



Invitation to Participate Letter and Consent Agreement: Employer

You are invited to participate in a research interview because *you are an employer or manager of a disabled person (or people) with an **evident** physical or sensory impairment who is presently employed with you in either a permanent, full-time position; or in a long-term, remunerative position that allows them to be financially independent.* Employers may include owner-operators of businesses, chief operating officers, vice presidents, management personnel, human resources personnel, or anyone responsible for the hiring or management of disabled individuals. In our discussions, we hope to gain insights from your experience. Our aim is to learn from the lived experiences of employers and managers to understand their workplace successes and challenges in employing disabled people. By listening to employers, we hope to understand how disabled employees are perceived and integrated into the workplace. Research findings may contribute to improved workplace culture, productivity, accommodation and inclusiveness of the workforce overall.

The PROUD Project Study Team

- Principal investigator: Dr. Chloë G. K. Atkins, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Scarborough College, University of Toronto
- Research Assistant: Isabelle Avakumovic-Pointon, MA Student, Centre for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, University of Toronto

Project Description

This interview is part of a research project funded jointly by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Department of National Defence Research Initiative: <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/dnd-eng.aspx>

The project aims to enrich the discussion of employment and disability by moving beyond the collection and assessment of dismal quantitative data. Consistently, research clearly outlines the extraordinary difficulty disabled adults have in obtaining and maintaining full-time, gainful employment, despite legislation that supports workplace accommodations and inclusion.

The project compares several countries (Canada, U.S., Britain, France and Belgium), and focuses on “what works” for disabled adults in the workforce. In studying individual experience, or micro-level challenges and successes, we are interviewing two different populations: (i) disabled employees with evident physical or sensory impairments, and (ii) employers who hire, supervisor, and manage disabled employees with evident physical or sensory impairments. The goals of this research are to improve employer hiring practices; improve the employment experiences and labour environment for disabled people; and encourage diversity in employment sectors and geographical areas in the country and around the world, *by focusing on what individuals, employers and governments are doing right*. The research results will suggest best practices and develop policy guidelines to promote better approaches to disabled recruits and to improve the treatment and engagement of disabled people in labour forces.

Nature of Participation

You will be interviewed about your experiences as an employer/manager who employs a person (or people) with an evident physical or sensory impairment. Your interview will take no longer than one hour at a location of your choice and employing technology that is both available and accessible to you. We will be using secure, virtual conferencing technology to conduct interviews.

Interviews will investigate your employment experiences and may address the following topics:

- How do employers conceptualize their own offices and workshops?
- What types of disabilities/impairments can your organization more easily accommodate?
- What types of policies and procedures are in place to hire and retain disabled employees? Are they working? How might they be improved?

- Have you received any government funding to hire a worker with a disability (e.g. funding to install special equipment or to pay part of their salary)?
- Do you have any stories about a disabled employee(s) who work(s) for you? (previous to being hired, or since being on the job)?

Other questions and topics may come up during the interview, with a focus on your unique experiences and perspective as an employer.

This research is defined as “critical research.” The federal government Tri-Council Article 3.6 TCPS-2, Article 3.6 states that:

“In critical inquiry, permission is not required from an institution, organization or other group in order to conduct research on them. If a researcher engages the participation of members of any such group without the group’s permission, the researcher shall inform participants of any foreseeable risk that may be posed by their participation.”

(https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/tcps2-eptc2_2018_chapter3-chapitre3.html#a)

For this reason, you have the option of either obtaining prior consent from your employer to participate in the interview or participating in this interview without organizational consent. There are different risks and benefits to either option depending on your choice (See **Risks and Benefits** section below).

