

**RESEARCH  
BRIEF  
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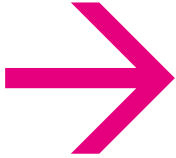
**FORTE:**

Swedish Research Council for  
Health, Working Life and Welfare

A photograph of two men in a kitchen setting. The man on the left is wearing a black chef's hat and a blue t-shirt with a grey apron. The man on the right is wearing a white chef's hat, glasses, and a dark blue t-shirt with a grey apron. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The background shows kitchen shelves with various items.

# INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AND WORK

EASY-TO-READ VERSION



**This brochure is all about research relating to work for people with intellectual disabilities.**

It is a summary of what various researchers have written.

It is mostly research from Sweden but also includes research from other countries.

This is an easy-to-read version of the publication “Intellectual Disability and Work”.

It is part of the “Research Brief” series of publications from Swedish research council Forte.

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**Research Brief**

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## It is hard for people with intellectual disabilities to get a job

A lot of people with intellectual disabilities want to have a job.

Politicians in Sweden agree that it is a good thing for as many people as possible to have a job.

But people with intellectual disabilities often have trouble getting a job.

So you could say that people with intellectual disabilities are marginalised in the employment market.

This means that they are less likely to get a job than other people.

Having a job means that you are earning money.

It can also mean that you are learning new things, meeting new people and increasing your self-confidence.

A lot of people believe that having a job makes it easier to be included in society.

Some people either cannot or do not want to work.

That might be because they have major disabilities.

It is important that there are suitable, meaningful activities for these people.

This publication is about the people who can and want to work.

## The term "Intellectual disability" is used in this publication

We use the term intellectual disability in this publication.

In other contexts, different terms are used.

For a long time, the term "*developmental disorder*" was used to describe this group.

But a lot of people have protested against it in recent years.

They feel that "developmental disorder" singles people out and they consider it to be a bad term.

Which is why we use intellectual disability in this publication.

*Most people with an intellectual disability attended special programs and upper secondary school for pupils with intellectual disabilities.*

## There are different ways to carry out research

Researchers use different methods when carrying out their studies.

Below are three different methods that the researchers used in the studies we read:

### 1. Questionnaires

A lot of people are asked questions.

Sometimes several thousand people.

Questionnaires are sent out by letter or email.

The people who receive the questionnaires answer the questions and then send them back to the researcher.

### 2. Interviews

In an interview study, researchers ask the people they are meeting to speak about their experiences and answer some questions.

There are not that many people answering questions.

Sometimes there are just 10 people.

But the researchers learn a lot about the people they meet.

### 3. Register study

In one of the studies we read, the researchers looked at the occupations of young adults with intellectual disabilities.

The researchers did not question anybody.

Instead they read various documents and papers.

## Very little research about intellectual disability and work

There are not many researchers who have studied work and intellectual disability.

So there is not much research about this subject.

## Very few have asked the people with intellectual disabilities

You might think that the researchers would have asked people who actually have an intellectual disability.

But almost nobody has in the research we have read.

Instead it is managers, staff and parents who have answered the questions.

## A lot of people attend Daily Activities after upper secondary school for pupils with intellectual disabilities

One researcher studied what people with intellectual disabilities do once they have completed upper secondary school for pupils with intellectual disabilities.

More than 12,000 people were included in the study.

These are the results:

- Just less than half (47 percent) attend the unpaid occupation called Daily Activities.
- Just less than a quarter (22 percent) work, almost all with subsidised wages.
- 7 percent are students.  
They attend folk high school or local adult education centers.
- Just less than a quarter (24 percent) are neither employed, attend Daily Activities or are studying.  
The researchers do not know what these people do or how they earn a living.

## Why is it so hard to get a job?

It is important that we find out why people with intellectual disabilities often have trouble getting a job.

Some think that people with intellectual disabilities are not capable of work.

They mean that the person's cognitive abilities are too low.

Cognitive abilities include, for example, remembering things, thinking a few steps ahead and planning.

But this is wrong, say several researchers.

It is not the individual's shortcomings and difficulties that make it hard to get a job.

The problem is that the demands and duties have not been adapted to suit the person who will be doing them.

Perhaps the person needs someone's help to explain how to perform the duties and more time to carry out the work.



## Laws can make it easier to get a job

There are many different things that affect someone's ability to get a job and keep it.

Legislation is an important thing.

