



Employer Assistance and Resource Network

# Beyond Yellow Ribbons: Research on Employer Preparedness to Include Veterans with Disabilities in the Workplace

**EARN supports employers in recruiting, hiring, retaining and advancing qualified veterans and individuals with disabilities.**

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# Beyond Yellow Ribbons: Research on Employer Preparedness to Include Veterans with Disabilities in the Workplace

**NETAC**

National Technical Assistance, Policy, and Research Center  
for Employers on Employment of People with Disabilities

**EARN**

Employer Assistance and Resource Network

National Society of  
Human Resource  
Management  
SHRM



**October 6, 2011**  
**Northeast ADA Center**  
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**Cornell University**

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# Why is this a burning issue?

*A 30 year old veteran returns from Iraq with PTSD. A middle school teacher prior to his service in Iraq, he now plans on limiting his job search to non-skilled work because he is sure he will never be hired for professional jobs when he tells his potential employer about his PTSD diagnosis.*

*A 24 year old soldier is recovering from a traumatic brain injury. She plans on hiding her disability from her employer because she fears she will be terminated if her employer finds out.*

*A 32 year old returns from Iraq with a spinal cord injury. An IT professional prior to his service, he believes he will not be able to return to his old job because the building he worked in lacks an elevator.*



# In a nutshell, let's consider...



1. A surge of goodwill; will it be enough?
2. The nature and prevalence of veterans' disabilities
3. Overview of the survey
4. Our findings
5. Conclusions and implications



# 1. A surge of goodwill: Will it be enough?

## A Prior Study: SHRM 2010 Poll\*

### Employers:

- Had practices to re-integrate vets into workforce (e.g. compensation, training, providing recognition, etc.)
- 53% had hired a veteran
- Agreed: the benefits of hiring vets in terms of skills, performance & discipline (e.g. generally 80 – 90% agreed that vets could bring a lot to the workplace)

### But when it came to vets with disabilities:

- About ½ saw PTSD as a challenge/barrier to employing veterans
- About ¼ saw physical disabilities as a challenge to employing veterans



\*Source: Society for Human Resource Management(2010). SHRM Poll: Employing Military Personnel and Recruiting Veterans—Attitudes and Practices.. Accessed at <http://www.shrm.org/RESEARCH/Pages/default.aspx>.

## 2. The nature and prevalence of veterans' disabilities

Vets returning from recent engagements (2009 American Community Survey):

- 21.9 million veterans in the U.S. in 2009
- 9.8 million working age vets were in workforce in 2009
- 5.5 million had a diagnosed disability



# Yet, the real rate of disability among veterans is likely substantially higher

## PTSD:

- 2008 RAND study: About 20 % of recently returned veterans screened positive for depression or PTSD
- Erbes , Westermeyer , Engdahl & Johnson (2007): Rate of PTSD among returning service members was 6 % diagnosed, with an additional 27% estimated to be undiagnosed

## TBI

- 2008 RAND study: 19% of soldiers received a probable TBI, with more subtle (and more difficult to diagnose) blast-related injuries being most common

## Many veterans have more than one disability

**30% of returning veterans screened positive for PTSD, TBI and/or major depression (RAND, 2008)**

# Overview: Disability rates & types

## DOD rates across OIF, OEF & OND\*

Total casualties: **41,675**

Largest reason code:

WEAPONRY, EXPLOSIVE DEVICE: **29,789**

\*US Department of Defense (DoD) Personnel and Procurement Statistics at <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/castop.htm>



# Why such a high rate of these disabilities?

Several features of recent engagements make the situation for these returning veterans unique



More likely than prior vets to:

- Have extended tours of duty and to be deployed more than once
- Not get the full recommended rest time between deployments
- Not have the safety net/community of active-duty military—more likely than in prior engagements to be National Guardsmen or Reservists.
- Be vulnerable to blast injuries, closed head injuries caused by mortar attacks and roadside bombs

Sources:

Tanielan T, Jaycox LH (2008)

Williamson V, Mulhall E. (2009)

