

The Employment Situation of Disabled People in Denmark

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The Study

The main aim of this paper is to provide relevant information about the labour market situation of disabled people in Denmark. The paper is based on combined survey and register information about approximately 8,000 disabled and non-disabled persons. The paper presents a descriptive analysis of disabled peoples' labour market participation. The findings suggest that the employment ratio of the disabled people is significantly lower than for non-disabled. When it comes to persons in employment only minor differences can be noted between jobs held by the disabled and non-disabled. In conclusion, it is argued that there seem to be a potential for an improvement of the employment rate of disabled people that may be enhanced through more emphasis on education and vocational rehabilitation measures as well as more flexible working conditions for disabled people.

Senior Researcher Jan Høgelund and Research Associate Jane Greve Pedersen have written the paper that is part of the research programme "*The Open Labour Market*". This research programme is initiated by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

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Contents

<i>THE STUDY</i>	3
1. INTRODUCTION	7
2. DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA SOURCES	7
3. THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION OF DISABLED PEOPLE	8
3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS	8
3.2 ACTIVITY STATUS.....	10
3.3 EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS.....	11
3.4 SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS.....	14
4. DISCUSSION	15
4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES	15
4.2 ACTIVITY STATUS.....	16
4.3 EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS.....	17
4.4 SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS.....	18
5. CONCLUSION	18
REFERENCES	19
WORKING PAPERS PUBLISHED BY THE DANISH NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF	
SOCIAL RESEARCH	20

1. Introduction

A major challenge to the European welfare states is the changing age composition of their populations. Owing to lower fertility, longer educations, longevity and early retirement the proportion of inactive people that is receiving income transfers is increasing, while the proportion of people in ordinary work is decreasing. This gives in turn rise to a considerably economic pressure on the European welfare states. Policies that increase labour supply may be one strategy to alleviate the rising pressure. In this respect disabled people has in recent years increasingly been brought into focus because they have relatively low employment rates (cf., e.g. European Commission, 1998).

A policy aiming at increasing the employment rate of disabled people is, however, not straightforward. First, disabled people have reduced workability. As a consequence they may not be able to (or interested in) full-time work on ordinary conditions. Thus, special measures allowing for flexible working hours and special working conditions may be needed. Second, several studies have ascertained that labour markets are changing mainly due to an increase in the demand for flexible, mobile, and well-educated labour meaning that low skill-jobs, which may facilitate the entry of disabled people into the labour market may tend to vanish (Kvist 2001). Raising the employment of disabled people might therefore need to be followed by vocational training and education for those who wish to be integrated into the labour market.

This paper deals with two questions. First, do disabled people make up a possible resource at the labour market? To examine this question we compare the labour market situation of disabled people with the situation of non-disabled people. Second, if the disabled comprise a potential labour market resource, to what extent will it be possible to take advantage of this unexploited resource?

Section 2 briefly presents the data sources, focusing on the definition of disability¹. Section 3 provides a descriptive analysis of the disabled population compared to the non-disabled population. The descriptive analysis focuses on: demographic characteristics, activity status, employment characteristics and social security benefit status. In section 4 we interpret some of the findings and briefly discuss how (and to what extent) the employment rate of disabled can be raised. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Description of the Data Sources

There is no official definition of disability in Denmark and therefore no official registration of disabled people. Consequently, our description of the employment situation of disabled people is based on survey data. We use the most recent Danish study that covers the entire adult population (Bengtsson, 1997).

¹ See appendix A for a thorough description of the survey data and methods used in the paper.

The data is based on a random sample of the Danish population in 1995. Out of 10,800 persons above 18 years that was approached for interview 9,200 persons answered equal to a response rate of 85 percent. Based on a number of questions about functional abilities/impairments 1,871 “possible disabled” were identified and selected for a face-to-face interview. Interview was obtained with 1,647 (response rate of 88 percent). For 8,036 persons (having excluded non-respondents and persons below 19 years or over 61 years) the survey data was combined with register data about e.g. education, income and working hours (the combination with register data from Statistics Denmark was completed in 2000).

