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Original research article

Work ability of the Czech workforce aged 50+ and the relationship between selected demographic and anthropometric variables

Petr Hlado^{a,*}, Bohumil Pokorný^b, Markéta Petrovová^c^a Masaryk University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Educational Sciences, Brno, Czech Republic^b Age Management, z. s., Brno, Czech Republic^c Masaryk University, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Occupational Medicine, Brno, Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

Background: An aging workforce is a global phenomenon with significant implications for European countries. Interventions facilitating the active performance of work until retirement age have consequently been developed. A new concept of work ability, which comprehensively describes the way to achieve a better correspondence between aging and work, has been created in Finland as of the end of the twentieth century. It also includes an objective measurement of work ability based on the index of work ability. The use of methods of objectification of work ability upon determination of the WAI index is still at an early stage in the Czech Republic.

Objectives: To determine the WAI values for different demographic groups of the Czech population older than 50 years of age, the relationship between working abilities with demographic and anthropometric characteristics and diseases of an individual.

Methods: The research tool is a questionnaire to measure the Work Ability Index (WAI), translated into the Czech language. The survey involved 361 respondents from six companies and organizations, including a group of 60 unemployed persons registered at the Labor Office. The data collection took place from September 2014 to February 2015. The software Statistica Cz 12 was used for data evaluation.

Results: The average value of WAI in the case of the sample was 39.4 ± 7.03 and attained higher than the Dutch reference values. The statistical tests showed that men achieve higher WAI than women, WAI decreases with a higher amount of BMI and the number of diseases diagnosed by a physician. A statistically significant relationship between WAI and the type of work performed was also found.

Conclusions: This paper presents data and their assessment obtained by measuring work ability through the WAI index in the first 361 workers of six companies and organizations in the fields of banking, government, healthcare and industrial sectors. It also presents current

* Corresponding author at: Masaryk University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Educational Sciences, Arna Nováka 1, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic.

E-mail address: hlado@phil.muni.cz (P. Hlado).

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knowledge concerning the objectification of work ability under real conditions for Czech employers through the method of determining the WAI index.

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Introduction

Significant changes in the age structure of the population in the Czech Republic and in European Union countries have occurred over the last few decades. Aging of the workforce is a global phenomenon that can cause a number of social and economic impacts and which will lead to changes in the structure of the labor market [1].

Nearly one third of the workforce within the European Union will be in the age range of 50–64 in 2025 [2]. The target rate of employment in the case of older workers has been determined to be 59% for that same year [3]. In comparison, only 33.6% of the European population aged 55–64 actively participated in working life in 1999, although the participation of older workers has been increasing. Their real employment rate varies considerably, however, within the individual European countries. It was the highest in Iceland (84.8%) and the lowest in Greece (34.3%) in 2015. According to the Eurostat statistics, the average employment rate for workers aged 55–64 has been increasing rapidly in the Czech Republic in recent years. It reached 37.5% in 1999, 42.7% in 2004, exceeded the level of fifty percent (51.6%) in 2013 and reached 55.5% in 2015, which is higher than the average of the 28 EU countries, which reached 53.3% that same year [4].

Most European countries have begun to address the need to increase work participation of employees, particularly of a higher age, in relation to the aging of the population. Government policies have been implementing a requirement to increase the age of full retirement so as to equalize the ratio between the employed and dependent persons [5]. Therefore, the aim of this study is to determine the level of work ability among various demographic groups of the Czech population older than 50 years of age, the relationship between work ability with selected demographic and anthropometric characteristics and the diseases of an individual, and to compare the Czech measurement results with the results obtained in the Dutch study. Research on work abilities has been the subject of considerable effort in the international context, as evidenced by a number of published studies. The Czech Republic, apart from some exceptions, has lacked, however, systematic research. A research was conducted in the Czech Republic in the year 2014 [6], focused on the work ability of nurses and midwives ($n = 53$) and employees of the company Vitkovice Reality Developments ($n = 54$). The following text summarizes the results of several years of efforts in the implementation of this tool in the Czech Republic, which has culminated thus far with the completion of a grant project implemented with the support of OP LZZ and the national budget of the Czech Republic no. CZ.1.04/5.1.01/B2.00012 “Implementation of Age Management in the Czech Republic” carried out by the Association of Institutions of Adult

Education of the Czech Republic (Asociace institucí vzdělávání dospělých ČR). The result is, among other things, the obtaining of the first data from 361 measurements related to work ability in six companies and organizations in the Czech Republic.

Theoretical overview

Attention has been paid to changes in relation to work ability in the context of an aging population. Work ability was primarily conceived from the medical point of view up until 1980, since the detection of work ability in general was based on diseases and disability rather than the health and functional capacity of a worker [7].

The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH), which came up with the conceptualization and design of the comprehensive evaluation procedure of work ability in the 1980s, was a pioneer for a new perspective of the concept of work ability. The basic scientific question was how long workers and employees are able to work and to what extent depending on the job content and work demands [8]. Work ability is defined in this context as the eligibility of workers to perform their work regarding work demands, health and intellectual resources, while work ability is the result of the interaction between the determinants of an individual (health, competencies and attitudes) and the working environment [9].

Based on this concept, researchers from FIOH created a questionnaire on the *Work Ability Index* (WAI). This tool was first developed for research purposes. The validity of the Work Ability Index was tested using a one-time clinical examination of a group of workers from different professions and their subsequent investigation after 4 and 11 years [10] and in the context of longitudinal studies of civil servants in Finland for a period of 16 and 28 years respectively [11]. WAI is currently used not only for research purposes, but also as a tool to measure the subjectively perceived work abilities of individuals [12], which enables quantification and evaluation of the ability of employees to adapt to work [13], the effectiveness of preventive measures and interventions aimed at promoting the health of workers [14].

The concept of work ability has been developed, among other things, in order to prevent individuals from leaving working life because of an inability to work [15]. Of importance is the fact that WAI has an empirically proven high predictive value. A low value of WAI predicts loss of work performance, plans to retire, long-term absence from work due to illness and early retirement [16–18]. Approximately 60% of people aged 45–57 years, who had a low WAI, left work over the course of the next 11 years because of early invalidity pension [14]. Thus, knowledge of WAI serves to prevent a temporary or permanent transition from work into retirement [19]. Another study involving a wide cohort of German employees revealed that low and average values of WAI are associated with a lower

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