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Expectations management; employer perspectives on opportunities for improved employment of persons with mental disabilities in Kenya*

Ikenna D. Ebuenyi^{a,b} , Alida J. van der Ham^a, Joske F. G. Bunders-Aelen^a  and Barbara J. Regeer^a 

^aAthena Institute, Amsterdam Public Health Research Institute, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; ^bISGlobal Hospital Clínic - Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

ABSTRACT

Purpose: In Kenya, the employment rate for persons with disabilities is about 1% compared to 73.8% for the general population, and the situation is even worse for persons with mental disabilities. Persons with mental disabilities are often regarded as “mad”, and stand little or no chance of employment. We undertook an exploratory study with employers and potential employers to understand factors that hinder or facilitate their employment and to gain insight into employers’ perceptions of mental disability.

Materials and methods: We adopted a mixed method study design, including in-depth interviews ($n = 10$) and questionnaires ($n = 158$) with (potential) employers in Kenya to explore the barriers and facilitators of employment for persons with mental disabilities.

Results: Out of the 158 employers who completed the questionnaire, only 15.4% had ever employed persons with mental disabilities. The perceptions that these persons are not productive and may be violent was associated with an unwillingness to employ them (OR: 10.11, 95%CI: 2.87–35.59 and OR: 3.6, 95%CI: 1.34–9.64, respectively). The possession of skills was the highest reported facilitator of employing persons with mental disabilities. Employers suggested that information about mental illness and the disclosure by prospective employees with mental disabilities are relevant for the provision of reasonable accommodation in the workplace.

Conclusion: Possession of skills and disclosure by persons with mental disabilities could improve their employability. Information targeted at all actors including employers, employees, government, and policy-makers is necessary for balancing employers and employees expectations.

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► IMPLICATIONS FOR REHABILITATION

- Disabled persons’ organisations or mental disability programs that seek to improve the employment of persons with mental disabilities should incorporate methods that address employer expectations through dialogue to find mutual benefits.
- Employers require essential information about mental illness, and guidance and support in order to provide reasonable accommodation in the workplace for persons with mental disabilities.
- Disabled persons’ organisations and inclusive employment programs should share the positive experiences of employers of persons with mental disabilities with employers who are unaware of the work abilities of persons with mental disabilities to stimulate adoption of inclusive practices.

Introduction

There are often fewer employment opportunities for persons with disabilities than for the general population, and the situation is even worse for persons with mental disabilities [1,2]. In Kenya, employment rate for persons with disabilities is about 1% [3] compared to 73.8% for the general population [4]. In the United States, about 70–90% of persons with mental disabilities are unemployed [5], while in Europe, employment rate for this group is about 30% [6]. Both common and severe mental illness are known causes of disability worldwide, and affected individuals experience significant employment difficulties [7,8]. Hence, in this study, persons with mental or psychosocial disabilities refers to individuals with common or severe mental illness that affects their

social or occupational functioning [9,10]. In low-income countries such as Kenya, the prospects of employment for persons with mental disabilities are especially poor. A report by Users of Psychiatry Kenya indicated high rates of unemployment among its members and overdependence on family caregivers for sustenance [10]. Similarly, the Pan African Network of People with Psychosocial Disabilities reported a scarcity of formal employment for persons with psychosocial disabilities on account of stigma and discrimination [11]. These reports are supported by the initial observations of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which stated that in Kenya, only 1% of persons with disabilities are employed [3]. It is pertinent to note that employment in low- and middle-income countries is largely in the informal sector, such as self-employment, family business, small

CONTACT Ikenna D Ebuenyi  i.d.ebuenyi@vu.nl  Athena Institute, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, De Boelelaan 1085, 1081HV Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

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privately owned businesses, especially for persons with low skills [12,13]. Hence, in addition to the stigma against mental illness, the structure of the labour market may also be responsible for the challenges of employment for persons with mental disabilities.

To enhance the employment of people with a disability, national and international policies such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) mandate employers to offer reasonable accommodation in the employment of a person with a disability [14]. In its article 27, the UNCRPD urged the recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities to work without discrimination and for the provision of reasonable accommodation in the work environment. This approach to disability is captured in the UNCRPD thus: "recognising that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal, and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." [14] For many employers, this creates a dilemma between fulfilling the requirements of reasonable accommodation for persons with mental disabilities on the one hand and ensuring productivity and profit on the other [15]. A multi-country exploratory survey in Europe revealed the willingness of employers to improve inclusion in the workplace and their need for specialist assistance to provide accommodation in the workplace for persons with mental disabilities [16]. However, a review by Khalema and Shankar suggested that globally, the majority of employers are unwilling to employ persons with severe mental illness on account of their perceived poor work ability [17]. According to Krupa et al. there are many myths about the work ability of persons with a mental illness. They include the perception that persons with a mental illness are unproductive or violent, and may be a liability [18]. These beliefs constitute a limitation to their employment opportunities and foreclose their participation in economic activities [17,18].

