Referring to Workers Within Work Disability Prevention Research: Person-First or Identify-First?

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Workers experiencing injury, disability, or other health conditions often have preferences related to how they are characterized and described. When referring to communities of workers, it is important to be mindful of how the community prefers to be characterized (where there is a preference) and adhere to their preferences. Using incorrect or inappropriate language can be offensive and even stigmatizing [1]. Two styles of language are commonly used: *Person-first* or *Identity-first* [2, 3].

Person-first language puts the person before the disability in the description, (e.g., person with work disability or worker with shoulder pain). Person-first language tends to be preferred in communities where people wish to emphasize themselves as a person over the disability or health condition.

Identity-first language uses the common identifier as an adjective, (e.g., disabled worker, deaf worker, autistic worker). In some worker groups, the common identifier is seen as a key part of the group's identity, so putting this identity first in the description is preferred. Generally, the identifier should not be used as a stand-alone term. For example, 'disabled worker' is widely used, whereas 'the disabled' is not. There are exceptions, as some autistic individuals prefer to be referred to as an autistic.

As there is often no clear consensus on what is best [4, 5], the editors of the Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation

encourage authors to learn from the populations, workers, and organizations they conduct research with. Referring to workers appropriately involves using the terminology the workers prefer.

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