

Article

Psychosocial job quality in a national sample of working Australians: A comparison of persons working with versus without disability[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Objectives: There is growing international policy interest in disability employment, yet there has been little investigation of job quality among people working with disability. This study uses Australian national data to compare the psychosocial job quality of people working with versus without disability. **Methods:** We used 10 annual waves of data from a large representative Australian panel survey to estimate the proportion of the population experiencing poorer psychosocial job quality (overall and by individual 'adversities' of low job control, high demands, high insecurity, and low fairness of pay) by disability status and impairment type. We used logistic regression to examine the pooled cross-sectional associations between disability and job quality, adjusting for age, sex, education and job type.

Results: Those working with any disability showed approximately 25% higher odds of reporting one or more adversity at work (OR: 1.23, 95% CI: 1.15, 1.31), and this finding was consistent across impairment types with the exception of intellectual/developmental disability. Estimates were largely unchanged after adjustments. Similar results were found for reporting two or more adversities compared one or more.

Conclusions: We observed that working people with a disability in Australia reported systematically poorer psychosocial job quality than those working without disability. These results suggest the need for further research to understand the reasons for these patterns, as well as policy and practice efforts to address this inequity.

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Introduction

In Australia and internationally, there is a renewed national policy focus on narrowing the difference in labour force participation between working age people with versus without disability. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that labour force participation

rate for people with disability was 54% in 2009, versus 83% for those with no disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The gap in labour force participation for those with and without disability increased with age (e.g., people with a disability aged 55–64 had a 40% participation rate). People with sensory and speech impairment had the highest rate of labour market participation (54%, with a 7% unemployment rate), while those with psychological impairments had the poorest (29% participation rate, with 19% unemployment). Unsurprisingly, disabled persons with 'employment restrictions' had lower participation rates (46%) than those without restriction (71%). Still, one fifth of those with disability who were not working reported no employment restriction, meaning it was not disability per se that prevented them from being in paid employment. Overall, occupations were similar for those with and without disability; however there was some variation by impairment type. A third of those with intellectual impairments were employed in low skill jobs (such as cleaners), while

[☆]What is new in this paper and what are the policy implications. This study is among the first to investigate the psychosocial quality of jobs held by people with a disability. We found that psychosocial job quality is systematically worse for working people with a disability. These results suggest the need for further research to understand the reasons for these patterns, as well as policy and practice efforts to address this inequity.

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20% of those with sensory and speech impairments were in professional occupations.

There has been little empirical research on the quality of the jobs held by people with disability despite the fact that Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which Australia is a signatory, recognises the rights of people with disability to work on an equal basis to others including the right “to just and favourable conditions of work, including equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe and healthy working conditions” (United Nations, 2006). Such knowledge could inform the design of jobs, programmes, and policies to enhance the employment of people with disability and serve as a baseline from which to monitor progress in the area into the future. Filling this gap in knowledge is particularly relevant in the Australian context, where a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was legislated in 2012 (Productivity Commission, 2011) and is currently being pilot-tested in selected Australian locations, with rollout of the full scheme anticipated in mid-2016 (National Disability Insurance Scheme, 2015). The NDIS aims to enhance the individualised focus of support and services accessed by those with disabilities in order to better meet their personal goals and aspirations, which can include paid work or other community participation. The financial viability of the scheme is premised on narrowing the disability employment gap by increasing employment opportunities and the sustainability of employment for persons with disabilities. The quality of these employment opportunities will likely play a role in the effectiveness of uptake, and the sustainability of employment for people with disability.

It is well-established that work can influence health and wellbeing in both positive and negative ways (Ross & Mirowsky, 1995; LaMontagne & Keegel, 2009; van der Noordt, IJzelenberg, Droomers, & Proper, 2014). There also evidence that persons with disability have poorer health and wellbeing compared to others, which is at least partly explained by the disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances in which they live and work (Honey, Emerson, & Llewellyn, 2011; Emerson, Llewellyn, Honey, & Kariuki, 2012; Emerson & Hatton, 2007). Hence, attention to optimising the quality of employment for people with disabilities, and at a minimum ensuring equal working conditions to those without disability, should be a guiding principle of programme and policy development, as it may increase the attractiveness of paid employment, optimise the influence of such work on health and wellbeing, and enhance the sustainability of employment for people with disability.

