Employment-related COVID-19 exposure risk among disabled people in the UK

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Summary

- Workplaces are fertile territory for the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus which causes COVID-19
- In the UK, disabled people were significantly less likely to work from home and more likely to be working outside the home during the pandemic
- Disabled people were also more highly concentrated in occupations with high risk of exposure to COVID-19
- Adds to evidence that disabled people experienced a particularly raw deal during the pandemic and helps to explain why three in five people who died from COVID-19 were disabled
Same storm, different boat!

- Disabled people accounted for 60% of COVID-19 deaths in the UK
- Even taking account of age and underlying health conditions (clinical vulnerability), disabled people had higher rates of death so were clearly more exposed to the virus
Data

• We use the ‘covid’ waves in Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) – monthly / bi-monthly surveys throughout the pandemic
• Data on whether they were employed, number of hours worked in the week and whether they often or always worked at home
• We match in data from the latest wave of the regular UKHLS survey to identify disabled people (long-standing physical or mental impairment, illness or disability and has substantial difficulties with one or more specified functions)
• For employed people, we also identify their occupation in 2019 – for each occupation we apply a ‘risk indication factor’ based on job quality measures from O*NET (see Kikuchi and Khurana, 2020)
High risk occupations

Physical proximity to others  Exposure to disease
Disabled people less likely to work from home …

Percentage of workers always or often working at home

- Blue line: Disabled
- Orange line: Non-disabled
… and more likely to work in high risk occupations

Average Risk Indication Factor of people working outside the home

![Graph showing risk factors for disabled and non-disabled individuals over time.](image)
What have we learnt?

• The UK government wants to get 1 million more disabled people into work by 2027. That’s great, but …
• COVID-19 is still with us and probability of further pandemics is high, so how can we enable disabled people to participate in the labour market safely?
• Recommendations of the Work and Pensions Committee:
  • Statutory right to request remote or flexible working from the start of employment
  • Support and encourage employers to adopt job carving practices when employing disabled people
  • Reform Statutory Sick Pay so it is available to the lowest paid and those in precarious forms of work
Thank you

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