



# Perceptions of Bipolar Disorder in the Workplace by Gender



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## PURPOSE

Bipolar disorder (BD) is a significant disability with 60% unemployment and 88% reporting job difficulties<sup>1</sup>. Research indicates stigma towards employees with BD impedes obtaining and maintaining employment. People are less likely to disclose illness if they believe their symptoms are imperceptible. Research also indicates that females adhere better to a treatment regimen when reporting high quality social supports, whereas men indicate lesser need for this. No known studies have examined attitudes towards working alongside someone with BD and concomitantly explored gender. A better understanding would help outline disclosure risks and develop strategies for their mitigation so employees may thrive.

## METHODS

Cross-sectional, deception survey completed by 628 working adults (18 or over) recruited through Qualtrics. Randomized participants read one of twelve vignettes describing hypothetical coworker behaviors that varied by: 1) coworker gender, 2) coworker present mood (depression versus hypomania), 3) reason for mood symptoms (relationship status change, BD diagnosis, no reason given). Following this, participants completed 17 survey questions, assessing attitudes in five areas (social acceptability, competency, reliability, advancement, and job demotion or loss). Additional assessment areas included: demographics, work history, disability status, degree of experience with BD. Two-way ANOVA were conducted to compare the effect of gender and degree of experience with BD on social acceptability, competency, reliability, advancement, and job demotion or loss with regards to coworkers with BD.



## RESULTS

Significance was found with gender and degree of experience on social acceptability [ $F(2,622) = 3.27$   $p = .039$ ], advancement [ $F(2,622) = 4.76$   $p = .009$ ], and loss or demotion [ $F(2,622) = 10.49$   $p = .000$ ]. The effect of gender and level of experience was insignificant on competency [ $F(2,622) = 1.39$ ,  $p = .251$ ] or reliability [ $F(2,622) = 2.89$ ,  $p = .056$ ]. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD indicated that the mean for social acceptability with gender and level of experience for high levels of experience ( $p = .01$ ) was significantly different than those with no experience or some experience ( $p = .995$ ), ( $p = .02$ ). These results suggest that men who report a greater degree of experience with people diagnosed with BD are more likely to report hypothetical coworkers with BD as more socially acceptable, more likely for advancement, and less likely to be demoted, than participant females.

## REFERENCES

1. <https://www.ajmc.com/view/jun05-2073ps91-s94> (Retrieved November 29, 2020).
2. Frederick T. L. Leong & Peter Zachar (1999) Gender and opinions about mental illness as predictors of attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 27:1, 123-132, DOI: 10.1080/03069889908259720.
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm> (Retrieved November 29, 2020).

## DISCUSSION

Prior research has demonstrated that women more favorably view people experiencing mental health disorders than men. Our study results are antithetical to prior literature reviews. This demonstrates a discussion opportunity why gender difference exists and how to address it in the workplace. Research has indicated stigma inhibits help seeking behaviors that come to the impedance of the person with BD. This study will hopefully assist in better exploration regarding stigma etiology with BD and gender and how-to tailor education and supports so that those living with BD may be successful with their diagnosis as well as in the workplace.