To address this gap in knowledge, we compare the psychosocial job quality of working people with disabilities to those without, both overall and stratified by impairment type (e.g. sensory and speech, psychological, physical) and gender. We focussed on a measure of psychosocial job quality which has been shown to have predictive validity in relation to health outcomes, and is available in a large nationally-representative longitudinal sample of working Australians—the Household Income & Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey (Butterworth et al., 2011a, 2011b). Specifically, we investigated whether psychosocial job quality (each of 4 domains and overall) differed among working people with, versus without, disability (disability overall, and stratified by impairment type and gender).

Method

Data

This analysis uses data from the HILDA survey. The survey covers a range of dimensions including social, demographic, health and economic characteristics. The HILDA survey has been conducted in annual waves since 2001. The original panel consisted of 13,969 individuals from 7682 households, randomly selected for the HILDA study using a

multi-staged approach; 488 census collection districts (the smallest geographic area defined in the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) comprising an average of about 225 dwellings) across Australia were selected, within each of these districts between 22 and 34 dwellings were selected, and within each dwelling up to three households were selected (Watson, 2008). All household members older than 15 years of age were eligible for interview. The survey collects detailed information using a combination of face-to-face interviews with trained interviewers and a self-completion questionnaire at each annual wave.

The initial household response rate at wave 1 was 66%. Retention of responding individuals at subsequent waves was 87% at wave 2 and > 90% thereafter (Wilkins & Warren, 2013). Over time, new respondents have entered the sample as non-respondents have consented to participate, young household members reached the age of 15 years, or with changes in household composition; for example, if a household member left his or her original household (e.g. children leave home, or a couple separates), an entire new household joins the panel.

We analysed data from 10 waves of the survey, from 2003 and 2012, as only these waves included questions about the type of impairment. The analysis is restricted to employed respondents who completed the questions assessing psychosocial job quality. Respondents did not complete the questions relating to job quality if 1) they were not currently in paid work (36.34%) or 2) they did not return the self-completion questionnaire section of the survey (10.24%). Fig. 1 outlines participant flow into the sample included in these analyses.

Measures

Outcome variable

Full details of the construction and validation of the psychosocial job quality measures are presented elsewhere (Butterworth et al., 2011a; Leach, Butterworth, Rodgers & Strazdins, 2010). Briefly, factor analysis and structural equation modelling of a module of 12 items which assessed psychosocial aspects of work identified three separate factors. These were job demands and complexity (four items, $\alpha=0.70$), job control (three items, $\alpha=0.82$), and perceived job security (three items, $\alpha=0.64$). The scales demonstrated predictable associations with more widely used measures of job demands and control (Leach et al., 2010) and other employment conditions such as casual

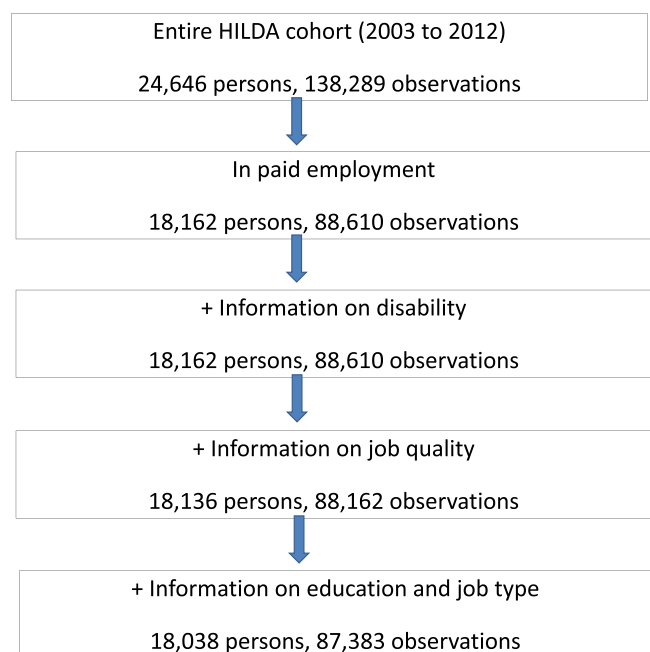


Fig. 1. Participant flow into the analytic sample.

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