

# Do People with Tattoos Have Equal Opportunities in the Labour Market?

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**ABSTRACT:** The article focuses on the theoretical analysis of discrimination and the situation of equal opportunities in the labour market among people with tattoos. The aim of the research is to identify the situation of equitable engagement in the labour market for individuals with tattoos. The paper presents the results of a quantitative study. The data analysis showed that respondents indicated that they had been discriminated against 1-2 times and 2% indicated that they had been discriminated against more than a few times at work because of their tattoos. Other aspects of equal opportunities presented in this paper.

**KEYWORDS:** people with tattoos; discrimination in the workplace; equal opportunities; labour market.

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## INTRODUCTION

The number of tattooed individuals in the world is increasing every year, and in particular, more and more Generation Y people are getting tattooed (Coleman, Cote, Gu, & Nicolau, 2017; Kremer, Pinedo, Ferrariolo, et al., 2019), so it is natural that more and more of them are appearing in the labour market (Baumann, Timming, & Gollan, 2015). A study by Coleman, Cote, Gu and Nicolau (2017) found that the more tattoos a person has, the more likely that person is to receive criticism and misunderstanding because of their tattoos. According to Tews (2019), it is believed that people who have tattoos are less intelligent, trustworthy and sincere, and according to Ruffle (2019), the more tattoos a person has, the more forms of discrimination and the more various difficulties in getting a job. It can be argued that, although tattoos are becoming more popular among people, discrimination against tattoos is not decreasing as fast. Further scientific insights into tattoo discrimination are complemented by Kalanj-Mizzi, Snell and Graetz Simmonds (2019), who point out that people who have a large tattoo or multiple tattoos are more likely to experience discrimination than those who have just one tattoo. It must be acknowledged that a significant proportion of society, including employers, contributes to discrimination by reducing employment opportunities for these individuals (Coleman, Cote, Gu and Nicolau, 2017). Although, according to Ellis (2014), tattoos do not indicate a person's knowledge, skills and abilities that are important in the workplace, it must be acknowledged that employers tend to 'label' a person because of the presence of a tattoo, as they associate it with various groups that exhibit inappropriate behaviours. In order to find an answer as to why people with tattoos experience exclusion and various forms of discrimination, it is possible to relate this to past stigmas where tattoos were associated with inappropriate behaviour that did not conform to societal norms (Coleman, Cote, Gu & Nicolau, 2017). Such discriminatory insights lead us to agree with the ideas of Broussard and Harton (2018) and Tews and Stafford (2020), noting that contemporary society is divided, with some parts of this society still not accepting of people with tattoos due to the prevailing belief in stereotypes. Ellis (2014) adds that this stereotypical thinking can be attributed to the fact that in the past, tattoos were mainly limited to gangsters, bikers, loose women and other people with bad reputations.

A closer look at the labour market recognises that the reaction of customers to tattooed employees is important for employers, as well as the maintenance of the company's image (Ellis, 2014). Broussard and Harton (2018) also found that, from the perspective of employers, tattooed individuals can scare away customers and spoil the company's image. However, this is not a societal trend, as there are employers in society who recruit individuals despite their tattoos, but it is important to note that this is not the case in many cases. It is acknowledged that there are employment opportunities for individuals with tattoos, but it is often a requirement that tattoos must be covered when, according to Ellis (2014), even though the individual is working on food production or in outdoor spaces in the summer. According to Bacchini and Lorusso (2017) and Steele and Carney (2021), the stigmas attached to tattoos have a significant impact on the lives of such people, and they experience discrimination not only in social life but also in the labour market, where a person with a tattoo or a piercing is perceived as less likely to have one of these jobs than a person without tattoos. The employment rate of people with tattoos is particularly low in areas where direct contact with customers is required, as customers attribute a high number of negative attributes to people with tattoos or refuse to use the company's services. Tews and Stafford (2020) found that clients are more likely to interact and collaborate with people who do not have contemporary body art, i.e. tattoos.

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Tsaur and Tang (2013), Coleman, Cote, Gu and Nicolau (2017) and Tews (2019) point out that the employability of people with tattoos varies considerably depending on the industry, where, for example, in the medical field, workers have to hide their tattoos.

It is also important to note other discriminatory manifestations where, according to Broussard and Harton (2018), women who have tattoos are nonetheless more discriminated against. For example, a study by Baumann, Timming, and Gollan (2015) found that men with tattoos were rated more highly than women, regardless of their occupational field. Women with tattoos have fewer job opportunities and are offered lower salaries (Bevan, 2014; Henle, Shore, Murphy and Marshall, 2021). It can be assumed that women with tattoos experience more discrimination than men.