# The special dynamic of these “signature” veterans’ disabilities...

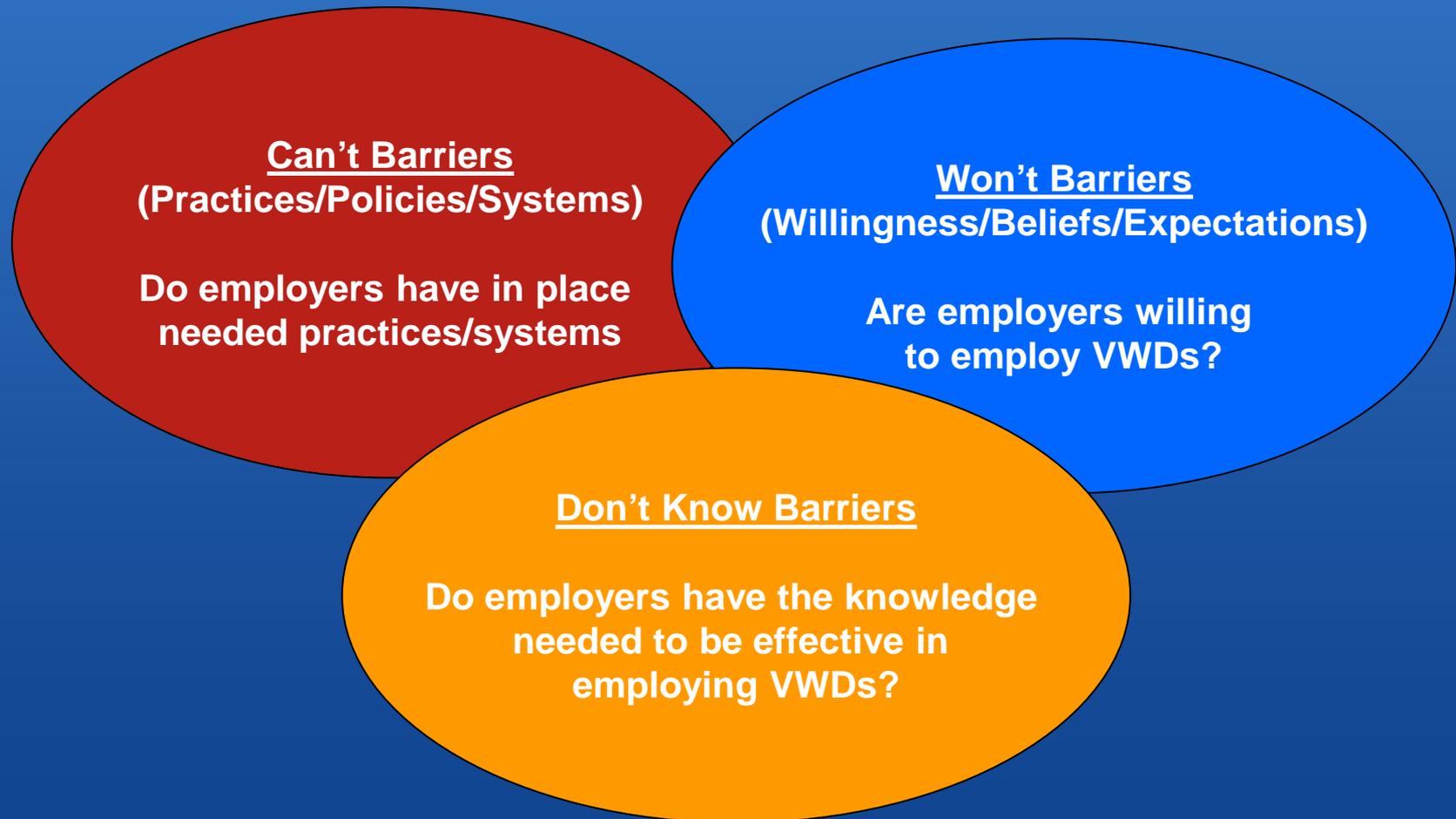
- Veteran is likely still on a journey to understand the impact and meaning of the disability AFTER the return to civilian work life
- Under-diagnosed & under-reported—Inadequate screening mechanisms
- Many will not be fully diagnosed & treated until long after return to civilian life
- Change a lot over time
- Can have a wide range of symptoms and subtle manifestations
- Tend to be highly stigmatized