In a bid to elaborate on processes to ensure that the desires and expectations of employers and employees are met, researchers have proposed several methods to include and integrate persons with mental disabilities in the workplace. For instance, in a randomised clinical trial conducted in several European countries, Burns and colleagues demonstrated that individual placement and support were useful for the vocational rehabilitation of persons with a severe mental illness [19]. This approach has been successfully tested in the UK and several other high-income countries. In mainland China, Zhang et al. showed in a randomised clinical trial that integrated, supported employment was useful in enhancing employment for persons with schizophrenia [20]. In the Netherlands, the inclusive redesign of work processes was found to be effective in creating work opportunities for persons with disabilities [21]. It is pertinent to add that the work support needs of persons with mental illness may depend on the condition but most importantly on the specific individual [15]. In all these processes, the cooperation and acceptance of the employer and information for employers about mental disabilities were shown to be significant for the successful inclusion of persons with mental disabilities in the workplace [20,21]. However, studies showed that employers would employ only those they deemed fit [16,22,23]. Although quota systems for employing persons with disabilities have been used to boost employment in high-income countries, their usefulness appears limited in low- and middle-income countries due to weak legislative implementation and a predominantly informal workforce [12,24]. In addition, it has been suggested that the quota system may reduce employer behaviour to a mere effort

to complete a checklist rather than the adoption of an inclusive work environment [25].

To date, few studies in low- and middle-income countries have addressed employer perceptions with respect to the employment of persons with mental disabilities [13,26]. It is also pertinent to note that few methods for enhancing the employment of persons with mental disabilities have been tried in Africa [19,20]. A scoping review on barriers to and facilitators of employment for persons with mental disabilities in Africa, reported three methods or facilitators of employment namely, self-employment, participation in cooperative income generation groups and supported employment services [13].

Therefore, we undertook an exploratory study with (potential) employers in Kenya to understand under what conditions they might employ persons with mental disabilities. Hence, we sought to: (a) gain insight into employers' perceptions of mental disability; (b) explore the factors that prevented or may prevent them employing persons with mental disabilities, and (c) understand factors that facilitated or might facilitate their employment of persons with mental disabilities. Bridging the knowledge gap on how to encourage employers to take on their role in realising the equal employment of people with a disability may be useful in reducing the high rates of unemployment amongst persons with mental disabilities.

Methods

Study design, population, and setting

We adopted an exploratory, mixed method study design, using a sequential design [27] involving the collection of qualitative data through interviews in the first phase which we used to design the quantitative instrument (questionnaire) for the second phase. The target population consisted of employers in and around Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.

Sampling

The employers for the qualitative interviews were purposively selected through referral by persons with mental disabilities who were employed and through employer networks in Kenya and recommendations of disabled persons' organisations in Kenya. The employers were sampled based on being the business owners or having direct influence over the employment process in their organisations. Employers and potential employers were sampled from rural and urban employment settings in and around Nairobi. A total of 200 employers were invited to complete the questionnaire, and 158 (79%) employers agreed to participate in the study. The questionnaires were paper based and delivered by the research assistants who waited for the employers to complete it or came back to collect it depending on the employer's preference.

Data collection

The qualitative study aimed to explore the diversity of employer perspectives related to persons with mental disabilities. We conducted ten in-depth interviews with employers. The qualitative interviews were conducted by the IDE and a master student after the provision of study information. Consent was obtained before every interview. The interviews were semi-structured and covered their perception of mental disability, perceived barriers and perceived facilitators for the employment of persons with mental disabilities. The interviews lasted

between 30 and 60 min, were recorded with an audio-recorder, and were transcribed verbatim. Data saturation was achieved when no additional information was obtained from the interviews [28].

The quantitative study was conducted to explore the factors associated with (non)employment of persons with a mental disability further in a larger sample of employers. Findings from the qualitative study were utilised in the design of the questionnaire. The questionnaire captured the socio-demographic characteristics of the employers and covered: (a) their perception of mental disability, (b) factors that prevented or might prevent the employment of persons with mental disabilities, and (c) factors that facilitated or might facilitate the employment of persons with mental disabilities. The questionnaire was pretested on ten employers randomly selected by the researchers. The questionnaires were self-administered in English or Swahili, the official languages in Kenya.

Data analysis and integration

The interviews were thematically analysed using Atlas.ti version 7.5.18 [29] with a descriptive open coding strategy. This was done independently by IDE, AJH, and BJR, and the final codes and sub-codes were agreed upon by the researchers. The quantitative data was checked, cleaned and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS window version 23, Chicago, IL) for analysis. Three levels of statistical analysis were conducted: descriptive statistics, bivariate and multivariate logistic regression. Exploratory data analysis techniques were used to uncover the distribution structure of the study variables as well as identify outliers or unusually entered values. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the general distribution of the hypothesised factors and outcomes through means, standard deviations, and range for continuous variables or proportions for categorical variables. Missing values were only reported in the descriptive statistics but were not included in subsequent analysis. Bivariate association between employers and non-employers of persons with mental disabilities and their characteristics (socio-demographics, knowledge, and perception) was estimated using logistic regression models. To select for potential confounding factors, variables with a p values less than 0.2 were entered into the multivariate logistic regression models using the forward method. All tests were two-sided, and statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. All of the analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS version 23.

Integration of qualitative and quantitative data was ensured throughout the study by an iterative analysis process involving all the authors. Results were organised according to the main themes guiding this research: (a) employers' perceptions of mental disability, (b) factors preventing the employment of persons with mental disabilities, and (c) factors facilitating the employment of persons with mental disabilities. In addition, a theme emerged from data on factors related to job tenure. For each of the main themes, several sub-themes were identified.

Ethics

Approval for the study design was granted by Amsterdam Public Health (WC2017-011) and Maseno University Ethics Review Committee (MSU/DRPI/MUERC/00391/17). Informed consent was obtained from all study participants.

