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Research article

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Abstract

This study used data from the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability to examine differences in work experiences between women and men aged 20 to 54 with a disability. These experiences capture the barriers that persons with disabilities reported encountering in their jobs, workplaces, and the labour market. Women with disabilities were more likely than men with disabilities to change the amount of their work, begin working from home, and take a leave of absence because of their condition. A higher proportion of women than men with disabilities required workplace accommodations, but there were no significant sex differences on whether these accommodations were available. Perceptions of labour discrimination were generally similar between men and women with disabilities, with one notable difference. Fewer women than men with disabilities, particularly those with more severe disabilities, reported being refused a job interview because of their condition.

Keywords: workers with disabilities; women with disabilities; barriers to employment; workplace accommodations; disability discrimination.

Authors

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Introduction

Persons with disabilities and women have been two of the designated groups under the *Employment Equity Act*, which aims to achieve equality in the workplace. With the *Accessible Canada Act* that came into force on July 11, 2019, the employment of persons with disabilities has further become a priority area, with a particular focus on identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessibility in employment. In accordance with these Acts, the purpose of this study is to extend research on the work experiences of women with disabilities as these pertain to barriers to their employment and in the workplace. Previous studies have shown that women with disabilities may face a double disadvantage in labour market, including, but not limited to, their employment rates, underemployment, and earnings (Burlock 2017; Kavanagh et al. 2015; Morris et al. 2018; Pettinicchio and Maroto 2017). However, relatively less is known about in what ways the work experiences of women and men with disabilities are similar or different.

In 2016, three in five Canadians aged 25 to 64 years with disabilities were employed compared with four in five of those without disabilities (Morris et al. 2018). Among persons with less severe disabilities, the employment rate was higher for women than men aged 25 to 34 years, but comparatively lower for women in older age groups.[1] Among persons with more severe disabilities, women aged 25 to 34 years also had a higher employment rate than men, while men aged 55 to 64 years had a higher employment rate than women in this age group. When educational attainment was considered, a mixed pattern of findings emerged. Among persons aged 25 to 64 years with less severe disabilities and a university education, men had a higher employment rate than women, but the opposite was the case among persons with more severe disabilities, as women in this group had a comparatively higher employment rate than men (Morris et al. 2018). Among those with a high school diploma or less, women had a lower employment rate than men, regardless of severity of disability.

Previous research has also shown that women with disabilities who are employed are more likely to have part-time jobs and earn less than others (Brown and Moloney 2018; Pettinicchio and Maroto 2017). In 2016, among employed persons with less severe disabilities, more than double the proportion of women than men had part-time jobs (Morris et al. 2018). The sex difference in part-time employment among persons with more severe disabilities was modest. Similarly, there was a large difference in median income between women and men with less severe disabilities ($30,080 versus $39,710 in 2015), while the income gap was smaller between women and men with more severe disabilities ($17,520 versus $20,230).

The availability and conditions of employment may account for some of these differences in employment. Although some persons with disabilities are students, retired, or unable to work because of their condition, other persons with disabilities have the potential to work[2] but are not currently in the labour force (Morris et al. 2018; Till et al. 2015). Among non-workers aged 25 to 64 years, a somewhat higher proportion of men (42%) than women (37%) with disabilities had the potential to work but were not employed (Morris et al. 2018). In part, this unrealized potential to work could result from barriers encountered in the labour market, such as a lack of jobs with needed accommodations, accessibility issues, or discrimination (Till et al. 2015).

In summary, these findings highlight an important intersection between disability status and sex (Gerschick 2000) and the need to better understand the work experiences of women compared with men with disabilities, while taking into consideration severity of disability. This study contributes to this area

1. See below (data and measures) for definition of severity of disability.
2. A person with “potential to work” was defined as someone who was officially unemployed or out of the labour force, but who intended to search for employment in the next 12 months. Persons who were retired or reported that their condition prevented them from working (even with accommodations) were not counted as potential workers (Morris et al. 2018).

by examining the work experiences of persons with disabilities, using a gender-based perspective and data from the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD). Work experiences refer to changes in work and work arrangements because of a condition, reasons for part-time employment, accommodations required to work, availability of these accommodations, and perceived labour market discrimination. These experiences capture the barriers that persons with disabilities reported encountering in their jobs, workplaces, and the labour market.

