The Assessment of Attitudes toward Individuals with Disabilities in the Workplace

Popovich, Scherbaum, Scherbaum, & Polinko (2003) conducted two studies to develop and test measures that assess beliefs about what constitutes a disability, affective reactions to working with individuals with disabilities, and beliefs about the reasonableness of workplace accommodations, in general and within the context of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Popovich et al. (2003) did not provide participants with any definition of what constitutes a disability because they wanted to develop scales that reflected a broad range of attitudes as well as specific reactions. However, in the second study, the scales were given to the participants along with the Americans with Disabilities Act definition of disability. This was done to determine participants attitudes toward working with individuals with disabilities in the workplace, more specifically, within the context of the ADA's definition.

In Study 1, Popovich et al. (2003) found "that there were large discrepancies between what participants believed were disabilities and what are legally considered disabilities." They also "identified gender and experience differences in affective reactions toward working with individuals who are disabled." Popovich et al. believed the reason for the discrepancy could be due to the participants having little knowledge regarding the ADA. In Study 2, Popovich et al. also found gender differences in beliefs about the reasonableness of typical accommodations. Popovich et al. report, "It is interesting to note that in Study 2, which included information about the ADA, the responses, in general, were more positive to both the affective reactions and reasonable accommodation conditions." "However, because of the inclusion of information about the ADA was not manipulated, conclusions about its role cannot be drawn."

In both studies, Popovich et al. found that the participants had very little knowledge of what conditions are actually covered by the ADA even when they were given information about the ADA. Popovich et al. conclude, "Acceptance of diversity in the workplace is not only important from a legal perspective but because of the labor shortages that currently exist in a number of industries, integrating persons with disabilities into the workforce had become a business necessity." "Gaining a better understanding of the attitudes toward this group will ease the transition for individuals and organizations alike." Popovich et al. believe the tools they have developed can aid in this understanding. Reference: