

‘To investigate the experiences of people working with a physical disability in Ireland’

Melissa McLoughlin

15043282

Master of Arts in Human Resource Management

School of Business, National College of Ireland

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ABSTRACT

This research by Melissa McLoughlin investigates the experiences of people working with a physical disability in Ireland. The study gives particular attention to the areas of access to employment, reasonable accommodations and training and development opportunities. To develop a strategy, it was important firstly to understand current literature around the subject area. A review of existing literature was carried out and determined that despite anti-discriminatory legislation and government employment schemes people with disabilities remain at a disadvantage in terms of employment prospects. The development of the social model of disability has created numerous barriers to employment, for people with disabilities.

In order to draw comparisons from existing research on the area an investigation was carried out to examine the employment experiences of six individuals with a physical disability in Ireland. The type and extent of the applicant's disabilities varied. The areas of access to employment, reasonable accommodations and training and development opportunities were explored with participants. In addition, respondents were asked to give their views regarding current inclusive employment practices and whether or not they feel more needs to be done to build inclusive working environments for all.

A qualitative method of data collection was used, furthermore individual, in-depth interviews were applied, generating a rich variety of feelings, experiences and opinions about the subject at hand. The results of this endeavour confirmed the findings of the literature review, barriers to employment for people with disabilities are very much in existence, however while the literature is very one sided, the results of this study indicate there is a lot is being done to ensure the needs of workers with disabilities are being met, but more still needs to be done.

By combining the results of the literature review and interview process, several recommendations on how to build more inclusive working environments were reached.

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Table 1.0 Demographic Information of Interviewees

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The chosen area of research for this study is:

‘To investigate the experiences of people working with a physical disability in Ireland’

The sub-objectives of the study are as follows:

1. What are the experiences of people with physical disabilities in terms of gaining access to employment?
2. What are the experiences of people with physical disabilities in relation to being reasonable accommodated in the workplace?
3. What are the experiences of people with physical disabilities regarding training and development opportunities?
4. Do people with physical disabilities feel their employers could be doing more to encourage inclusive employment practices? If yes, what could they recommend?

The World Health Organisation (2011) reports that 15% of the world’s population lives with some form of disability. From the fifty-one countries surveyed, employment rates among men with a disability were 52.8%, and 19.6% for women with a disability, compared to 64.9% for non-disabled men and 29.9% for non-disabled women. In Ireland, Central Statistics Office (2012) figures show that in 2011 there were 542,277 people aged 15 and over living with a disability. Of those, 112,502 or 20.7% were at work. These figures are important as they account for a significant portion of the world’s population. Majority of people living with a disability want to work if they feel capable of doing so.

In an analysis of the National Disability Survey, Watson, Banks and Lyons (2015) estimated that over half of those not employed at the time of the survey wanted to work if the circumstances were right. It is important that globally there is an understanding of what constitutes as a disability and that people working with a disability are treated to the same extent as people working without a disability. Both organisations make note of an obvious increase in the number of people acquiring a disability. In comparison with census figures from the CSO in 2006 there was an overall increase of 201,550 people or 51.2% in a 5-year period; that is an overall population increase of 8.2% (CSO, 2012). The WHO (2011) report similar figures and highlight a possible explanation for the increase: the rise in chronic health diseases,

coupled with improved medical infrastructure are pro-longing life, this combined with the general ageing of the world's population. Therefore, it is of critical importance that the issue of disability in the workplace remains a prioritised one. Disability will always exist in the world, it is important that correct legislation is in place so that organisations can construct their policies appropriately. Given these statistics it is therefore justifiable to carry out a study that looks at disability in the workplace.

There is a variety of literature in existence that addresses disability in the workplace. The research is extensive and has been conducted worldwide. Some of the main contributors include, The Department of Education and Training (2005), The Invisible Disabilities Association (2017), as well as Watson et al., (2015). The large variety of resources available provided a contextual background of information, from which the main questions were obtained for the primary investigation stage of this study. A key finding from existing literature is the view that people with disabilities remain at a disadvantage in terms of employment prospects. The aim of this study will be to address the primary areas of employment, to include; access, reasonable accommodations and training and development opportunities, as well as the opinion of participants regarding the improvement of inclusive employment practices. Curious to investigate if the experiences of a small group of participants in the Irish workforce match the findings of the literature review.

This research paper will begin by addressing some of the current literature relating to disability in the workplace. Doing so will not only provide the reader with a greater understanding of the topic at hand, but will help develop the research questions that are addressed later in the study. Next, the methodology section of this report will outline clearly the research questions obtained from studying existing literature. Additionally, the chosen research method will be introduced, along with the reasons for choosing that method. The findings of this study will then be presented in the results section of this paper. Taking account of the sub-objectives of this paper, the various themes resulting from this study will be addressed and presented as topics for analysis. Once all the results have been correlated they will be compared with the results of the literature review in the hope of formulating any apparent differences and similarities. The final section of this paper will draw a conclusion to the research study,

and address any recommendations considered useful for further study. Additionally, recommendations will be given as to how we can be more inclusive in the workplace.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section will outline literature examining the experiences of people working with a physical disability, including the factors that contribute to those experiences. The controversial issue of defining disability will be addressed, allowing for inputs from a variety of authors. The workplace and the elements that contribute to the existence of a workplace will be accessed. After which disability and work will be examined together. The types of equality legislation from Ireland and the United Kingdom will be touched upon, leading onto examples of case law relating to discrimination in the workplace on the ground of disability.

The main themes presented throughout the literature are ‘disability’ ‘disability and employment’, ‘equality legislation’, ‘barriers to employment’, ‘discrimination’ ‘access to employment’ and ‘reasonable accommodations’. Each of these areas will be defined and discussed in detail. The Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015 as set out in the Irish Statute book are of particular importance to this research. As the act seeks to outlaw discrimination, while promoting equality in the workplace, it will act as a useful guide to aid with the completion of this research project.

An investigation will be carried out to explore the thoughts, experiences and feelings of people working with a physical disability. The literature aims to answer the following questions, what does the current picture of disability in the workplace resemble? What are the figures for disabled people in the workplace at present? What kind of legislation exists to ensure the rights of workers with disabilities are being met? These issues are important, they pinpoint the current situation regarding disability in the workplace, as well as what works and what doesn’t. The findings can help highlight any changes that need to be made, be it to existing equality legislation, to employment practices or to societal influences in general.

Within the context of this research it is important to look at people’s perceptions, particularly those of people working with a physical disability - what insights can be offered to employers and the government on how to create a better working environment that encourages inclusive practices across all aspects of employment.

Equality legislation protects individuals from discrimination in the following areas; in education, as a consumer, use of public services, buying or renting of property and in

the workplace. For the purposes of this study, the researcher will focus on the impact of equality legislation on physically disabled people in the workplace.

2.2 Defining Disability

The term ‘disability’ has been somewhat hard and controversial to define. The meaning of ‘disability’ has evolved and changed over the years. A wide range of approaches have been discussed throughout disability related literature. The one thing that is certain however, is that in order to develop effective programmes and policies that ensure the rights of disabled people are being met, a shared definition or understanding of ‘disability’ should be agreed upon (Department of Education and Training, 2005). Indeed, existing literature narrows the scope of defining disability into two major classification systems: ‘the medical model’ and ‘the social model’ and further suggests that in recent years there has been a shift from the ‘medical’ to the ‘social model’. In other words, people with disabilities are perceived as being disabled by society, rather than by their bodies (WHO, 2011). This is an important perspective as it not only affects how we define disability but has an impact on social planning and programme design, as well as on employment strategies (Department of Education and Training, 2005).

For the purpose of this research project a number of varying definitions have been located; United Kingdom Government (2010) suggests that a person is disabled if they have a mental or physical impairment that causes them substantial and long-term adverse effects when carrying out their daily activities. Additionally, the Employment Equality Act 1998 – 2015, offer a detailed description of the term ‘disability’:

“The total or partial absence of a person’s bodily or mental functions, including the absence of a part of a person’s body. The presence in the body of organisms causing, or likely to cause, chronic disease or illness. The malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of a person’s body. A condition of malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction. A condition, illness or disease which affects a person’s thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or which results in disturbed behaviour”

(Government of Ireland, 2016, p.8).

As previously mentioned ‘disability’ is something that many believe is a socially constructed concept. Khosrow-Pour (2017) offer to explain this concept – ‘disability’ is the restriction triggered by a contemporary social organisation, which takes little to no account of people who have impairments, as well as the functional or behavioural consequences of those impairments. The result is social exclusion, less favourable treatment of and discrimination against people with impairments. Hence, people with ‘disabilities’ are people with impairments who are disabled by barriers in society. The key point being made is the notion that disability is external to the individual and is a result of environmental and social factors.

Before moving on, it is important to look at the term invisible disabilities; these are disabilities that are not immediately apparent to another person. The Invisible Disabilities Association (2017) offer the following explanation; invisible disabilities are physical, mental or neurological conditions that restrict a person’s mobility, senses or activities and are undistinguishable to the onlooker. As a result, people with invisible disabilities are subject to judgment, misunderstandings and false perceptions (The Invisible Disabilities Association, 2017). An example of an invisible disability is someone with a level of hearing loss in one or both ears, but because they choose not to wear a hearing aid, their disability is not immediately evident. It is not hard to imagine how this can cause difficulties not only for the person themselves but even for those around them who are unaware of their level of ability. In the workplace, workers with invisible disabilities encounter unique challenges compared to workers with visible disabilities. Workers with invisible disabilities can choose whether to disclose their disability to their employer and/or co-workers. Disclosing this kind of information can have implications on the individual workers health, social relationships and work performances (Santuzzi, Waltz, Finkelstein and Rupp, 2014).

2.3 Disability and Work

The workplace refers to the place a person works, this can be in an office, a factory, or at home. Every workplace has its own mission statement, “a mission statement documents the purpose for an organisations existence and often contains code of

corporate conduct to guide management in implementing the mission” (De Kluyver, 2000, p. 10). The mission statement sets the companies culture, Hofstede refers to culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 13). It is the set of values or assumptions shared by an organisation which they associate to what is successful, what is to be prioritized and how people should behave towards one another (Lane and Maznevski, 2014).

