

POSTER ABSTRACT

Are people with mental disorders excluded from work and from active labour market programs?

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In Norway the employment rate amongst people with mental disorders is about half compared to the rest of the group with disabilities. The same pattern is found in other OECD countries, where on average only one in four individuals reporting a mental health condition is employed. Since there is evidence that work can improve mental health and reduce psychological distress, policymakers are looking for solutions to improve labour market participation among people with mental health problems.

A large part of the public effort for activating disadvantaged groups in the labour market are directed through active labour market programmes ALMPs. The main goal of these programs is to enhance employment opportunities and employability by providing training and qualifications. Numerous evaluation studies have analyzed how these programs affect the participant's chance of employment, and whether the effects vary for different subgroups of the disabled. There is, however, less research on the recruitment to ALMPs and the accomplishment of program participation.

The aim of this paper is to identify if there are barriers that prohibits people with mental disorders in either getting vocational training, or carrying through the planned training. The paper focuses on differences between people with mental disorders and others in need of vocational training with regard to i recruitment and ii what kind of measures that are offered.

In the study, we follow a group of long time recipients LTRs of social assistance benefits for eight years. These individuals are distant from the labour market; they do not qualify for social security benefits, and many have physical or mental health problems. The participants, 1 066 in all, were recruited to the study in 2005. About 50 per cent responded to a questionnaire that provided information on sociodemographic characteristics, work, health, pain, health-related quality of life, use of alcohol and narcotics, and more. This data set has recently been linked with information from a number of national administrative registers, which enables us to follow vital aspects of their life course, including participation in labour market programs, over a period of eight years, i.e. from 2005 through 2013.

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Preliminary analyses show that a large majority 88 per cent of LTRs has participated in an active labour market program at least once. A rather high share 40 per cent has four or more spells of ALMP participation. LTRs who in 2005 report multiple health problems, i.e. poor mental health and physical pain, participate less frequent than other subgroups: 17 per cent have never participated in an ALMP; 29 per cent has four or more ALMP spells.

Further analyses will examine how LTRs participation patterns vary with what kind of health problem they have.

Keywords: active labour market policies; social assistance recipients; norway; longitudinal studies