Data source and measures

The study was based on data from the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD), which is a post-censal survey that collected data on Canadians aged 15 years and older with a functional difficulty (e.g., difficulty seeing) or a condition that has lasted or is expected to last six months or longer (Cloutier, Grondin, and Lévesque 2018). To conserve interview time, the CSD included sociodemographic data on respondents from the 2016 Census. The CSD covered Canadians residing in households in the ten provinces and three territories, but excluded individuals residing in institutions (e.g., long-term care facilities) and on First Nations reserves. Over 23,000 individuals (an estimated weighted population size of 6.2 million) participated in the survey, with an overall response rate of 69.5%. Over one-half of the survey respondents (55.8%) were women.

The CSD used the Disability Screening Questions (DSQ) to measure the presence of disability; the DSQ is based on the social model of disability and defines disability according to how frequently or intensely a functional difficulty or condition limits a person's daily activities (Grondin 2016). In the CSD, respondents who reported that a functional difficulty or condition limited their daily activities "sometimes," "often," or "always" were identified as persons with disabilities. Those who reported that a functional difficulty or condition "never" or "rarely" limited their daily activities were not identified as persons with disabilities, with one exception. People who rarely experienced activity limitations but reported a high intensity of difficulty (i.e., "have a lot of difficulty" or "cannot do most activities") were also identified as persons with disabilities. Those who reported having a developmental condition were identified as persons with disabilities, regardless of how frequently or intensely their condition limited their daily activities.

For each type of disability,[3] the CSD calculated a severity score based on the frequency and intensity of activity limitations (Cloutier et al. 2018). The CSD calculated a global disability score based on the combined scores for the number of different types of disabilities a person had. To facilitate interpretation of the global severity scores, the CSD analytical file includes a derived variable that identifies four severity classes: Class 1 = mild, Class 2 = moderate, Class 3 = severe, and Class 4 = very severe disability.[4] Following previous studies, the present study combined respondents in the mild and moderate disability classes into a comparison group and combined those in the severe and very severe classes into another group (Morris et al. 2018; Turcotte 2014). These groups are labelled as "less severe" and "more severe," respectively.

The CSD asked respondents a wide range of questions about their work situation, reasons for part-time employment, self-reported requirements for and availability of workplace accommodations, job training, and perceptions of labour discrimination. This study used descriptive statistics to compare women and men with disabilities on these work experiences, and differences were tested for statistical significance. In the CSD, the variable sex refers to whether the respondent was reported to be female or male in the interview or on the Census. The analysis compared sex differences on work experiences among persons with (1) any disability, (2) less severe disabilities, and (3) and more severe disabilities. While differences

3. The DSQ measures 10 disability types: seeing, hearing, mobility, flexibility, dexterity, pain-related, learning, developmental, mental health-related, and memory. There is also an 11th category for unspecified/unknown disabilities.
4. See Grondin (2016) for further methodological details on the measurement of disability and the severity of disability.

in types of disabilities could also influence sex differences in work experiences, data and methodological limitations prevented a comparison across different types of disabilities.

Although it is conventional to define the core working-age population as persons aged 25 to 54 years, which allows for school completion, among CSD respondents aged 20 to 24 years, 30% were in school and 58% were employed at the time of the study. Therefore, to be more inclusive, the analysis focused on respondents aged 20 to 54 years[5] who reported being employed during the survey reference week. For the items on workplace accommodations and perceived labour discrimination, the analysis also included persons who were employed in the previous five years.

Results

Descriptive characteristics

Table 1 describes the demographic and disability characteristics of employed persons with a disability aged 20 to 54 years. While the data in this table present sex differences in education, employment, occupation, and wages among persons with disabilities, these data should not be interpreted as estimates of how disability contributes to these characteristics.

There were significant sex differences in the age composition of the sample. A higher proportion of women with disabilities were in the two youngest age groups and a lower proportion were in the oldest age group. About 11% of women with disabilities were aged 20 to 24 years and 28% were aged 25 to 34 years. This compares to 8% and 22% of men with disabilities, respectively. A similar proportion of women and men (about 29% each) with disabilities were aged 35 to 44 years. Significantly more men (41%) than women (33%) with disabilities were aged 45 to 54.