All interviews will be conducted employing secure, virtual conferencing technology. We will ensure that the technology is available and accessible to you. The University of Toronto employs Microsoft Teams as its primary mode of conducting such exchanges. It requires that every participant download and use the Microsoft Teams application. It is important to understand that while Microsoft Teams is a familiar technology, it is not completely secure. Nonetheless, the likelihood of a security breach is small when using Microsoft Teams and it more easily allows for secure recording of the interviews. The interview will be recorded. The audio recording will be securely transcribed and summarized by the research team. You may consent to audio or audio-visual recording.

At the end of the project, the research results will be shared with all participants in an executive summary and full report. If you are interested, you will also be invited to participate in a symposium that draws together research participants, scholars, employers and policy makers to discuss the research conclusions.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is defined by Canada's Tri-Council Research Agency as "the obligation of an individual or organization to safeguard entrusted information."

The PROUD research team has measures in place to safeguard the data collected during this project, "and protect information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss or theft."

(https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/tcps2-eptc2_2018_chapter5-chapitre5.html#1)

The study team will not share any personal identifying information such as your name and contact information outside of the research team (unless you consent to sharing your name and organization – see consent options below). Only the study team and the University of Toronto Research Ethics Program will have access to your contact information. This information will be used only for communication with you during the length of the study, for updates on the research, and for administration purposes (such as emailing or mailing gift cards).

The data gathered during the interview will be protected in the following ways. The research team has created a data security protocol in consultation with the University of Toronto Information and Instructional Technology Services to prevent unauthorized data breaches and to maintain a high level of integrity with regards to all research data. The video interview will be recorded in Microsoft Teams, transcribed by a member of the research team, and data that might identify participants (e.g. names, city, or place of work) will be removed from the transcripts. All participants will be identified only by an identifier code and will not be identified by name in any discussion or reporting of the research results. Any demographic information will only be used for contextualizing the research data (e.g., noticing similarities between participants, such as professions, regions, age, etc.). This personal information will be gathered using a highly secure survey process. Care will be taken with regard to e-mail communication and the sharing of personal information. Files containing personal data such as audio or video recordings will be destroyed as soon as the team determines the files themselves have no more research value. Video interviews shared between the research team members will also be redacted, with only one copy of the original video maintained in a highly secure location. Again, it will be destroyed after it has been determined to have no more research value to the project.

University of Toronto Information Technology services stores data in Canada, and is compliant with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). Audio files and transcripts of interviews will be stored on secure servers and computers at the University of Toronto, and on researchers' password protected and data encrypted computers and equipment. If any secondary use of an audio file is required e.g. for another project, the researchers will seek separate, individual consent for use.

Please note that the University of Toronto Research Ethics Program may have confidential access to this project's research data to help ensure participant protection procedures are followed. The following link provides further detail about the university of Toronto's informed consent policy and ethics requirements: <https://research.utoronto.ca/informed-consent>

Some participants may want their name or organization known. You will have the option to consent to this at the beginning or end of the interview (or at any time during the study) to allow us to disclose your name and/or organization in documentation and reporting about the research. The reason we ask this is that some organizations might want to be transparent about their involvement in the research or want recognition for participating. In addition, knowing who has participated might have the effect of giving the outcomes of the research more credibility.

Risks and Benefits

Our study involves individual, confidential interviews and therefore, we will take every measure necessary to protect the identity of participants and maintain confidentiality as requested or required. Due to the sensitive and personal nature of this interview process, some participants might have feelings of anxiety or stress during the interview process. Before commencing, the researcher will remind you that you may discontinue the interview at any time and ask if you would like to continue. You may decline to answer any questions or discontinue the interview, or withdraw your contribution at any time without fear of penalty.

Participation in this research project involves a very small but present social or legal risk for negative consequences such as reprimand or termination. Even when we increase confidentiality (e.g., by redacting identifying information and by following data protection policies, plans and procedures), we cannot mitigate all possibility of identification of the research participant if you wish to take a critical perspective in your interview. We mask individual identity by using general descriptions about your place of work and geographic location

(see **Confidentiality** and **Protection and Future Use of Participant Data**).

Despite these precautionary measures, employment-related risks are possible.

