

Attitudes towards hiring an employee with experience of mental illness

Background

Mental illness is a prominent health issue among New Zealanders, with one in five adults having been diagnosed with a mood disorder (depression or bipolar disorder) at some time in their life (Oakley Browne, 2006). Research indicates that while society's literacy about mental illness has increased, positive attitudes towards people who experience mental illness have not increased at the same rate (Schomerus et al., 2012).

The Health Promotion Agency (HPA) aims to help New Zealanders value and include people with experience of mental illness and distress in their communities. Contributing to this aim, HPA's Health and Lifestyles Survey (HLS) monitors New Zealanders' behaviour and attitudes towards a range of health topics, including mental health. This fact sheet reports on data from the 2014 HLS around attitudes towards hiring employees with experience of mental illness.

Methodology

To measure attitudes towards hiring candidates with experience of mental illness, respondents in the 2014 HLS were shown a vignette that presented an employer choosing to hire a candidate with less work experience and no history of mental illness, over hiring a candidate with more work experience and a history of mental illness. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the employer's decision.

For this analysis responses were grouped into 'agree' ('strongly agree' or 'agree') or 'disagree' ('neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'). Responses were compared by gender, age, ethnicity, educational background, employment status, and neighbourhood deprivation. See the 'About the Health and Lifestyles Survey' section for more detail and the relevant comparison groups. Only group differences that were statistically significant ($p < .05$) are reported.

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Nearly one-third (29%, 26-32%) of respondents were in agreement with the decision to hire the less experienced candidate with no experience of mental illness; 6% (4-7%) strongly agreed and 23% (21-26%) agreed (see Figure 1). While 24% (21-26%) were ambivalent, 29% (26-32%) disagreed, 9% (8-11%) strongly disagreed, and 9% (7-10%) didn't know.

Attitudes towards hiring candidates with experience of mental illness were associated with gender, age, ethnicity and deprivation. Those who were more likely to agree or strongly agree with the decision to

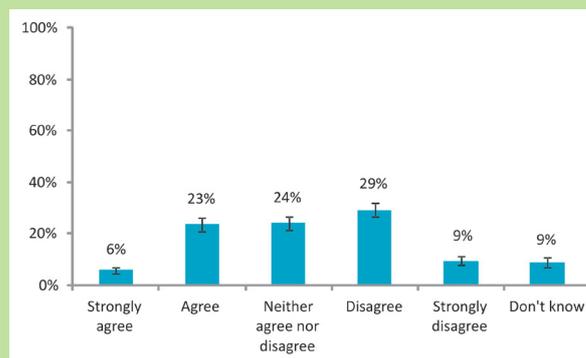


Figure 1: Level of agreement with employer's decision to hire less experienced candidate with no experience of mental illness over a more experienced candidate with experience of mental illness

hire a less experienced candidate in preference to a candidate with experience of mental illness were:

- male (35%), compared with female (29%)
- aged 65 years or older (41%), compared with 15 to 24 years (24%)
- Asian ethnicity (51%), compared with European/ Other ethnicity (30%)
- living in a low deprivation neighbourhood (34%), compared to a mid deprivation neighbourhood (24%).

Key points

- The majority (62%) of respondents were ambivalent (24%) or disagreed (38%) with an employer's decision to hire a less experienced candidate with no experience of mental illness, over a more experienced candidate who had experience of mental illness.
- Those who were more likely to agree with the employer's decision to hire the less experienced candidate with no experience of mental illness were: male, older people, people who identified with Asian ethnicity or those living in low deprivation neighbourhoods.

About the Health and Lifestyles Survey (HLS)

- The HLS is a nationwide in-home face-to-face survey conducted every two years since 2008.
- The 2014 HLS consisted of a sample of 2,594 New Zealanders aged 15-years and over, who provided information about their health behaviours and attitudes relating to tobacco, skin cancer prevention, healthy eating, gambling, alcohol, exercise, immunisation and mental health. The response rate was 73.2%.
- The 2014 HLS sample included 1,420 European/ Other people, 564 Māori, 393 Pacific people and 217 Asian people (prioritised ethnicity).
- The data have been adjusted (weighted) according to 2013 Census data to ensure they are representative of the New Zealand population.
- For this analysis, jack-knife proportions and associated 95% confidence intervals were produced. Sub-group differences were tested using logistic regression.
- Comparison groups for these analyses were as follows:
 - Gender (males, compared with females).
 - Age (25 to 44 years, 45 to 64 years and 65 + years, compared with 15 to 24 years).
 - Ethnicity (Māori, Pacific and Asian, compared with European/Other).
 - Neighbourhood deprivation status (mid and high deprivation levels, compared with low deprivation level).
 - Educational background (secondary school, trade certificate/professional/diploma and degree/postgraduate, compared with no formal qualification).
 - Employment status (part-time employed, homemaker and other, compared with full-time employed).
- A full description of the HLS methodology and further HLS publications can be found at <http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>.

References

- Oakley Browne, M. A. (2006). Lifetime prevalence and lifetime risk of DSM-IV disorders. In M. A. Oakley Browne, J. E. Wells & K. M. Scott (Eds.), *Te Rau Hinengaro: The New Zealand Mental Health Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.
- Schomerus, G., Schwahn, C., Holzinger, A., Corrigan, P. W., Grabe, H. J., Carta, M. G., & Angermeyer, M. C. (2012). Evolution of public attitudes about mental illness: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 125, 440-452.

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About the HPA

HPA is a Crown entity that leads and delivers innovative, high quality and cost-effective programmes and activities that promote health, wellbeing and healthy lifestyles, prevent disease, illness and injury, enable environments that support health and wellbeing and healthy lifestyles, and reduce personal, social and economic harm.

Research and Evaluation Unit

Health Promotion Agency, PO Box 2142, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

<http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>

research@hpa.org.nz

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