There were also significant sex differences in educational attainment, with women with disabilities having higher levels of education than men with disabilities. Among the employed, 31% of women and 23% of men with disabilities had a Bachelor's degree or higher. A higher proportion of women (35%) than men (23%) with disabilities had a college/CEGEP certificate or diploma below a Bachelor's degree. Conversely, a higher proportion of men (14%) than women (8%) with disabilities had a trades certificate or diploma. For about 27% of men and 21% of women with disabilities, high school was their highest level of education. About three times as many men (13%) as women (5%) with disabilities had less education than a high school diploma.

On educational attainment, the sex difference among persons with disabilities generally followed a similar pattern as among persons without disabilities. However, the educational advantage among women appears to have been larger among persons with disabilities compared to among persons without disabilities (data not shown). The sex gap in the proportion of persons with less than a high school education was comparatively smaller among persons without disabilities. Among those aged 20 to 54 years and currently employed, 5% of women and 8% of men without disabilities had less than a high school education or about a 3-percentage point gap, which compares to a 9-point gap among persons with disabilities. About 29% of women and 23% of men without disabilities had some post-secondary education, a sex gap of 4 percentage points, which compares to a 13-point gap among persons with

5. To test the robustness of the results, the analyses were repeated for the sample aged 25 to 54 years and 15 to 64 years (data not shown). The results from these supplemental analyses were broadly consistent with the sex differences on work experiences among the 20 to 54-year-olds sample.

disabilities. No other differences in educational attainment were observed between women and men with disabilities.

Table 1
Selected characteristics of Canadians with disabilities aged 20 to 54 and currently employed, 2017

	Women		Men
	percent		
Age group			
20 to 24	10.7	*	8.1
25 to 34	27.8	*	21.5
35 to 44	28.8		29.2
45 to 54	32.6	*	41.2
Highest level of education			
Less than high school	4.5	*	13.4
High school diploma or equivalent	21.3	*	26.5
Trade certificate or diploma	8.0	*	14.3
College/CEGEP certificate or diploma[1]	35.4	*	22.5
Bachelor's degree or higher	30.8	*	23.2
Severity of disability			
Mild	55.6		58.7
Moderate	20.8		21.0
Severe	15.5		12.8
Very severe	8.1		7.5
Number of disabilities			
One	43.8		47.0
Two or three	39.9		37.0
More than three	16.3		16.0
Employment characteristics			
Full-time	76.4	*	88.4
Part-time	23.6	*	11.6
Employee	88.2		86.8
Self-employed	11.8		12.7
Non-permanent job among employees	13.7		11.3
Permanent job among employees	86.3		88.7
Occupational group			
Management	5.1	*	7.8
Business, finance, and administration	24.6	*	11.0
Natural and applied sciences	3.8	*	10.3
Health	12.0	*	2.9 [E]
Education, law and social, and community and government services	17.8	*	8.1
Art, culture, recreation, and sport	3.6		3.3 [E]
Sales and service	27.9	*	21.6
Trades, transport, and equipment operators	2.7	*[E]	26.4
Natural resources and agriculture	0.5	*[E]	2.5
Manufacturing and utilities	1.8	*[E]	6.1
Wages (from Census 2016, reference year: 2015)			
Median ($)	31,100	*	43,300

[E] use with caution

* significantly different from men in same disability class at $p < 0.05$

[1] Includes post-secondary diploma or certificate below a Bachelor's degree.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017.

There were non-significant differences between women and men in the severity of disability and the number of disabilities. The majority of women had either a mild (56%) or moderate (21%) disability, while the remainder had either a severe (16%) or very severe (8%) disability. The proportions of men in each severity class were fairly similar to those of women. About 44% of women and 47% of men had one disability, 40% of women and 37% of men had two or three disabilities, and 16% of both women and men had four or more disabilities.