According to Tews (2019), the meaning of a tattoo also affects employability. According to Tews (2019), tattoos are usually divided into dark (symbolising death, violence, etc.) and light (symbolising nature, harmony, etc.). Tews (2019) notes that people who have dark tattoos are more likely to experience difficulties in the workplace or discrimination at work than people who have light tattoos. It can be argued that workers with light tattoos evoke positive emotions.

Feelings of tattooed people in the face of discrimination in the labour market. Bacchini (2017) argues that tattoos are eloquent and can reveal a person's past experiences, religion, attitudes, character and hobbies. Kalanj-Mizzi, Snell and Graetz Simmonds (2019) argue that tattoos are often used to signify the loss of loved ones and the pain of bereavement. Naben, Rosario Dias, Ferreira et al. (2019) observe that for people, their tattoo symbolises a happier and freer body, thus linking the importance of emotional and physical pain and experiences. At the same time, according to Naben, Rosario Dias, Ferreira et al. (2019), tattoos express pain, humiliation, sexual harassment, trauma, and various misfortunes as a kind of healing process that helps to improve and grow.

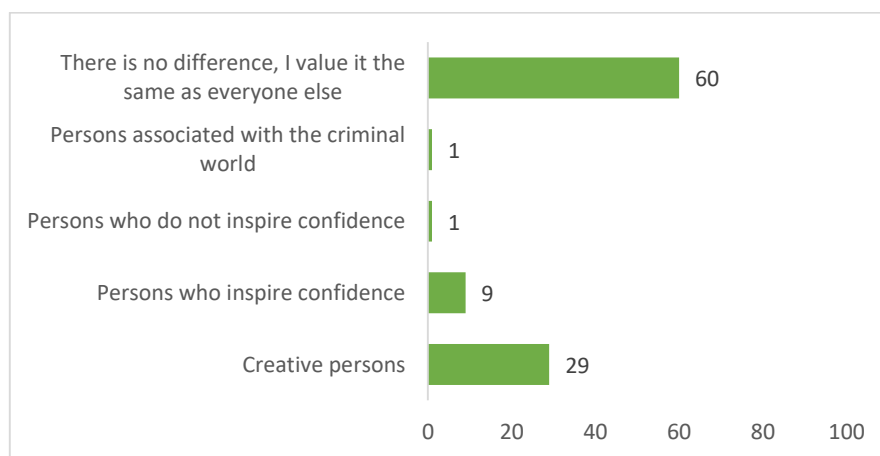
It is particularly important to address the wellbeing of people with tattoos as a result of discrimination and stereotypical negative thinking towards them. Ellis (2014) found that tattooed people who experienced discrimination became more withdrawn, angry, less motivated and had poor job performance. Broussard and Harton (2018) noted that many people with tattoos believed that they would and would not be hired because of their body art in open places.

In today's society, it is important to promote a new attitude towards individuals with tattoos. It is important to form attitudes that the distinctive appearance of individuals with tattoos does not really indicate professional ability (Ellis, 2014). For example, Baumann, Timming and Gollan (2015) attribute a particularly significant shift in change to customers and their attitudes, as it is the customers who determine the business of employers.

In light of these theoretical insights, the aim of this study is to identify the situation of equitable engagement in the labour market for individuals with tattoos.

## METHODOLOGY

The quantitative study aimed to find out how participants perceive other people with tattoos. The data are presented in the overall



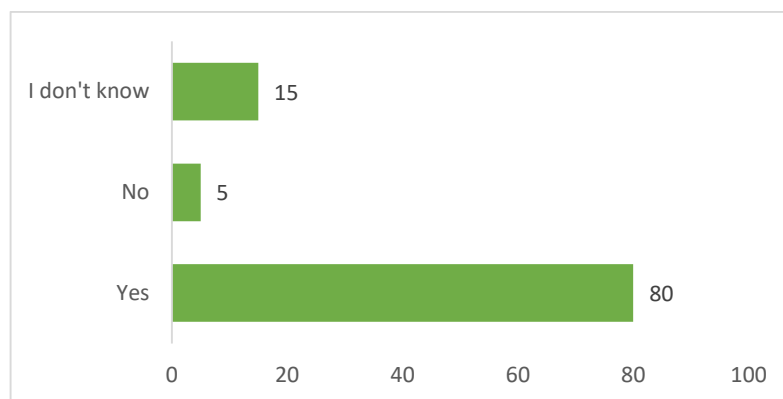
sample in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Ratings of people with tattoos (%)

Analysis of the survey data shows that 60% of respondents say it makes no difference to them whether a person has a tattoo or not. They value all people equally. This positive attitude towards people with tattoos is also reflected in the responses of the other 29% of respondents, who said that people with tattoos are creative. However, 1% of the respondents indicated that people with tattoos are not trustworthy or are connected to the criminal world.

The aim was also to find out whether there are other people with tattoos in the respondents' workplace. The aggregated data from the survey are presented in the overall sample in Figure 2.

