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Working with a work disability

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Registration date 29/09/2023	**Overall study status** Ongoing	
Last Edited 24/06/2024	**Condition category** Other	

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Securing a paying job can be challenging, especially for people with work disabilities. While many employers express a willingness to hire such individuals, only a small number actually follow through on their promises. Consequently, there is a crucial need for effective support in both hiring and keeping people with disabilities in the workforce. By understanding what factors make employment sustainable and improving the strategies used by employers and job agencies, we believe we can increase the chances of people with work disabilities finding and maintaining meaningful employment.

The goal of this project is to study the programs and efforts currently in place by employers and job agencies. By doing so, we hope to enhance the long-term participation of people with work disabilities in the labor market. This research will help make these programs better, encouraging more employers to take meaningful steps towards hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities. Ultimately, our aim is to make the transition to paid employment easier and more sustainable for people with work disabilities.

Our project is divided into three main parts, each with its own goal:
1. Gaining a deep understanding of the factors and methods that help individuals with disabilities get and keep jobs.
2. Improving and evaluating the effective strategies already used by employers and job agencies.
3. Analyzing the societal costs and benefits associated with individuals with disabilities gaining and maintaining employment.

Who can participate?
This research focuses on three main groups: employers, employment service providers, and individuals with work disabilities. In this project, we define individuals with work disabilities as people who have physical or mental limitations that make it difficult for them to work. Our study goes beyond just those who are officially registered in a specific employment program.

For our research, we will include individuals with work disabilities who are currently being helped to find regular paid jobs or have recently started working in such positions. We won't be looking at people who have worked for one company for a very long time, or those who are just starting to reintegrate into the workforce.

When it comes to employers, we will primarily be focusing on their human resources or diversity and inclusion departments. In smaller companies, this role might be handled by the owner or entrepreneur, while in larger companies, it's typically the HR professional or direct supervisor.

What does the study involve?
The project will use a method called learning evaluation to carry out its research. We will work closely with partners in a learning network to thoroughly analyze and understand how different factors in various situations can lead to a good outcome, which in our case is long-lasting paid employment. This will help us figure out what works best for different people and situations. We will use both qualitative (words and descriptions) and quantitative (numbers and data) research methods.

The project is divided into three phases:
Phase 1
In this phase, we will gather information through interviews with employers, interviews with people with disabilities, and looking at past data. By doing this, we can better understand what factors and mechanisms affect hiring and keeping a job for people with disabilities. This will help us find ways to improve their chances of working.

Phase 2
After collecting information in the first phase, we will share and discuss what we've learned with our partners in the learning network. We will then use these insights to come up with practical steps to make the strategies used by employers and job agencies better. At the same time, we will also start a research study where we follow people with work disabilities for a year as they start working. This will help us see how these strategies and changes affect their health and well-being.

Phase 3
In the final phase, we will use the information from the research study to look at how starting and keeping a job affects the health of people with work disabilities. We will also analyze data about things like the kind of benefits they receive, their job status, and how often they use healthcare services. This will help us figure out if it's beneficial for society as a whole for people with disabilities to work and how it compares to the costs.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
The research project we're planning will look at and improve the programs that employers and job agencies are already using. We won't be testing new ideas or asking people who wouldn't already be trying to find a long-lasting job to participate. We will only include people who are currently getting help to find a regular paid job or have just started working in one. So, the project is not expected to be very demanding or risky for the participants.

Where is the study run from?
Erasmus Medical Center - Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
September 2023 to August 2027.

Who is funding the study?
The study is funded by ZonMw, within the program 'Vakkundig aan het werk 2'. (The Netherlands)

Who is the main contact?
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Contact information

Type(s)
Scientific

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
10691

Study information

Scientific Title
A learning evaluation with employers and employment service providers, aimed at improving sustainable labor participation among people with working disabilities

Study objectives
It is not apparent for everyone to have paid employment, particularly among people with a work disability. Although more than half of employers indicate the willingness to hire people with a disability, only a small portion follow through. Accordingly, there is a need for effective support in the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities, in order to leverage the potential for change among employees. We hypothesize that acquiring insights into the factors and mechanisms contributing to sustainable employment, and evaluating and optimizing current approaches employed by employers and employment service providers, will consequently enhance opportunities for individuals with a work disability to achieve sustainable employment.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)

Approved 03/06/2024, METC (Kamer Ae-337, Rotterdam, 3000 CA Rotterdam, Netherlands; +31 10-70 34428; metc@erasmusmc.nl), ref: MEC-2023-0708

Primary study design
Observational

Study design
Mixed methods

Study type(s)
Other, Quality of life

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Participation in paid employment (and sustainability of employment) among individuals with a work disability.

