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OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ASSIST DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS TO OBTAIN EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

Lottie Smith
lottiesmith@siu.edu

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OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ASSIST DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS
TO OBTAIN EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

by

Lottie Smith

B.S., University of Arizona, 2002

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Science

Department of Rehabilitation Administration and Services
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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Approved by:

Dr. Thomas Upton, Chair

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
April 10, 2020

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores texts and articles that report on occupational barriers faced by working age individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing as it relates to the attainment and retention of employment. Research will reveal the occupational barriers the deaf population faces and the negative effects on employability. Likewise, this paper will examine the obstacles that attribute to that person's improbability to gain and maintain employment outcomes.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

This project is an investigation into the occupational barriers faced by working age individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing as they relate to employment outcomes of job attainment and retention. For the majority of people, employment is a major aspect of life. Working persons are motivated to join the workforce for varying reasons. The decision to work is individualized, but it is often motivated by the need to support themselves or their families. Employment can also satisfy complex needs such as social and psychological desires. The desire to work is no different for deaf or hard of hearing persons. Yet, their occupational experiences are dissimilar to their hearing peers.

Reasons for higher unemployment rates in the deaf community vary but are often attributed to employers' hiring practices, misconceptions and attitudes (Deaf Job Wizard, 2019). The intention of this paper is to review the current literature, to identify the occupational barriers, and to contribute to a clearer understanding of employment outcomes of individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities

Amendments Act of 2008 were passed to thwart discrimination of persons with disabilities. Specifically, Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits private employers, state and local governments, employment agencies, and labor unions from discriminating application processes, hiring, firing, advancement, and compensation practices against qualified individuals with disabilities in employment (ADA, 1990). Even though these laws mandate reasonable accommodations, people with disabilities continue to historically encounter employment gaps and encounter occupational barriers.

Research tells us that with reasonable accommodations qualified deaf and hard of hearing employees are capable of performing occupational duties to the same accomplishment as to employees with normal hearing ranges. Nevertheless, employment rates are disproportionate, and this disparity has yet to be resolved. According to the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes (2019), there is significant variance when comparing 47% deaf and hard of hearing are unemployed, compared to 24% of people with normal hearing ranges. According to the recent estimates of the World Health Organization (2019), around 466 million people worldwide have disabling hearing loss. An estimated 48 million people live with hearing loss in the United States, and about two-thirds are under sixty-five-years-old (Hearing Health Foundation, 2020). By 2050, over 900 million people will have disabling hearing loss (World Health Organization, 2019). Individuals with hearing loss were nearly two times more likely to be unemployed or underemployed than those without hearing loss even after factors such as age and race were controlled (Emmett and Francis, 2015).

The occupational barriers faced by the deaf and hard of hearing population not only impede achieving employment but also inhibits them from maintaining employment which further contributes to the dismal unemployment rates of this population. Employment barriers

impede their full potential to optimal job performance suggesting the importance for appropriate accommodations are needed for the deaf population to be successful. Furthermore, 31% of deaf and hard of hearing employees reported to be in need of workplace accommodation without receiving it (Svinndal, Solheim, Rise, & Jensen, 2018).

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

This research seeks to examine the employment barriers for deaf and hard of hearing individuals as discussed in current literature. This will be accomplished through critical analysis of research of texts and articles written on the subject of occupational barriers that individuals with hearing loss experience related to employment outcomes. The questions to be addressed are as follows:

1. What are the specific barriers encountered by deaf and hard of hearing people when entering and maintaining employment?
2. What interventions such as accommodations and support services does research show to alleviate occupational barriers?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The literature reviewed provided multiple definitions for the terms deaf and hard of hearing depending on which category from the models of deafness the writer identifies such as the medical, social, and cultural models. Defining these terms is the initial step in understating the deaf population and the occupational barriers impacted by varying degrees of hearing. For purposes of this project, terms are defined as follows:

Accommodations - A modification or adjustment to the hiring process or to the work environment that enable an individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of the job to the same extent as people without disabilities.

Barriers – An obstacle preventing access to or in a person’s work environment, including physical structures and attitudinal biases that limit functioning and create disability.

Deaf – A profound hearing loss in which a person has little to no functional hearing, would not benefit from assistive listening devices, and would often use sign language for communication.

Disability – An impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.