### ***3. Overview of the survey***

*An ecological framework:*

## *The DBTAC—NE Barrier Intervention Model*



# About the survey

Conducted in Fall 2010

In collaboration:

- The Northeast ADA Center
- National ADA Network of Centers
- National (SHRM)

Online survey of National SHRM members

10,000 HR professionals surveyed

1,083 surveys returned



# 4. Highlights--Survey Findings

Overall: HR professionals are largely willing to hire veterans with disabilities and do see some benefits of having these veterans in their workforce

Yet, they are struggling to turn this goodwill into solid HR practices to find, hire, and manage the talents of these veterans

Expressed goodwill is not the same as prioritizing this issue!



## Do employers have the knowledge needed?

### Accommodations

Employers largely did not know where to go to find accommodation resources for VWDs

- 41% did not know where to find resources to help them accommodate VWDs

### Recruiting

Most employers had not heard of resources related to finding and recruiting VWDs

- 73% had not heard of the VetSuccess Program
- 61% had not heard of the Wounded Warrior Program.
- Varied by sector

### The Law

Employers were confused about disability disclosure and did not know which laws applied to VWDs

- 58% incorrectly believed applicants must disclose during the hiring process (a key finding given that, to a large degree, PTSD and TBI are often not obvious to others)
- 42% incorrectly believed that USERRA and not the ADA is the main law covering VWDs in the workplace
- 31% of respondents did not know which laws covered VWDs



## Are employers willing?

### Overall perceived benefits

Generally, employers did believe in benefits of employing VWDs

- 73% agreed/strongly agreed hiring VWDs would benefit their organization
- 24% unsure

### Job performance expectations

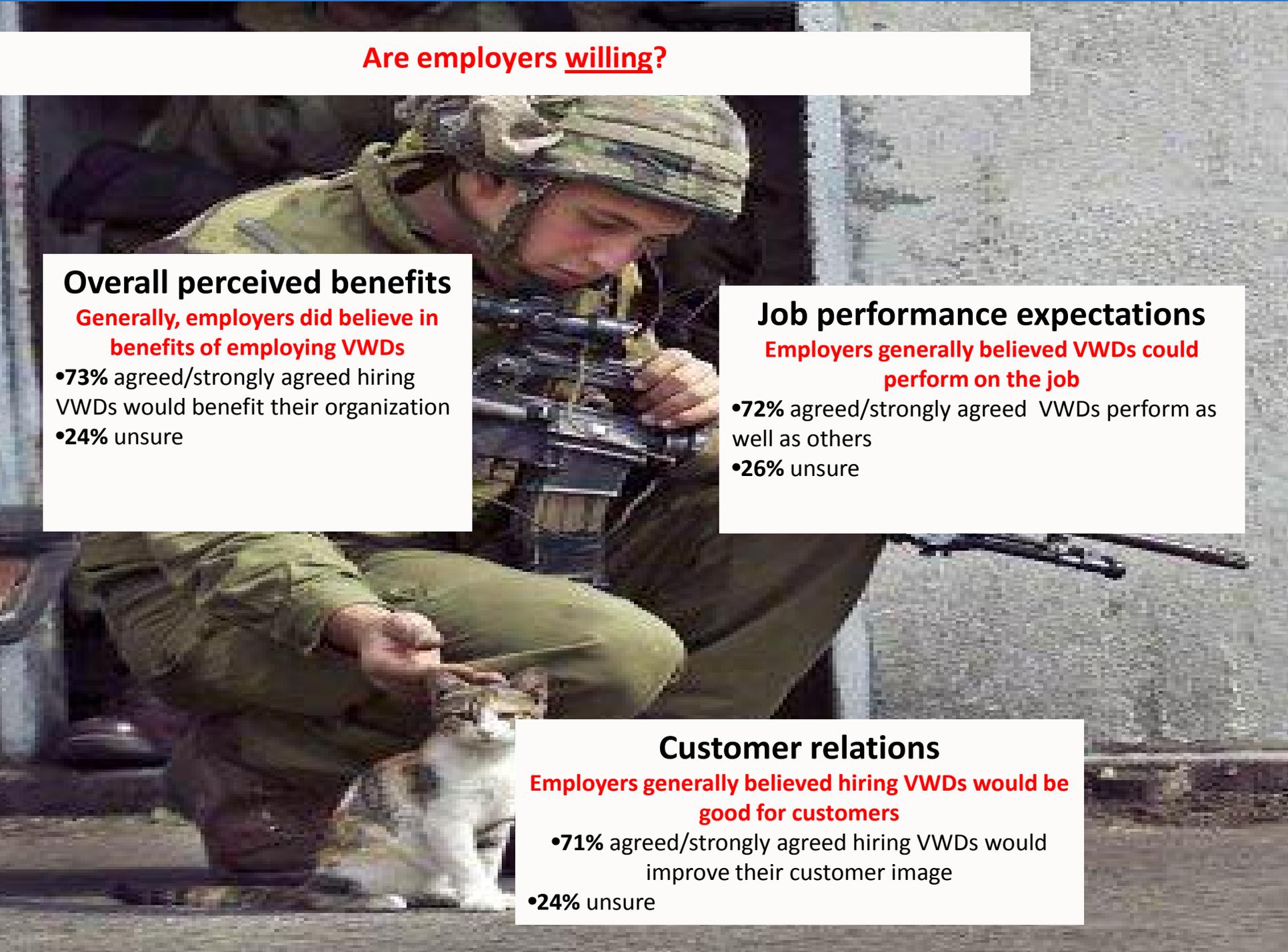
Employers generally believed VWDs could perform on the job