Results

Characteristics of study population

The interviewed employers included 7 men and 3 women. The employment sectors included hotels, the food industry, public organisations, non-governmental organisations, and the construction industry. Of the ten employers interviewed, only 2 had knowingly offered employment to persons with mental disabilities. Two other employers who reported having persons with mental disabilities in their companies reported that their illness was identified after they had taken up employment, while the other employers declared they had never employed or worked with persons with a mental disability.

The sociodemographic characteristics of the 158 employers who participated in the questionnaire are shown in Table 1. Slightly more than half (58.3%) of the employers were female. Nearly half (49.4%) was aged between 31 and 40 years, with a median (interquartile range) age of 34 (21–69) years. The overall prevalence of employers who had ever employed persons with a mental disability was 15.4%, while 29.3% of employers had employed persons with other types of disabilities.

Perceptions of mental disabilities

Employers' perceptions of mental disability can be assigned to four categories: (1) general typology and terminology, (2) causes of mental disability, (3) impact on functioning, and (4) general knowledge and attitudes towards people with mental disabilities. These themes emerged from the survey and interview data by analysing employers' responses when asked to define "mental disability".

General typology and terminology

A total of 36% of the responses in the survey provided insight into how employers generally refer to "mental disability".

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents ($N = 158$).

Variable	Category	Distribution $N(\%)$
Gender	Male	65 (41.7)
	Female	91 (58.3)
	Missing	2
Age categories	21–30 years	45 (29.2)
	31–40 years	76 (49.4)
	41–50 years	23 (14.9)
	51 years and above	10 (6.5)
	Missing	4
Age in years	Median (range)	34 (21–69)
Employment sector	Private	153 (96.8)
	Public	5 (3.2)
Think that a person with a mental disability should have equal employment opportunities to the general population?	Yes	98 (63.2)
	No	57 (36.8)
	Missing	3
Ever employed someone with a mental disability in your organization?	Yes	24 (15.4)
	No	132 (84.6)
	Missing	2
Ever employed people with other forms of disability?	Yes	46 (29.3)
	No	111 (70.7)
	Missing	1
Aware of legislation that mandates employers to employ persons with a mental disability?	Yes	34 (21.9)
	No	121 (78.1)
	Missing	3
Would you employ persons with a mental disability if this law is enforced?	Yes	99 (64.7)
	No	54 (35.3)
	Missing	5
Would government support in the form of subsidies encourage you to employ persons with mental disabilities?	Yes	108 (68.8)
	No	49 (31.2)
	Missing	1

"Disorder" was the term that employers used most often, referring to mental disability either as a mental disorder or as a brain disorder (27% of responses in this category). Employers also regularly used the term "condition," which more generally refers to a certain variation in the state of health or well being (21% of responses within this category). They applied this term in phrases such as "natural condition" or "unusual condition." Furthermore, employers often mentioned the term "abnormal/not normal", implying a disruption of normal functioning (17% of answers within this category). Other terms that were used by a few employers were: "illness," "sickness," and "challenged." Some of them also referred to people with mental disabilities as "mad" and "not sound of mind". In the interview with one employer, this terminology was also used:

What really comes into my mind when somebody talks about mental illness, to me I think it's a mad person. (Employer 6, Female, Hotel manager)

In the interviews, some employers also emphasised the "normality" of mental disability:

Most people are mentally challenged. In fact, almost everybody in life is in their own way to some percentage, maybe someone is 10% or 5%, mentally challenged. (Employer 1, Male, Restaurant owner)

Causes of mental disability

When asked to define "mental disability," a total of 29% of all respondents included a reference to the causal mechanisms of disability. The large majority of these responses (74%) referred to problems in the brain in terms of "brain disorder," "brain dysfunction," and "brain problems." Some responses in this category (6%) referred to disability as a psychological problem, pointing to psychosocial mechanisms causing disability. Another theme included some responses (6%) referring to "problems with functioning of the mind." Regarding these answers, it remained unclear how respondents interpreted the concept of "the mind." Another theme included more specific answers explaining that the condition was due to natural causes, either since birth or by accident. The interviewed employers rarely referred to causes of disability when asked to explain how they perceived mental disability.

Impact on functioning

Approximately one-third (35%) of all responses referred to the consequences of mental disability for a person's functioning. Half of them (50%) referred specifically to impaired cognitive functioning regarding thinking, reasoning, and learning abilities. Respondents used phrases such as: "unable to reason rightly," "can't think and make decisions," and "slow to learn or to understand things." Such associations also emerged in the interviews: "this person is not in a position to make a sound decision in most cases" (Employer 1, Male, Restaurant owner). A number of other responses in this category addressed impaired functioning or performance without specifying this further (22%). Some respondents referred to instability in functioning (5%) or that guidance and assistance were needed because of impairments in functioning. Another less frequently mentioned theme involved abnormal behaviour patterns, and respondents described this for example as "does not behave normally" and "acts in a weird way".

General knowledge and attitudes

When asked in the questionnaire about their thoughts on equal employment opportunities between persons with a mental disability and the general population, 62% of the employers

indicated that they think persons with a mental disability should have equal employment opportunities. The interviewed employers also made remarks that gave indications of their general knowledge of and attitudes towards mental disability in society. Some employers mentioned the importance of an inclusive, non-discriminatory approach, explaining that people with mental disabilities should be treated like any other person and should be integrated into society. In addition, approximately half of the interviewees mentioned a general lack of awareness and understanding about mental illness in society. One employer said:

I don't think we have enough awareness, and when people talk about mental disabilities, most people talk of people who are institutionalised in hospitals. (Employer 6, Female, Hotel manager)

Several employers also mentioned the stigma attached to mental disabilities and explained that this causes people not to talk about the topic or to avoid people suffering from mental disabilities and their families.