Hard of hearing – Hearing ranging from mild to severe affecting one or both ears in which a person benefits from hearing aids, cochlear implants, and other assistive listening devices.

Hearing loss – Encompasses a partial or total inability to hear.

Employment Outcomes - Obtaining or retaining part time to full-time employment.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The scope of the project is to review the current literature as it relates to employment barriers for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. It is to be acknowledged that it is not possible to address all the service needs of individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing, nor is this research intended to be a procedural strategy for such individuals.

CHAPTER 2

OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of research on the knowledge of common occupational barriers experienced by the deaf and hard of hearing community. The concept of adversity and struggle are widespread to people with disabilities, despite legislative efforts to remove barriers. To eliminate barriers, we must identify the barrier, explore accommodations, and provide adjustments that afford individuals with hearing loss an equal opportunity to employability. The goal of this literature review is to assess occupational barriers within the categories of communication, educational, attitudinal, environmental, and expenditure barriers.

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Communication is essential across all aspects of employment. Deafness directly affects how a person communicates. Communication difficulties have influenced employment rates and continue to be the primary issue contributing to lack of advancement for deaf and hard of hearing workers (Luft, 2000).

Stoker & Orwat (2018), conducted a phenomenological qualitative study on the communication barriers between deaf employees and hearing managers. As stated in the definition of terms, a person who is deaf has a profound hearing loss in which a person has little to no functional hearing. This individual would not benefit from assistive listening devices and would often use sign language for communication. The primary objective of this study was to understand the subjective experiences of communication difficulties perceived by deaf workers. The study found that communication challenges were present within group interactions causing the deaf workers to guess what was being said. It is especially difficult for a deaf worker to follow the conversation when there were several people interacting with one another such as

during brainstorming with quick transition from one speaker to another. The conversation moves too quickly and jumps from one person to the next causing more guessing and errors in speechreading. Deaf workers reported the tendency to avoid challenging communication situations such as conversations with multiple speakers. Supervisors were unaware of the challenges with speechreading and that it was not the preferred means of communication for the workers. They alleged limiting communication to gestures and written conversations was sufficient. Research showed that the preferred mode of communication was American Sign Language for all participants. Yet few employees were comfortable expressing a sense of injustice to the lack of accommodation. Although all managers were familiar with sign language interpreters and how they are used to facilitate communication, they were unfamiliar with how to obtain a sign language interpreter. The analysis brought forth that supervisors lacked knowledge to reasonably provide communication accommodations. This lack of knowledge inevitably leads to formation of barriers as worker employers do not understand how to effectively communicate with deaf employees in the workplace (Lempka, 2019). The study concluded a disconnect persists between employer knowledge and the mandates of the American Disability Act especially among small and midsize organizations.

Haynes (2014), presented a quantitative study investigating the effect of residual hearing ability connected to the effectiveness of communication strategies of deaf and hard of hearing employees in group settings with multiple speakers. The analysis was separated into two parts. The first part of the research focused on the meeting environment with multiple speakers. Meeting environments were categorized as the following types: informal, purposeful, informational, classroom presentation, and large lecture. The second portion of the data analysis focused on the effectiveness of communication accommodations and the extent in which such

accommodations were utilized. Statistical analyses consisted of analysis of variance (ANOVA) to ensure the sample consisted of employees with varying hearing abilities within the meeting environments. The effectiveness of receptive and expressive communication accommodations were analyzed across all meeting types. Receptive communication is a person's ability to understand what others are saying. Receptive communication accommodations consisted of hearing amplification coupled with speech reading, real-time transcription, and onsite or remote sign language interpretation services. Expressive communication is when the deaf or hard of hearing person speaks verbally for themselves or through a sign language interpreter. Research was conducted by surveying 161 deaf and hard of hearing employees. The survey identified the occurrence of communication accommodations used in the meetings types and ranked their effectiveness. The most common receptive communication accommodation provided was hearing amplification/speech reading which employees ranked as the least effective within meeting environments with multiple speakers. The least common receptive communication accommodations provided was a remote sign language interpreter which employees ranked as an effective accommodation. Employees ranked real-time transcription as the most effective receptive communication accommodation. However, this accommodation was only arranged 50% of the time. The next highest effectiveness ranking was having an interpreter present in the meeting, which was provided to employees around 49% of the time. As for expressive communication accommodations the most common means of accommodations provided was for the deaf or hard of hearing person to express themselves with their own voice, which they ranked as one of the top two most effective with the highest effective ranking being having a sign language interpreter present at the meeting. The research shows discrepancy between the provided accommodations and that in which employees state are effective means of

communication. This suggests communication barriers are common within meetings with multiple speakers.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT BARRIERS