On a different note, Fricke and Totterdill (2004) maintain work culture to be the factors in the work environment that determine to what extent employees can apply full use of their competencies and creative potential. Work cultures are made up of norms and values; norms are the guidelines that decide an organisations behaviour in particular situations (Leatherbarrow, Fletcher and Currie, 2010). Values act as boundaries of cultural systems, they do not require authentication or proof (Deutsch, Coleman and Marcus, 2006).

Organisations will implement various methods of instilling the organisations culture onto its employees, e.g. internal training methods are a useful way of imparting an organisations culture onto its workers. Work culture is very important as it sets a precedence for how an organisation views its employees, and furthermore how those employees will be treated by that organisation. Generally, the aim is to increase productivity and promote job satisfaction and personal development (Fricke and Totterdill, 2004).

Much of the literature examined suggests that disabled people remain at a disadvantage in terms of employment – in an analysis of a study commissioned by the National Disability Authority, 31% of working-age people with a disability were at work (MacNamee, 2017). The UK and USA report similar figures, in the UK the employment rate of people with disabilities was 38.9%, while in the US it was 38.1%. In stark contrast, employment rates for people with disabilities in Switzerland was 62.2%, while in Norway they were reported as 61.7% (WHO, 2011). Indeed, the prevalence of disability is expected to increase due to the rise in chronic health conditions coupled with improved medical services, as well the ageing of the world’s population, leading to an inevitable rise in figures among people with disabilities at work (WHO, 2011).

MacNamee (2017) also report that 56% of people with disabilities had worked at some point in their lives. Of course, the reason they are not working now can be attributed to a number of explanations. Acquiring a disability later in life is one of the reasons for people's decision to leave work. Around 2-3% of impairments are present at birth while the remainder are acquired during the life course (Barnes, 2012). Important to note is the striking level of those interested in working - over half of the people not employed at the time of the report wanted to work if the circumstances were right (Watson, Banks and Lyons, 2015). The literature is lengthy and explanations extensive. However, many authors have narrowed the scope of employment barriers for disabled people down to three: physical, attitudinal and organisational.

Physical barriers that affect disabled people at work come in the form of obstructions that make movement within the workplace difficult, in other words the issue is with a lack of access due to poor planning (Hales, 1996). Modarressy-Tehrani (2016) concur, with disability advocates maintaining problems with access remain widespread. Physical barriers can also include a lack of appropriate tools or equipment, as well as reasonable adjustments - these barriers cement fear in the minds of both employed people with disabilities, as well as unemployed people seeking work (Bengisu, Izbirak and Mackieh, 2008). An analysis of The National Disability Survey reported that unmet needs for services and devices presented a barrier to employment for people with disabilities. The most identified unmet needs included; flexible work arrangements (46%), modified job tasks (29%) and accessibility modifications (32%) (Watson et al., 2015). Some employers expressed concerns around the potential costs to the organisation for employing someone with a disability. This is in direct relation to making reasonable accommodations for a person who is disabled, as a way of better enabling them to carry out their duties. Houtenville and Kalargyrou (2011) indicate that particularly in small organisations there exists a fear of the cost of adjustments to better equip someone who is disabled. However, the authors do state that under the Americans with Disabilities Act the provision of making reasonable adjustments, the record shows that most such adjustments are not exceptionally high. In a similar way, (Jayasooria, Krishnan and Ooi, 1997) agree that employers showed reluctance to adopt or make changes to modify facilities and equipment, more than likely due to potential costs of such adjustments.

Attitudinal barriers can be described as the negative attitudes disabled workers experience through the people around them, including employers and co-workers (Bengisu et al. 2008). A large number of authors reported the attitudes of employers as one of the major challenges facing people with disabilities – employers and fellow workers tend to create greater barriers than any physical barrier (Department of Educational and Training, 2005). As previously mentioned there is a collective agreement that in recent years there has been a shift from ‘the medical model’ to ‘the social model’ of disability. The development of the social model has challenged traditional concepts of disability. Many sources agree that it’s this mindset that has played a key role in the employment disadvantage of people with disabilities. Hanley (2014) argues that despite anti-discrimination legislation and government support schemes disabled people remain at a disadvantage in terms of employment. Hanley blames the discriminatory attitudes of both employers and staff for this. His findings suggest that staff rationality over disability and work is conflicted. On the one hand, he found that people view work as competitive at both organisational and individual level. On the other hand, although workers seem generally sympathetic towards the idea of having disabled people in their workplace, they had anxiety over the actuality of it. Hanley indicates that people rationalise this way of thinking by conceptualising disabled workers as different to disabled people. The competitive drive that exists today as well as perceptions of what is fair, require disabled people to ‘fit’ into work and to not be treated differently to their co-workers. The unfortunate result of this reality Hanley claims is that staff attitudes towards what is reasonable are a key driver in regard organisational and managerial approaches to what is reasonable. Not unlike Hanley, Butler and Parr (1999) proposes that more and more employers are expecting employees to be able to do everything, to be flexible, to self-manage their time, to see something and fix it, to be adaptable and to perform and become their employment. This attitude coincides with the increasing competitive nature of corporate society.

Some employers expressed fears around the ability of employees with disabilities to adequately carry out the work allocated to them. The concern is that an employee with a disability would not have the requisite skills necessary for the job and would not be as productive as employees who did not have a disability (Houtenville et al. 2011). Of course, in certain countries there is an obvious issue with existing prejudices regarding

disability, which deters employers from considering applications made by employees with disabilities (Jayasooria et al. 1997).

Another aspect of the social model of disability is its tendency to group all disabled people together, as the same. This attitude is harmful in the sense that the nature and extent of a person's disability differs greatly. None the less, disabled people are often grouped together in schools, in segregated recreation programmes, in rehabilitation centres, in legislation and in the employment line (Goggin and Newell, 2003). Similarly, The Department of Education and Training (2005) wish to highlight the importance, where possible of examining the circumstances of people with a disability in a way that acknowledges the diversity of people with disabilities while taking account of those differences.

The Department of Education and Training (2005) give particular mention to the attitudinal barriers facing people with invisible disabilities. The author asks firstly that society recognise invisible disabilities and the significant role they play on the lives of those affected by them. Secondly, the author urges academics and researchers to involve people with invisible disabilities in their projects, often people with the most obvious physical disabilities are chosen. Involving people with invisible disabilities will help to eradicate the stigma around cognitive or psychological disabilities.

Finally, organisational barriers refer to the way disabled people are viewed by an organisation, in other words, through the company's culture and employment policies. The ideal scenario for workers with disabilities is to be secure in the knowledge they are entering an environment with an open culture and a willingness to carry out the necessary adjustments to better enable that person to carry out their duties (Bengisu et al. 2008). Additionally, Hales (1996) suggests that organisational barriers are experienced indirectly and often without the knowledge of those who are affected by them. This could include the recruitment, assessment and promotion procedures of a company. Such procedures could apply criteria irrelevant to the job, or allow decisions to be made based on assumptions rather than fact, therefore discriminating against a person or a group.

Butler and Parr (1999) offer a real-life example of indirect discrimination in the workplace. Jane an employee at Central Bank, with a visual impairment. Jane had worked for several years on the switchboard until the company decided to centralise all telephone services to two sites. The distance was too far for most people to travel but especially Jane whose impairment made traveling an arduous process. Jane reluctantly left her job after being made a cashier. Jane struggled to fulfil the duties associated with this role and became stressed. However, Jane had a job she could do and was happy with. The company's decision to encompass the telephone units to just two sites could be seen as indirect discrimination as the organisation did not make allowances for the travel Jane would have to do.

Some authors suggest a different way of looking at disability and the workplace and consider the notion of political correctness in terms of disability. In majority of cases society will try to avoid forms of expression or actions that could potentially exclude or insult someone with a disability. However, there are some that would argue that political correctness can be taken too far at times. MacNamee (2017) argues fear on the parts of the employers, of saying or doing the wrong thing. Likewise, Houtenville and Kalargyrou (2011) reported that very often supervisors felt uncomfortable disciplining or evaluating employees who were disabled. This fear is imbedded in the minds of some, of being accused or labelled as discriminatory. The department of Education and Training (2005) suggest that governments have recognised the nature of disability is changing, and that new and different types of disabilities are now being recognised. The author looks to the advancement in technologies to account for this. Modern technologies have made it possible to understand and treat certain medical conditions, that remained a mystery before. The on-going change and development can only further improve the way society looks at disability. As governments create plans, they will consider these changes and the new challenges that emerge, ensuring they respond appropriately.

2.4 Equality/ Anti – Discriminatory Legislation

Equality legislation exists to protect individuals from unfair treatment, as well as to promote inclusive practices in the workplace. Each country adopts its own equality legislation, however countries from the European Union implement their laws (directives) regarding labour in accordance with the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, countries in the EU develop their own laws to incorporate EU labour law. In accordance with the Treaty, particularly article 153 - it adopts laws that set minimum requirements for; working and employment conditions as well as informing and consulting workers (European Commission, 2016).

In both the United Kingdom and Ireland national legislation has been drawn up to comply with EU directives. Included is an extensive coverage of what employers must do to ensure a fair working environment for all employees. Furthermore, the acts encompass all aspects of work, including the recruitment and selection process, as well as the employment conditions of those working in the organisation. The Acts present a set of guidelines for both employers and employees.

The Equality Act 2010 is the main piece of legislation in the UK that aims to protect people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society- it replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single act. It is now simpler to understand and has strengthened the level of protection in many situations (Gov.UK, 2015). The Equality Act 2010 outlines nine protected characteristics in employment, these include: age, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity leave, gender, marital and civil status, race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religious belief (outlook or lack of), sexual orientation and disability (United Kingdom Government, 2010). Employers are not allowed to discriminate against an individual or group based on any of the nine protected grounds. Similarly, The Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015 are Irelands main piece of legislation that aim to protect people from discrimination in the workplace.

According to Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2016) The Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015 aim to do the following: promote equality in the workplace, outlaw discrimination across the nine protected grounds, ban sexual and other types of harassment, prohibit victimisation, ensure that adequate facilities for people with disabilities are available in relation to access to employment, advancing in

employment and taking part in training, and allowing for positive action to ensure everybody receives full equality across the nine protected grounds.