Yeah, so there is a real stigma for mental issues, people don't like anything to do with that, it's too unpredictable, people don't understand it. (Employer 9, Female, Law firm HRM manager)

Barriers to employing persons with a mental disability

Employers reported various barriers to employing persons with a mental disability. They include: reduced productivity, fear or worries related to violence, the recurrent nature of the psychiatric illness, and attitude of others.

Reduced productivity

Most employers need employees who are capable of meeting their expectations in terms of productivity, and they believe that persons with a mental illness may be unable to meet those expectations. Employers expect the best from employees, and the employees' ability to perform on the job or meet job expectations determines if they are hired or retained.

By the time you are engaging someone, it's really like buying something; it's just that now you are buying services of someone. It's about them being able to perform the work they are really hired to do. (Employer 7, Male, Chain store manager)

While some employers considered reduced productivity to be a major barrier to employing persons with mental disabilities, others were concerned that they may be violent in the workplace on account of their illness.

Fear of violence and safety

The fear of mental illness and the perception that persons with mental disabilities are likely to be violent was reported by the employers as a major limitation to their employing persons with mental disabilities. The employers were not just worried about violence, they were also unsure of how to handle it in the workplace. This fear was expressed by one of the employers as follows:

I think one of the fears is, what if this person gets violent, what do we do? How do we restrain them, who do we call? Or, what action should be taken within the office to assist this person? (Employer 4, Male, Microfinance manager)

Some other employers revealed through their fears the underlying (mis)understanding about mental illness and the myths about violence of persons with a mental illness. This was aptly captured in the following words:

You never know, anything can happen, things keep on changing with them, he can even get himself in the cooker; so you see I am not

Table 2. Individual factors associated with unwillingness of employers to employ persons with a mental disability.

Variable	Category	Total n(%)	Factors that stopped or might stop employers from employing persons with mental disabilities		OR (95% CI)
			Non-employers of persons with mental disabilities		
			Yes n(%)	No n(%)	
The recurring psychiatric illness	Yes	48 (30.8%)	40 (30.3%)	8 (33.3%)	0.87 (0.34–2.20)
	No	108 (69.2%)	92 (69.7%)	16 (66.7%)	Ref.
Fear of violence and safety	Yes	78 (50.0%)	72 (54.5%)	6 (25.0%)	3.60 (1.34–9.64)
	No	78 (50.0%)	60 (45.5%)	18 (75.0%)	Ref.
They are not productive	Yes	81 (51.9%)	78 (59.1%)	3 (12.5%)	10.11 (2.87–35.59)
	No	75 (48.1%)	54 (40.9%)	21 (87.5%)	Ref.
On account of what other workers may say	Yes	8 (5.1%)	7 (5.3%)	1 (4.2%)	1.29 (0.15–10.97)
	No	148 (94.9%)	125 (94.7%)	23 (95.8%)	Ref.
Others	Yes	10 (6.4%)	7 (5.3%)	3 (12.5%)	0.39 (0.09–1.64)
	No	146 (93.6%)	125 (94.7%)	21 (87.5%)	Ref.

Ref: Reference category; OR: Odds Ratio; CI: Confidence interval.

discriminating against them, but those are my concerns. (Employer 7, Male, Chain store manager)

Attitude of others

For other employers, the job environment and the attitude of co-workers were major limitations to employing persons with a mental disability.

But peers are actually the ones who complain about the inability of these people to handle what they think is normal. [...] Like currently there is someone who is here on such a basis; we are not very sure but there is a lot of laxity, there is a lot of delay in the delivery ... (Employer 1, Male, Restaurant owner)

The attitude of others was not limited to co-workers; the attitude of customers and clients is important as they may stop patronising the business if they discover persons with mental disabilities have been taken on as employees.

...with our industry it is very sensitive. You are likely to lose your clientele because of such. And maybe if you had such a person you would have to have them in the back office. (Employer 6, Female, Hotel manager)

Hence, the expected reaction of clients and co-workers in the job environment was a reported barrier to employing persons with mental disabilities. This was perceived by employers as especially relevant in some job sectors like hotels and supermarkets where the person with a mental disability would be in direct contact with clients as well as co-workers.

Table 2 and present the reasons for not employing persons with a mental disability or factors that might stop employers from employing persons with a mental disability based on the questionnaire. Not being productive (51.9%) and fear of violence and safety (50.0%) were the main ones, followed by the recurrence of the psychiatric illness (30.8%) (Table 2). "Other reasons" (6.4%) and "on account of what other workers may say" (5.1%) were mentioned least. Fear of violence and safety and non-productivity were the two factors associated with an unwillingness to employ persons with mental disabilities (OR: 3.6, 95%CI: 1.34–9.64 and OR: 10.11, 95%CI: 2.87–35.59, respectively) (Table 2).

Facilitators of employing persons with a mental disability

The reported facilitators of employing persons with a mental disability included familiarity with the affected person/mental illness, skills/qualification of the individual, sympathy or humanity, and availability of incentives for the employers.

