Disability at Work: Assessing Routes towards Fair and Sustainable Employment

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Rehabilitation: Can it be Achieved in the Community? 19th November 2015
Disability disadvantage at work

1. Employment gaps
2. Wellbeing gaps

Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS) 2011

• % disabled employees in the workplace
• disabled employees perceptions of wellbeing, fairness and job quality/satisfaction
Workplace characteristics that shape the experience of disabled employees

➢ Equal opportunities policies and practices

➢ Trade union representation

➢ Organisation and management of work
Background

Disadvantage in employment (Jones, 2006; Bell & Heitmueller, 2009; Baumberg et al., 2015)

Disadvantage once in work (Schur et al., 2009; Fevre et al., 2008, 2009; Longhi et al., 2012; Jones, 2015)

External environment

– How does this change in response to changes in legislation?
– To what extent does it change over the economic cycle?
Disability and the Economic Cycle: Theory

Theory would suggest labour market inequality is exacerbated during an downturn

- Focus on performance (Rubery & Rafferty, 2013)
- Opportunity to discriminate (Becker, 1957; Biddle & Hammermesh, 2013)
- Concentration in ‘sensitive’ employment (Rubery & Rafferty, 2013)
Disability and the Economic Cycle: Evidence

Evidence in relation to disability is limited, focuses on employment and provides mixed conclusions.

US
- ‘Last hired, first fired’ (Kruse & Schur, 2003: 31)
- Enhanced sensitivity to the recent recession (Kaye, 2010)

UK
- Relative cyclical employment insensitivity (Berthoud, 2009 and 2011)
Our Contribution

New evidence Britain recent ‘Great’ Recession

Secondary data Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2011
- 21,981 employees
- 1,923 workplaces

Relative ‘in-work’ experience of disabled employees
- Personal characteristics
- Job characteristics
- Workplace characteristics

Interaction between the internal environment and experience (Stone & Colella, 1996)
Impact of the Recession

Did any of the following happen to you as a result of the most recent recession, whilst working at this workplace?

1. I was not working at this workplace during the recession
2. My workload increased
3. My work was reorganised
4. I was moved to another job
5. My wages were frozen or cut
6. My non-wage benefits (e.g. vehicles or meals) were reduced
7. My contracted working hours were reduced
8. Access to paid overtime was restricted
9. I was required to take unpaid leave
10. Access to training was restricted
11. None of the above.
Disability

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

1. No
2. Yes, limited a little
3. Yes, limited a lot.

Disabled employees (9.7%) are either limited a little or a lot.
Experience of the Recession by Disability

- Workload increased
- Work reorganised
- Moved another job
- Wage freeze
- Non-wage benefits cut
- Hours reduced
- Paid overtime restricted
- Unpaid leave
- Access to training

Percent of employees

- Disabled
- Non-disabled
Relative Experience of the Recession by Disability

- Workload increased
- Work reorganised
- Wage freeze
- Paid overtime restricted
- Access to training restricted

Percentage point gap by disability

- Unadjusted
- Adjusted for personal characteristics
- Adjusted for job characteristics
- Adjusted for workplace characteristics

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Relative Experience of the Recession by Disability

Disabled employees report a more averse relative experience

• Workload increased
• Work reorganised
• Wage freeze
• Paid overtime restricted
• Access to training restricted

This is not explained by personal, job or workplace characteristics and suggests it is related to disability *per se*. 
Relative Experience of the Recession by Workplace Characteristics

The relative experience does not vary by workplace characteristics designed to proxy the equality environment.

- Equal opportunities policy and practice
- Sector
- Trade union recognition

Conclusion

Differences in the reported experience of the recession between disabled and non-disabled employees in Britain in 2011

– Disabled employees report a more negative experience
– This is not simply a reflection of pre-existing disadvantage
– Reported experience does not vary significantly between workplaces
– Suggests an influence of disability across workplaces
The Experience of Disabled Employees during the Great Recession

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