The law states, for example, that companies who employ people with intellectual disabilities are entitled to subsidies from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency.

That money should be used to pay the employee's salary and improve the workplace as much as possible for the employee.

## Laws may result in people choosing not to work

But sometimes laws can create obstacles for work.

For example, people with intellectual disabilities are not allowed to receive activity benefits and have a job at the same time.

The security of receiving activity benefits is important for a lot of people.

Which is why sometimes people turn down the chance of work so they can keep their activity benefits.

## Social support in the workplace is important

Social support in the workplace is important.

Support might mean how the job duties should be done.

Support might also mean help with something else that is important at a workplace.

For example, help with planning the journey to work and getting to work on time.

Sometimes a person needs help understanding how the workplace is run.

This is called the social codes of the workplace.

It might include at what time you take your coffee breaks, how long your breaks are and what you can talk to your co-workers about during your break.

Social support is particularly important for people who have not worked before.

## Good if the employer knows people with disabilities

Employers who know people with an intellectual disability are positive about employing people with that disability.

Employers who do not know people with intellectual disabilities are less positive.

## Good to receive government subsidies

Employers think it is a good thing that they can get support and subsidies from the government.

That way they can adapt the workplace and learn more about intellectual disability.

## Uncommon to go from Daily Activities to a job

A lot of people can work and want to work, rather than attending Daily Activities.

But people attending Daily Activities rarely begin working.

Researchers have studied why so few people attending Daily Activities begin working.

They say that there could be several reasons.

Here are two examples that researchers have written about:

1. People attending Daily Activities do not receive any support or help with finding a job.
2. Daily Activities need their talented people.

Particularly where there is customer interaction.

In a café, for example.

Which is why the people running the café are sometimes not encouraged to look for a job.

## More men than women at work

The research we have read shows that more men than women with intellectual disabilities have a job.

But researchers do not know why that is.

## Parents and friends make a big difference

People who receive support from friends and family find it easier to get a job.

When parents believe that their child will be able to work, then their adult child will do better when it comes to getting a job.

It is also important that parents help by speaking up, if the person has trouble doing that themselves.

This might include giving feedback to the teachers and counsellor at school, to the Swedish Social Insurance Agency or the Swedish Public Employment Service.

Several studies show that parents with a good social status in society are in a better position to support their children. Social status includes things like understanding the language, having a good education and being financially secure.

Parents with a high social status are in a better position to influence the support their child receives from society.

## Supported Employment is one form of workplace support

Society tries to provide a good level of support so that more people with intellectual disabilities can work.

Supported Employment is the name of a support method that Sweden and a lot of other countries consider to be a good thing.

When you work with Supported Employment, there are a few things – or so-called principles – to consider that are particularly important.

Here is a summary of them:

1. Everybody is different and therefore needs different support.  
So start with what the person needs.
2. Support should be given to both the employer and the employee.
3. Support should be provided for as long as necessary.
4. The job should be on the open labour market.  
Not within the Daily Activities sphere or other special operations.
5. The employee should get a job quickly where they can learn and further develop their skills.

The Swedish Social Insurance Agency has investigated how things turned out for a few people with intellectual disabilities and people with other disabilities.

The conclusion was that Supported Employment is a good method for men.

For women, the method was no better than other methods.

Researchers do not know why Supported Employment works better for men than for women.

## More research is needed into the topic of work and disability

There are a lot of unanswered questions about jobs for people with intellectual disabilities.

Here are a few examples of questions that we think researchers should investigate:

1. What do people with intellectual disabilities themselves actually think about work?
2. Can laws and regulations make it easier or harder for people to get a job?
3. Why do more men with intellectual disabilities have jobs than women?
4. What is the situation like for people with a foreign background and an intellectual disability?
5. Does upper secondary school for pupils with intellectual disabilities give students an education that will lead to a job?
6. How much does it cost society when people with intellectual disabilities do not work?
7. What can be done to help people with intellectual disabilities learn new things throughout their life?
8. How can we create meaningful activities for people with intellectual disabilities who cannot or do not want to work?

## ABOUT FORTE

Forte is a government agency that funds research areas that are important for society.

Forte provides funding to researchers studying the fields of health, work and welfare.

Forte receives funding from the government.

Forte believes that everybody should be given the opportunity to read the researchers' results.

Which is why we have presented the research findings in an easier way in this publication.

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