Familiarity and skills of the individual

Most employers suggested that the major determinants to their employment decision are familiarity with the person and/or their skills. Of the two employers who had ever knowingly employed persons with a mental disability, the factors that facilitated their action were the skills of the individual and familiarity. One of the respondents who had employed a lady with bipolar disorder declared:

I had a bit of knowledge about her condition. In the interview, there were around six ladies and she was able to beat them because she demonstrated her competence in working with small children. We therefore decided to give her that employment (Employer 3, Male, Public secondary school principal)

Similarly, another employee who had paid the tuition of a young male with bipolar disorder in addition to offering internship employment stated:

The reason I hired him is because I have a condition of my own. Having gone through that frustration gave me the understanding or the acceptance for somebody else who may be rejected in another environment. (Employer 2, Male, Architectural firm owner)

Hence, familiarity with the illness or the individual with a mental illness was suggested as a facilitator to employment. This borders on sympathy and the zeal to give back to society, which was also reported by the employers as a facilitator of employing persons with a mental disability. This is also linked to humanity, which the employers regarded as a facilitator to employing persons with mental disabilities.

Sympathy/humanity

The desire to "touch lives" is also related to the decision of some employers to fulfil the corporate social responsibility (CSR) objectives of their organisation. This view was expressed by an employee who reported that to them, hiring an individual with a mental disability was "... more of CSR element than it is full-time employment" (Employer 2, Male, Architectural Firm Owner).

The theme of sympathy was also illustrated by another employer who declared:

I also hire to touch a life. So the existence of any business that you have, if you are not touching lives then you are not doing anything in the society. (Employer 1, Male, Restaurant Owner)

Incentives for employers

Some employers suggested that incentives from the government in the form of grants or tax rebates would facilitate their decision to employ persons with mental disabilities. They suggested that

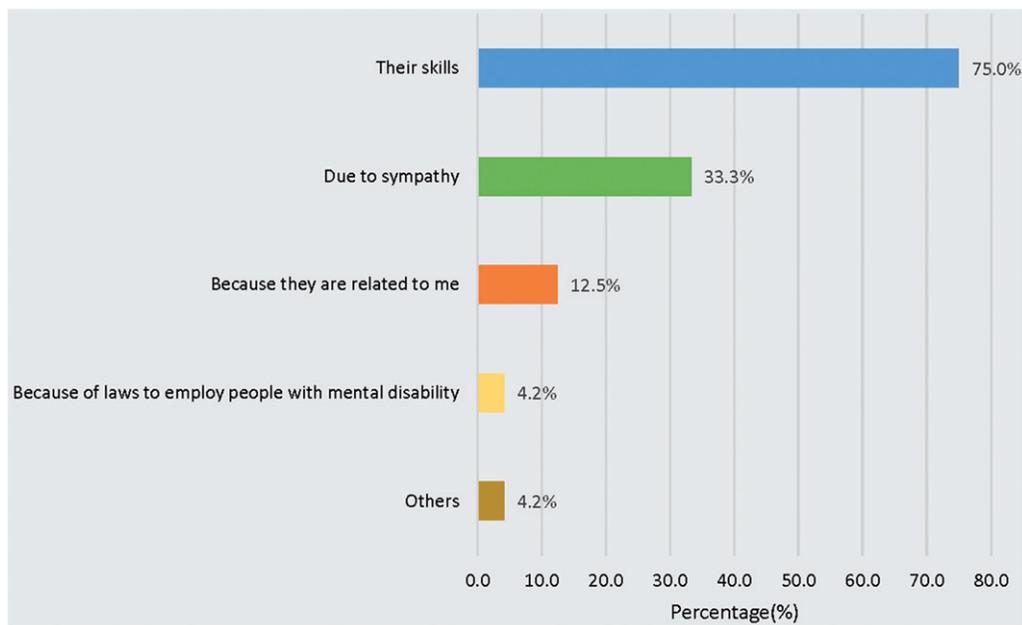


Figure 1. Reasons for employing persons with mental disabilities ($N = 24$).

this would cushion the effect of the accommodations they provide for the individual and the loss in productivity on account of ill health the organisation would bear. This is vividly described by an employer in these words:

Tax rebates would help because then we can use the money to deal with the salary component of our obligation. If we can afford not to link his remuneration to the output, then that would allow us to still retain him in our industry (Employer 2, Male, Architectural firm owner)

Main reasons for employment

The facilitators of employment reported by the employers in the qualitative interviews were strengthened by the quantitative survey, with the recurrence of familiarity with disability, individual skills and incentives being likely facilitators of employing persons with mental disabilities.

Figure 1 presents the results of the questionnaire regarding the main reasons why the employers employed persons with a mental disability. The main reason was because of their skills (75%), followed by sympathy (33.3%), and because they are related to them (12.5%). The categories “because of the laws to employ people with mental disability” and “other reasons” accounted for only 4.2% each.

Table 3 presents the results of the association between socio-demographic, knowledge and perception variables and employers of persons with mental disabilities. We observed an association between employers who think that a person with a mental disability should have equal employment opportunities to the general population and employers of persons with mental disabilities (OR: 4.68, 95%CI: 1.32–16.52). Those who have ever employed persons with other forms of disability had higher odds of employing persons with mental disabilities compared to those who had never done so (OR: 6.80, 95%CI: 2.65–17.43). Employers who have employed persons with mental disabilities also had higher odds of employing persons with a mental disability if the law was enforced by the government (OR: 3.01, 95%CI: 0.97–9.35).

