The importance of vocational rehabilitation in relation to social inequality, research examples

Merete Labriola, senior researcher DEFACTUM & Dept. of Public Health, Section of Social Medicine and Rehabilitation, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark
Benefits of work

- Financial
- Time and space regulator
- Status
- Formal & informal interpersonal relations
- Contributor
- Personal— and social identity
- Gives meaning to life
- Rewarding
- Well-being
- Opportunity

Marie Jahoda 1973 and many more
Work!

• Employment is generally the most important means of obtaining adequate economic resources, which are essential for material well-being and full participation in today’s society!
and..

- Work is central to individual identity, social roles and social status.

- Employment and socio-economic status are the main drivers of social gradients in physical and mental health and mortality.
but..

• Despite advances vocational rehabilitation interventions there still exists differences in work retention cross structure of social class
Inequality in risk for long-term sickness absence

Risk for long-term (8+weeks) sickness absence according to educational level

Labriola M, Lund T, Christensen CB. RESULTATER AF SYGEFRÅVFÅRSFORSKNING 2003-2007
Denmark: Short-,medium-,and long-term sickness absence by sector

1 Sector “Agriculture, forestry and fishing” is not included in the figure
Vocational rehabilitation/return to work

Fig. 5.1 An individual’s progress from disease or injury towards a return to the labour market or disability pension [4]
**Education and RTW - Danish prospective study among 930 employees on sickness-absence benefits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Determinants</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hazard ratio</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>P-value</td>
<td>Hazard ratio</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>P-value</td>
<td>Hazard ratio</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>P-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female gender</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.67–0.88</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.68–0.89</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.64–0.85</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (per 1 year increase)</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.79–0.91</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.79–0.91</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.80–0.92</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No education vs. all others</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.69–0.93</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.67–0.91</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.67–0.92</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model 1 unadjusted; model 2 mutually adjusted; model 3 additionally adjusted for health behaviour. CI, confidence interval.

Lund T, Labriola M, Christensen KB, Bültmann U, Villadsen E. Return to work among sickness-absent Danish employees: prospective results from the Danish Work Environment Cohort Study/National Register on Social Transfer Payments. Int J Rehabil Res. 2006 Sep;29(3):229-35.
Depression-Related Work Disability: Socioeconomic Inequalities in Onset, Duration and Recurrence

Jenni Ervasti et al. PLOSone 2013
Results

• a consistent inverse socioeconomic gradient in work disability due to depression.
Return to work was slower for employees with basic education compared to those with higher education.
Results;

• **Recurrent work disability episodes** due to depression were **less** common among upper-grade non-manual workers than among lower-grade non-manual and manual workers.
Conclusions:

• These data from Finnish public sector employees show persistent socioeconomic inequalities in work disability due to depression in terms of onset, recovery and recurrence.
Social inequality in cancer rehabilitation

• The chance of returning to work after treatment for cancer is five times higher among highly educated people compared to people with education no more than elementary level. 
  Finn Diderichsen 2011

• And

• Despite equal access to care, SES had a significant impact on cancer survivors’ rehabilitation. Holm LV et al. Acta Oncologica, 2013;
Impact of education level on risk of permanent work disability, for non-traumatic shoulder disorders

Hazard ratios adjusted for age, gender, type of surgery, extent of surgery, surgery year, administrative region.

Hazard ratio

1

2

3

Education level

Higher or medium

Vocational

Low

Missing

Differences in risk factors for voluntary early retirement and disability pension: a 15-year follow-up in a cohort of nurses’ aides

Lone Donbæk Jensen, Pia Køhler Ryom, Michael Victor Christensen, Johan Hviid Andersen
Risk of permanent work disability in relation to education level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Permanent work disability, %</th>
<th>Adjusted hazard rate*</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>academic</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skilled</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.3-1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unskilled</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.7-2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>missing</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.9-1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Adjusted for, gender, age, discharge diagnosis, hospital treatment, and department, and year of admission

N= 6570 low back pain patients 2001-2006

Jensen LD et al. 2012
Social inequality as a predictor of occupational reintegration of chronic back pain patients following medical rehabilitation

Hofreuter K, Koch U, Morfeld M 2008
Results

- Of individuals undergoing rehabilitation, those from lower social classes returned to work later than those from higher social classes.
So..

• The probability of successful reintegration into working life increases according to the position within the vertical structure of social class.
Therefore..

• vocational rehabilitation is also working with public health in relation to social inequality
What to do!
Vocational rehabilitation! individual level
Vocational rehabilitation! community level
A sole focus on ..

• personal system is **not** enough to prevent a person to permanently withdraw from his or her productive work life
• ensuring an inclusive work culture has been found to be important in order to prevent work disability.
Call For Action

• Include the **workplaces**, not just talk
• Discuss how corporate social responsibility pays off
Thank you for your attention!

Thank you