- 72% agreed/strongly agreed VWDs perform as well as others
- 26% unsure

### Customer relations

Employers generally believed hiring VWDs would be good for customers

- 71% agreed/strongly agreed hiring VWDs would improve their customer image
- 24% unsure



## Are employers willing?

### Perceived manager time burden

Generally, employers believed VWDs would take more of a manager's time

61% agreed/strongly agreed accommodating VWDs would take more of a manager's time/effort

29% unsure

10% believed accommodating VWDs would not take more of a manager's time/effort

### Signature disabilities

Generally, employers were unsure if workers with the signature disabilities would be violent in the workplace

•39% disagreed/strongly disagreed that workers with PTSD were more likely to be violent in the workplace

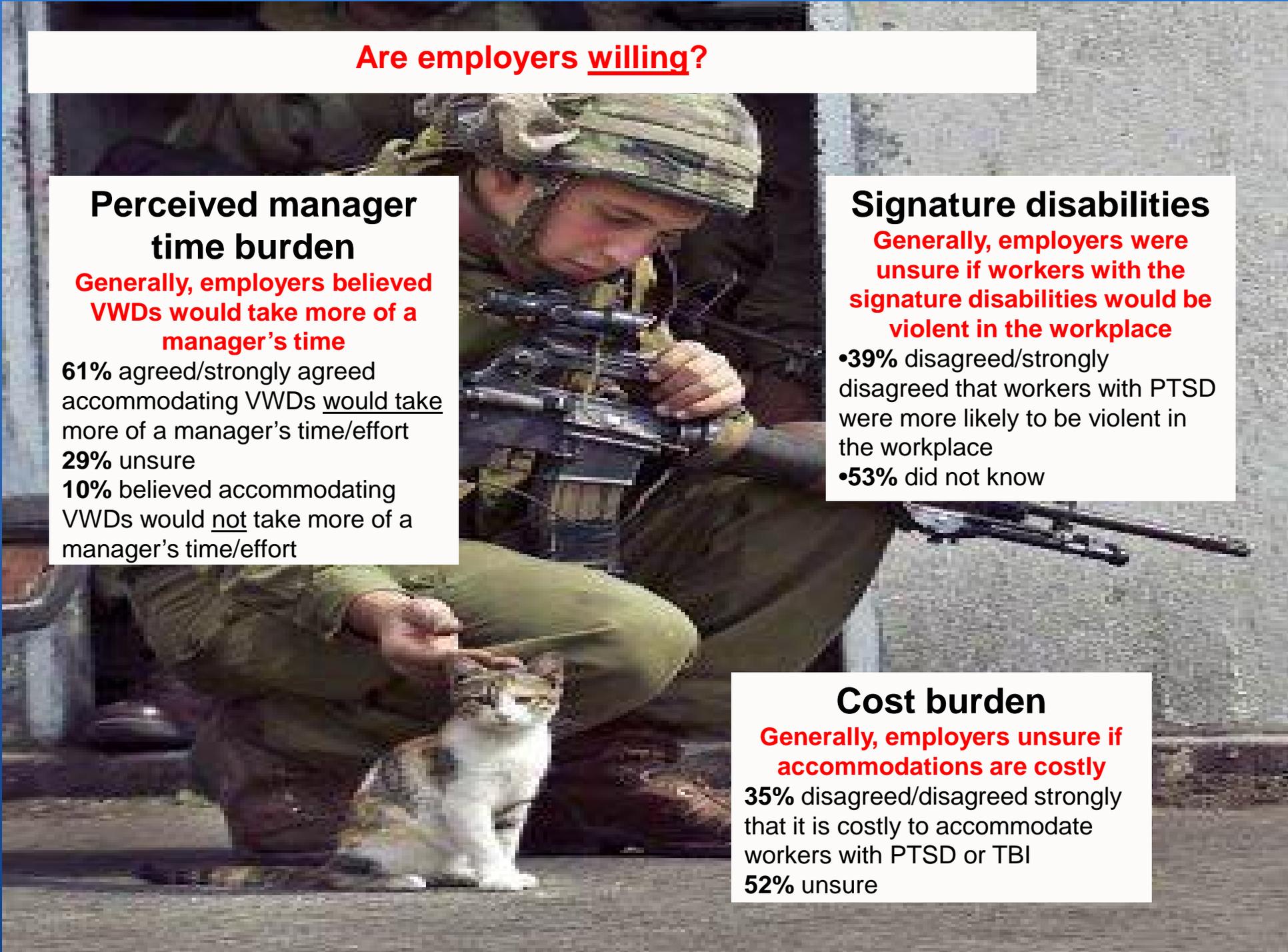
•53% did not know

### Cost burden

Generally, employers unsure if accommodations are costly

35% disagreed/disagreed strongly that it is costly to accommodate workers with PTSD or TBI

52% unsure



## Do employers have practices/processes in place?

### Accommodation Practices for PTSD

**Employers had scant experience  
accommodating workers with  
signature disabilities**

- 6% had accommodated a worker with PTSD in the last year
- 2% had accommodated a worker with TBI in the last year



### Hiring

**Generally, employers had not  
hired veterans with known  
disabilities**

- 17% had hired a veteran who had disclosed a disability either before or after time of hire
- 52% had not hired a veteran with a known disability
- 31% unsure

### (EAP)

**Most employers do not have an EAP  
with expertise in VWDs**

