

Stigma Associated with Invisible Disabilities and Its Effect on Intended Disclosure in the Workplace

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Abstract : Disability discrimination is a long-standing issue that, despite protections, continues to result in unemployment, underemployment, and lack of advancement for disabled persons. Visible stigma is researched substantially; however, less is known about the impact of stigma associated with identities that can be concealed. Although researchers have investigated this issue, currently there is no tool to measure this phenomenon. The purpose of this quantitative study was to create and validate a new tool to measure stigma associated with invisible disabilities. The study is grounded by Roberts' conceptual model of professional image construction integrating social identity, impression management, and organizational behavior; Meisenbach's stigma management communication theory addressing the vulnerabilities and resilience to stigma communication by focusing on how individuals encounter and react to perceived stigmas; and Kelley and Michela's causal attribution theory. Participants included 1,412 adults in the United States 18 years or older currently employed or who have been employed within the last 5 years. Confirmatory factor analysis of the new Workplace Invisible Disabilities Experience scale showed excellent fit of the factor structure to the data, $\chi^2/df = 1.855$, CFI = .955, RMSEA = .045, $p = .0001$. The scale has three subscales, Ableism, Advocacy, and Acceptance, with excellent internal consistency reliability. Total score, Advocacy, and Acceptance were associated with intention to disclose. Implications for positive social change include helping organizations to understand the extent of invisible disability stigma that can help improve workplace performance and satisfaction.

Keywords : invisible disabilities, accommodations, acceptance, social change, workplace inclusion

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