Among the currently employed,[6] significantly fewer women (76%) than men (88%) with disabilities had full-time employment and double the proportion of women (24%) as men (12%) with disabilities had part-time employment.[7] A similar proportion of women (88%) as men (87%) with disabilities were employees and 12% of women and 13% of men with disabilities were self-employed.[8] Of employees, a similar proportion of women (86%) as men (89%) with disabilities had permanent jobs.

There were also significant differences between women and men with disabilities in occupational group. For example, about double the proportion of women (25%) than men (11%) were employed in business, finance, and administration jobs. About four times as many women (12%) as men (3%) were employed in health occupations and about double the proportion of women (18%) as men (8%) were employed in occupations in education, law and social, and community and government services. A higher proportion of women (28%) than men (22%) were employed in sales and service occupations. A far higher proportion of men (26%) than women (3%) were employed in the trades, transport, and as equipment operators. A higher proportion of men (10%) than women (4%) worked in jobs in natural and applied sciences.[9]

In 2015, among persons aged 20 to 54 years, the median before-tax earnings of women with disabilities was $31,100, significantly lower than the $43,300 median earnings of men with disabilities.[10]

In summary, women with disabilities, on average, were younger than men with disabilities, but had higher levels of education. Among persons with disabilities, women were more likely to be employed part-time and had lower wages compared with men. Women with disabilities were more likely to be employed in sales and service followed by business, finance, and administration, whereas men with disabilities were more likely to be employed in trades, transport, and equipment operators. There were no sex differences in severity of disability or the number of disabilities.

Work experiences

Among persons with any disability who were employed, similar proportions of women (36%) and men (35%) reported that their condition limited the amount or kind of work they could do at their present job or business (Table 2, Column 1). This experience varied depending on severity of disability but there were no sex differences. Among persons with less severe disabilities, about one-quarter of women (27%) and men (25%) reported that their condition limited their capacity to work (Table 2, Column 2). This increased to 67% of women and 72% of men with more severe disabilities (Table 2, Column 3).

6. A similar proportion of men and women with disabilities aged 20 to 54 were employed (64%). However, among persons without disabilities aged 20 to 54, men were more likely than women to have been employed (85% vs. 79%).
7. Part-time employment is defined as less than 30 hours per week.
8. A very small number of respondents worked in a family business without pay, but the numbers are too unreliable to be reported.
9. The sex differences in part-/full-time work and occupational group were not statistically different between persons with and without disabilities (data not shown).
10. This income variable is from the 2016 Census and the reference period is the 2015 calendar year.

Table 2
Work experiences of Canadians with disabilities aged 20 to 54 by sex and severity of disability, 2017

	Any disability		Less severe		More severe	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
	percent					
Work situation						
Condition limits current work	36.4	34.7	26.8	25.2	67.3	71.7
Changed kind of work	23.5	24.3	19.0	19.1	38.0	44.7
Changed amount of work	30.5 *	23.6	23.8 *	18.7	51.8	42.7
Changed jobs	21.5	20.3	17.6	16.2	33.8	36.3
Began working from home	10.1 *	6.9	7.0	6.0	20.1 *	10.5
Leave of absence (> one month)	30.3 *	24.2	25.0 *	18.7	47.5	46.0
None of the above	44.5 *	50.4	51.5 *	57.6	21.9	22.0
Reasons for part-time employment						
Health condition	27.2	30.1	16.2	14.0 E	51.7	51.6
Child care	13.0	F	16.2 E	F	F	F
Personal or family responsibilities	F	F	F	F	F	F
Attending school	9.0 E	11.9 E	10.8 E	13.2 E	4.8 E	F
Economic conditions	3.0 E	F	F	F	F	F
Could not find full-time work	2.6 E	F	3.4 E	F	F	F
Job is part-time or contract	32.4	28.7	37.7	36.1	20.5 E	18.8 E
Personal preference	6.1 E	7.9 E	6.1 E	F	F	F
Job training						
Classroom training	45.3	41.6	47.2	43.0	39.2	36.1
On-the-job training	51.5	48.1	53.2	51.2	46.2 *	35.9
Job training not paid by employer	14.2 *	10.3	13.6 *	10.0	16.0	11.3 E

E use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

* significantly different from men in same disability class at $p < 0.05$

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017.