- 74% have an EAP
- 38% have EAP with expertise in veterans' issues

### Affinity/resource group

**Most employers do not have an  
affinity group focusing on either  
disability or veterans' issues**

- 9% have an affinity/resource group focused on disability
- 7% have an affinity/resource group focused on veterans



# 5. Conclusions & implications

## Limitations of our study:

### “Not sure” response category

- Surfaces knowledge needs, but masks socially undesirable responses?

### Sample that consisted solely of SHRM members

- Accessed a difficult-to-reach audience, but over-represented large, private sector organizations
- Could practices around diversity plans, EAP and Affinity groups be over-represented in our study?

# Final thoughts...

Overall, our findings indicate that, though employers do have goodwill in this area, goodwill alone may not be enough to ensure that workplaces are geared up to enable VWDs to fully contribute their talents on the job.

Many of the policies and practices needed to provide support to veterans with disabilities are not yet present in the majority of workplaces.



# What's needed now?

Recently completed: A “mirror” survey for veterans themselves supported by Kessler Foundation

Be wary of spraying out more resources...Employers largely are not using the myriad of resources that are already available. More information dissemination may not lead to changes in practice

Several areas for further research:

1. Differences between size/sector
2. Employers' knowledge-seeking motivations & behaviors

This is an area where basic KT approaches could be very helpful!



# Questions?

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