

Chapter 61

Educated Physically Disabled Women in the Information and Communication Technology Sector

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze how highly educated women with physical disability (WwPD) are employed and integrated in the information and communication technology (ICT) field as experienced by themselves. This question is important due to the lack of knowledge regarding the employment of highly educated WwPD in the ICT sector. An empirical study was carried out with the help of a qualitative research method that involved eight interviews. The study showed that disability has a significant impact when women choose the ICT sector for their studies. However, one of the significant findings was that the individuals' characters matter the most.

INTRODUCTION

This paper introduces research that focused on highly educated women with physical disability (WwPD) and their experiences when getting jobs in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector after graduating with a diploma suitable for this sector. Studies on female employees in the ICT sector have been carried out for some decades (e.g., Statistics ICT in Nordic countries, 2001; Preston, 2006; Abdelgawad et al., 2012). This paper adds an important viewpoint to the research, i.e., that of physical disability.

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According to Banks and Lawrence (2006), people with disability (PWD) are able to work in non-manual jobs better and longer than in manual jobs. This might be partly due to the general assumption that the ICT sector is not physically demanding, which was also expressed by some of the interviewees in the current study.

Regarding working, Nikulainen and Pajarinen (2013) reported that employment in the ICT sector saw a significant increase during the 1990s, but after being fairly stable in the mid-2000s, it started to decline before 2010. However, they also reported that manufacturing, services, and software in the ICT sector have experienced different trends, as the manufacturing and service industries have declined in recent years and the software industry has grown significantly.

Furthermore, the study of Nosek et al. (2003) strongly argued that disability and education have a strong direct effect on women's employment. Clayton et al. (2012) confirmed that the underrepresentation of women in the ICT sector seems to persist. Unemployment perceived by PwD was also reported by Abdelgawad et al. (2012), who studied the influences of supportive actions carried out by the public services sector in Norway. According to the authors, the number of unemployed PwD did not decrease despite the supportive actions that targeted them.

Vidacek-Hains et al. (2011) have studied PwD in relation to education. According to their findings in Croatia, the number of PwD who want to pursue their higher education is increasing. They noted that there are several institutional resources available that make it possible to offer higher education to people with learning difficulties or other disabilities. Likewise, the government in Finland is committed to increasing educational equality and access to education. PwD are encouraged to build their autonomy and social participation by gaining more education. Finland is committed to supporting people's access to education despite their issues related to age or disabilities (STM, 2012, p. 41-12.)

We ask the following question in this paper: How do highly educated WwPD get employed in the ICT sector as experienced by themselves? The topic was investigated by questioning how disability affected choosing the field, gaining employment, and working in the ICT sector.

In the current study, a qualitative research method was applied together with semi-structured interviews that were conducted with eight Finnish WwPD. The disabilities of the interviewees varied widely. All but one of the interviewees had completed a university degree or a polytechnic degree that was suitable for the ICT sector. In addition, all of the interviewees had either worked in the past or worked at the time of the study in the ICT sector.

Our study concerned only physical disabilities due to their permanent nature. The analysis of the interviews carried out in the current study showed that disabilities do significantly impact the choice of studying in the ICT sector. Contrary to earlier knowledge about difficulties of gaining employment, the current study suggests that, in general, it is not too difficult to get a job in the ICT sector if one has a higher education degree related to the sector. However, the study revealed that WwPD also have negative experiences related to getting employed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nordic countries have paid attention to female employment for decades. The statistics reveal that the share of women in the labor markets ranged between 64% (in Finland) and 83% (in Iceland) in the late 1990s (Statistics ICT in Nordic Countries, 2001). Related to gender issues, Triventi (2013) verified that wage-related discrimination between genders is lower in Nordic countries and higher in the Czech

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