



Helping chronically ill and disabled people into work: what can we learn from international comparative analyses?

- In the UK, employment rates for people with a chronic illness and disability are low and show a social gradient, with less skilled manual workers suffering the most.
- This project aimed to identify and synthesise evidence on policies and interventions that might help chronically ill and disabled people into work in five highly developed welfare systems: Canada, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the UK.
- Comparing these five countries in relation to *macro-level policies*, the problematic employment situation in the UK for people with limiting illness and low education may in part be a consequence of adverse long term macroeconomic conditions combined with a relatively low level of active labour market policies.
- In relation to *focused interventions*, a typology of eight different types of intervention was developed and studies reviewed within each category. Some intervention types produced promising results in terms of improved employment chances for participants. Influential factors in terms of impact included intensive personal support and substantial financial incentives.
- There are many pitfalls to interpreting the evidence on social interventions including: biased selection of participants into the interventions; take-up of universal initiatives by those for whom they were least intended; measurement of outcomes too soon or inappropriately; hidden stigma associated with some interventions; low take-up leading to negligible population impact. All these make in-depth knowledge of the intervention/system context and the incorporation of evidence from qualitative studies a necessity.
- Very few studies investigated whether there was a differential impact of the interventions for different socio-economic groups. It is essential for future effectiveness studies to monitor differential impact. Some of the studies that did, found that specific interventions were less accessible to less skilled manual groups, who would need additional support to help them return to work.
- These are the very groups that our epidemiological analyses reveal have the poorest, and declining, employment chances in all five countries, with the situation in the UK being of particular concern. The current recession in all the countries make it more pressing than ever to address this problem.

Details of the research team

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