About 24% of women with any disability reported that they changed their kind of work because of their condition. Again, the proportion of women who changed their kind of work depended on the severity of disability. About 19% of women with less severe disabilities and 38% of women with more severe disabilities changed their kind of work because of their condition. While 22% of women with any disability changed jobs because of their condition, about 18% of women with less severe and 34% of women with more severe disabilities changed jobs. There were no significant differences between women and men with disabilities on change in kind of work or change in job because of a health condition.

There were, however, some significant sex differences that suggest that women with disabilities may face a disadvantage compared to men regarding their work situation. Among persons with any disability, a significantly higher proportion of women (31%) than men (24%) reported that they changed their amount of work because of their condition (Table 2, Column 1). Among persons with less severe disabilities, 24% of women and 19% of men changed their amount of work, a statistically significant difference (Table 2, Column 2). A larger proportion of women (52%) than men (43%) with more severe disabilities also changed their amount of work because of their condition, but this difference was statistically non-significant (Table 2, Column 3).

A larger proportion of women than men began working from home because of their condition, but this difference was significant only among persons with any disability and more severe disabilities. Among persons with more severe disabilities, about twice the proportion of women (20%) as men (11%) began working from home because of their condition. In comparison, about 10% of women (vs. 7% of men) with any disability and 7% of women (vs. 6% of men) with less severe disabilities began working from home.

A comparatively higher proportion of women than men with any disability (30% vs. 24%) or with less severe disabilities (25% vs. 19%) took a leave of absence (over one month) because of their condition. However, proportions were similar between men and women with more severe disabilities with almost one-half of women (48%) and men (46%) taking a leave of absence.

Overall, less women than men with any disability (45% vs. 50%) or less severe disabilities (52% vs. 58%) did not report any of the above work situations; for persons with more severe disabilities, the figure was much lower at 22%, but similar between women and men.

Among persons with disabilities who had part-time jobs, the CSD asked respondents to report the main reason for their part-time employment. Aside from jobs that were part-time to begin with, the predominant reason for part-time employment was "health condition," but there were no significant sex differences on this response. About 27% of women and 30% of men with any disability indicated that they worked part-time because of their health condition. Among persons with less severe disabilities, about 16% of women and 14% of men reported that they worked part-time because of a health condition, while 52% of both women and men with more severe disabilities worked part-time for this reason.

Among women with disabilities, childcare was also a reason for part-time employment. About 13% of women with any disability indicated they worked a part-time job because of child care responsibilities. In general, child care is one of the reasons that women (with or without disabilities) with children have part-time employment (Moyser 2017). About one-third of women with any disability worked part-time because their job was a part-time or contract position or because more hours were unavailable. A similar proportion of men with any disability reported having a part-time job for the same reason. In general, the reasons for part-time employment were similar for women and men with disabilities.

There were some sex differences in job training. About 46% of women compared with 36% of men with more severe disabilities received on-the-job training from their employer. A somewhat higher proportion of women than men (14% vs. 10%) with less severe disabilities took job training that was not paid by their employer. Across severity of disability, a similar proportion of men and women received classroom training.

In summary, women with disabilities were more likely to change the amount of their work, begin working from home, and take a leave of absence compared with men with disabilities. Different reasons for part-time employment were equally indicated by women and men disabilities, although the numbers on some responses were too small to report. Some sex differences were observed for job training with more women than men with more severe disabilities receiving on-the-job training from their employer and more women than men with less severe disabilities taking job training not paid by their employer.

Workplace accommodations

Environmental barriers to participation are a key source of disablement (MacKenzie, Hurst, and Crompton 2009; WHO 2001). For example, an unaccommodating work environment is a social disadvantage that is imposed on persons with disabilities. The CSD included a series of questions about the workplace accommodations that persons with disabilities reported that they required because of their condition, and a set of follow-up questions on whether these accommodations were available to them.[11] The results in this section include persons who were employed at the time of the survey as well as in the previous five years.

11. The CSD questions on required accommodations included 15 items. This study presented the five most common accommodations that respondents reported that they required. It is also the case that some respondents may have required multiple accommodations.

