



CRE-DH

Centre of Research
Excellence in
Disability and Health

Plain English Summary

The impact of underemployment on people with disability

At the Centre of Research Excellence in Disability and Health (CRE-DH), we research how people with disabilities find work, what kinds of jobs they do and how their experience of work shapes their health and wellbeing.

We know from earlier research, that work is beneficial for people with a disability and this is significant because people with disabilities have high levels of unemployment, and are likely to be in jobs that are not that secure.

Leading researcher Dr Allison Milner recently studied the effects of underemployment on people with disabilities compared to the general population.

Underemployment is when you have a job but you work less hours than you want to, and is very much tied to job insecurity because you don't know when you will be getting work or not. It can also include working in a job that does not match your skills, expectations or experience.

It is increasingly common and Australia has one of the highest underemployment rates in the OECD countries.

Our research revealed the following:

- Compared with other workers, people with disabilities are much more likely to experience greater pay inequity and job insecurity than those without disabilities
- Underemployment was more prevalent for Australians with disability compared to the general population
- Being underemployed is particularly damaging for the mental health and wellbeing of people with disabilities.

One of the reasons why people with disability may be particularly vulnerable to underemployment is due to the work that they're doing, as well as the environment that they're in.

The fact is that people with disability are more likely to face discrimination when they're going to work and we know they face other social and economic exclusions. This may be why they're facing a greater decline in their mental health when they experience underemployment.

The combination of multiple disadvantage can explain to some extent why people with disabilities experience greater declines in their mental health when they are underemployed, compared with the general population.

There is a need for better policy and protections around employment outcomes for people with disabilities so that their health, particularly their mental health is not compromised because of the work that they do.

About the Survey

The Household Income and Labour Dynamics (HILDA) Survey collects information on many aspects of life in Australia, including household and family relationships, income and employment, and health and education.

The national survey of over 17,000 people takes place in Australia every year.

Participants are followed over the course of their lifetime.

Researchers analysed the data collected in the survey to provide information to policy makers in health, education and social services.

Read the article

Milner A, King TL, LaMontagne AD, Aitken Z, Petrie D, & Kavanagh A. **Underemployment and its impacts on mental health among those with disabilities: evidence from the HILDA cohort.** *J Epidemiol Community Health* 29 September 2017.

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