A person with hearing loss is at risk of language delay which often results in difficulties with primary and secondary academics (Lederberg, Schick, & Spencer, 2013). Educational attainment for deaf and hard of hearing individuals has not increased in levels compared to the hearing population (Rydberg, Gellerstedt, & Danermark, 2009). Lack of education substantially limits opportunity for employment and chance of advancement within current occupational settings for deaf and hard of hearing workers. Additionally, education has been linked to the ability to live independently. This information is important because educational attainment narrows employment disparity. Educational attainment is a substantial barrier as validated in the following review of literature.

Gaps are evident across varying aspects when comparing deaf and hard of hearing populations to populations of people with normal hearing. A report developed by the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes (2019), described educational attainment outcomes of the deaf and hard of hearing population within the United States. Across all key findings in the research there were large gaps between deaf and hard of hearing compared to hearing people. Data was reported from the 2017 American Community Survey conducted by the United States Census Bureau. In 2017, there was an educational gap of 5.7% with 83.7% of deaf adults and 89.4% of hearing adults in the United States whom had graduated high school. Only 27.7% of adults have completed an associate's degree, 18.8% of adults with hearing loss have completed a bachelor's degree, 6.6% have completed a master's degree, and .6% have completed a doctoral degree. When compared to hearing adults in the United States there is significant inequality

between the two groups with educational gaps of 15.6% of people completing an associate's degree. Attainment gaps in education follow the same trend regardless of age as they are consistent across age groups showing no discrepancy. In general, the research showed that all ethnicities had lower education rates across race and ethnicity than hearing adults.