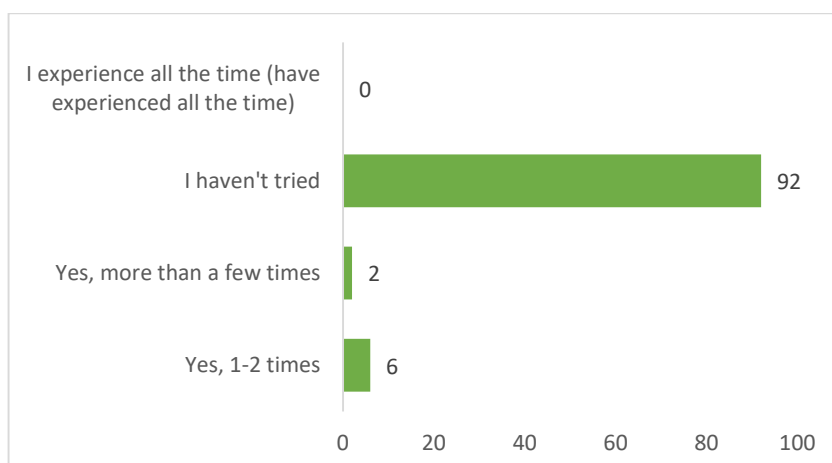
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**Figure 2. Information provided by people with tattoos about other people with tattoos in their workplace (%)**

The survey found that 80% of respondents report that there are other people with tattoos in their workplace. As can be seen, the number of employees with tattoos is certainly significant. However, 15% of the respondents indicate that they do not know if there are other people with tattoos in their workplace.

The survey also sought to find out whether respondents have experienced or are experiencing discrimination because of their tattoo(s) in the workplace. The survey data is presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Information provided by people with tattoos about other people with tattoos in their workplace (%)**

The survey asked a direct question about discrimination on the basis of tattoos in the workplace. It found that 92% of respondents with tattoos said they had not experienced discrimination. However, the analysis of the follow-up questions, which already provided the respondents with specific possible forms of discrimination, suggests that respondents may have lacked information on the variety of forms of discrimination when answering this question. However, as can be seen from these data, 6% of respondents indicated that they had been discriminated against 1-2 times and 2% indicated that they had been discriminated against more than a few times at work because of their tattoos.

The study aimed to find out what forms of discrimination the participants had experienced in the workplace. Respondents were asked to rate the statements from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The survey data are presented in the total sample in Table 1.

**Table 1. Discriminatory forms of workplace discrimination experienced by people with tattoos (%)**

Statements	I totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Don't agree	I totally don't agree
Reduced opportunities for direct work with clients	1,7	10	26,7	26,7	35
Limited opportunities for career progression	0	3,4	17,2	44,8	34,5
Reduced chances of securing a job	0	10,3	27,6	32,8	29,3
Cues from colleagues about tattoo(s)	1,7	8,6	22,4	36,2	31
Hints about tattoo(s) from supervisor	3,4	6,9	24,1	36,2	29,3

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Replicas of existing tattoos from customers	5,2	6,9	25,9	34,5	27,6
Less chance of being the face of the company (advertising, etc.) if the tattoo is in a visible place	6,9	17,2	24,1	27,6	24,1
Reduced chances of becoming the best employee	0	0	19,3	36,8	43,9
Reduced salary	0	0	10,3	39,7	50
Request from management to hide the tattoo	3,4	8,6	25,9	29,3	32,8
Perceived gossip from co-workers about the tattoo or tattoos they have	1,7	5,2	22,4	34,5	36,2
I think my tattoos make me less valued professionally than other employees	0	0	17,2	41,4	41,4
I am valued in the workplace for my knowledge and skills, and my tattoos are irrelevant	50	22,4	10,3	5,2	12,1

Analysis of the survey data showed that respondents with tattoos did not distinguish between most of the forms of discrimination reported. However, it is important to note that 17.2% of the workers who took part in the study did face fewer opportunities to be the face of the company (advertising, etc.) if their tattoo is visible, and 10.3% of the respondents also reported fewer opportunities to obtain a job. At the same time, 10% of respondents agreed that they had less chance of working directly with clients because of their tattoo(s). It is important to note that 50% strongly agreed and 22.4% agreed that they are valued in the workplace for their knowledge and skills, and that their tattoos do not matter.

In order to further explore respondents' experiences of equal inclusion and discrimination due to tattoos in the workplace, the respondents' own reactions to possible forms of discrimination in the workplace were examined. Respondents were asked to rate the statements from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The survey data are presented in the total sample in Table 2.