Interventions
Phase 1: qualitative research (semi-structured interviews) & quantitative research (retrospective cohort study)
Phase 2: quantitative research (prospective longitudinal cohort study)
Phase 3: Social cost-benefit analysis

The project will be implemented using the methodology of a learning evaluation. Working collaboratively with partners within a learning network, a thorough analysis is conducted through a realistic evaluation, identifying the specific mechanisms within various contexts that contribute to sustainable paid employment. In doing so, the project aims to assess and optimize current best practices employed by employment service providers and employers. Moreover, it will provide insight into what works, for who, and in which context. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods are utilized. The project is structured into three distinct phases:

Phase 1
Input is gathered through (A) interviews with employers, (B) interviews with people with disabilities, and (C) retrospective data analysis using registry data. By gaining a deeper understanding of the factors and mechanisms influencing hiring and retention, we can identify opportunities to enhance the labor force participation of individuals with disabilities.

Phase 2
Findings from the initial phase are shared and discussed within the learning network. These insights are subsequently translated into concrete steps towards the optimization of current best practices applied by employers and employment service providers.
Additionally, prospective longitudinal research is conducted, following individuals with a work disability for one year from the start of their trajectory towards paid employment. The longitudinal research delves into the mechanisms of promising approaches and optimizations implemented by employers and employment service providers. Moreover, it sheds light on the impact of commencing paid employment on the health and well-being of individuals with a work disability.

Phase 3
Based on previously obtained information from the prospective study, additional analyses will

be conducted that explore the health effects of commencing and maintaining paid employment for individuals with a work disability. Furthermore, utilizing data on factors such as the type of benefits, employment status, and healthcare usage, a societal cost-benefit analysis will be performed.

Intervention Type
Other

Primary outcome(s)
Measured using interviews and registry data:
1. The initiation of paid work
2. The retention of paid work. Initiating paid work is defined as engaging in paid employment for a minimum of three months. Retention of work is defined as being employed for at least 6 months (moderately sustainable) and at least 12 months (sustainable)

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Self-esteem will be measured using the Rosenborg Self-Esteem Scale at baseline.
2. Physical health and quality of life will be measured at baseline, 6 months and 12 months using the SF12.
3. Mental health will be measured at baseline, 6 months and 12 months using the MI5
4. Psychosocial & physical work factors are measured among participant who entered paid employment at the 6 and 12 month measurements, using questions from the COPSOQ and STREAM questionnaires.
5. Work ability will be measured at baseline, 6 months and 12 months, using the Work Ability Index.
6. Use of healthcare will be measured at baseline, 6 months and 12 months, using the TIC-P questionnaire (short version)

Completion date
31/08/2027

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
Individuals with a work disability who are being guided towards regular paid employment or have recently started such employment are included for this research.
In this proposal, a ‘work disability’ refers to any physical or mental limitations that hinder one’s ability to work.

Participant type(s)
Healthy volunteer, Employee

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Adult

Lower age limit
18 Years

Upper age limit
67 Years

Sex
All

Key exclusion criteria
Individuals in the first or second track of reintegration are excluded from participation.

Date of first enrolment
01/11/2023

Date of final enrolment
01/09/2025

Locations

Countries of recruitment
Netherlands

Study participating centre
Erasmus MC
Dr. Molewaterplein 40
Rotterdam
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3015GD

Sponsor information

Organisation
Erasmus MC

ROR
https://ror.org/018906e22

Funder(s)

Funder type
Government

Funder Name
ZonMw

Alternative Name(s)
Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development

Funding Body Type
Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype
Other non-profit organizations

Location
Netherlands

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study will be available upon request.
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IPD sharing plan summary
Available on request