The acts apply to everyone, namely: part-time, full-time and temporary employees, vocational training bodies, public and private sector employment, trade unions, professionals and trade bodies and employment agencies. The acts place an obligation on employers to ensure they are not discriminating against anyone based on any of the nine protected grounds. Employers must ensure they are not being discriminatory regarding recruitment and selection practices (including advertising), equal pay, access to employment, working conditions, training and experience, classification of posts or promotion, dismissal and collective agreements (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2016).

The nine protected grounds outlined in The Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015 and The Equality Act 2010 differ on two grounds. Unlike, The Equality Act 2010, The Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015 do not list gender reassignment or pregnancy and maternity, but instead offer family status and membership of the traveling community. It is understood that the reason for choosing these areas is due to the rationale that these groups are among the most vulnerable and in danger of exploitation, and therefore must be protected (Government of Ireland, 2016).

Regarding the protected ground of disability there are a number of provisions placed on employers to ensure the fair and adequate treatment of workers with disabilities. Firstly, every employer must be seen to be providing reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. This includes accommodating every individual regarding their access to employment, opportunities to participate or advance and to undergo training. However, an employer does not have to reasonably accommodate an employee with a disability if the measures would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer. Examples of reasonable accommodations can include adaptations to premises or equipment, flexible working arrangements or re-designing the job spec. If it is an employer's intention to dismiss an employee because they no longer feel that person is capable of carrying out their job, the employer must ensure they initiate the following steps to avoid having an unfair dismissals claim taken against them. The employer must carry out an occupational health assessment of the employee, after which they must be seen to be providing reasonable accommodations. The employer

can also look at the employee's medical reports. A notice of intention to dismiss must be given to the employee, allowing them the opportunity to influence their employer's decision - the employee may do this by recommending possible changes the employer has failed to consider (Citizens Information, 2017). Only after these steps have been followed can an employer carry out a dismissal on the grounds of incapacity. Important to mention is that it has also been noted that the individual themselves should be frank and realistic about their own ability to continue working.

In addition to The Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015, the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 exists to ensure, as far as is reasonably possible, the safety, health and welfare needs of all employees are being met. Regulation 25 of the General Application Regulations gives particular mention to employees with disabilities. Employers must ensure, where necessary, the environment is organised to take account of employees with disabilities. Particularly, regarding doors, passageways, staircases, washbasins, lavatories and workstations. The Act also highlights those with invisible disabilities, urging companies to create a culture that is non-judgemental and supportive, thus encouraging employees with invisible disabilities to feel comfortable disclosing their disability to their employer. Disclosure is important as it allows an employer to consider the health and safety needs of the individual employee, hence ensuring the health and safety needs of that employee are not being compromised (Health and Safety Authority, 2009).

Despite the existence of anti-discrimination legislation discrimination in the workplace does happen. Discrimination has taken place if: "A person is treated less favourably than another person is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on any of the 'discriminatory grounds'" (Government of Ireland, 2016, Part 2, Section 6). There are two types of discrimination in the workplace, direct discrimination and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination takes place when someone has been treated less favourably because of a protected attribute, whereas indirect discrimination occurs when an organisation's policies or work practices are the same for everyone but place a particular employee or group at a disadvantage (Citizens Information, 2016).

It is important for employers to keep informed about current employment equality legislation and to ensure their policies match accordingly. Employment Rights Ireland (2013) argue the necessity for organisations to adhere to equality legislation and avoid being labelled as having discriminated against an individual or community. It is also essential to avoid having cases taken against your organisation for acts of discrimination. Consequences of discriminating can have a major negative impact on the employer and their business as well as the potential to cause unnecessary stress to the employee. In Ireland, any cases of discrimination are taken with the Workplace Relations Commission – this study aims to establish whether people with disabilities have ever been subjected to any form of discrimination in the workplace.

2.5 Case Laws

Every year there are several claims taken against employers by employees who believe they have suffered discrimination on the ground of disability. Nano Nagle School versus Marie Daly is just one example of such a case. Marie Daley, a Special Needs Assistant took a case for having suffered discrimination on the grounds of disability against her employer, Nano Nagle School. After becoming paralysed from the waist down, Ms. Daly required a wheelchair to assist her with mobility. Ms. Daly's employer refused to allow her to return to work on foot of an occupational health assessment, which determined Ms. Daly was no longer able to perform the totality of her work duties. It is unrealistic to think that someone in Ms. Daly's position could ever be reasonably accommodated to the point of being able to carry out the totality of her duties as before her accident. Instead, her employer failed to make an informed decision on what is reasonable and proportionate. The school did not attempt to make adaptations to the physical environment, nor did they consider the use of specialised equipment or look at re-designing the job role. The Labour Court ruled in favour of Ms. Daly and awarded her compensation to the value of €40,000 (Moran and Ryan, 2015).

In a similar way, Fergal Reilly took a case against his employer, United Parcels Service for constructive dismissal on the grounds of disability and reasonable accommodation. After suffering trauma to his knee, Mr. Reilly's employer refused to allow him to return to his position as lead driver as he was certified as being fit for

light duties. Mr. Reilly resigned citing; his employer's failure to give him work, failure to pay his wages, failure to process grievances and failure to communicate. It was determined that United Parcels Services fell short of on their duties to acquire all the relevant information and provide reasonable accommodations. Mr. Reilly was forced to resign and his employer did discriminate in relation to Mr. Reilly's disability.

2.6 Conclusion

To conclude, the literature review has drawn on existing works to help examine the experiences of people working with a physical disability. Current literature has determined that in general people with disabilities appear to be at a disadvantage in terms of employment. There has been a degree of difficulty in relation to defining the word disability. However, many agree the term disability is something society has constructed. This perception would suggest that people have impairments and are disabled by barriers in society. The scope of employment barriers has been narrowed down to three; physical, attitudinal and organisational. Attitudinal barriers represent the greatest degree of difficulty for disabled workers. The attitudes of employers and co-workers have major outcomes (not necessarily always negative) on the employment prospects of those with disabilities. Organisational culture plays a vital role in determining the experiences of disabled workers. Ideally companies should implement an open culture where people with disabilities feel comfortable to discuss it with their employers.

However, there is some debate that suggests governments have recognised the challenges faced by those with disabilities and have considered and will continue to consider these challenges when it comes to policy arrangement. This is highly important as four out of five people will acquire a disability during their working life (MacNamee, 2017). Policy makers need to ensure correct provisions are being made to guarantee the needs of disabled people are being met.

Equality legislation exists to promote equality in the workplace and to prevent discrimination. The Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015 are Ireland's main pieces of equality legislation. The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 highlights the importance for employers to plan and manage for health and safety on an inclusive

basis, in other words by assuming that disability is a factor in your health and safety plan. The Act also illustrates the link between employee's well-being at work and their work environment and how an inclusive working environment will lead to greater productivity due to less absenteeism as employees will feel valued and respected in their workplace (Health and Safety Authority, 2009).

From the literature obtained, it is clear that although anti-discrimination legislation exists to protect people with disabilities in employment, the introduction of the social model of disability has left people with disabilities at a disadvantage in terms of employment prospects. It is useful at this point to conduct research with volunteers regarding their individual experiences and how they match up to existing literature on the area.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The main objective of this research paper is to investigate the experiences of people working with a physical disability in Ireland. The literature suggests that the Employment Equality Act 1998 – 2015 establish clear guidelines for employers to follow when it comes to the employment practices of people who have disabilities. Existing studies would suggest that people with disabilities still encounter a degree of discrimination in terms of access to employment and remaining in employment.

Primary Objective:

“To investigate the experiences of people working with a physical disability in Ireland”

Sub Objectives:

1. What are the experiences of people with physical disabilities in terms of gaining access to employment?
2. What are the experiences of people with physical disabilities in relation to being reasonable accommodated in the workplace?
3. What are the experiences of people with physical disabilities regarding training and development opportunities?
4. Do people with physical disabilities feel their employers could be doing more to encourage inclusive employment practices? If yes, what could they recommend?

3.2 Participants

A total of six people were interviewed for this study. The participants consisted of three men and three women aged between 22 – 51 years. The candidates worked across a variety of sectors, including; education, non-profit, IT, marketing and retail. The type and extent of the individual participants disabilities varied. At the same time, two of the participants had a condition known as Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita (AMC). A separate pair suffered with seizures, although not caused for the same reason, while one participant had Epilepsy the other had a condition known as Psychogenic Nonepileptic Seizures (PNES) or Pseudoseizures. The two remaining participants acquired their disabilities later-on in life, one resulting from accident and

the other through illness. The findings and analysis section of this research study has a table describing the details of each participant.

Two of the six participants work on a part-time basis, while one has flexible working hours. One of the participants chooses to work part-time because she does not feel capable of working more hours due to her disability. The other participant works part-time because it's all her company has available. The candidate working flexible hours arranged this with her employer, as it better enables her to do her job. The remaining participants work full-time and are happy to do so. Interestingly, four of the six volunteers are disability activists and are actively advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, including in employment.

3.3 Research Design

“Research design constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data” (Cooper and Schindler, 2014, p.125) It acts as a tool that assists and guides the researcher in their investigation to obtain answers to research questions. Choosing the correct research design was crucial, it was important to explore the options available for tailoring a design to suit the needs of this study. It was paramount that the chosen design would help to integrate the different components of the research in a clear, concise manner (Cooper and Schindler, 2014).

A critical issue of consideration was to determine the type of research paradigm to use. Collis and Hussey (2014) describe a research paradigm as a framework on how research should be conducted. Research consists of two paradigms; positivism and interpretivism. Wisker (2008) suggests that the use of quantitative methods can be contributed to positivistic research; that is concerned with gaining the facts about something or setting out to prove something is right or wrong. It is most commonly used by researchers who believe that the world is or that human behaviour is: definable, fixable, provable, or can be discovered to articulate rigid and unchanging facts. It is deductive research; it tests theory and meaning. On the other hand, the use of qualitative methods can be accredited as post positivistic research or interpretivism; that facts can be wrong and nothing is certain, everything is open to interpretation. Researchers that use qualitative research methods generally believe the world to be indefinable, interpreted and shifting in meaning as to why anything is the way it is. Data is interpreted in context and links are made. It is inductive research; it makes

theory and contributes to research (Wisker, 2008). After extensive analysis, an interpretive approach was chosen as the aim of this study was to explore and gather information about experiences, thoughts and feelings.

