to gather a team of experts to provide consensus on shared feedback related to the assessment tool used [11]. These experts would be more appropriate to provide health and video literacy. While this form of evaluation would involve anonymously selecting a panel and providing a questionnaire for collection of data, this would be time consuming and would need to be well thought out. This is a potential expansion of the study in the future for further reliability and validity testing of the survey tool.

Revised vignettes

Vignette #1

Sarah Anderson, a U. S. veteran whom served in Iraq, is applying for a job at a financial firm as an Analyst Director. While serving as a Signal Officer in the military, she was responsible for leading others using her communication skills. During this time, she was involved in an

explosive accident that led to an injury, amputation of her left arm; resulting in her to wear a prosthetic. Following her military services, she was able to obtain a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. In college, she also participated in the veterans' club on campus and dedicated time as an intern at a local bank.

Vignette #2

Daniel Gonzalez, a U. S. veteran whom served in Afghanistan, is applying for a job at a media network as a Director of Social-Media. While serving as a Supply Officer in the military, he was responsible for ensuring everyone is provided equipment and supplies necessary beforehand. During this time, he was involved in a combat situation that led him to respond quickly under pressure; resulting now to have some symptoms of anxiety disorder. Following his military services, he was able to obtain a Bachelor's degree in Public Relations. In college, Daniel joined the media club on campus and had the opportunity to intern at a local advertising agency.

Vignette #3

Andre Koplun, a U. S. veteran whom served in both Afghanistan and Iraq, is applying for a job at a non-profit agency for low-income children as a Program Director. While serving as an Artillery Mechanic, his responsibilities were to perform recovery and maintenance on filed weapons. After serving in the military, Andre has worked in various construction projects in the community and at a local convenient store stocking shelves.

Revised Job Attainment Questionnaire

An interview took place, in which the candidate was found to fulfill each of the questions asked.

1. If you are the employer, how likely would you select this candidate for this position?

Very Unlikely Unlikely Somewhat Likely Likely Very Likely

2. In your opinion, how qualified is this candidate for the position?

Poorly Qualified Somewhat Qualified Qualified Highly Qualified

3. Do you think this candidate will have the ability to fulfill the duties required of this position?

Very Unlikely Unlikely Somewhat Unlikely Likely Very Unlikely

4. Briefly explain why you gave this candidate the ratings for “ability to fulfill the duties required of this position”.

Revised Demographics Questionnaire

1. What is your gender?

Male Female Choose not to answer

2. What is your age?

3. What is your class standing?

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Post-Baccalaureate (Continued Education)

4. What ethnicity do you identify with?

Hispanic African American Caucasian Native American Asian Pacific Islander

Other

5. Are you disabled? (physically or regarding mental health)

Yes No

Display logic to show next question only if answered “Yes” to #5.

6. Choose the type of disability that applies to you.

Physical Health

Mental Health

Both Physical and Mental Health

Choose not to answer

7. Are you a U.S. Veteran?

Yes No

If answered "Yes" to being a U.S. Veteran. Directed to these Veteran specific questions.

8. What U. S. military branch or branches did you serve in? (Select ALL that apply.)

Marine Corps Navy Army Coast Guard Air Force National Guard

9. How many years did you serve?

10. Do you have a service-connected disability?

YES NO

Display logic showed next question if answered "YES" to #10.

11. Choose the type of disability that applies to you.

Physical Health

Mental Health

Both Physical and Mental Health

Choose not to answer

12. Select below what level of hiring experience best describes you.

Unexperienced Minimally Experienced Somewhat Experienced Experienced

Very Experienced

Data Analysis

This study's main objective had been to review a prior assessment tool utilized for studying perceptions of disabled veterans in the workforce, with plans to produce a revised tool ready for a future sample via a pilot study. The prior method of assessment created by Reed was found lacking professional input for validating the tool [1]. Such finding could be a limitation to

the results that were found. Consideration of reducing limitations for another sample was determined.

Various edits were made after conducting two professional interviews and gathering advice. Each interview had been with a person who had a background in the subject matter, which permitted reputable feedback and validity of content. Minor changes were made to each of the vignettes of potential job candidates as well as both job attainment and demographics questionnaires. By obtaining data across interviews of professionals helped to propose recommendations for further action and study.

To enhance the assessment tool created by Reed the below research questions guided this study and revisions to be made to the assessment tool [1]. The research questions were as follow:

1. Is the assessment tool measuring what is intended to be measured?
2. Are there selective biases from the way content is provided?
3. Can the assessment tool provide replicated results for future samples?

Careful reflection on each of these question with the interviewee prompted the formation of the revisions and next steps. Findings and implications were produced from these guides in research questions.

Revisions to the assessment tool included: change to type of mental disability, adaptation of military roles used to relate more to civilian application of job duties, adding female gender to one of the candidate descriptions, adding a line of interview success prior to vignette for job selection, and permitted critical thinking about study sample as well as further professional refinement measures. The reason for making changes to the questions was to offer more diversity and inclusivity. Inclusion of various genders, level of knowledge of military roles per having

both veteran versus non-veteran participants, and more generalized approach to disability diagnoses can offer more participant understanding of material presented.

Reed found physical disability was the preferred candidate for job selection, however this might have been due to the way the content had been delivered and possible bias towards the mental health diagnosis described [1]. For this reason, changes could help eliminate such consideration and show more evidence of validity if another sample has same findings. Through offering simplification and having relatable information can be found to contribute to perceptions made related to the candidates described. For this reason, each vignette was carefully examined for content provided and how to maintain similar information across all information.

Interviews of two differing professionals having either experience in research, disabilities, and/or veterans was quite helpful in acquiring useful data. Expertise knowledge had assisted in identifying areas that may have led to responses from the initial study. To help solidify the material used to review perceptions of disabled veterans whom are applying for a position in the civilian workforce, the revisions are pertinent. The findings provided a much clearer assessment tool ready for conducting a pilot study. As a result, for future studies the name of the assessments in combination are to be referred to as “Perceptions of Disabled Veterans in the Civilian Workforce” questionnaire.

Implications and recommendations

At this time there remains limited research in this specific topic of interest. There had been no other assessment tools similar to Reed implemented in recent research [1]. The measure used continues to be the closest in analyzing treatment in the workplace with a variable to encompass perception of disability, yet not specific to perception of likelihood to hire disabled

veterans [7]. For this reason, adapting the prior assessment tool was most appropriate for this specific field of interest.

Another matter to consider is the impact the COVID pandemic has had on various outlets of providing services. This detail may possibly provide additional implications to the workforce's hiring as a result. For instance, perhaps candidates may be viewed differently if the position is offered as remote per less interaction on site. This area of topic could open the idea for additional research applicable to disabled veterans in the workforce post the COVID pandemic.

In readiness for a pilot study, research could be compared with the prior sample from Reed for similar findings and/or changes with such revisions made to the assessment tool [1]. Preceding the pilot study, recommendation of viewing a larger sample could be obtained to continue for comparison for reliability. A wide range of data could be collected to provide more information with this revised assessment tool.

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