

Women with disabilities less likely to have accommodations, finds study

‘The downside of not focusing on accommodations is losing critical talent’: says academic discussing negative impact on employers when women face more barriers



By [Stacy Thomas](#)

Jan 15, 2025

Share

Women with disabilities face a disproportionate challenge in the workplace: more of them need accommodations, yet fewer get the support they ask for.

That’s according to a new report by the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW), citing findings from Statistics Canada.

For one, disability rates among women have climbed from 24% in 2017 to 30% in 2022.

And more than a quarter of those women (28%) did not receive accommodations for their disabilities when they requested them, compared to 19% of men.

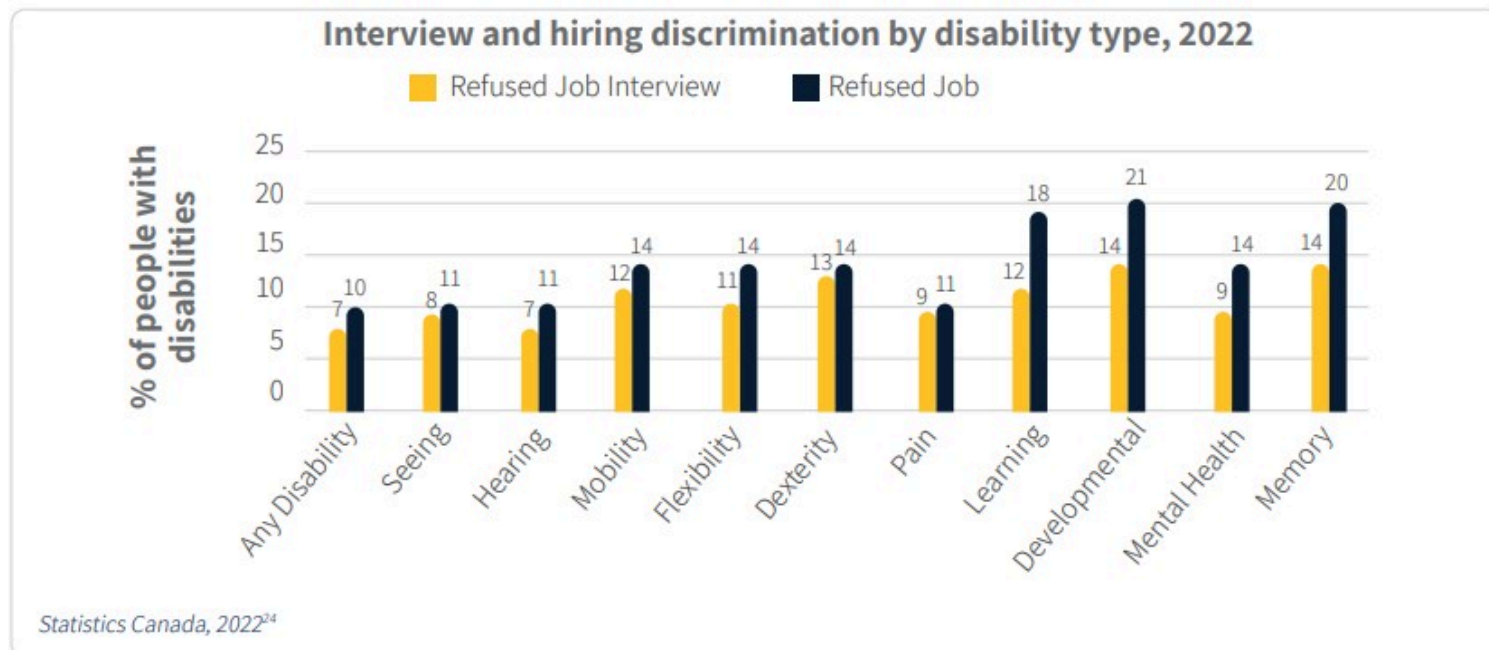
Organizational risks of not accommodating women equally

Not only is this disparity an obvious [equity and inclusion issue](#), it’s also a legal and reputational risk for employers who aren’t stepping up. According to Janani Ramesh, PhD candidate at McGill University, the organizational consequences of not accommodating disabled women are costly on many levels.

"There are attitudes that employers have, which are preventing them from harnessing the productivity gains from employees, disabled employees. And they are really losing out in terms of the longer-term perspective," says Ramesh.

"The image of the company is being affected."

Citing several sources, including the *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, the CCRW report details several well-documented benefits that inclusive organizations enjoy, such as increased innovation to entire teams that disabled employees bring, reputational gains and increases in profit – an extra \$64 in profit per employee, [according to Accenture](#).