Table 4 shows that, after adjusting for all factors associated with employers of persons with mental disabilities at the bivariate level, employers who have ever employed persons living with other forms of disability had higher odds of employing persons

with mental disabilities compared to those who have never employed them (OR: 5.66, 95%CI: 2.07–15.52). Employers who think that persons with mental disabilities should have equal employment opportunities to the general population and indicated that support in the form of subsidies would encourage them to employ persons with mental disabilities had higher odds of employing persons with mental disabilities compared to those who said no (OR: 3.69, 95%CI: 1.41–9.60).

Job tenure

Factors identified in the interviews regarding job tenure fall into three categories: performance on the job, insurance/guidance, and work adjustments.

Performance on the job

Several employers emphasised the importance of job performance as “performance is key” (Employer 4, Male, Microfinance manager). They want to see that someone is functioning normally and able to deliver.

We are a performance-driven organization, and for us what really matters is, are you able to deliver on what you have set out to do or what you’ve been given as your deliverables in a certain period. (Employer 9, Female, Law firm HRM manager)

However, a larger number of employers mentioned adjusting their expectations of the performance of people with a mental disability. They either had lower expectations or only expected them to perform well for aspects they were competent in. In order to be able to adjust their expectations, employers generally advised that people disclose their mental illness to them.

One employer mentioned the unpredictability of people’s performance and possible inability to perform as aspects that could lead to dismissal. Another employer specifically mentioned that an inability to perform or continued periods of absence would be a reason to terminate employment.

Insurance and guidance

Another category of factors entails remarks made by employers about dealing with liabilities they perceived due to employing

Table 3. Individual factors associated with employers of persons with a mental disability.

Variable	Category	Total n(%)	Employers of persons with mental disabilities		OR (95% CI)
			No n(%)	Yes n(%)	
Gender	Male	64 (41.6%)	53 (40.5%)	11 (47.8%)	1.35 (0.55–3.28)
	Female	90 (58.4%)	78 (59.5%)	12 (52.2%)	Ref.
Age category	21–30 years	45 (29.6%)	38 (29.7%)	7 (29.2%)	0.74 (0.13–4.23)
	31–40 years	74 (48.7%)	61 (47.7%)	13 (54.2%)	0.85 (0.16–4.49)
	41–50 years	23 (15.1%)	21 (16.4%)	2 (8.3%)	0.38 (0.05–3.18)
	51 and above	10 (6.6%)	8 (6.3%)	2 (8.3%)	Ref.
Employment sector	Private	151 (96.8%)	128 (97.0%)	23 (95.8%)	0.72 (0.08–6.72)
	Public	5 (3.2%)	4 (3.0%)	1 (4.2%)	Ref.
Think that a person with a mental disability should have equal employment opportunities to the general population?	Yes	97 (63.0%)	77 (58.8%)	20 (87.0%)	4.68 (1.32–16.52)
	No	57 (37.0%)	54 (41.2%)	3 (13.0%)	Ref.
Ever employed people with other forms of disability?	Yes	46 (29.5%)	30 (22.7%)	16 (66.7%)	6.80 (2.65–17.43)
	No	110 (70.5%)	102 (77.3%)	8 (33.3%)	Ref.
Aware of legislation that mandates employers to employ persons with a mental disability?	Yes	33 (21.4%)	25 (19.2%)	8 (33.3%)	2.10 (0.81–5.45)
	No	121 (78.6%)	105 (80.8%)	16 (66.7%)	Ref.
Would you employ persons with a mental disability if this law is enforced?	Yes	98 (64.5%)	79 (61.2%)	19 (82.6%)	3.01 (0.97–9.35)
	No	54 (35.5%)	50 (38.8%)	4 (17.4%)	Ref.
Would government support in the form of subsidies encourage you to employ persons with mental disabilities?	Yes	107 (68.6%)	88 (66.7%)	19 (79.2%)	1.90 (0.67–5.43)
	No	49 (31.4%)	44 (33.3%)	5 (20.8%)	Ref.

Ref: Reference category; OR: Odds Ratio; CI: Confidence interval.

Table 4. Multivariate analysis of factors associated with potential employers of persons with mental disability.

Variable	Category	N (%)	AOR (95% CI)
Factors associated with employers of persons with a mental disability			
Think that a person with a mental disability should have equal employment opportunities to the general population?	Yes	97 (63.0%)	3.62 (0.94–14.02)
	No	57 (37.0%)	Ref.
Ever employed people with other forms of disability?	Yes	46 (29.5%)	5.66 (2.07–15.52)
	No	110 (70.5%)	Ref.
Aware of legislation that mandates employers to employ persons with a mental disability?	Yes	33 (21.4%)	12.9 (0.43–3.92)
	No	121 (78.6%)	Ref.
Would you employ persons with a mental disability if this law is enforced?	Yes	98 (64.5%)	1.85 (0.53–6.43)
	No	54 (35.5%)	Ref.
Factors associated with employers who think persons with a mental disability should have equal employment opportunities to the general population			
Ever employed someone with a mental disability in your organization?	Yes	23 (14.9%)	3.41 (0.89–13.06)
	No	131 (85.1%)	Ref.
Would you employ persons with a mental disability if this law is enforced?	Yes	97 (64.2%)	1.98 (0.77–5.04)
	No	54 (35.8%)	Ref.
Would government support in the form of subsidies encourage you to employ persons with mental disabilities?	Yes	107 (69.0%)	3.69 (1.41–9.60)
	No	48 (31.0%)	Ref.

