EMPLOYMENT OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED PERSONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Introduction

The employment plays one of the most important roles in human life. It bears financial safety, stable existence, work activity and productivity, as well as making and maintaining new acquaintances. There are many challenges in the employment process. The unemployment rate in Serbia is very high, even higher among persons with visual impairment. During the 20. century, the range of professions for visually impaired persons was not a wide one. There were professions such as physiotherapists, telephone operators, but there were also high educated persons in the areas such as law, languages, sociology, psychology, special paedagogy, journalistics and other social sciences.

In the last decades, with the development of new information technologies, the range of professions becomes wider. The usage of computers opens up new opportunities for the jobs visually impaired persons can do, but also for more independence in already existing jobs.

On the occasion of the annual employment conference organized by the European Blind Union (EBU), which will this year be held in Belgrade, the Union of the Blind of Serbia conducted a research on the employment status of visually impaired persons in the Republic of Serbia. This document contains the results of the research.

Methodology

The objective of the research

The objective of the research was to identify the employment status of visually impaired persons in the Republic of Serbia.

The tasks of the research:

- To find out whether there is any significant statistical difference between the visually impaired persons who have experienced some form of discrimination while seeking employment and those who have not;

- to find out whether additional health problems have impact on seeking employment;

- to find out whether the websites of the companies/enterprises are accessible to the visually impaired persons seeking employment;

- to find out whether visually impaired persons seek employment in their professions.

Hypotheses:

There is a bigger percentage of the persons who experienced some form of discrimination while seeking employment than of those who have not.

Additional health problems in visually impaired persons do not necessarily have impact on seeking employment.

The majority of the companies' websites is accessible for visually impaired persons.

Visually impaired persons are more inclined to seek the employment in their professions.

Variables

Independent: gender, age, degree of visual impairment, the time of the sight loss, degree of education.

Dependent: Employment status of visually impaired persons.

Research tool:

For the purpose of the research, we used a questionnaire examining the employment status of persons with visual impairment. It consists of three parts: general data on the subjects containing eight questions; the part for unemployed persons containing nine questions of closed type and the possibility of adding other responses; and the part for employed persons containing 10 questions of closed type and the possibility of adding other responses.

Research sample:

The sample consisted of 124 subjects, whereby 51.6% were female and 48.4% male subjects.

The age of subjects varied between 18 and 62 years, but the majority of the responses was given by the subjects 30-35 years old.

The responses have been received from 39 towns in Serbia, but the majority of the responses has been received from Belgrade area (29).

There were 55.6% totally blind and 44.4% partially sighted subjects.

The time of the sight loss:

by birth: 67.7%, in school age: 20.2%, later: 12.1%.

According to the education degree, the majority of the subjects have the secondary education (54%), 14.5% of the subjects graduated from university, 11.3% finished master studies, 9.7% has high/higher education, 8.9% of the subjects has primary education and 1.6% doctor titles.

There were 54.8% subjects moving independently, 8.9% those who do not move independently, and 36.3% those who use personal assistance.

Out of total number of subjects (124), 77 (62.1%) are unemployed and 47 (37.9%) are employed.

Time and location of the research:

The research was conducted in Belgrade, from June to September 2021. The subjects had the possibility to fill the questionnaire online, entering the link they had receaved.

Results and discussion:

In this discussion, we will first show the results according to the tasks and hypotheses, and then subsequently address some key question for this subject.

There are 55.6% blind or visually impaired persons who experienced some form of discrimination seeking employment, and 44.4% persons who did not experience any discrimination.

These percentages confirm the first hypothesis, i.e. that there are more blind and visually impaired persons who experienced some form of discrimination as job seekers than those who did not.

The impact of additional health problems during the seeking employment: In 49.2 of the subjects these problems have no influence, in 11.3% these problems do have influence, and in 2.4% of the subjects these problems have a partial impact.

This confirms the second hypothesis: Additional health problems in visually impaired persons do not necessarily influence the seeking for a job.

When we talk about the adaptation of the websites of companies to the needs of visually impaired persons seeking employment, 4.8% of the websites are adapted, 37.1% are partially adapted, whereas 22.6% are not adapted at all.

From these percentages we can conclude that the third hypothesis that the majority of website of the companies are adapted to the visually impaired persons seeking for a job is only partially confirmed.

After acquiring an education level, people mostly try to find a job in their profession. Is it exactly so in this case?

There are 22.6% of the subjects seeking employment in their profession, 5.6% of the subjects do not seek employment in their profession, 1.6% are likely to do so, whereas biggest percentage of 35.5% of the subjects would accept any job that would be offered to them, on condition that it is in accordance with their possibilities.

From the above mentioned data we can conclude that the fourth hypothesis that visually impaired persons are more inclined to seek the employment in their professions is not confirmed.

In the question: What were the difficulties that you encountered while seeking employment? the subjects was given the possibility to tick more than one check box.

The 58.9% of the subjects ticked visual impairment, whereas 52.4% ticked the prejudice of the employers. A very few subjects (3.2%) ticked the box "insufficient family support".

To answer the question: What are your reasons for seeking the employment? the subjects also had the possibility of multiple choice. Financial security was ticked by 59.7% of the subjects, The reason of 50.8% of the subjects was to acquire years of service, also 50.8% seek an employment because they want to be independent from others, and 49.2% want to be useful and equal society members.

One of the presumptions concerning the employment of visually impaired persons is that the employer should adapt the workplace. To what extent is it really necessary?

The question: Is your wlrkplace adapted? 15.3% of the subjects answered "Yes", 10.5% "no", and 11.3% answered "partially". Of course, this question applied only for the employed subjects.

As far as the ways of adaptation of the workplace are concerned, the subjects had the possibility of multiple choice, but they also could add a response they considered appropriate. The main concern for the most of the subjects (12.9%) was safe access to the building, 10.5% ticked safe workspace adaptation, 9.7% chose the adaptation of working tasks, 4% think that the offices should be marked with the large print numbers for visually impaired persons, whereas the smallest percentage (1.6%) of the responses relate to the marking of offices in Braille.

Which assistive technologies are mostly used by visually impaired persons on the workplace?

The biggest percentage of the subjects use the computer with speech synthesis (18.5%). Some respondents do not use any assistive technologies, because they do not need them to do their jobs properly (telephone operators, physiotherapists...).

Conclusion

As we can see from this research, there is a bigger percentage of unemployed persons in Serbia. There is so much to be done in Serbia to decrease the unemployment rate among visually impaired persons. In order to address this problem as adequately as possible, the state and its institutions, the media, and the Union of the Blind of Serbia with its local organizations must be more involved and there is still much to do on the awareness raising of the society. In order to decrease and eliminate the prejudice, especially in the employment area, it is necessary to organize various round tables, seminars, webinars, workshops and trainings of employers in different companies. Employers mostly place the main accent to the visual impairment, i.e. to the limitations of a visually impaired person. On the contrary, these persons, in accordance with their qualifications, possibilities and opportunities, can perform their tasks adequately, with certain reasonable adaptations if needed.

More research on this subject would be appreciated in the future, in order to verify if something is changing in the employment status of this population in our country.

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