“Disabled” and “non-disabled” have been delineated using a severity score scale developed by Martin, Meltzer and Elliot (1988). More than 100 questions about various functional abilities, e.g. locomotion, seeing and behaviour (cf. appendix A) were used.

From this survey it can be estimated that 9 percent of the Danish adult population are slightly disabled and 7 percent are severely disabled. In this paper the latter group is considered as disabled.

3. The Employment Situation of Disabled People

This section compares the employment situation of disabled and non-disabled people. Section 3.1 gives a general description of the two groups with regard to various demographic characteristics. Then in section 3.2, the activity status of disabled and non-disabled is described in order to shed light on the extent that disabled people are in employment. Section 3.3, which focuses on employed persons, compares the employment characteristics of the disabled and non-disabled as to scrutiny whether the jobs and work characteristics of the disabled are different from that of the non-disabled. The final section, section 3.4, focuses on benefit receipt of the disabled in order to describe to what extent the disabled are covered by various benefit schemes.

3.1 Demographic Characteristics

There are major differences between the (self-reported) disabled and non-disabled as regards age distribution, sex, educational level and household composition.

The disabled are in general older than the non-disabled. Almost two thirds (65 percent) of the disabled are 45 years or more compared to only just one third (35 percent) of the non-disabled.

Table 1: Age distribution, percent

Age groups	With self-reported disability	Without self-reported disability	Total
19 to 24	3.7	14.0	13.3
25 to 34	12.3	27.0	26.0
35 to 44	19.2	23.8	23.5
45 to 54	34.1	24.0	24.7
55 to 61	30.6	11.2	12.6
Total (Working Age)	99.9	100.0	100.1
Number of observations	489	7,547	8,036

Source: Own calculations based on data from Bengtsson (1997) and register data from Statistics Denmark

The share of females is significantly higher among the disabled than among the non-disabled. Two thirds of the disabled are women (67 percent) whereas this is true only for about half (49 percent) of the non-disabled.

Table 2: Gender, percent

Gender	With self-reported disability	Without self-reported disability	Total
Male	33.3	51.5	50.4
Female	66.7	48.5	49.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of observations	489	7,547	8,036

Source: Own calculations based on data from Bengtsson (1997) and register data from Statistics Denmark

In general the educational level is lower among the disabled than among the non-disabled. More than twice as many of the non-disabled (16 percent) have a third level education compared to the disabled (7 percent)². This difference may to some extent be caused by the age differences: older persons tend in general to have a lower educational attainment than younger persons.

Table 3: Education level, percent

Educational level	With self-reported disability	Without self-reported disability	Total
Primary level	--	--	--
Secondary level	92.7	83.7	84.3
Tertiary level	7.3	16.3	15.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of observations	473	7,329	7,802

Source: Own calculations based on data from Bengtsson (1997) and register data from Statistics Denmark

² Third level education includes first and second stage of tertiary education.

There is no difference between the disabled and non-disabled with regard to marital status, i.e. in both groups about 70 percent are living together with a partner. There are however significant differences with respect to children. The disabled households with 2 adults (47 percent) are more often than the non-disabled households with 2 adults (33 percent) living without dependent children. This fact is partly explained by higher age among disabled (see table 1).

Table 4: Household composition, percent

Household Composition	With self-reported disability	Without self-reported disability	Total
1 adult with dependent children	4.8	3.8	3.8
2 adult with dependent children	22.6	37.0	36.0
Other with dependent children	--	--	--
1 adult no dependent children	26.2	26.2	26.2
2 adult no dependent children	46.5	33.0	34.0
Other no dependent children	--	--	--
Total	100.1	100.0	100.0
Number of observations	489	7,547	8,036

Source: Own calculations based on data from Bengtsson (1997) and register data from Statistics Denmark

In sum, the descriptive analysis shows that the disabled persons more often than non-disabled persons tend to be older, women, low educated, and living without dependent children.