As part of the research design process it was crucial to determine the method of data collection. The aim of quantitative research methods is to test objective theories by examining the relationship among variables; in turn, these variables can be measured producing numbered data that can be analysed using statistical procedures. Moreover, Cooper and Schindler (2014) deliberate that quantitative research methods can fall short of providing the insights needed by the researcher. The final written report would symbolize a very set structure (Creswell, 2009). Examples of quantitative research methods are surveys and experimental designs. It was decided that quantitative research would not be appropriate for this study as the aim was not to test theory or meaning, it was to explore and understand thoughts and opinions about a critical issue.

In complete contrast, the aim of qualitative research methods is to understand how and why things happen, to understand the different meanings people place on their experiences, to try and uncover hidden interpretations, understandings and motivations - types of qualitative research methods include: focus groups, interviews, case studies, grounded theory, action research and observations (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). The final written report generally has a flexible structure (Creswell, 2009). However, Cooper and Schindler (2004) do argue that qualitative data can be too subjective and susceptible to human error, the researcher must ensure they are not bias in data collections and interpretation. The research required the ability to understand meanings, beliefs and experiences, therefore the ideal method of research for this study was qualitative research methods.

Interviews are the primary method of data collection in qualitative methodologies – they can be conducted individually or in groups. Some of the skills required by an interviewer include: the ability to make respondents feel comfortable, the finesse to probe for more detail without making the respondent feel harassed, the common sense to remain neutral, the capability to listen carefully and to think outside of the box - to make connections (Copper and Schindler, 2014).

Copper and Schindler (2014) and Bell (2014) agree that interviews are useful because of their adaptability, they allow the researcher to follow up thoughts and ideas, to probe responses and investigate motives and feelings. Vital information regarding the experiences of people working with a physical disability in Ireland were obtained, including the positive and negative elements of their experiences.

Interviews and moreover, semi-structured interviews were used in this study. Semi-structured interviews allow for set questions to be drawn up, but they are not restrictive - the interview can take a new, un-planned route. Cooper and Schindler (2014) are adamant that if done correctly the researcher can extract a greater variety of data, achieve greater clarity and elaboration of answers. The use of semi-structured interviews produced results that gave meaning, experience and views.

On completion of the interview process a thematic coding method will be adopted to analyse the data collected. Attridge-Stirling (2011) describes this technique as widely used for conducting analysis of qualitative material. It is a useful tool for organising data under headings or themes to portray clear, distinctive results.

3.4 Research Instrument

The interview questions were broken down into three sections. The first section included general introductory questions relating to demographics, as well as questions regarding the respondent's disability and type of work. It was important firstly to include this section to ease the respondent into the interview process and secondly, to gain an understanding of the participants history. The next section related to anti-discriminatory legislation. Taking mainly from The Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015, this section looked at participants experiences relating to access to employment, reasonable accommodation, training and development opportunities and potential acts of discrimination.

The final section related to employment support services and further suggestions from participants. This section was critical to gain a deeper understanding of existing employment services and their usefulness. This section also allowed participants, where necessary the opportunity to make suggestions for inclusive employment

practices. The questions asked in the interview process were compiled from the findings obtained in the literature review section of this paper. Authors such as Hales (1996) and The Department of Education and Training (2005) give particular reference to the employment barriers people with disabilities face every day. It was important to obtain answers that related directly to these areas. A copy of the interview questions asked can be found in the appendix section of this paper.

3.5 Procedure

Several disability related associations across Ireland were contacted in the hope of obtaining volunteers to partake in interviews. Examples include, but are not limited to: The National Council for the Blind of Ireland, The National Disability Authority, DeafHear and Enable Ireland. The results of this endeavour were unsuccessful, in the end each of the participants were obtained through personal contacts. Each participant was contacted by phone or email and asked if they'd like to partake in this study. Prior to conducting any interviews, each of the participants were emailed a copy of the interview questions, as well as background information relating to the research topic. The candidates were also emailed a copy of the interview consent form. Each interview was carried out face-to-face – an obvious benefit of which was the opportunity observe and record both verbal and non-verbal behaviour (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). A different setting was agreed upon for each of the interviews – a place that was comfortable for the both the interviewee and the interviewer.

The interviews were recorded using a dictaphone, and a transcription was drawn up after each interview. Respondents were given two consent forms to sign prior to starting the interview – a copy for each party to take home. Additionally, one of the participants was provided with a consent form regarding permission to include material in this study. A copy of both consent forms can be found in the appendix section of this paper. The interviews ranged between half an hour to an hour. Two of the six participants requested a copy of this research study to read once it is completed.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The aim of ethics in research is to ensure that no person partaking in the research suffers any adverse consequences as a result (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Each of the interviewees was made clear of the intentions of this study and was given a consent form to sign and keep. Before each interview, respondents were asked if they would like any part of this study verified or if they had any issues regarding the process. No details have been used in this research that could be traced back to any of the participants. Any information gathered has been stored on a USB device that only the researcher has access to. Each of the volunteers was made aware that any information gathered for the purposes of this research would be destroyed after six months of this paper having been submitted.

4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter discusses the results of the interview process. As discussed in the methodology section of this report the rationale behind this research is to investigate the experiences of people working with a physical disability in Ireland.

The findings have been accumulated from the research papers sub-objectives as follows:

1. What are the experiences of people with physical disabilities in terms of gaining access to employment?
2. What are the experiences of people with physical disabilities in relation to being reasonable accommodated in the workplace?
3. What are the experiences of people with physical disabilities regarding training and development opportunities?
4. Do people with physical disabilities feel their employers could be doing more to encourage inclusive employment practices? If yes, what could they recommend?

A qualitative method of data collection was used, namely using interviews. Once data was collected, it was analysed and organised into categories. This provided a clear understanding of the main themes emerging from the research.

The questions used for the interview process were correlated from findings extracted from the literature review section of this paper. As stated in the methodology the interviews aim to explore the experiences, feelings and opinions of candidates. To note: the findings account for a mix of respondents current and past experiences regarding employment.

As previously mentioned a thematic approach was used to analyse the findings. Utilization of a thematic approach allows the researcher to identify, analyse and report various patterns and themes emerging from collected data, it is a useful tool for organising data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

4.2 Characteristics of Participants

The interviewees comprised of six people who are in employment and have a physical disability. The group consisted of three men and three women who work across a variety of sectors. Three of the candidates have what are known as invisible disabilities that have physical connotations on their bodies. The interviews were carried out face-to-face and lasted approximately half an hour to an hour.

| | Age | Gender | Profession | Working Hours | Disability |
|----------------------|------------|---------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| Interviewee 1 | 22 | Male | Teacher | Full-Time | Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita (AMC)and Osteoporosis |
| Interviewee 2 | 35 | Female | Digital Marketing | Flexi-Hours | Epilepsy |
| Interviewee 3 | 42 | Male | IT Consultant | Full-Time | Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita (AMC)and Blindness |
| Interviewee 4 | 51 | Female | Sales Assistant | Part-Time | Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, Antiphospholipid, Reduced power on left hand side after a stroke |
| Interviewee 5 | 37 | Male | Counsellor/ Psychotherapist | Full-Time | Quadriplegia resulting from an accident |
| Interviewee 6 | 25 | Female | Philanthropist | Part-Time | Psychogenic Nonepileptic Seizures (PNES) or Pseudoseizures |

Table 1.0 Demographic Information of Interviewees

Hitherto, the use of semi-structured interviews was proposed. Bell (2010) suggests the use of interviews as advantageous, in that they allow the researcher to adapt to the responses given, while probing for further information. The transcripts from each of the interviews were studied in an attempt to identify the main themes and ideas.

The findings are presented under the sub-objectives of this research report. An example of an interview transcripts is accessible in the appendix section of this paper.

4.3 Objective 1: To explore the experiences of people with disabilities in terms of access to employment

There was a varied response from applicants regarding their experiences of gaining access to employment. It's simplest perhaps to look at access to employment under the following headings: advertising, interview process, recruitment and selection, ease of access and employment support services.

4.3.1 Advertising

Overall, the candidates had little to say regarding advertisement of posts. Two of the five interviewees obtained their current roles through internal advertisement methods. One of the five interviewees conveyed an issue with advertisement processes. Interviewee 4, who has Lupus and reduced mobility after suffering a stroke spoke of how she refrained from applying for several jobs because of the job criteria listed. The interviewee presented the example of an advertisement that requested applicants to have the ability to type 45 words a minute. This interviewee had experience in this kind of work and felt she could have added a lot to the role, but due to her disability would not have been able to guarantee that level of typing. In interviewee 4's words, "*I didn't bother applying for those jobs as I knew I would have to tell them about my condition, but typing was only one aspect of the job, I felt slightly discriminated against*".

4.3.2 Interview Process

Concerning the interview process each participant reported no difficulties in terms of feeling physically and emotionally accommodated for the interview process of their current job. Be that as it may, two of the six candidates reported acts of verbal discrimination in interviews they had carried out in the past. Participant 2, who has epilepsy spoke about how she was questioned very negatively in an interview after she disclosed her disability, to quote, "*I was asked how did I think I was able for this job*

given my condition”. After the interview ceased the employer provided interviewee 2 with very negative feedback and simply focused on her disability. Similarly, interviewee 1 who uses a wheelchair divulged how he was asked in an interview how he would “*deal with his situation outside of the classroom*”, which he understood to mean his disability.

In addition, it is interesting to note the following regarding the interview process; three of the six interviewees have invisible disabilities - all of them chose not to disclose their disability during the interview process. This could be interpreted that each of them felt that by not disclosing their disability this would open more doors for them in terms of gaining access to employment. Interviewee 4 stated, “*I didn't mention my condition, I thought it might impact my chances of getting the job*”. In a similar way, interviewee 2 said, “*I didn't tell my employer in the interview, I was afraid they wouldn't employ me*”. Important to note is that two of the three mentioned above disclosed their disabilities to their employers after they received the job, and were met with positive attitudes. One of the three has chosen to remain quiet about her disability.