**Figure 2. Response of people with tattoos to discrimination in the workplace (%)**

Statements	I totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Don't agree	I totally don't agree
Difficulties in working with colleagues	1,7	1,7	10	43,3	43,3
I started to hide my tattoo	0	9,1	7,3	21,8	61,8
I started to wonder if my tattoo was visible	0	7,1	12,5	23,2	57,1
I started to think about what others think about my tattoo	0	12,5	8,9	23,2	55,4
Difficulties in cooperation with my supervisor	0	5,4	7,1	30,4	57,1
Psychological tension in the workplace	1,8	3,6	10,7	26,8	57,1
Lack of motivation	0	3,6	5,5	27,3	63,6
Doubts about my chosen profession or position	0	1,8	10,7	30,4	57,1
Started thinking about quitting my job	0	3,6	7,1	25	64,3
Started to avoid informal activities of co-workers	0	1,8	12,7	25,5	60
Can't concentrate or focus when working	0	1,8	7,3	27,3	63,6
Frequent mood swings and frequent feelings of anxiety	1,8	1,8	3,6	23,6	69,1
More often feel internal tension, negative emotions	1,9	1,9	3,7	25,9	66,7
I become indecisive/impetuous	0	1,8	5,5	18,2	74,5
I started to avoid contact with others more often	0	3,6	7,3	25,5	63,6
Started taking psychotropic/sedative substances to relax	0	0	5,7	17	77,4
Increased lack of self-confidence	0	1,8	9,1	18,2	70,9
Reluctance to go to work	0	1,8	10,9	21,8	65,5
I started to miss assignments on time	0	0	7,3	21,8	70,9
My reaction to discrimination was neutral	16,1	8,9	41,1	14,3	19,6

The analysis of the survey data revealed that respondents with tattoos tended to strongly disagree that they had experienced the effects of possible discrimination in the workplace as stated in the statements. However, 12.5% of the participants agreed that because of their tattoo(s), they had started to think about what others thought about my tattoo. This shows that concern for the

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opinion of co-workers is important for the employees who participated in the study. 16.1% strongly agree and 8.9% agree that their reaction to discrimination was neutral.

Further analysis of the results of the study is related to the analysis of measures to promote equal inclusion in the labour market. Respondents were asked to rate the statements from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The survey data are presented for the total sample in Table 3.

**Table 3. Measures reported by people with tattoos to promote equal inclusion in the labour market (%)**

Statements	I totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Don't agree	I totally don't agree
Publicising friendly companies towards people with tattoos	18,8	37,6	32,9	7,1	3,5
Publicising unfriendly companies towards persons with tattoos	7,1	20	44,7	18,8	9,4
Training for managers on equal inclusion in the labour market	34,1	40	18,8	5,9	1,2
Organising informal gatherings for staff	15,3	49,4	24,7	9,4	1,2
Training for all staff on tattoos to reduce existing stereotypes	16,5	34,1	34,1	8,2	7,1
To maximise the involvement of tattooed persons in the social activities of the organisation	14,1	31,8	42,4	5,9	5,9
Encouraging people not to conceal their tattoo or tattoos	34,1	38,8	17,6	5,9	3,5
Communicating to the organisation the importance of a diverse workforce, including tattooed persons	20	41,2	32,9	4,7	1,2
Fines for employers for discriminating against people with tattoos	20	17,6	35,3	18,8	8,2

The majority (15.3% strongly agree and 49.4% agree) of respondents with tattoos indicated that it is important to organise informal gatherings in the workplace which they believe would promote equal inclusion of people with tattoos in the labour market. Also, 34.1% of the participants strongly agree and 40% agree that training for managers on equal inclusion in the labour market should be organised. It is acknowledged that communication within the organisation about the importance of a diverse workforce, including tattooed people. This measure is strongly supported by 20% of respondents and 41.2% of respondents agree. As shown in the survey data, the least supported is the publicising of unfriendly companies towards tattooed individuals (7.1% strongly supported; 20% supported).

## CONCLUSIONS

1. An analysis of the scientific literature has shown that the number of people with tattoos in society is increasing. However, negative stereotypes prevail in relation to these individuals.
2. Theoretical insights suggest that negative stereotyping of people with tattoos is also prevalent in the labour market, where they are subjected to various forms of discrimination by employers or clients.
3. Analysis of the results of the quantitative survey revealed that 92% of respondents with tattoos have not experienced discrimination on the basis of a tattoo at work. However, 6% of respondents indicated that they had been discriminated against 1-2 times and 2% indicated that they had been discriminated against more than a few times at work because of their tattoos.
4. The quantitative study revealed that 17.2% of the workers who participated in the study had faced fewer opportunities to be the face of the company (advertising, etc.) if their tattoo was in a visible place, and 10.3% of the respondents also reported having faced fewer opportunities to get a job. At the same time, 10% of the respondents agreed that they had fewer opportunities for direct work with clients because of their tattoo(s). It is important to note that 50% strongly agreed and 22.4% agreed that they are valued in the workplace for their knowledge and skills, and that their tattoos do not matter.

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