3.2 Activity Status

There are very significant differences in the activity status between the disabled and the non-disabled. Among the non-disabled 81 percent are working whereas this is only the case for approximately 45 percent of the disabled. This major difference is reflected in the fact that nearly half of the disabled (49 percent) are inactive compared to a little more than one in ten (12 percent) of the non-disabled. In other words, the employment of disabled people in Denmark is much lower than the employment of non-disabled among the adult population in general.

Table 5: Activity status, percent

Activity Status	With self-reported disability	Without self-reported disability	Total
Working	44.5	80.8	78.2
Unemployed	6.4	7.1	7.0
Inactive	49.1	12.1	14.7
Total	100.0	100.0	99.9
Number of observations	489	7,538	8,027

Source: Own calculations based on data from Bengtsson (1997) and register data from Statistics Denmark

It should be noted, however, that part of the differences could reflect the mentioned demographic differences between disabled and non-disabled. Thus, the labour force participation is in general lower among older, women, and low educated persons. Consequently, this descriptive analysis cannot conclude that employment differences are caused entirely by circumstances related to the disability. This issue is discussed further in section 4.2.

3.3 Employment Characteristics

Table 6 suggests that among persons who are working those with self-reported disabilities tend to be self-employed twice as often as those without a disability. That is, among the disabled 17 percent are self-employed compared to 8 percent of the non-disabled. In contrast the number of employees is considerably lower among the disabled (83 percent) than among the non-disabled (93 percent).

Table 6: Type of employment, percent

Type of employment	With self-reported disability	Without self-reported disability	Total
Employee	83.2	92.5	92.1
Self-employed	16.8	7.6	7.9
Total	100.0	100.1	100.0
Number of observations	217	6,127	6,344

Source: Own calculations based on data from Bengtsson (1997) and register data from Statistics Denmark

In general, the disabled work fewer hours per week than the non-disabled. Almost half of the disabled (47 percent) are working under 30 hours per week whereas this is only the case among less than one third of the non-disabled (30 percent).

Table 7: Working hours, percent

Hours of work per week	With self-reported disability	Without self-reported disability	Total
Less than 20	28.2	16.3	16.8
Between 20 and 29	19.0	13.7	13.9
More than 29	52.8	70.0	69.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of observations	216	6,109	6,325

Source: Own calculations based on data from Bengtsson (1997) and register data from Statistics Denmark

Disabled persons have in general lower gross income than non-disabled persons. When the data is divided into quintiles, it appears that the disabled make up a relatively large fraction of the total number of persons in the two lowest quintiles (cf. table 8). Or to put it differently, more than half (55 percent) of the disabled have an income in the first or second quintile whereas this is the case for only 39 percent of the non-disabled. This difference may to a certain extent reflect that the disabled in general tend to work fewer hours per week than the non-disabled. Moreover, it should be noted that due to progression in the tax system, a distribution of net incomes probably would yield a more equal distribution.

Table 8: Wage level, measured in quintiles, percent

Wage level (quintiles)	With self-reported disability	Without self-reported disability	Total
First	29.3	19.6	20.0
Second	25.4	19.8	20.0
Third	19.9	20.1	20.0
Fourth	12.2	20.4	20.0
Fifth	13.2	20.2	19.9
Total	100.0	100.1	99.9
Number of observations	217	6,127	6,344

Source: Own calculations based on data from Bengtsson (1997) and register data from Statistics Denmark

The distribution on Sector of economic activity does not reveal major differences. There is however a tendency that the disabled work in the primary sector more often than the non-disabled (this difference is however statistically insignificant).

Table 9: Sector of economic activity, percent

Sector of economic activity	With self-reported disability	Without self-reported disability	Total
Primary Sector	6.1	3.4	3.4
Secondary Sector	27.1	25.2	25.3
Tertiary Sector	66.9	71.4	71.3
Total	100.1	100.0	100.0
Number of observations	186	5,934	6,120

Source: Own calculations based on data from Bengtsson (1997) and register data from Statistics Denmark

With regard to tenure the data displays that disabled in general have longer tenure than non-disabled suggesting that disabled workers are less flexible than non-disabled workers. Twenty-seven percent of the disabled have been employed in their present job for at least 10 years whereas this is only the case for 16 percent of the non-disabled.

