P03-271

PERCEPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS IN A SAMPLE OF PORTUGUESE EMPLOYERS

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Introduction: Despite society argues that all citizens have equal rights and equal opportunities, mentally ill individuals face discrimination, especially in the employment context. Research reported benefits of working and have a job, witch help play social roles and feel useful, key components in social inclusion and recovery of mentally ill individuals. Employers have an important role in the access of mentally ill individuals into work. They take decisions that affect life opportunities, but, due to their powerful position, their attitudes can influence all enterprise and maintain stereotypes and stigma.

Aims: Know perceptions and stereotypes about mental illness in Portuguese employers.

Methods: Data were collected using a translation of Attitude Scale for Mental Illness (Hahn, 2002), evaluating dimensions such as separatism, stereotyping, restrictiveness, benevolence, pessimistic prediction and stigmatization. The scale was fulfil using online anonym way, by 50 employers from small (under 250 employees) metallurgic or textile enterprises (60% male, 40% female; mean age 45.9 years).

Results: None of the enterprises have employees with mental illness, neither integration policies. Employers prefer to give a job to people with physical disabilities than to people with mental illness, choosing people with schizophrenia as the last possibility. They have little contact with mentally ill individuals, 96% don't know governmental policies for job inclusion and only 54% accepts to participate in meetings to understand those policies. Stereotyping, benevolence and pessimistic prediction present highest values.

Conclusions: Employers must be informed about governmental policies using work as a form of social inclusion from mentally ill people.