

Disabled working mothers: Barriers to and enablers of paid employment

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Policy context



- ‘Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People’ by the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit (2005) sought to create equality in employment for disabled people by 2025.
- 2015 Conservative Party manifesto pledged to halve the employment gap between disabled and nondisabled people.⁵
- Yet the current Government is trying to reduce benefit system and aspects of Access to Work⁴ expenditures.
- Disability benefits cost approximately £13.5 billion in UK in 2014 (Banks, Blundell and Emmerson 2015).*
- Lower than Nordic countries and only poorer European member states are spending less than the UK (Danson *et al.* 2015; European Commission 2015).
- UK already has one of the greatest differences between the incomes of rich and poor in Europe (Danson *et al.* 2015).

Key cuts affecting disabled people in work

*Disability Living Allowance*₆

- 21 per cent of DLA claimants work (Brawn 2014).
- Over half of working people on DLA would need to discontinue or reduce their work, if their allowances were cut (Disabilities Rights Partnership 2011).
- Yet the phased replacement of the Disability Living Allowance by the Personal Independence Payment is reducing the assistance disabled people receive in order to maintain their independence (Roulstone 2015).

Tax credits

- Office for National Statistics (2010a) report that employed people with impairments found tax credits to be one of the most important things they received to help them work, second only to modification/reduction in their work hours or days.

Yet tax credits have been under threat:

- 2013 replacement of six means tested benefits (including child tax credits and working tax credits) with Universal Credit began (Department of Work and Pensions 2016b). ⁷
- 2015 Chancellor George Osborne shelved plans to cut tax credits for existing claimants.
- Nevertheless, new claimants who are in work and put on Universal Credit are likely to face lower incomes.

Access to Work

- October 2015, Access to Work grants were capped at a yearly maximum of £40,800 for all new claimants (Clarke, 2016a)
- 89.5% of claimants getting grants above £40,800 are deaf or have a hearing loss (Department for Work and Pensions, 2015).
- Spending Review and Autumn Statement in 2015 Chancellor George Osborne promised a real-terms increase in Access to Work funding ⁶

Disability, work and motherhood

Research indicates that:

- 68 per cent of disabled women are employed, 10 percentage points lower than nondisabled females (Hogarth *et al* 2009).
- Disabled mothers are more likely to move between employment and unemployment than their nondisabled counterparts (Atkinson, Finney and McKay 2007).

Little research focuses on disabled working mothers.

- E.G. Commission for Social Care Inspection's (2009) research on disabled parents only mentions that some disabled parents work.
- Little is known about what facilitates or limits disabled mothers paid employment.
- Policy makers, academics and advocates do not have adequate information to anticipate the implications of the changing benefit and access landscape for disabled working mothers.

Research design

Research aims

- To understand the relationship between disability and employment outcomes among UK mothers in multiple dimensions.
- Inform policy makers to ensure disabled mothers' rights to employment and adequate standards of living.

The research questions focused on in this paper:

- 1) what are the reasons for work limits amongst disabled mothers, and how do these differ from nondisabled mothers?;
- 2) what types of support do employed disabled mothers find helpful, and how does this compared with nondisabled mothers?

Data

- 2009/10 Life Opportunity Survey Data ⁷.
- 37,500 households and 31,161 adults aged 16 and over were selected from a random sample
- average interview survey length was 56 minutes.
- sample for this study was working-aged (16-59) employed mothers with at least one dependent child.
- disabled mothers (n=695) and nondisabled mothers (n=3,223).

Findings

A. Barriers to work

Employed disabled mothers compared to nondisabled mothers:

Bivariate results indicate that disabled mothers *were more likely to experience limits in the type or amount of paid work than nondisabled mothers* (46 v. 36 per cent, $p < 0.001$).

- Logistic regression results also demonstrate disabled mothers were significantly more likely to experience limits in work amount or types than nondisabled mothers (OR = 1.37, $p < 0.001$).⁸

Both indicated family responsibilities as the number one reason for the work limitation (significantly higher for nondisabled mothers 85 v 72 per cent, $p < 0.001$).

Disabled mothers were significantly more likely to report the following reasons for their limits in work:

- health condition, illness, impairment, disability (25 v. 1 per cent, $p < 0.001$);
- affects receipt of benefits (12 v. 6 per cent, $p < 0.001$);
- lack of special aids, equipment and assistances (6 v. 3 per cent $p < 0.05$); and
- anxiety/lack of confidence (6 v. 2 per cent, $p < 0.001$).