Table 10: Tenure, percent

Tenure	With self-reported disability	Without self-reported disability	Total
Below 2 years	38.1	43.8	43.6
2 to 9 years	35.4	40.4	40.2
10 years or more	26.6	15.9	16.3
Total	100.1	100.1	100.1
Number of observations	164	5,404	5,568

Source: Own calculations based on data from Bengtsson (1997) and register data from Statistics Denmark

The result, that disabled people are supposed to have longer tenure is not supported by a more recent study about “the social engagement of enterprises” (Høgelund & Kruhøffer, 2000)³. The authors find no association between disability and tenure.

Earlier periods of unemployment is measured as the average unemployment degree in 1993 and 1994, cf. table 11 below. An unemployment degree on nil indicates that the person has not been registered (at the public employment service) as unemployed whereas a degree on 1000 reflects that the person has been full-time unemployed during both 1993 and 1994. The disabled has a slightly (statistical insignificant) lower average unemployment degree (on 43) than the non-disabled (55). One could expect that the disabled would be more unemployed than the non-disabled. However, the finding may to a large extent reflect that the disabled are inactive much more often than the non-disabled meaning that the disabled relatively often are not registered as unemployed and therefore are unavailable for the labour market. This interpretation is sup-

³ The data comprises a (net) sample of 7,225 wage earners between 15 and 66 and it can be assumed to be representative for all wage earners in Denmark (the response rate was app. 68). The wage earners were interviewed in the fourth quarter of 1999. Disabled and non-disabled wage earners have been categorised on the basis of the question: “Are you disabled or do you have a chronic disease?” (Answering categories: Yes/No).

ported by the data from Høgelund & Kruhøffer (2000), which suggest that the extent of previous non-employment, i.e. unemployed or inactive, is not very different among the disabled and non-disabled. Calculations based on the data from Høgelund & Kruhøffer (2000) shows that 9 percent of the disabled report that they were not employed one year before they were interviewed compared to 7 percent of the non-disabled⁴.

Table 11: Average unemployment degree (0-1000)

Earlier periods of unemployment	With self-reported disability	Without self-reported disability
in 1993 and 1994	42.5	54.6
Number of observations	217	6,127

Source: Own calculations based on data from Bengtsson (1997) and register data from Statistics Denmark

To sum up, the figures presented in this section suggest that the employment characteristic of employed disabled and non-disabled differ in certain aspects. Compared to the non-disabled, the disabled seem to work fewer hours per week and to have a lower gross income. As regards tenure the evidence is mixed. Data from 1995 shows a significant difference in tenure for disabled compared to non-disabled, while more recent data from 2000 show no difference.

3.4 Social Security Benefits

Receipt of various cash benefits for disabled and non-disabled is displayed in table 12. The variable, Type of benefit, is based on register data and it measures the predominant benefit (if any) received during 1994 meaning that respondents who received a benefit for e.g. one week during 1994 are registered as having received a benefit.

Table 12: Benefit receipt

Type of benefit	With self-reported disability	Without self-reported disability	Total
Unemployment benefit	11.1	13.2	13.0
Disability benefit	34.8	2.4	4.6
Social Assistance	5.5	2.9	3.0
Other benefit	14.0	8.7	9.0
No benefit	34.7	73.0	70.3
Total	100.1	100.2	99.9
Number of observations	489	7,547	8,036

Source: Own calculations based on data from Bengtsson (1997) and register data from Statistics Denmark

It comes as no surprise that disabled receive benefits much more often than non-disabled, i.e. 65 percent of the disabled received at least one type of benefit during 1994

⁴ In contrast to Høgelund & Kruhøffer (2000) we exclude persons who do not have wage-earner employment as their predominant occupation.

whereas this was only the case for 27 percent of the non-disabled⁵. The frequency of persons who received a disability benefit is high among the disabled (35 percent) compared to the non-disabled (2 percent). The high number of disabled receiving disability benefit is in accordance with the high number of inactive disabled, cf. above.