Ref: Reference category; AOR: Adjusted Odds Ratio; CI: Confidence interval.

someone with a mental disability. Generally, employers wanted an institution or person to fall back on in case of problems during the employment of a person with a mental disability. Several employers explained that it is important for them to have some kind of safe-guard or insurance to cover them for possible losses due to the inability to perform or absence of a person with a mental disability. One employer mentioned already investing in arranging a good insurance for mental disabilities, which can be hard to negotiate:

Most insurance companies will not cover mental illness and when they do the limit is really low, you can't get much out of it. [...] So when we are negotiating for those covers we insist, I insist that it has to come up to at least as high as what they have for other chronic conditions like diabetes or whatever, if not more, and we have achieved that. (Employer 9, Female, Law firm HRM manager)

Some employers said they required guidance or support from medical institutions. They wanted medical professionals to be closely involved during the employment of persons with mental disabilities, for example by guaranteeing their general fitness for work or by ensuring adherence to medication.

They would have to be residing in the institution in such a way that every day before they leave, we are sure that the person is okay, and in

case the person is not able, we even call the employer, that so and so would not able to report [...] and take ownership, takes drugs every day in the morning before they go to work. (Employer 2, Male, Architectural firm owner)

Lastly, one employer mentioned already investing in counseling services for staff in order to prevent the possible drop-out of employees due to a variety of issues:

We have outsourced counseling services to basically help our staff cope with those things like depression, stress, and all those others so that they don't get to the point where they just can't manage it. So we highly encourage our staff to take up counseling services before they break, and that is a service that they take up very well. (Employer 9, Female, Law firm HRM manager)

Work adjustments

Most remarks on job retention referred to aspects at the workplace level. The notion of adjusting tasks and job descriptions to the person with a mental disability was particularly prominent. Persons with a mental disability were often assigned to jobs that are less demanding and had less responsibility or no strict deadlines in order to reduce possible strain. The need for close

supervision at the workplace was mentioned several times. Some employers mentioned assigning only specific tasks they considered safer or that formed less of a risk for the company, for example by not having them involved with customers or keeping them away from potentially dangerous machinery.

And maybe if you had such a person, you would have to have them in the back office because with the hotel you have front office, these are people who are directly involved with guests, and then we have back of office. (Employer 6, Female, Hotel manager)

Another way of adjusting work to a person with a mental disability was by generally allowing them more flexibility in their work schedule or workplace, for example by allowing them to work from different places.

We have flexi arrangements where basically for whatever reason people feel like they would like to either come in a bit earlier or leave early. That is an arrangement that we accommodate within the organization. (Employer 8, Female, NGO HRM manager)

Employers mentioned that disclosure of the mental disability was necessary for them to be able to allow for such flexibility:

The best is to disclose at the beginning to the employers and how to cope, how they are coping with the situation so that from the word go, they are putting these people in their proper categories and not expecting too much of them. (Employer 1, Male, Restaurant owner)

Some stated that they also needed detailed insights into their employee's capabilities in order to be able to adjust tasks to that person's abilities. Lastly, some employers mentioned the importance of creating an open and accepting atmosphere for people with a mental disability. This may involve creating awareness among fellow employees about a person's mental disability:

So as you work with such people, I feel there should be no signs from the employer or the work colleague that try to indicate there is discrimination or simply showing incapacitation of this person because when you show this incapacitation, she is likely now to feel that she doesn't qualify, to her it will also look like you are demeaning her, which will actually interfere with the systems such that she is not able to concentrate and move on as she would wish. (Employer 3, Male, Public secondary school Principal)

Discussion

In this study, we explored the factors that hinder or facilitate employing persons with mental disabilities. Previous studies have mainly focused on the attitude of employers to the employment of persons with mental disabilities [30,31], but our study takes this further to explore the practices of employers and their perception of what may help improve the rate of employment of persons with mental disabilities. We examined the perceptions and experiences of actual employers of persons with mental disabilities to understand their motivations. Although we know from this study and others that employers' perceptions are usually not conducive to employment [32–34], our study revealed some opportunities. It highlighted an incongruence between an employer's belief that persons with a mental disability should enjoy equal employment opportunities to the general population and the actual practice of not hiring those individuals. This difference between perceptions and practice is supported by the recommendations of Shove and colleagues, who state that everyday life and change processes require social practice [35]. In fact, the practice of having employed persons with other forms of disability was the only predictor of employing persons with a mental disability in our study. The practice of this category of employers may have been influenced by experiential knowledge and presents an opportunity for the sensitisation of other employers

without prior experience of having employees with disabilities and mental disabilities. This suggests that facilitating direct contact with employers who hire persons with mental disabilities could be key in striving for equal employment opportunities.

In this study, we noted that personal experience or understanding of mental illness was a unifying factor amongst the employers who had consciously employed persons with a mental disability. The perceptions about mental illness are often dependent on the level of information available to the individual making the assessment. The pivotal role of information is demonstrated in its importance in employment models utilised in high-income countries to stimulate the work integration of persons with mental disabilities [20,21]. Workplace accommodations using supported employment or the inclusive redesign of work are dependent on employer awareness, the health care system, and supportive government policies [20,21]. These are factors that are scarce in Kenya and other low-income settings. However, workplace accommodations involve conscious employer decisions, which are also dependent on certain local or individual factors such as disclosure [36,37]. The employers in our study suggested that workplace accommodations are only possible if persons with mental disabilities disclose their condition because employers may only be able to help if armed with information. However, the disclosure action depends on the individual and may backfire if employers have negative perceptions about mental illness [36]. Hence, some employers in the study suggested that disclosure should be done after the person has been employed and not at the recruitment stage.