B. Enablers of work

The most common assistance reportedly received by disabled mothers were:

- ‘modified hours or days or reduced work hours’ (34.2 v. 31.8 % not significant),
- ‘tax credits’ (26.6 v. 20.6 % $p < .01$) and
- ‘changes to work area or work equipment’ (8.8 v. 4.2 % $p < .001$).

building modifications (2.6 v. 0.6 % $p < .001$), and other equipment or services (3.6 v. 1.6 % $p < .01$) were also important accommodations for some disabled mothers

Disabled mothers were also less likely to work full-time (42 v. 46 %, $p < 0.05$)

Limitations of the Life Opportunities Survey

- In relation to things that are helpful in work, the LOS asked ‘Has anything on this card helped you at work?’, not ‘what assistance would you find helpful at work?’ Therefore:
 - it is not possible for us to ascertain if there are any adjustments that respondents would have liked to receive, but did not.
 - For example, an assistant, job coach or mentor could help some disabled working mothers⁹, but they may not have access to this assistance.
- Some disabled people have developed their own effective strategies, which were not options in the Life Opportunities Survey.
- The LOS assumes 'solutions' come from professionals, technology, the State, or employers not the disabled person. ¹⁰

Implications and policy recommendations

- Receiving tax credits, changes to work area or work equipment, building modifications, and other equipment or services are important accommodations for disabled mothers.
- Health condition, illness, impairment, disability; lack of special aids, equipment and assistances; and anxiety/lack of confidence were significant reasons why some disabled women were limited in work.
- These findings underscore the importance of tax credits and the Access to Work programme.
- The Government should review the planned design and implementation of Universal Credit, particularly in relation to disabled working mothers, to ensure that it does not adversely affect this group.
- The employment profile of disabled working mothers should be monitored to determine the impacts of the changing benefits and access landscape.
- Policy measures to support disabled mothers to maintain paid work should be considered, including increasing tax credits and raising awareness of supports available from the Access to Work programme.
- This will require an increase in the funding of the Access to Work programme.

Independent variables

Whether or not the employed mother was disabled.

Dependent variables

1. limited in the type or amount of paid work (yes/no);
2. reasons for work limitations (lack of job opportunities, family responsibilities, lack of qualifications/experiences/skills, health condition/illness/impairment/disability, attitudes of colleagues and employers, affects receipt of benefits, lack of special aids/equipment/assistance, difficulty accessing transport/buildings/facilities, lack of confidence);
3. types of help received from workplace (modified hours or days or reduced work hours, modified duties, job coach or personal assistant, changes to work area or equipment, building modification, tax credits, other equipment or services).

Control variables

- Sociodemographic characteristics were controlled in the multivariate models.

Table 1. Employment status of Sample of Working-aged (16-59) Employed Disabled and Non-disabled mothers



Variables	Nondisabled Mothers (n=3,223)	Disabled Mothers (n=695)	Test statistics
	n (%)	n (%)	χ^2
Full-time	1,460 (46.4%)	283 (41.5%)	5.15*
Limited in the type or amount of paid work	1,100 (36.2%)	309 (45.9%)	20.01***
Reasons for the limit ^a			
Lack of job opportunities	101 (9.2%)	40 (12.9%)	3.59
Family responsibilities	934 (84.9%)	221 (71.5%)	25.67***
Lack of qualifications /experiences /skills	94 (8.6%)	33 (10.7%)	1.36
Health condition / illness/ impairment/disability	15 (1.4%)	77 (24.9%)	212.47***
Attitudes of colleagues and employers	52 (4.7%)	22 (7.1%)	2.32
Affects receipt of benefits	60 (5.5%)	36 (11.7%)	14.86***
Lack of special aids, equipment and assistances	31 (2.8%)	19 (6.1%)	5.89*
Difficulty accessing transport, buildings, facilities	75 (6.8%)	29 (9.4%)	3.14
Anxiety/lack of confidence	21 (1.9%)	19 (6.2%)	14.84***
Help type from workplace^c			
Modified hours or days or reduced work hours	1,024 (31.8%)	238 (34.2%)	0.47
Modified duties	115 (3.6%)	40 (5.8%)	4.65*
A job coach or personal assistant	114 (3.5%)	23 (3.3%)	0.28
Changes to work area or work equipment	136 (4.2%)	61 (8.8%)	20.56***
Building modification (i.e. handrails or ramps)	20 (0.6%)	18 (2.6%)	23.54***
Tax credits	664 (20.6%)	185 (26.6%)	10.23**
Other equipment or services	53 (1.6%)	25 (3.6%)	10.22**

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