The receipt of social assistance and other benefits, e.g. early retirement benefit, sickness benefit, vocational rehabilitation and benefit from activation measures, is also more frequent among the disabled than the non-disabled. Thus, among the disabled 6 percent received social assistance and 14 percent received other benefits during 1994. For the non-disabled the corresponding figures are 3 percent and 9 percent, respectively. The frequency of unemployment benefit receipt is almost the same among the disabled and non-disabled.

4. Discussion

The major findings presented in this paper can be summarised as follows. The disabled appears to differ from the non-disabled with regard to:

1. Demographic characteristics
2. Activity status
3. Certain employment characteristics (when employed) and
4. Receipt of cash benefits

How can we explain these differences? In addition to the ad hoc explanations mentioned in the previous section, this section offers some further explanations and a brief discussion of how (and to what extent) the employment rate of disabled can be raised.

4.1 Demographic Differences

Bengtsson (1997) finds that most of the disabled became disabled as adults and that the risk of becoming disabled increases with age, which might be explained by the fact that most of the disabled report that their disability was caused by circumstances related to their employment. The fact that the majority becomes disabled as adults may explain the noted age differences.

How should we understand the relationship between education and disability (relatively few disabled having a third level education)? As most persons become disabled as adults it could be that low educational attainment (through strenuous jobs) leads to a higher risk of becoming disabled. Or it might be, as noted earlier, that the difference in educational level reflects a different age composition among the disabled and non-disabled. The latter is supported by earlier studies (e.g. Bengtsson, 1997).

⁵ It can be noted that the frequent benefit receipt among the adult population may be said to reflect the “encompassing” Danish Welfare State where many citizens receive public welfare.

4.2 Activity Status

The descriptive analysis showed that only 45 percent of the disabled are working compared to 81 percent of the non-disabled. This significant difference in the working situation between disabled and non-disabled raises several questions.

First, it can be asked to what extent it is disabilities that cause the low employment rate among the disabled. As noted in section 3.2, a low employment rate could partly be caused by differences in age, education and sex between the disabled and non-disabled. This is to some extent true. Bengtsson (1997) finds that education and age to a certain extent explain differences in employment rates between the disabled and non-disabled. However, disability also influences the employment rate. In other words, a disability seems in it self to reduce the employment rate. This is supported by the fact that approximately two thirds of the disabled who stopped working report that this was related to their disability. Moreover, Bengtsson (1997) finds that even minor disabilities lead to a significant reduction of the employment rate. This could indicate that there is a potential scope for an improvement of the employment rate of the disabled.

Second, Bengtsson (1997) compares the “employment rate” (employed or under education) of the (physical) disabled in the 1995 data with the employment rate of physical disabled in 1962 (Andersen, 1964). The evidence suggests that the employment rate of the disabled in 1995 is quite similar to the employment rate found in the 1962-study (it has decreased for men and increased for women). This should however be compared with the fact that the overall employment rate has increased since the 1960's. The comparison with the 1962-study seems therefore to suggest that the disability policy in the 1970's and 1980's was insufficient to bring the disabled into employment.

Historically the goal of the disability policy was to increase the employment of the disabled on the ordinary labour market. This is also the case today. The work capacity of the disabled and thereby their employment opportunities is to be increased through further education and vocational rehabilitation. However, the present policy is increasingly aimed also at employment on special conditions. The flexjob and Skaanejob schemes that were established in 1998 provide wage-subsidised employment on special conditions for persons with permanently reduced work capacity. The use of these schemes has increased and is expected to increase further in the coming years, especially after the disability benefit reform will be fully implemented in 2003.