4.3.3 Recruitment and Selection

In relation to the recruitment and selection process each of the volunteers reported positive experiences regarding their current roles. Each of the volunteers applied for their positions, took part in the interview process and were offered the job. Three of the six volunteers spoke about past experiences where they felt as though they were not selected for a position in direct relation to them having a disability. As previously mentioned interview 2, experienced negative feedback in an interview after disclosing she had a disability. In that instance interviewee 2 was not selected for the job and considered taking that employer to court, after which she decided against. Likewise, interviewee 4 disclosed she had limited power in the left side of her body after being told in an interview that part of her new job would require her to handle deliveries. Interviewee 4 explained to the employer that she may require assistance from her co-workers when it came to lifting boxes. However, despite years of related experience she did not receive the job and believes the reason to be attributed to her disability. Finally, interviewee 1 described his disappointment of never being selected for summer work while he attended college. Interviewee 1 believes there's a strong chance this was attributed to his disability as he was often given unrealistic excuses from

employers, he noted how one employer told him, “*he must have a degree to have a summer job*”.

4.3.4 Ease of Access

Four of the six interviewees described positive experiences regarding ease of access in their current workplace. Interviewee 1, who uses a wheelchair describes the accessibility of his workplace, “*it has three accessible bathrooms and ramps where I need them*”. Two of the six candidates indicated issues regarding ease of access. Interviewee 5 who also uses a wheelchair spoke about how he must enter his work establishment through the back door as the front cannot be fitted with a ramp. The interviewee explains this is because his workplace is listed as a ‘protected building’. At the same time entering through the back door makes interviewee 1 feel “*like a second-class citizen*”.

4.3.5 Employment Support Services

The subject of employment support services received mixed reviews from participants. On the one hand, three of the six interviewees said they either didn’t feel they needed such services, or they weren’t made aware of them. Regardless each of them said they felt confident about obtaining work on their own. Of the three that did use them interviewee 1 who uses a wheelchair spoke of the EmployAbility Service delivered through the Department of Social protection. The participants experience of using the service was disappointing as he explained how they are “*not very action based*”. Interviewee 1 also shared his experiences of needing PA support to better enable him to do his job. The service is provided by the Health Service Executive, interviewee 1 finds the service disappointing as the Health Service will only fund his PA support for two thirds of his working week. Interviewee 1 feels he must constantly fight for this support and constantly justify why he needs it. The impression he receives is that the Health Service think he should be grateful for what he gets, rather than it be his right to receive it.

In contrast, interviewee 3 and 5 spoke quite positively of their experiences using employment support services. Interviewee 3, who uses a wheelchair and is visually impaired shared his experience of applying for an Adaptation Grant, provided through the Department of Social Protection, Interviewee 3 had no difficulties obtaining the grant. Similarly, interviewee 5 who uses a wheelchair spoke of his positive

experiences using a variety of local services, who's aim is to help people with disabilities enter the workforce. “*After my accident I had to re-skill, the centre provided me with training that allowed me to go back to college and re-train*”.

4.4 Objective 2: To investigate the experiences of people with disabilities in terms of reasonable accommodations

For the purposes of this section interviewee 4 is excluded. Interviewee 4 has chosen not to disclose her disability to her employer and therefore has not given her employer the opportunity to reasonably accommodate her. Interviewee 4 admitted she reschedules her hospital appointments to her days off and relies on her co-workers for heavy lifting jobs.

Of the five remaining volunteers, each of them reported that for the most part they feel reasonably accommodated in their current roles. Each of the participants described the types of accommodations they have received, to include: flexible working arrangements, adaptations to the physical layout of the workplace, assistive technology/equipment, as well as some additional accommodations listed below.

4.4.1 Flexible Working Arrangements

One of the five candidates make use of flexible working arrangements offered to her by her employer. Interviewee 2 who has epilepsy, “*mornings aren't good for me, my employer has told me to come to work when I'm ready, it's been an immense help to me as stress is a major trigger for me*”.

4.4.2 Adaptations to Physical Layout

Four of the five participants have had adaptations made to the physical layout of their work environment. Two of the five have had occupational health assessments carried out by their employers, after which the respondents reported their “*employers carried out all the necessary adjustments*”.

Two of the five volunteers did however express their desire for further adaptations. Interviewee 5 said he feels accommodated “*to a point*”. “*The bump between the doorways is very high and the width of the doorways isn't ideal for passing through in my wheelchair*”. Additionally, interviewee 6 who suffers with pseudoseizures spoke of her wish to have a lift installed in her workplace. “*I have to take six flights of stairs to get to my desk in the morning, the toilets are located downstairs also, I just worry if I was ever to have a seizure whilst taking the stairs*”.

4.4.3 Assistive Technology/Equipment

Two of the five interviewees have been provided with assistive technology from their employers (the only two that have had occupational health assessments carried out). On foot of an occupational health assessment interviewee 2 had several changes made to her work area. Firstly, she was re-located to the outside of the desk where she would be less likely to hurt herself if she was to fall having a seizure. Interviewee 2 was fitted with two computer screens, a headset and an orthopaedic chair, in an attempt to ensure her safety, comfort and ease of work. The organisation also arranged for a ‘seizure buddy’ to sit beside interview 2, someone who is trained accordingly in the event of a seizure. In interviewee 2’s words, “*I feel 100% respected and accepted*”.

4.4.4 Additional Accommodations

In addition to the accommodations mentioned above, a few of the volunteers had various other accommodations made that they wished to highlight. Interviewee 1 spoke of how he attends a meeting with his employer every three months to discuss his needs, “*I have provided my employer with a list of what I will need on my return to work in September*”. Interviewee 2 and 6 who suffer with a similar condition expressed their appreciation at having the CEO of their companies regularly “*check-in*” on them, “*the CEO of my company deals with it personally, he has been very supportive*” – interviewee 2.

Furthermore, interviewee 2 wished to highlight her companies’ extensive efforts to further accommodate her. After being encouraged to do so by her employer, interviewee 2 wrote a letter explaining her condition, and what to do in the event of her having a seizure and sent it by email to each of her co-workers. Interviewee 2 reports positive feedback from this initiative – a copy of interviewee 2’s letter can be found in the appendix section of this paper. In addition, for business trips, “*the company puts me in a hotel close to where the conference is being held, if it’s too far they’ll arrange a taxi for me*”. This candidate’s employer also offered her a number of paid for counselling sessions, of which she made use. Finally, after suffering a severe seizure in work which resulted in falling down the stairs interviewee 2 wound up in hospital for three weeks and was out of sick from work for five months. During this time, she received full pay and was told to “*just get better*”.

4.5 Objective 3: To examine the experiences of people with disabilities regarding training and development opportunities

From the six-people interviewed all of them reported positive experiences of the training and development opportunities in their current workplaces. Two of the six candidates have progressed into other areas of the companies they are working for, with interviewee 2 stating, “*I’m further along than I ever thought I would be as someone with epilepsy*”. Indeed, Interviewee 1 and 3 argue the necessity for disabled workers to advocate for themselves and their ability to perform their job. According to interviewee 1 disabled workers should, “*showcase transferable skills as a result of your disability, you need to showcase your strengths*”, moreover interviewee 3 describes his experiences of needing to prove himself to certain people, “*some people may be reluctant to consider you because you’re doing something different to the ‘norm’, you may have to prove yourself to these people*”.

Interviewee 6, although happy in her current position does have concerns about her future – “*I feel I could be overlooked for development opportunities, my employers may not want to add to my stress levels and cause seizures*”. Interesting to note is interviewee 2’s experience with a previous employer. Interviewee 6 and 2 both suffer with seizures, interviewee 2 spoke about how she was promoted four times in a previous job. She started having seizures and from that point on her employer’s attitude became very negative towards her – “*after the seizures started my employers started coming up with list of things I was doing wrong, after a year I could no longer take it and decided to quit*”.

4.6 Objective 4: Do people with physical disabilities feel their employers could be doing more to encourage inclusive employment practices? If yes, what could they recommend?

The overall answer to this question is yes. Although the participants did report positive experiences of inclusive practices in their current workplaces, each of them did convey the opinion that more needs to be done. There were several suggestions the volunteers wanted to make, not only to employers, but to the government, to society in general and to people with disabilities looking for employment.

4.6.1 For Employers

Two of the six interviewees suggested that employers offer a probationary period or trial run to workers with disabilities. The same two participants referred to job searching as “*very disheartening*” and ask that employers “*take a chance*”. The request is for employers to allow disabled workers the opportunity to showcase their skills and prove they are ‘fit’ for the job. In addition, interviewee 3 asks of employers who have had an unpleasant experience in the past, “*to not let it deter you from employing someone who is disabled again*”.

Interviewee 2 and 6 want the CEO’s of companies to speak out about the benefits of inclusive employment practices. “*CEO’s of large companies should speak out in the media to encourage inclusive employment practices*” – interviewee 2. Additionally, interviewee 6 asks that “*employers be more understanding, particularly in small organisations*”. These participants ask that organisations draw up policies in line with equality legislation but also consider alternatives that might help to better enable disabled people at work.

“*Fear of rejection*” was mentioned by the three participants with invisible disabilities. Interviewee 4 suggests that “*employers should be more cautious of the words they use in job advertisements, they are indirectly discriminating, I wouldn’t apply for a lot of jobs out of fear*”.

Interviewee 2 wished to acknowledge her company as multi-award winners of ‘Best place to work’, and recommends other companies to “*strive for such awards*”.

4.6.2 For the Government

Four of the six volunteers requested “*better planning strategies*” for new and existing buildings. Interviewee 5 feels that efforts are “*half-hearted*”, as someone who uses a large wheelchair he sometimes finds it difficult to pass through doorways. Current provisions state that doorways must be of a certain width – “*that only accounts for the smallest size of wheelchair*”. Interviewee 5 asks that people look at “*the worst-case scenario*”, not a “*one size fits all*”. Interviewee 5 and 1 also agree that ramp ratios are too high causing people to tip. Interviewee 5 suggests that people in wheelchairs should be placed on panels as they “*better understand the obstacles wheelchair users face*”.