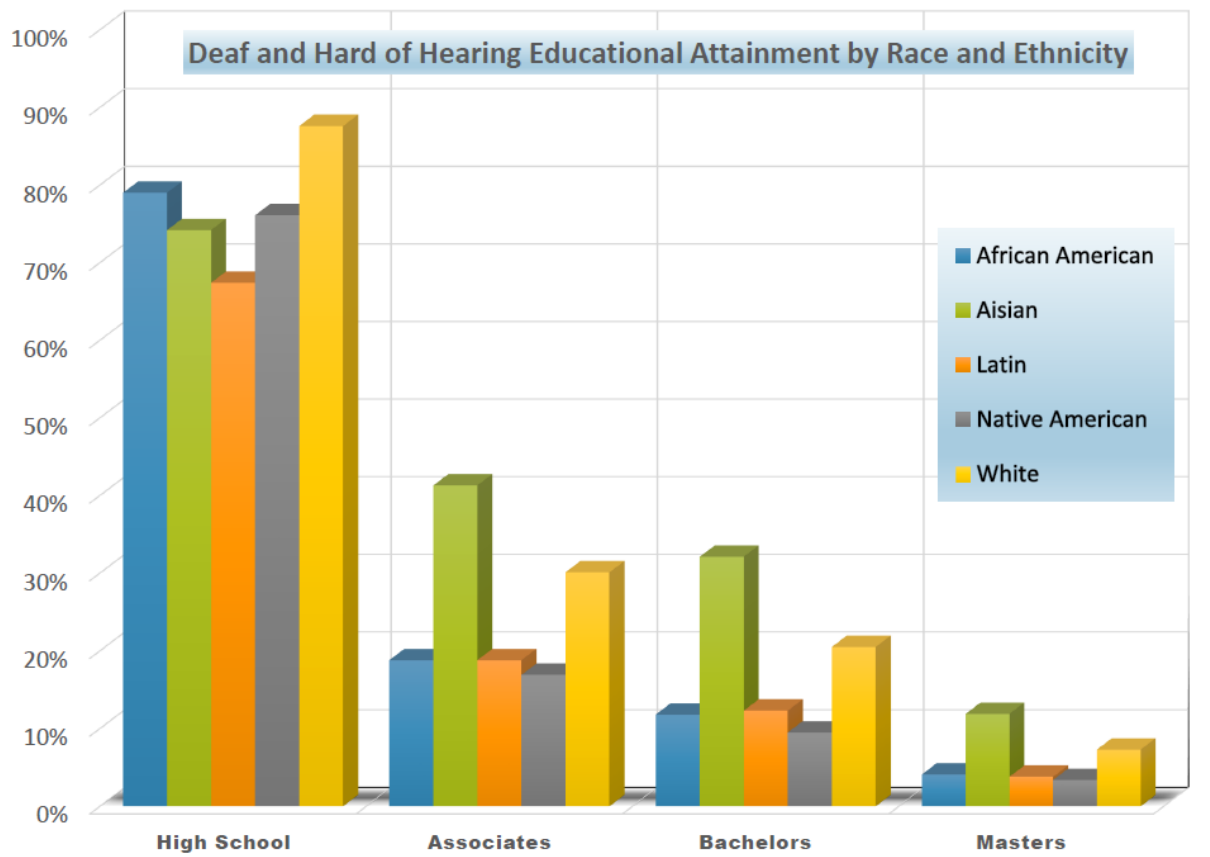


Figure 1. Educational attainment by race and ethnicity

A previously dated quantitative study conducted by Blanchfield, Feldman, Dunbar, & Gardner (2001), utilized three nationally representative datasets to determine the population calculations. From their research it was concluded that 44.4% of deaf individuals of the United States Population did not obtain a high school diploma. Compared to the hearing population resulting in 18.7% of the population did not graduate from high school. The authors further researched postsecondary outcomes of deaf and hard of hearing persons. Of the deaf and hard of

hearing population 5.1% graduated from college whereas 12.8% of the hearing sample graduated from college. The percentages decreased further to 4.8% of the deaf and hard of hearing sample obtaining or continuing with post college professional education. Adversely there was an increase within the hearing population resulting in 9.2% continuing education post college graduation.

ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS

Substantial research has been focused on the attitudes and perspectives towards people with disabilities. Yet, there is a shortfall of literature on attitudinal barriers in employment of deaf and hard of hearing employees. Attitudinal barriers have been described as the most basic barrier but most difficult barrier to remove because attitudinal behaviors are due to the beliefs of the characteristics held by others towards an individual or group. (Sahu & Sahu, 2015). It was stated in a case study, “It’s about how people perceive and treat the disabled as a bother, an eyesore, something less than a person” (Quinton, 2014). Employers often do not recognize the needs of deaf and hard of hearing workers as they have formed attitudinal beliefs of them (Hetu & Getty, 1993).

Hasanbegovic & Kovacevic (2018), conducted a mixed methods study using qualitative and quantitative research to assess the discrimination against deaf and hard of hearing workers at the workplace. Interview methods were used to examine three groups (N = 171) randomly selected within the categories of deafness (n = 57), co-workers with hearing (n = 57), and managers (n = 57). Interviews consisted of 15 questions. Deaf workers were provided a sign language interpreter. The data suggested that 64.9% of deaf and hard of hearing workers believe that they do not have an equivalent position with hearing workers 60% of workers who can hear, and 56% of managers also agreed with this statement. All three groups suggested discrimination

against deaf and hard of hearing workers was present. Workers who could hear 47% and managers 46% supported the statement, “To always prefer to hire people who are deaf if they have developed verbal speech.” Additional attitudinal biases were evident when asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “Managers are interested in a good worker, regardless of whether he is deaf or not,” 87% of all three groups disagreed with this statement (Hasanbegovic & Kovacevic, 2018). The research also supported the idea that hearing workers 97% and managers 93% underestimate the work of deaf and hard of hearing workers as they disagreed with the statement that workers with hearing impairment are capable of doing the same work as hearing workers. From the research it can be concluded that attitudinal barriers were present within the context of this study.

Another study on employer attitudes towards employing disabled workers by Woodley Metzger (2012), sought to determine the qualities employers look for in prospective employees. This research surveyed 106 employers about their attitudes and what they perceived their staff and customers attitudes towards workers with disabilities. While this research focused on broad categories of disabilities there was analysis specific to deaf and hard of hearing populations. For the purpose of this literature review the writings will target deaf and hard of hearing workers.