With regard to work retention focus has so far been put on measures such as work place adaptations and various kinds of “aid at the work place”. This may very well be effective instruments, but disabled who are working are asking for other measures that may improve their employment possibilities, i.e. reduced working hours, extended possibilities for having a rest at the job, and better possibilities for extended periods of sick leave (Bengtsson 1997). The fact that disabled people more often than non-disabled are working as self-employed (c.f. table 6) may also support the need for more flexible working conditions. Thus, self-employment may allow for flexible working conditions

because the self-employed more often than wage earners are able to organise and plan the tasks that need to be carried out as part of their job.

The above suggests that disabilities hamper the possibility of becoming employed and that there seems to be scope for a further improvement of the employment rate of the disabled. However, it could be asked whether the disabled that are unemployed consider their employment possibilities to be reduced, compared to the non-disabled, and further, whether they wish to become employed? If both answers are “no”, it could be argued that the present situation is satisfactory and that further efforts in getting the disabled into employment would be a waste. Bengtsson (1997) finds that approximately one half of disabled who are unemployed consider their employment possibilities strongly reduced. About one third would like to be become employed. This fraction increases when the extent of disability is reduced. On the one hand, this could support, at least partly, that a disability reduces employment possibilities and that increased employment efforts are demanded. On the other hand, it may as well suggest that most of the disabled who would like to work in fact are employed. This is supported by the fact that only 11 percent of the unemployed disabled had made an effort to become employed (Bengtsson, 1997). Consequently, the scope for an improvement of the employment rate may be restricted⁶.

4.3 Employment Characteristics

In section 3.3 we concluded that among employed persons the disabled work fewer hours per week and they have lower gross incomes than the non-disabled. Consequently, one could draw the conclusion that considerable employment differences between the disabled and non-disabled exist. A closer look at the data suggests however that we should be cautious in drawing such a conclusion.

Bengtsson (1997) studies the relationship between working hours, gender, age, and disability. He finds that when age and gender are taken into consideration the disability does not influence the number of weekly working hours. Also, the conclusion about income difference may need to be modified. The difference may as mentioned to a certain extent reflect that the disabled in general tend to work fewer hours per week than the non-disabled does. Furthermore, using survey information about household income, Bengtsson (1997) finds that age explains part of the difference but also that the disability matters. In other words, the effect of disability status on income may be less prominent than a quick look at the figures suggests.

Finally, when the employment situation of the disabled and non-disabled are compared on other dimensions only minor differences can be noted. In addition to the dimensions covered in this paper, Høgelund & Kruhøffer (2000) compare the disabled wage earners and the non-disabled wage earners with regard to: whether they are employed in the

⁶ It should however be noted that the relatively low number of disabled seeking employment may be caused by limited employment opportunities. Thus, if the employment opportunities were improved more disabled would find it attractive to become employed.

private or the public sector, the geographic location of their work places, whether they have subordinate staff, are working in shifts, and if they have night work. The authors find no significant differences.

In other words, these findings seem to indicate that differences between the disabled and non-disabled employed are rather limited.

4.4 Social Security Benefits

In section 3.4 it was ascertained that about one third of the disabled received a disability benefit in the year before they were interviewed. In addition some 30 percent received unemployment benefit, social assistance or other benefits for a shorter or longer period during 1994. Thus, in total almost two thirds of the disabled received a benefit in 1994. Almost half of the disabled were classified as “inactive”, cf. table 5. Knowing that several of the disabled persons received a temporary benefit it seems as the figure for benefit receipt and the group of inactive are of the same size. This seems to show that the vast majority of the disabled are either employed or covered by social security benefits.

5. Conclusion

The available evidence suggests that the employment ratio of the disabled people in Denmark is significantly lower than the rate among the non-disabled. When it comes to people in employment only minor differences can be noted between jobs held by disabled and non-disabled. Finally, there seems to be a potential for an improvement of the employment rate of the disabled people. One strategy to achieve this may be by placing more emphasis on education and vocational rehabilitation measures and more flexible working conditions for disabled people.

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