Four out of the six volunteers feel that current equality legislation needs better regulation and enforcement, “*encourage companies to be more aware of legislation and more needs to be done to enforce current legislation*” – interviewee 2. Furthermore, these volunteers ask for laws to be implemented that take account of the individual needs of each person. This topic rated highly among the participants with all of them expressing concerns that disabled people are grouped together as the same, meaning their individual needs are often not accounted for. Every participant asked that society recognise the needs of everyone as different. According to interviewee 3, “*two blind people have different needs, people need to recognise that*”.

4.6.3 For People with Disabilities

Several of the interviewees were very clear about the part people with disabilities must play regarding work. Four of the six volunteers actively advocate for the needs and rights of people with disabilities and argue that disabled people, “*can't be afraid to ask for what they need*”. Interviewee 1 placed massive emphasis on the need for disabled people to “*advocate for their own needs*”. Furthermore, he suggests that those with disabilities “*make a name for themselves*”, “*get involved*”, “*network*”, “*make use of online platforms*” and “*Maintain a positive mental attitude*”.

4.6.4 Additional Comments

Interviewee 1 wished to highlight his experiences of using local employment support services and indicated that he finds local services better than national ones.

Interviewee 3 noted that “*political correctness goes too far at times*” and for the most part to “*treat disabled people the same as everyone else*”.

4.7 Conclusion

The findings and analysis section of this research paper has ascertained some interesting results. It is a topic each of the participants responded very passionately to. The interview process produced some very strong opinions and eye-opening experiences from participants. What seems clear from the findings is that each of the participants have had a mixture of positive and negative experiences. Majority of the negative experiences appear to come from time spent in previous employments, perhaps suggesting that workers have had to seek out employers that utilize more substantial inclusive employment practices.

Regarding access to employment, there are some findings that suggest employers need to be more careful of what they are saying to people in interviews. Perhaps the most interesting findings appear to be the issue of participants with invisible disabilities not disclosing their disabilities during the interview process. Further on, findings seem to link this dilemma to “*fear of rejection*”.

In relation to reasonable accommodations, generally the participants seemed happy with the level of accommodation they’ve received in their current workplaces. The most common form of reasonable accommodations has been adaptations to the physical layout of the participants workplaces. At the same time, several of the candidates do indicate that people with disabilities need to acquire the ability to ask for what they need from their employers. Two of the interviewees are utilizing assistive technology in their workplaces, these two participants are the only ones to have had occupational health assessments carried out by their employers. One of the respondents was exempt from this subject area as she has chosen not to disclose her disability to her employer. This is the individual’s decision and it’s her right to do so, however this candidate could be inadvertently putting herself at risk, particularly regarding her health and safety. Interesting to note are the additional accommodations made by some employers. These employers have recognised the individual needs of their employees, needs that go beyond the provisions stated under equality legislation.

Overall participants were happy with the existing training and development opportunities in their workplaces. Although many of the respondents reported the need for people with disabilities to advocate for themselves, and to showcase their skills as they may have to prove themselves to certain individuals. A thought-provoking finding that came from this topic was in relation to the candidate who expressed her fear of being over-looked for progression opportunities because of her disability. A fellow candidate who suffers with a similar disability experienced the exact situation this respondent is describing, perhaps providing proof the candidate has reason to be worried.

Finally, all the candidates wished to offer suggestions on how employers can encourage more inclusive employment practices. One of the main suggestions was for employers to change their attitudes, to be more “*open-minded*”, and to give people with disabilities “*a chance*”. A “*fear of rejection*” exists, particularly among

participants with invisible disabilities. Several of the respondents believe that by speaking out in the media, CEO's can encourage more inclusive employment practices. The candidates ask that the government to incorporate “*better planning strategies*” to new and existing buildings, to “*have disabled people on panels*” and to consider the “*worst-case scenario*” when designing legislation. Almost all the participants ask for improved monitoring and enforcement of current equality legislation. One of the main points to take from the findings is the respondents wish to be treated as separate individuals with their own distinct needs. Some of the candidates wish to encourage people with disabilities to “*ask for what they need*” and to advocate for their rights and needs, and perhaps most importantly to “*remember change isn't going to happen overnight*”.

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This section will look at comparing the findings obtained from the interview process with the results ascertained in the literature review section. The sub-objectives of this report aim to investigate the experiences of people with disabilities in relation to gaining access to employment, reasonable accommodations, training and development opportunities and whether participants feel employers could be doing more to encourage inclusive employment practices. The key findings of the interview process are linked to the key findings of the literature review and are presented under the following headings:

5.2 Equality Legislation

As outlined by The Government of Ireland (2016) The Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015 are Ireland's main pieces of legislation that protect people with disabilities from discrimination in the workplace, whilst promoting inclusive employment practices. The acts place several provisions on employers to ensure the fair and adequate treatment of workers with disabilities. Such provisions include: reasonable accommodations, access to employment, opportunities to participate or advance and the chance to undergo training. It is evident from the findings of this study that employers have been attempting to abide by these provisions and ensure the rights of workers with disabilities are being met. Each of the participants was asked if they were familiar with any existing equality legislation and if so, what legislation. Five out of the six interviewees were aware of The Employment Equality Acts and the provisions they place upon employers regarding people with disabilities in the workplace. As not all the participants were familiar with the Acts perhaps there needs to be more emphasis placed on the importance of such Acts.

5.3 Employment Barriers

The literature review section of this paper determined that people with disabilities remain at a disadvantage in terms of employment prospects (MacNamee, 2017). Current literature has narrowed the scope of employment barriers down to three: physical, attitudinal and organisational. After assessing the findings obtained from the interview process, it is evident there are numerous links with the findings of the literature review. The interviewees describe several situations that resemble the barriers listed above.

Firstly, Hales (1996) describes physical barriers as those that make movement difficult, the issue is with a lack of access due to poor planning. Interestingly, four of the six interviewees agree that we need to incorporate “*better planning strategies*”, with one respondent suggesting “*people with disabilities need to be placed on panels*” and for policy makers to plan for a “*worst-case scenario*” situation. According to the literature physical barriers also constitute assistive technology or equipment. Of the six candidates only two have received assistive equipment from their employers. In fact, these particular respondents are the only ones to have had occupational health assessments carried out by their employers. Of course, this begs the question; could the others profit from assistive technology if they were to have an OHA carried out? In other words, should employers automatically carry out occupational health assessments on employees with a disability?

The results of the literature review also determined reasonable accommodations as a type of physical barrier. Watson et al., (2015) present several of the unmet needs reported by people with disabilities in the National Disability Survey. Flexible working arrangements was the highest unmet need accounted for by participants, at 46%. Comparing this to the findings of this study, only one of the participants reported flexi-time arrangements with their employer. Of course, the other participants may not require flexi-hours, but considering it is the highest accounted for unmet need there’s a strong possibility they may not have been offered or granted permission for flexible working arrangements. However, the participants were not asked to elaborate on this topic so this current study was unable to support this theory. Accessibility modifications accounted for the second highest unmet need at 32%, (Watson et al., 2015). The findings of the interview process slightly contradict this report. Majority of the participants had alterations made to the physical layout of their workplaces, and for the most part did feel their accessibility needs had been met. In saying that two of the participants admitted they would appreciate further modifications, so perhaps while there is some level of modification in existence, more needs to be done.

The Department of Education and Training (2005) introduced the idea of the social model of disability, which suggests the term disability is a socially constructed concept. Khosrow-Par (2017) argue the term disability is the restriction placed on people by a contemporary social organisation. None the less, the social model of

disability has an impact on social planning, programme design and on employment strategies.

Current literature reported the attitudes of employers as one of the major challenges facing workers with disabilities – employers and fellow co-workers tend to create greater barriers than any physical barrier (Department of Education and Training, 2005). Several of the participants from this study concur with this finding. Some of the participants referend to job searching as “*very disheartening*” and asked that employers be “*more open-minded*”, and willing to “*take a chance*” on people with disabilities. One of the respondents asked for employers who have had a bad experience, “*to not let it deter you from employing someone who is disabled again*”. In addition, there is a “*fear of rejection*” particularly among participants with invisible disabilities, perhaps suggesting there is still a stigma around conditions that are not visibly apparent. The Department of Education and Training (2005) asks that employers and society alike recognise invisible disabilities and the significant role they play on the lives of those affected by them. Furthermore, a recommendation arising from the literature review is to conduct further study on individuals with hidden disabilities.

Indeed, one of the most relevant findings from both this study and the literature review is the issue of grouping disabled people together, as the same (Goggin and Newell, 2003). The Department of Education and Training (2005) requests the need to examine the circumstances of people with disabilities in a way that acknowledges the diversity of people with disabilities, while taking account of those differences. Similarly, all the participants agree that society and employers cannot continue to group disabled people together and expect that it’s a “*one size fits all*” scenario – “*two blind people have different needs, people need to recognise that*”.

According to literature findings organisational barriers refer to the way people with disabilities are viewed by an organisation, in other words through the company’s culture and employment policies. An organisations culture decides what is to be prioritized and how people should behave towards one another (Lane and Maznevski, 2014). In a similar way, Frike and Totterdill (2014) maintain cultures influence over the extent to which employees can apply full use of their competencies and potentials. In essence, companies should create open cultures where employees feel comfortable

and respected. Findings from the interview process coincide with literature findings, with respondents asking for “*CEO’s to speak out in the media about inclusive employment practices*”. Moreover, one respondent suggests that companies strive for awards such as ‘Best place to work’. Lastly, interviewees ask that organisations draw up their policies in line with equality legislation, and to even consider additional provisions that may better enable someone who has a disability.

5.4 Additional Findings

Although not one of the more frequently mentioned topics political correctness was mentioned in both the findings of this study and the literature review. MacNamee (2017) indicates there is fear on the parts of the employers, of saying or doing the wrong thing. In most cases employers and society in general will try to avoid saying or doing something that could cause offence or exclusion of people with disabilities. However, in today’s society it’s often hard to know what the correct way of saying something is. Politically correct language is ever changing and too often people use incorrect phrases or terms that could be seen as offensive. One of the respondents agrees that “*political correctness goes too far*”, and for the most part to “*treat disabled workers the same as everyone else*”.