Research began by asking employers questions about their life experience with persons with disabilities. Of the 106 employers 9% classified themselves as disabled, 63% had an immediate or extended family member, friend or colleague with a disability in their life. Employers were asked how likely they were to employ a person who is deaf or hard of hearing. Resulting in 41% saying they were less likely to hire them. Most deaf and hard of hearing individuals also have a speech impairment due to their hearing loss, which 60% of employers were less likely to hire a person with a moderate to high speech impairment. Consequently, 11%

of employers felt that a person with hearing loss would not be capable of working even. With adaptive technology such as a videophone or a sound amplified telephone deaf and hard of hearing persons are capable of communicating on the phone. However, the research indicated that some managers believed that deaf and hard of hearing workers were unqualified for positions requiring them to use the phone because they were unlikely to be able to do the work. When asked if a deaf or hard of hearing person had the right skills and qualities, how likely were they to employ. Managers reported there were not likely to employ 15%, 26% were less likely than if they not disabled, 45% were just as likely as if they were not disabled and as previously mentioned 11% said regardless of skill or quality they believed they couldn't do the work. Managers were asked about staff comfortability working alongside a person who is deaf or hard of hearing and individuals with a speech impairment. 21% reported belief that staff would not be comfortable working with a person with a hearing loss. While analysis resulted in 32% would be uncomfortable working with a person with speech difficulties. Additionally, employers felt that their customers and clients would not be comfortable being assisted by a person who is deaf or hard of hearing 42% and 53% when dealing with an employee with a speech impairment.

ENVIRONMENTAL BARRIERS

Deaf and hard of hearing employees use their workspace differently than workers with normal hearing. Physical barriers can obstruct the workspace preventing deaf and hard of hearing workers from being effective within the workplace. Environmental barriers include all the elements in a person's environment that, due to their absence or presence, limit functioning and impede access (Giraldo-Rodríguez, Mino-León, Murillo-González, & Agudelo-Botero, 2019). Environmental barriers and hearing loss prevent deaf and hard of hearing workers from fully participating in work functions (Stiles, 2013).

A publication by Stika (2011), discussed barriers faced by deaf and hard of hearing workers across a broad spectrum of employment from the interview process to removing barriers within a performance appraisal. The article discussed common accommodations that even though might seem simple in method will make a big difference in access to the workplace. The application can cause issues for some individuals. They may need assistance with unfamiliar terms inhibiting them from accurately completing the application process. Allowing a deaf person to take the application to clarify language having it translated into sign language, or allowing additional time to complete the application remove such language barriers. During the interview supervisors should be sensitive to different types of communication requests and language preferences. Applicants can request a sign language interpreter, speech to text services, or ask the person interviewing to wear a microphone that will transmit amplification of the person's voice to their hearing aids. Stika (2011), stated some simple accommodations to think about during interviews:

Simple accommodations may include conducting the interview in a quiet, well-lit environment with minimal visual or auditory distractions. The interviewer must be willing to use the interviewee's assistive listening device (such as a portable microphone), if one is used. Talk at a normal pace and at a normal volume. If asked, be willing to converse at a different pace or volume, or to try other strategies like note-writing. If asked to repeat a question or comment, do so. If the interviewee asks for a second repetition, it is usually not helpful to repeat the exact same words or phrases yet again; instead, rephrase the question or comment in other words. Avoid sitting in front of bright lights, windows, or other sources of glare, which make it difficult to see the face and thus to speech-read (p. 8).

Once an applicant is selected they then are expected to attend orientation or training to acclimate to the job duties. Training tools such as videos are commonly used. Inaccessible training videos are one of the most common barriers encountered by deaf and hard of hearing workers. Employers should ensure that all training materials are closed captioned or subtitled. Other environmental modifications such as adequately lighted office areas without glare that

could obstruct communication are simple fixes. An employer might consider placing a deaf or hard of hearing worker in an area that is quiet so that communication can easily happen without the obstruction of environmental noise. Fire alarms should be equipped with flashing lights so that sound-based safety systems are made visual. Another common physical barrier encountered is telecommunication systems which are designed for persons whom can hear. Ensure availability of a video phone for deaf and hard of hearing employees with visual alerts such as a flashing light to facilitate telephone communications. Employers can consider email and text messaging, as an alternative for office communication. Lempka (2019), discussed arranging furniture to help an employee who is deaf or hard of hearing feel at ease so that they can be more aware of their surroundings. Lastly, Stika (2011), examined performance appraisals are based on written review of an employee's job performance. Extra time to read the appraisal, providing interpreters, speech to text or assistive listening devices, or other visual communications will ensure barrier free communications.