Table 3
Workplace accommodations of Canadians with disabilities aged 20 to 54 by sex and severity of disability, 2017

	Any disability		Less severe		More severe	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
			percent			
Workplace accommodations						
Accommodations required						
Modified or different duties	16.2	14.9	9.5	8.6	36.1	35.8
Telework arrangement	12.8 *	5.9	8.6 *	4.0 [E]	25.3 *	12.5
Modified or reduced work hours	25.4 *	15.8	18.0 *	10.0	47.3 *	35.1
Modified workstation	14.3 *	6.7	10.8 *	4.4 [E]	24.6 *	14.3
Special chair or back support	14.7 *	8.6	10.3 *	5.4 [E]	27.7 *	18.9
Accommodations available						
Modified or different duties	49.9	54.8	53.8	54.9	46.9	54.7
Telework arrangement	49.2	52.9	55.5	73.2	42.8	32.2 [E]
Modified or reduced work hours	64.4	63.3	66.9	69.4	61.6	57.6
Modified workstation	57.2	53.1	62.4	63.5	50.6	42.4
Special chair or back support	53.2	53.1	60.2	69.7	45.4	37.1 [E]

[E] use with caution

* significantly different from men in same disability class at $p < 0.05$

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017.

On most of the workplace accommodations that respondents reported that they required, there were significant differences between women and men with any disability, less severe disabilities, and more severe disabilities (Table 3). Broadly, a significantly higher proportion of women required accommodations to be able to work. About twice the proportion of women than men required a telework arrangement. This was the case for 13% of women with any disability, 9% of women with less severe disabilities, and 25% of women with more severe disabilities. Among women who required it, a telework arrangement was available to just over half of those with a less severe disability (56%), compared to almost three-quarters of men (73%), but this difference was statistically non-significant. About 43% of women and 32% of men with more severe disabilities had a telework arrangement available to them, which was not a significant difference.

Among persons with any disability, 25% of women versus 16% of men required modified or reduced work hours (a significant difference). Among persons with less severe disabilities, a significantly higher proportion of women (18%) than men (10%) required modified or reduced work hours. This accommodation was available to a similar proportion of women (67%) and men (69%) with less severe disabilities. Among persons with more severe disabilities, about one-half of women (47%) and one-third of men (35%) required modified or reduced work hours (a significant difference), and this accommodation was available to 62% of women and 58% of the men, although this latter sex difference was non-significant.

More than double the proportion of women (11%) than men (4%) with less severe disabilities required a modified or ergonomic workstation. Of those that required it, about two-thirds of both women (62%) and men (64%) had this accommodation available. Among respondents with more severe disabilities, a significantly higher proportion of women (25%) than men (14%) also required a modified workstation, and this accommodation was available to about half of women (51%) and under half of men (42%) (no significant difference). A significantly larger proportion of women than men with any disability, less severe disabilities, and more severe disabilities required a special chair or back support. About 60% of women with less severe disabilities (vs. 70% of men) and 45% of women with more severe disabilities (vs. 37% of men) had this accommodation available to them (no significant sex differences).

Overall, a higher proportion of women than men reported requirements for workplace accommodations, but there were non-significant sex differences in whether these accommodations were available.

Perceived labour discrimination

The CSD also asked respondents about their perceived labour discrimination in the past five years. Thus, similar to the previous section, the results include persons who were employed at the time of the survey as well as in the previous five years. About 7% of women and 9% of men with any disability reported being refused a job interview in the past five years because of their condition (a significant difference) (Table 4). This difference seemed to be due to less women than men with more severe disabilities reporting this experience (13% vs. 20%). There were no other sex differences on the selected items of perceived labour discrimination (Table 4).

Table 4
Perceived labour discrimination of Canadians with disabilities aged 20 to 54 by sex and severity of disability, 2017

	Any disability		Less severe		More severe	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
			percent			
Perceived labour discrimination						
Was refused a job interview	6.9 *	9.4	4.3	5.7	13.4 *	19.7
Was refused a job	11.2	13.2	7.1	8.8	21.8	25.5
Was refused a promotion	10.5	10.8	7.1	7.9	19.1	18.9
Felt disadvantaged	32.7	33.3	22.0	22.7	59.9	64.4
Felt to be considered as disadvantaged	32.0	32.8	21.3	22.0	59.8	65.1

* significantly different from men in same disability class at $p < 0.05$

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017.