Literature review findings uncovered the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. The Act exists to ensure the safety, health and welfare needs of all employees are being met. The Act gives particular mention to employees with disabilities and furthermore those with invisible disabilities. The Act asks that employers create a culture that is non-judgemental, supportive and open so that employees feel they can disclose their disability, ensuring their health and safety needs are not compromised (Health and Safety Authority, 2009). One of the respondents from the interview section has chosen not to disclose her disability to her employer, it is understandable to suggest this participant may be inadvertently putting herself at risk, particularly regarding her health and safety. Although the Act does recommend that employers plan and manage for health and safety on an inclusive basis, as already mentioned the needs of every person with a disability are different. Therefore, this employer cannot plan for their employee’s individual needs.

Several of the interviewees wished to convey the importance for people with disabilities to advocate for themselves and their rights. The impression received is that

equality legislation can only do so much, often it's up to people themselves to ask for what they need. One particular interviewee wished to highlight the importance for people with disabilities to "*push themselves*", "*to work for themselves*" and to "*use their strengths*", in order to achieve what they want. Furthermore, this particular candidate issued a word of caution, "*it's not going to happen over-night, change happens over a period of time*".

5.5 Evaluation

Choosing a qualitative research method of data collection proved the ideal choice for this study. The data obtained was rich in detail and emotion. Although conducting face-to face interviews was time consuming it allowed for a relationship to form between the interviewer and interviewee resulting in an open, honest discussion about the topic at hand.

The variety of existing literature on the subject was vast, and perhaps at times overwhelming. However, it was more beneficial to have "too much" literature as opposed to "too little". It was possible to make comparison between the findings of current literature and the results of this study.

The intention of this study was to gather participants with a greater variety of disabilities. It was believed that doing so would allow for a broader range of experiences. However, after conducting this research it is evident that the type and extent of an individual's disability varies greatly and regardless of whether two people have the same disability their experiences are very different as their needs are completely different. Additionally, two of the participants had disabilities that technically calcify as a mental/psychological disability, but as there are major physical outcomes on the person's body it was felt these experiences were still applicable to this research.

While it would have been beneficial to have obtained more participants to interview, as it would have added to the richness of experiences – this was not possible due to such poor feedback from contacted organisations. The sample is based on a small number of participants, it is a convenience sample and does not reflect the majority.

There were a couple of areas encountered that were beyond the scope of this study. This study was unable to fully support the issue of invisible disabilities and the dilemma facing people whether to disclose their disability and how it affects them in

terms of access to employment, reasonable accommodations and training and development opportunities. One of the participants from the interview process has chosen not to disclose her disability to her employer, although the respondent did state “*fear of rejection*” during her interview, it is not fully clear if this was her only reason for choosing not to disclose. Recommended further study would be to investigate the experiences of people with invisible disabilities, as separate from other types of disabilities. This study presented a lot of unanswered questions relating to this issue. There appears to be a dilemma facing people with invisible disabilities regarding the issue of disclosure and the affect it has on their health, social relationships and work performance.

In addition, it was not feasible to go into more detail regarding flexible working arrangements and occupational health assessments. Watson et al., (2015) report flexible working arrangements as the highest accounted for unmet need among people with disabilities and only one of the participants from this study had flexible working arrangements. Regarding occupational health assessments, the two participants from this study that had assessments carried out by their employers were the only two found to be utilizing assistive technology. Further recommended study would be to address these areas in more detail.

Furthermore, one of interviews indicated the need for smaller organisation to be more open minded, so perhaps this is an area that requires further investigation. Areas such as age and gender were not fully explored in this study. Majority of disabilities are acquired later on in life so it would be interesting to investigate the impact of acquiring a disability later on, as opposed to being born with it.

5.6 Conclusion

It is evident from the passage above there are a number of links between the results of this study and existing literature. The biggest of which are the obvious barriers placed upon people with disabilities in terms of employment prospects. At the same time, the findings of the literature review appear predominantly negative, suggesting people with disabilities are over-looked and cast aside by contemporary social society. The findings of this study convey a slightly different picture. Although the respondents have provided several accounts of negative experiences in past employments, each of them seems for the most part happy in their current workplaces. This perhaps coincides

with The Department of Education and Training (2005) suggestion that governments have recognised the nature of disability is changing, and that new and different types of disabilities are now being recognised. It is important to remember however that the findings of this study focused purely on Irish experiences, whereas the findings of the literature review are worldwide.

There were many strengths and weaknesses encountered in this research paper, as well as several limitations. There is certainly room for further study on the area, and it is important it is addressed in order to ensure correct provision are being made for people with disabilities in employment.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the sub-objectives of this research study have been obtained. One of the key findings from the literature section of this report is the existence of employment barriers facing people with disabilities. From the findings of this study there is a degree of similarity with existing literature, although perhaps not to the same extent. Although participants had experienced a level of discrimination, and agree that more needs to be done to encourage inclusive employment practices, many of the participants also reported very positive experiences in their current workplaces.

Barriers to participation need to be identified and removed, possibly requiring changes to laws, policies, institutions, and environments. Such measures are important not only for people with disabilities in employment but for people who are unemployed and seeking work.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Recommendation 1: Reduce physical barriers to employment

Drawing from the findings of this study, there are several ways of overcoming physical barriers to employment. Much of the physical barriers people with disabilities face are as a direct result of insufficient equality legislation. Although the aim of equality legislation is to prevent discrimination and promote equality, often the provisions placed on employers and institutions fall short of effectively ensuring the needs of workers with disabilities are being met. There needs to be greater enforcement and regulation of existing legislation, the government need to consider examining current legislation and adding where necessary further provisions that account for the individual needs of people with disabilities, as separate from one another.

Additionally, the government need to consider better planning strategies to new and existing buildings. At present, efforts are “*half-hearted*”, and simply don’t account for a “*worst-case scenario*”, making it difficult for some to overcome the physical barriers they are presented with. There is also the issue of representation – people with disabilities need to be more visible and take a leading role in decision-making, ensuring development policies and programmes are shaped to take better account of their requirements.

To help people with disabilities that are unemployed and seeking work, the government need create internships that are of value and have an end aim. Current internship schemes don't always have an end aim, and the person can find they are no better off afterwards, in terms of employment prospects. In addition, the government need to stop cutting secondary benefits, such as allotted PA support as this would better enable both employed and unemployed people with disabilities. For some people with disabilities returning to work means they will inevitably lose a lot of their secondary benefits, that combined with the possibility of working flexi-time due to their disability, leaves some people with a difficult decision to make regarding their employment prospects.

6.2.2 Recommendation 2: Reduce attitudinal barriers to employment

Most attitudinal barriers come from the negative attitudes received from employers and from co-workers. Employers can do a lot to help improve the attitudinal barriers that face workers with disabilities. This begins at the recruitment stage, employers need to be careful they are not indirectly discriminating against people with disabilities. They can do this by ensuring the following: avoid using language in job advertisements that indirectly discriminates against someone with a disability, avoid focusing on an individual's disability during the interview process, do ask questions regarding what that person may need to better enable them to perform at work. Employers need to be more open-minded and take a chance - there are support agencies out there and employers need to make better use of them. Offering a trial run or probationary period would be beneficial for both the employer and the employee. It is a chance for the employee to showcase their skills and a chance for the employer to set aside potential fears and see that people with disabilities have a lot to offer regarding work ethic.

'Positive Action' is a term used to describe the additional measures employers take that are separate to the ones required under equality legislation. Employers could implement steps to attract people with disabilities to their organisation, whilst helping to promote equality (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2016). An example of 'positive action' could be to form a partnership relationship with an employment support service such as the EmployAbility service.

6.2.3 Recommendation 3: Reduce organisational barriers to employment

As previously mentioned organisational barriers refer to an organisations culture. Organisations should strive for excellence in terms of inclusive employment practices. There are several competitions in existence that recognise and reward the hard work organisations put into building a happy, inclusive workplace for all. Examples of ways to create an inclusive environment are; to build an open culture, that respects and appreciates the individual needs of all its employees. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2016) describe a ‘7 Step Framework’ to building a culture of equality and Human Rights in the Workplace. The framework includes everything from policy implementation, disability awareness training and incorporating equality and human rights concerns into the heart of key decision making in the organisation.

Another way of overcoming organisational barriers is to create an Employer Brand, to build a reputation as an employer of choice among people with disabilities. Employee engagement is a crucial element of this process. Consider the five-letter acronym, SAUCE (satisfaction + awareness + understanding + commitment = engagement) (Croston, 2008). Employee engagement is vital to improving an employer brand image – the golden rule is to understand your own organisation, and ask staff questions relating to what works and what doesn’t, what they like and don’t like about working for the company, only then can your organisation take the steps toward becoming an employer of choice among people with disabilities (Taylor, 2014).

The evidence from this report suggests that many of the barriers people with disabilities face are avoidable and the difficulties associated with disability can be overcome. Of course, these recommendations incur a level of cost. Employers and the government alike need to ask themselves, do the benefits of building inclusive employment practices out way the cost of implementing such strategies and policies.

Companies need to invest more heavily in Human Resources and ensure a sufficient inclusive employment scheme is put in place. Such efforts take a degree of planning and time to implement. Simpler steps like using language that doesn’t indirectly discriminate against people with disabilities in job advertisements can be achieved almost immediately. Building an inclusive work culture that values and respects the needs of everyone may take a year or two, to properly implement.

Changes to existing legislation or implementation of new equality legislation can take years of planning. The government need to plan more effectively in the annual budget and ensure secondary benefits or not being reduced.

The important thing to remember is four out of five people acquire a disability during their working life, it is important to plan and account for it in the best conceivable way (MacNamee, 2017).

7.0 REFLECTIVE LEARNING LOG

The process of conducting this study was a challenging one. The difficulty of balancing this study with work and other commitments was far more difficult than imagined. The concept of studying over the summer months was not a new one, however studying for a level nine qualification was. It became apparent quite quickly the level of work that was expected of me. The vast array of existing literature on the subject was at times overwhelming, however, it was crucial to exhaust as much literature as possible in order to gain a greater understanding of disability in the workplace.

