

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Assessing the Willingness of Employers to Hire Persons with Disabilities in the Media Industry, in Ashanti Region of Ghana

To acquire a job is one of the priorities for every person. This is because having a job raises an individual's status, earns him or her respect, and enables one to lead an independent life in society. However, job acquisition is generally dependent on the employer. The employer makes decisions about the person who best fits the position (Chima, 2001; Popovich et al, 2003; Zissi et al, 2007; Gustafsson et al, 2013).

Due to the large number of job-seekers, employers discriminate in terms of disability, gender, appearance, or physical strength and not just on competence (Mapuranga & Mutswanga, 2014). Stevens' research work (2002) found that employers often have narrow and stereotypical views on disability. They tend to have a one-dimensional perspective of disability, which is the medical perspective; a view that has been challenged by some who see disability as being 'socially constructed'. Also, some religious employers see 'disability' as a sinful act committed by an individual or the family and would not want to associate with them (Otieno, 2009). As a result, most persons with disabilities are jobless and find it very difficult to secure employment.

Ashanti has the highest number of persons with disabilities (124,501) in Ghana, according to the 2010 Population and Housing Census conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service (2012), and is the second highest region in the media landscape, according to the National Communications Authority fourth quarter report of 2018. Data from the 2010 Population and Housing Census indicates that 3,398 persons with disability are unemployed and are seeking jobs. It is not known however whether employers in the media industry are willing to hire persons with disabilities, since the media industry is one of the major industries that disseminate information to the masses and is also a key site for the reinforcement of negative images and ideas (Cortes, 1995).

An assessment was carried out on the willingness of employers in the media industry to hire persons with disability in the Ashanti region. To this end, 64 employers in the media industry were randomly selected. They consisted of

29 General Managers, 23 Human Resource Managers, and 12 owners of the companies. Most of them (80%) were males and had occupied their positions for three years and more. Among them, 5% had some form of disability.

To measure employers' level of willingness, a 5-point scale ranging from "very willing" to "very unwilling" was used. It was found that 76% of employers were unwilling to hire persons with disabilities because of the kind of disability a person may have and the cost of changing the environment or buying assistive devices. However, 17% of employers were willing to hire persons with certain forms of disability in a decreasing scale, namely physical impairment, visual impairment, speech impairment and hearing impairment. The rationale in the study of Dewson et al (2005) is that employers do not know what the right jobs are for the hearing and speech impaired persons. The survey also revealed that 81% of employers had no education about disability and therefore did not have any quota system for persons with disability.

Since employers play a major role in employment, it is highly recommended that a quota system is allocated for persons with disabilities in all licensed companies. Consequently, refresher programmes or courses on disability issues should be properly instituted for employers to broaden their outlook. Also, the media should play a major role in the hiring of persons with disabilities because it is the mouthpiece of the people and should lead by example. The government should also ensure that employers who hire persons with disabilities are motivated through incentives like tax exemptions or reductions. Finally, the government should assist the media industry in promoting universal design environment.

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