Some employers in this study harboured the fear that persons with mental disabilities would be violent or unproductive, and these factors were associated with an unwillingness to hire them. The discrimination exhibited by these employers has been reported in studies that explored the attitude of employers to individuals with mental disabilities [32,34,38]. These negative perceptions about persons with mental disabilities are integral to the employment decision and may explain the request for some form of assurance that persons with a disability are "OK" as a precondition to hiring them, as requested by some employers in this study. The perceptions are also related to the declaration by other employers in this study that persons with mental disabilities should be hired to work "in the back office." However, the idea of limiting the type of jobs available to people with a mental disability might conflict with the right to compete and desired employment, which is a fundamental right of every individual as recommended by both the UNCRPD and the sustainable development goals [14,39].

Our study highlights the obvious lack of information about legislation on inclusive employment. Less than a quarter of the employers was aware of legislation mandating employers to employ persons with mental disabilities, and none of the interviewed employers had ever accessed the government tax rebates available for employers of persons with disabilities in Kenya. This illustrates the usefulness of bridging the policy-practice gap and how the mere presence of good policies may not be sufficient if there are no pathways to their implementation and monitoring [23,40].

Employment of persons with psychiatric disabilities remains a complex social issue with significant rights and economic dimensions [24,41]. The UN global compact suggests that inclusive employment by businesses is a triple win (person with disabilities, businesses, and society) [24]. However, inclusive employment is limited by the stigma of mental illness [42] and the beliefs and myths associated with mental illness [18,22,43]. These perceptions,

when shared by employers, affect the decision to employ persons with mental disabilities [13,17]. Also, there are issues related to the individual, mental illness, and social context that affects the employability of persons with mental disabilities [32,37]. All these factors are influenced by the mental health system, political will, and policies operating in the local context.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend strategies that positively improve the perceptions of employers regarding the employment and return to work of persons with mental disabilities. This may be achieved through dialogue (between employers and disability organisations) and reconstruction of the social role and expectations associated with persons with mental disabilities and other disadvantaged groups [44,45]. Also, we recommend further research on how to strengthen return to work for persons with mental disabilities after episodes of illness.

Our study showed that mere legislative recommendations and punitive laws may be unable to improve the practice of inclusive employment as much as a personal understanding of the need for change. The positive experience of the employers who have employed persons with a mental disability needs to be shared and held up to convince the group of employers holding onto myths about the work capability of persons with mental disabilities. This illustrates the importance of in-depth insight into the realities of employers which our study sought to explore. Our study also revealed employers' concerns and need for reassurances through job coaches and support that assists persons with mental disabilities to stay at work. This may point to a lack of information about mental illness and a genuine need for direction. However, it may also be related to a perception of a devalued work role of persons with mental disabilities [44,45]. Striving for normalisation of the employment of persons with disabilities through facilitating direct contact and experience among employers could prove useful for reconstructing work roles. Yet, it is pertinent to consider that normalisation of mental disabilities as observed by Scheid [38] may, in fact, deprive affected individuals of the accommodation that they need. The role of job coaches and support for persons with mental disabilities is in line with supported employment, which has been found relevant for work integration. It is useful to highlight the pivotal role of health care in this process, as demonstrated in other inclusive employment models [20,21], because work may be impossible without health.

Hence, expectation management to improve the employment of persons with mental disabilities is two-sided. First, the employers need to be informed about the work capability of people with mental disabilities, (inter)national regulations, possibilities to provide accommodation, and the benefits of employing people with a mental disability. Second, society's expectations of employers need to be managed by taking into account the realities of entrepreneurs; decisions on hiring staff require careful considerations that involve weighing a range of factors, including productivity and continuity of the business.

In spite of the strengths and findings of this study, we acknowledge certain limitations as well. The narratives of the employers may be affected by social conformity rather than their actual situation. The results represent the perceptions of the actual employers we recruited for the study and may differ for employers in other settings whose social context is different. Although our employers were all in Nairobi which is the capital of Kenya, we were unable to stratify them into urban, suburban or rural areas. In addition, most of the employers were from the private sector because employers from public or government organisations required either further approval or permission from their organisation to speak to us or complete the questionnaire.

Conclusion

The employability of persons with mental disabilities is a complex issue and dependent on a set of interrelated factors aside from employers (the person with a mental disability and the socio-political environment). The employers' perceptions about mental illness may affect the employment of persons with mental disabilities. However, it is also pertinent to note that the employers' expectations in terms of productivity, especially in resource-poor settings with economic challenges, may limit their possibilities for corporate social responsibility. Hence, while programs that aim to improve employment for persons with mental disabilities should consider processes that improve employers' perceptions as an intervention strategy, it is also important that government policies evolve a favourable economic environment to encourage employers. In addition, policies like tax rebates or subsidies may increase the disposition of employers to a more inclusive employment practice.

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ORCID

Ikenna D. Ebuenyi  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3329-6296>

Joske F. G. Bunders-Aelen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0007-6430>

Barbara J. Regeer  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9044-9367>

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