As the research team would like to create an environment of trust for participants, if your current or previous employer, or any other organization, requests access to research data that may identify participants, for the purpose of litigation, the following measures will be taken. Primary research materials will be deleted from our repositories as soon as they have no research value. Even if we are subpoenaed for information, any identifying data will not exist after a certain period and so, retrieval of any such information would be impossible. If, in the unlikely event that we are subpoenaed prior to the destruction of identifying materials, we will refuse to disclose and seek legal counsel.

The researchers intend to share the research results with participants, employers, policy makers, funders, governments and the public. The research outcomes could contribute to better working conditions for disabled people with physical and sensory impairments, improved hiring practices for employers, a more positive and inclusive labour environment for people living in disabling contexts who want to be employed, and improved public understanding of disabled people, their challenges and needs. This potential benefit is the primary motivation for carrying out the study, and the researchers are transparent about pursuing critical research outcomes and social change (if some might consider this a bias).

If, in the unlikely event that the researchers are asked to divulge their sources or breach confidentiality, they will refuse and seek legal counsel.

Compensation

If you consent to participate in the interview, you will receive a \$50/£40/ €40 gift card as an honorarium to thank-you for participating in this study. The researchers will also cover special costs associated with the interview such as requiring a sign language interpreter or another accommodation to make the interview possible.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no known conflicts of interest for the researchers. Dr. Atkins has a chronic illness and is disabled. She has experienced the precarious nature of employment throughout her career. As such, Dr. Atkins has a personal connection to the study's focus.

Protection and Future Use of Participant Data

Results from this study will be disseminated in many different ways. Research findings will be reported back to participants and to the stakeholder community in research journals articles, presentations to stakeholders and other interested parties, disseminated to the media in opinion/editorial articles (Op/Ed), or published reports on research in the mainstream media such as newspapers and blogs.

The interview data (audio files and transcripts of the interviews), however, will not be made open or shared outside the project due to the sensitive nature of the subject and the need to protect confidentiality. All data gathered during the project will be protected according to University of Toronto's data security and encryption standards available at: <https://research.utoronto.ca/data-security-standards-personally-identifiable-other-confidential-data-research>

For example, audio recordings will be made on a password protected and encrypted cell phone or recording device, but deleted after the files are transferred to a secure server environment. After the project is finished, the research data will be kept for two years, after which time it will be deleted from computers and/or paper copies securely destroyed. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council considers this to be a reasonable time period to store research data after the project is finished (https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/about-au_sujet/policies-politiques/statements-enonces/edata-donnees_electroniques-eng.aspx)

The research team will avoid making paper copies of documents containing personal identifying information, however, any hard copy documents e.g. researcher notes, will be stored in a locked office and locked cabinet and destroyed after the project is finished.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you may decline to answer questions, discontinue the interview, or choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any fear of penalty. If you wish to withdraw your participation after the interview has taken place, please contact the researchers by email. Your data will be removed from the study and all audio recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.

Contact Information About the Study

Please contact Chloe Atkins at chloegk.atkins@utoronto.ca or Isabelle Avakumovic-Pointon at i.avakumovicpointon@mail.utoronto.ca

Contact for Complaints

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273

Consent and Signature Page

Please indicate your agreement to participate in the study by checking the following boxes and providing the date, your name, and your signature below.

I have read the consent agreement and agree with the details of my involvement in this research project.

The researcher has gone over the consent agreement and answered any questions.

Please choose ONE of the TWO following options:

I have permission from my organization to participate in this interview.

OR

I am not seeking permission from my organization to participate in this interview. I understand the risks involved with not seeking organizational consent to participate.

Please choose ONE of the TWO following options:

I am comfortable with, and agree, to have our research interview being audio recorded. I do NOT consent to video recording.

OR

I am comfortable with, and agree, to have our research interview audio and video recorded.

Participant Name

Participant Signature

Date