Although no other sex differences were observed on the selected items of perceived labour discrimination, the non-significant differences are worth reporting to provide insight into the prevalence of perceived labour discrimination among persons with disabilities. For example, 7% of women and 9% of men with less severe disabilities believed they were refused a job in the past five years because of their condition, while 22% of women and 26% of men with more severe disabilities reported this work experience. About 7% of women and 8% of men with less severe disabilities indicated they were refused a job promotion because of their condition, compared to about 19% of both women and men with more severe disabilities.

About 60% of women with more severe disabilities considered themselves to be disadvantaged in employment because of their condition. This compares to 64% of men with more severe disabilities and 22% of women with less severe disabilities. About 60% of women with more severe disabilities felt that a current or future potential employer would likely consider them to be disadvantaged in employment because of their condition. This compares to 65% of men with more severe disabilities and 21% of women with less severe disabilities.

Overall, perceptions of labour discrimination were generally similar between men and women with disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disability with one notable difference. Less women than men with disabilities, particularly those with more severe disabilities, reported being refused a job interview in the past five years because of their condition.

Conclusion

The present study compared women and men with disabilities on work experiences, which included experiences such as changes in work situation, reasons for part-time employment, workplace accommodations, and perceived labour market discrimination. A particular focus was on the severity of disability. Several important insights can be distilled from the findings.

First, it appears that presence of disability has wider consequences for the work situation of women with disabilities than men with disabilities. When asked if they ever changed their work situation because of their condition, a significantly higher proportion of women with disabilities reported that they changed their amount of work, began working from home (teleworking), or took a leave of absence. However, a similar proportion of men and women with disabilities reported that their condition limited their current work or compelled them to change their kind of work. From the present analysis, it is not possible to conclude whether the sex differences in changes in work situation represent a disadvantage among women with disabilities. Indeed, observed differences such as teleworking might be a result of flexible work arrangements or work accommodations, which may be considered as positive work experiences that support employment of women with disabilities.

Second, consistent with the general population, child care was a top reason for part-time employment among women with disabilities. For the most part, it was a person's condition that necessitated part-time employment. For example, about one-half of women with more severe disabilities reported working part-time because of their condition. A similar proportion of men with more severe disabilities reported working part-time for the same reason.

Third, a higher proportion of women than men with more severe disabilities received on-the-job training from their employer and a higher proportion of women than men with less severe disabilities took job training that was not paid by their employer.

Fourth, women with disabilities reported a greater requirement for workplace accommodations than did men with disabilities. This included a greater requirement for a telework arrangement, modified or reduced work hours, and specialized office furniture. It was beyond the scope of this study to shed light on the potential reasons for these differences. Notably, the results indicated that there were no sex differences in the accommodations available.

Still, a considerable percentage of women and men with disabilities reported having unmet accommodations to be able to work. The combination of a greater need for workplace accommodations and the general lack of these accommodations could partially contribute to the lower rates of employment and higher rates of part-time employment, particularly among women with disabilities. For example, about one-half of women with disabilities who reported a requirement for modified duties or a telework arrangement did not have these accommodations available. Over one-half did not have access to specialized office furniture. Just under two-thirds did not have access to a job with modified hours. These unmet requirements for accommodations may shed light into the identification of potential barriers relevant to the work experiences of women (and men) with disabilities. Further research is needed to better understand the factors behind the unmet accommodation requirements in order to prevent barriers to accessibility in employment.

Finally, perceptions of labour discrimination were generally similar between men and women with disabilities with one exception. Less women than men with disabilities, particularly with those with more severe disabilities, reported being refused a job interview in the past five years because of their condition. Yet, about a third of women and men with disabilities considered themselves to be disadvantaged in employment because of their condition.

In conclusion, the findings from this study may be useful to identify potential barriers relevant to the work experiences of women and men with disabilities. Future research is needed to better understand whether sex differences in work experiences vary with type of disability and other demographic characteristics. Data limitations prevented a deeper analysis considering multiple disaggregation, and the results do not rule out the possibility that confounding factors such as age or type of disability contributed to similarities or differences between women and men with disabilities on their work experiences.

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