EXPENDITURE BARRIERS

Frequently employers perceive the costs of providing disability accommodations to be exorbitant (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011). Employers should not assume that all hard of hearing employees will require an accommodation or even the same accommodation. Depending on the type and frequency of the accommodation there are potential costs associated with implementation of accommodations. From 2004 to 2019 the Job Accommodation Network (2019,) 2,744 employers to examine the average costs of workplace accommodations. The survey results showed that most employers (58%) reported that the accommodations implemented required no expense to the organization. In the previous sections the review of literature substantiated this statement. Accommodations such as wearing a microphone to an

assistive listening device, providing an employee with additional time to review their performance appraisal, moving to an environment with limited environmental noise, or rearranging an office to provide uninhibited communication are all no costs solutions. The survey found that the remaining 42% of employers reported that accommodations had a typical cost of \$500 to fulfill. In certain accommodation requests, state vocational rehabilitation agencies or disability organizations provide employers assistance with expense in accommodations resulting in little or no cost to the employer. Some states offer incentives to hire employees with disabilities and there are tax credits and deductions through the Internal Revenue Service. There are also federal tax credits and deductions to help offset the cost of accommodations.

CHAPTER 3

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

SUMMARY

Individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing face numerous occupational barriers related to the attainment and retention of employment. As the review of literature presented, barriers are not limited to one area of employment. This literature explains deaf and hard of hearing workers are impacted through multiple faucets of employment such as communication, educational, attitudinal, environmental, and expenditure barriers. These barriers are widespread and negatively influence the attainment and retention on employability. The literature suggests examination of barriers are essential to determine consequential interventions.

The literature showed that deaf and hard of hearing employees are at a disadvantage from their hearing peers. Across all key findings in the research showed large gaps between deaf and hard of hearing employees due to substantial barriers. The deaf and hard of hearing population are not afforded the same opportunity to educational attainment resulting in less opportunity to employability. Lack of educational opportunity substantially inhibits attaining employment and opportunity for advancement.

The research revealed that employers lacked the knowledge needed to reasonably provide appropriate accommodations or workplace modifications as most employers perceive accommodations to be disproportionately expensive. The literature also discussed employers' attitudes and perceptions construed with beliefs uncharacteristically portrayed by the deaf and hard of hearing population. The lack of understanding resulted in workplace accommodations that were ineffective for deaf and hard of hearing employees. Employers lacked exposure of adequate experience with people with hearing loss in order to implement effective means of

communication. The literature further revealed management misinterpreted lack of response by the deaf and hard of hearing employees in request for different accommodations to imply satisfaction with their existing accommodations.

CONCLUSION

The major findings indicate that significant occupational barriers are reported by individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. These barriers substantially impact the attainment and retention of employment for this population. The most basic barrier continuing to exist amongst people with disabilities is the lack of knowledge and understanding towards this population. Even after passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the research revealed the prevalence of debilitating effects of attitudinal barriers towards people with hearing loss. The outcome is that more awareness is required towards the resolution of reducing stigmatization and personal bias with regard to deaf and hard of hearing employees. It is only through such action of understanding will the employment gap decrease between deaf and hard of hearing compared to hearing employees.

RECOMMENDATION

The results of the study facilitate understanding of workplace barriers encountered by deaf and hard of hearing populations. Additional research is needed to gain a more solid understanding of transitional services available to this population. Administrators are advised to consider the barriers identified in the study when assisting deaf and hard of hearing employees while considering that accommodations are individualized and should not be prescribed. It is to be acknowledged that it is not possible to address all the service needs within this overview. Employers should always first consult with the deaf or hard of hearing employee to determine reasonable accommodations. This dialogue must be an ongoing interactive process to ensure

access.

Employers would benefit from implementation of disability awareness trainings with focus on workplace accommodations for deaf and hard of hearing employees. Training is essential for the reason that deaf and hard of hearing individuals are a substantial part of our population with anticipation of increased numbers within the population. Instituting disability awareness would better equip administrators to provide equitable occupational access to deaf and hard of hearing employees. Consequently, contributing to a society of inclusivity while eradicating personal biases, removing stigmas, and aiding in the attainment and retention of deaf and hard of hearing employees.

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VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Lottie J. Smith

Lottiesmith03@gmail.com

University of Arizona
Bachelor of Science, Special Education and Rehabilitation, December 2002

Research Paper Title:
Overcoming Barriers to Assist Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals to Obtain
Employment Outcomes

Major Professor: Thomas Upton