As [the Shaping Tomorrow study reports](#), over one-third (36%) of people with disabilities report feeling disadvantaged in employment due to their disability. Companies that don't address this issue could see their best workers walk away, says Ramesh.

"The downside of not focusing on accommodations is losing critical talent," she explains.

"Because these people who are disabled ... it's not like they're not accomplishing tasks. It's a myth that they're not able to accomplish tasks."

With platforms such as Glassdoor increasing the visibility of [employer treatment of their staff](#), word-of-mouth has become a powerful tool for disabled employees to avoid organizations that don't value accessibility, says Ramesh.

"Employees who hear ... that their fellow colleagues were not treated well during the application process, or they were rejected because of their disabilities, are unlikely to reapply to the company," she says.

"The image of the company, in terms of Glassdoor, is going to get affected, and their reputation is going to be at stake in the long run as an accessible employer."

Why are women denied disability accommodations?

So why are women with disabilities being denied accommodations more often than men? As Ramesh explains, a lot of it comes down to bias.

"I think [women are stereotyped](#) as being more difficult and more emotional, and there are certain stereotypes, gender stereotypes that women face in the workplace, which makes them hesitant to ask for accommodations, compared to men," says Ramesh.

That hesitation, combined with workplace biases and possible retaliation for disclosing, creates a system where women’s accommodation needs are often ignored or dismissed, she says.

"And they're also at risk, greater risk for harassment and abuse, because once they share information about their disability, that information can be used against them."

Intersectionality matters

Women with disabilities don’t just deal with discrimination because of their disability—they also face barriers because of their gender; this “intersectionality” is a common barrier to individuals who identify with more than one underrepresented group, Ramesh explains.

"Intersectionality is something that I feel HR managers are not focusing on," she says.

“Going forward, our organizations need to take into account – into their culture – various aspects of employees’ identities. Not just disability, but also gender, race and various aspects of employees identities, to factor in their accommodations."



Disability inclusion: leading by example

Workplace culture plays a huge role in whether employees feel comfortable asking for and receiving accommodations, Ramesh says, stressing that simply training and putting out information around disability accommodations is not generally sufficient to encourage employees to request accommodations.

For this reason, she recommends genuine transparency at the leadership level. Citing COVID-19 era leadership as an example, Ramesh highlights the power of leader vulnerability around disability in creating a culture of inclusivity.

"In the time of COVID, leaders took the initiative to share information, like share stories about their experiences when a peer support helped them, when they were especially vulnerable," says Ramesh.

"So when leaders take a step up and share stories like that, there's a greater culture of peer support. And I think that kind of a culture needs to be built up, and that would help women to understand that there is a cultural change taking place."

Third-party advocacy to promote accommodation equity

Employers need to go beyond just checking the box on diversity training; case studies and real-life examples of successful accommodations can also be helpful tools to shift workplace culture. The key concept is demonstrating inclusivity with real-life examples that will make women feel more comfortable to disclose, Ramesh says.

“Sharing positive stories of peer support and positive stories of accommodation ... stories like that, when they're highlighted, that creates a culture that there's greater peer support, there's a cultural change being undertaken at the company.”

One of the best ways to improve workplace inclusivity is to collaborate with advocacy organizations that specialize in disability rights. Working with HR, these third parties can work together with the organization to implement more accessibility, for existing employees and incoming hires, she says.

"I see that as a positive effort on the part of the employer, when they associate with advocacy groups and nonprofit groups to advance the efforts of diversity and disability groups within the company.”

Latest stories

B.C. safety violations show how gaps in protocol can lead to employee fatalities

Coast Guard worker’s firing for ‘fire axe’ threats upheld

Are ‘professional appearance’ standards still relevant? How about legal?

Free newsletter

The Canadian HR Newswire is a FREE weekly newsletter that keeps you up to date on news, opinion and analysis about the field of human resources. Please enter email address below to subscribe.

Enter your Email address here

Sign up

0 Comments

1 Login ▼

G

Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS ?

Name

♡ Share

BestNewestOldest

Be the first to comment.

Latest News



Employers spending less on wellbeing benefits: report



🔒 Biometrics in the workplace: Are they really necessary?



‘I’m done’ not a resignation after all




Women with disabilities less likely to have accommodations, finds study.

Free newsletter

Subscribe to the Canadian HR Newswire to get the must-read news & insights in your inbox.

Email address

Sign up

- Newsletter
- Terms of Use
- Advertise
- Contact us
- Cookie Policy
- Authors
- Advisory board
- RSS 

- Digital Subscription Agreement
- Terms & Conditions
- About us
- Privacy
- Consent Preferences
- External contributors
- Sitemap

