

# New study to probe disability employment discrimination

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It's no secret that Canadians with disabilities have a harder time than others at finding work. Now, new research led by political sociologist and U of T Mississauga assistant professor David Pettinicchio will examine how discrimination by employers during the hiring process can contribute to this situation.

In a first-of-its-kind study, Pettinicchio will explore this form of [discrimination](#) by auditing the interactions between employers and fictitious job candidates with [disabilities](#). Specifically, he and his team, which will include graduate and undergraduate sociology students at U of T, will respond to job postings in Canada with multiple model resumés that will be virtually identical in experience and qualifications, but have variations in the candidates' disability status. They will then analyze the resulting email and phone correspondences from employers to determine whether the presence of a disability plays a role in their hiring decisions.

"People with disabilities face serious employment challenges, but it's really hard to observe where discrimination takes place in this context," Pettinicchio says. "This study will help us better understand why employers are still reluctant to hire these individuals."

Statistics Canada reports that in 2011, the employment rate among Canadians age 25 to 64 with disabilities was 49 per cent, compared to 79 per cent for those without a disability. As well, 12 per cent of Canadians with disabilities have reported being refused a job as a result of their

condition; the figure was 33 per cent among 25- to 34-year-olds with a severe or very severe disability.

Pettinicchio says parsing what's behind these stats requires more than surveying employers, which he says can result in "social desirability biases"—respondents answering questions in a way that will be viewed favourably by others. This is why he will take a field experiment approach to understanding disability [employment discrimination](#) during the hiring process.

His three-year study, which will begin tentatively this fall, will involve creating fictitious resumés with commensurate education and job experiences, but half will include information suggesting the candidate has a physical or cognitive disability. They will be submitted to employers with job postings in Toronto and Edmonton in the occupational areas of administrative or clerical work, and trade, construction or transport work.

Pettinicchio says while Canada has introduced policies to promote employment equity for individuals with disabilities, they don't do enough to counter the discriminatory attitudes and practices by employers that make it difficult for them to enter the workforce. The result, he says, is that companies miss out on good workers, while those with disabilities continue to experience higher levels of unemployment and economic equality than the rest of the population.

"Employers think hiring someone with a disability is going to cut into their bottom line, and they'll have to do too many accommodations, but a lot of those ideas are myths," Pettinicchio says. "We hope our findings will shed light on possible reasons for why anti-discrimination legislation doesn't always seem to lead to the kinds of positive employment outcomes they are meant to produce."

Provided by University of Toronto

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