Understanding the importance of time management was an important lesson from this study. Getting through as much of the literature as possible allowed for the interview questions to be drawn up. Locating participants proved difficult and, at times frustrating due to the lack of response from disability related organisations. Once participants were obtained, time had to be allotted for conducting the interviews face to face. After which, the results needed to be compiled into themes for the findings and analysis section of this report.

The chosen area of research is considered somewhat controversial, but having previously written a thesis about inclusive practices in early childhood education it was an area of interest for the researcher. Before conducting this study, the existence of employment barriers for people with disabilities was not apparent. Conducting interviews with people that were more than happy to talk about their experiences was an eye-opening and endearing experience. Overall, the result of completing this study was very beneficial and educational and this information will be of critical importance going forward with a career in Human Resource Management.

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APPENDIX

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTION

Style: Semi-Structured

General introductory questions about work and disability

- 1) What sector do you work in?
- 2) Do you work part-time or full-time?
- 3) How long have you been working in your current role?
- 4) What are the daily activities you must carry out to fulfil your job role?
- 5) What is your disability? did you become disabled due to illness or an accident or were you born with it?
- 6) Do you feel your disability hinders your participation at work? If yes, how does it affect you?

Equality/ Anti-Discriminatory Legislation

- 7) Are you familiar with existing equality legislation in Ireland? If yes, what legislation? If no, a short breakdown of equality legislation will be given.
- 8) What was your experience of gaining access to your current job? Did you require any alterations to be made to accommodate you during the interview process? OR Did you have any issues on your return to work following your accident/ diagnosis?
- 9) Has your employer had to make adaptations to the physical layout of your workplace to better enable you to do your job?
- 10) Have you and your employer had to look at re-designing your job role?
- 11) Do you feel as though you have been reasonably accommodated by your employer? Is there more your employer could do to better accommodate you?
- 12) Has there ever been any issues between you and your employer regarding your need to seek or begin medical treatment?
- 13) Do you require specially adapted equipment/technologies to do your job? If yes, has your employer provided you with this equipment?
- 14) Do you feel as though your disability has ever had an impact on your progression within the company?
- 15) Have you ever had any issues with discrimination, either directly or indirectly?

Employment support services & further suggestions

- 16) Are you aware of any employment support services that assist people with disabilities looking for work?
- 17) Have you any experience of using these services and can you tell me about them?
- 18) Do you feel your disability has been an issue or obstacle for you when looking for work?
- 19) Do you feel your disability has been an issue or obstacle for you in terms of remaining in employment?
- 20) Are there any suggestions you would like to offer, be it to the government, to employers or people in general, that would help build more inclusive working environments for all?

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title: The experiences of people working with a physical disability in Ireland.

Research Investigator: Melissa McLoughlin

I _____ (Your Name) agree to participate in an interview carried out by Melissa McLoughlin, a student at the National College of Ireland, to aid with the research of ‘The experiences of people working with a physical disability in Ireland’

I have read the information related to the research project and understand the aims of the project.

I am aware of the questions to be discussed in the interview.

I am fully aware that I will remain anonymous throughout data reported and that I have the right to leave the interview at any point.

I am fully aware that data collected will be stored securely, safely and in accordance with Data Protection Act (1998).

I am fully aware that the recordings will be destroyed after a period of 6 months from the date in which the research is submitted (August 2017).

I am fully aware that I am not obliged to answer any question, but that I do so at my own free will.

I agree to have the interview recorded (voices only), so it can be transcribed after the interview is held.

I am aware that I can make any reasonable changes to this consent form.

Name in Print

Participants Signature

Date

Researchers Signature

Date

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO INCLUDE MATERIAL IN RESEARCH

Research Project Title: To investigate the experiences of people working with a physical disability in Ireland.

Research Investigator: Melissa McLoughlin

I _____ (Your Name) give permission to Melissa McLoughlin, a student at the National College of Ireland, to include material produced by me in an email dated the 12/07/17 and titled 'What to do if I have a seizure' - to aid with the research of 'The experiences of people working with a physical disability in Ireland'

Name in Print

Participants Signature

Date

Researchers Signature

Date

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW 6

Section 1

- 1) Philanthropy
- 2) Part-Time – not in relation to disability
- 3) Six months
- 4) Computer work, answering phones, attending meetings outside of workplace
- 5) Psychogenic nonepileptic seizures (PNES), or Pseudoseizures. Are emotional, stress-related in origin. There since childhood, discovered in early 20's.
- 6) When a seizure happens yes, must go home and may be out of work for a day or two.

Section 2

- 7) Yes, The Employment Equality Act and The Disability Act
- 8) Applied for my job online, asked to come for an interview. No assistance needed for the interview process. I told them about my condition after I got that job, I didn't want it to affect my chances of getting the job.
- 9) No, but I would appreciate a lift in the building.
- 10) No
- 11) Yes, happy enough with the accommodations. The only issue is with the stairs, I have to take six flights of stairs that are very narrow and steep in order to get to my desk in the morning, the bathrooms are downstairs too, I just worry if I was ever to have a seizure whilst taking the stairs. A lift would be great.
- 12) No. I attend a support group and CBT specialist once a month, my employer doesn't mind but I feel guilty taking the time off to go.
- 13) No
- 14) Not right now but I feel I could be overlooked for development opportunities in the future, my employers may not want to add to my stress levels and cause seizures.
- 15) No, not that I'm aware of

Section 3

- 16) No, I haven't been made aware of any
- 17) N/A
- 18) Yes, I'm afraid of rejection. I don't generally disclose my condition in interviews. I've been accused of faking my illness in the past.
- 19) No but as mentioned already I'm worried about my progression opportunities, if I'm overlooked for opportunities, I can't see myself staying there.
- 20) There needs to be better regulation and enforcement of current legislation. The government need to implement more legislation that takes account of the individual needs of people with disabilities, as they vary greatly. Employers need to be more understanding, particularly in smaller organisations. I would like if there was a greater link between the Health Service and the Mental Health Service. The CEO of my company is always checking in on me, that makes a huge difference, in a good way.

INTERVIEWEE 2'S LETTER TO CO-WORKERS

I was diagnosed with Epilepsy about 16 years ago and am one of 40,000 people with epilepsy in Ireland (we could nearly fill the Aviva Stadium!). I wanted to write a quick note on what to expect if I do have a seizure in work and just to let you know that while it might be a bit weird to see me or someone else having one, **don't panic.** ☺

Having a seizure is normal for me & it's a lot easier to deal with when you know what to do. The last few seizures I had an aura/warning beforehand so I can go somewhere safe. The seizure could happen within an hour or 24 hours (sometimes if I get to rest they don't happen at all). I have what's called tonic clonic seizures – it's like when a computer crashes, it takes a while to reboot and then start up again. My brain completely shuts off when I have the seizure and after the shaking has stopped the brain starts to work again, just **VERY** slowly.

If I have a seizure what can you do?

- When I have a seizure for a few seconds my body goes limp, then every muscle tenses and I'll fall (like someone fainting). Phil is my Seizure Buddy and he's caught me and kept me safe 99.9999% of the time – he's a legend! As long as I haven't hit my head off anything, there's nothing to worry about. This has happened many times before, I'm pretty durable. All I end up with are a few bumps and bruises.
- Try and lie me on my back – once I start having the seizure I get **VERY** heavy **VERY** quickly so just let me have the seizure at that stage.
- Please don't put anything in my mouth - don't worry I can't swallow my tongue during a seizure - it's impossible!
- Put a coat or something under my head if you can (won't always be possible).
- Move any chairs out of the way so I don't bang my legs etc
- Pls call Paul. (**086 *******/ Nina, she's well used to 'post seizure' me – **086 *******).
- If you happen to find me somewhere on the ground i.e. you haven't seen me fall, it is best to call an ambulance from a health and safety perspective. However, if you've watched me fall and know I wasn't harmed I would prefer not to leave in an ambulance. The hospital will release me after a prolonged wait with the diagnosis of "You have epilepsy". I'm much better going home to rest; I can recuperate much quicker there.
- It's always better to have a familiar face when I come around so if Phil is around they can sit with me during the seizure / afterwards. When I regain consciousness, I'll be very confused as everything is a bit scrambled and my short-term memory won't be at its best.

What to expect:

- It normally lasts 1-4 minutes which isn't long but I'm sure seems like an eternity when watching someone.

- I will make random noises - this is the air being forced past the vocal cords as the muscles stiffen and it is completely fine and normal (sounds a bit weird from what I've been told though ☺)
- My whole body will clench while seizing which is totally normal (and a great tone up exercise!! Like intense planking lol)
- My lips will turn a bluish colour
- My skin will turn pale/white/grey depending on how long the seizure lasts this is normal and just a lack of blood circulating around the body.
- My heart generally stops for a millisecond – this is a good thing as it generally jolts me out of the seizure.
- Please remember everything is OK, I've been through this many times, don't panic; don't be too worried (unless I fall down the stairs!!☺), just let me have my seizure and I'll come out of it and be back to myself.
- If you follow these suggestions you are doing everything you can for me, if someone sits with me while I have the seizure – that means more to me than most other things – waking up to familiar faces is always so much easier to start remembering everything.

When I wake up:

Several things may happen depending on the type/ length of seizure etc.

- I generally don't remember much in the first few minutes. This can include my name and where I am etc so you may have the same conversation with me over and over until my memory starts working again. My short-term memory will be scrambled. Sometimes it'll come back in a minute sometimes a half hour
- I can be irritable, cranky and downright rude when I wake up but I'm not **really** aware of it – at this point I don't know why people are looking at me so tend to get a bit defensive because I don't remember I've had a seizure! I will probably give out if an ambulance arrives but please don't take me seriously!
- If my memory is normal then it was a very small one. Confusion and complete amnesia when I come around is completely normal and slowly wears off as I start to realise I've had a seizure.

Paul or the ambulance will arrive soon after I come around.

If anyone has any questions just let me know, or you can find out more information about epilepsy and seizures at <http://www.epilepsy.ie/>

If you know what you're dealing with it's much easier to manage. To the Hays Veterans, thank you so much for all your support, get well wishes and jokes! For those new to the Hays; I hope this will help and if you've any questions please ask.

