

Young People with Physical Disabilities at Work in Lithuania: Experiences and Attitudes

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to disclose the experiences and attitudes of young people with disabilities towards their professional activities and finding a job and to discover what the main opportunities and obstacles are for the integration of young disabled people into the Lithuanian labour market. The empirical basis of this research consists of 18 in-depth interviews with 18-35 year old young people with physical disabilities. In-depth interviews with young people with physical disabilities disclosed that a successful transition into the labour market first of all depends on the educational level (especially tertiary education) of a person, acquired appropriate employability skills, etc. Young disabled people experienced stigmatized attitudes by employers and a lack of interest to employ a disabled person. It is emphasized that employers in Lithuania are unwilling to employ a disabled person due to some special requirements (e.g., work assistant services, special requirements for the workplace, shorter working hours, etc.). In the high number of cases young people with disabilities face a double stigma, e.g., young and disabled, lack of working experience, etc.

Keywords: physical disabilities, disabled youth, labour market.

Introduction

There have been considerable changes towards the situation in the labour market and societal attitudes towards people with disabilities during the two last decades in Lithuania. The period after regaining independence (1990), membership in the United Nations (1991) and the European Union (2004) is marked by a substantial contribution for creating and implementing strategies for social inclusion of the disabled by improving the quality of life of the disabled people and extending their life opportunities. Lithuania is committed in all areas of social life to rule according to the principle of equality of all people, has declared personal equality regardless of gender, racial/ethnic origin, religion/beliefs, disability, age, sexual orientation, social status, etc. Since the Lithuanian European Union membership, there have been new social policies as well as new initiatives

created that prevent social exclusion of the disabled and stigmatization in different areas of social life. There are National level initiatives that encourage disabled people to seek education and employment more actively. The positive changes concerning the employment of the disabled were encouraged by the two State Disabled People Social Integration (2003-2012) and State Disabled People Social Integration (2013-2019) Programs and other legal documents regulating employment possibilities of the disabled and the protection of their rights; e.g. the Law on Equal Opportunities (2003); the Law on Social Enterprises (2004); the Law on Social Integration of the Disabled (2004); the Law on Support for Employment (2006), etc.

A lack of appropriate skills and qualifications limits the employment opportunities of young people with disabilities. It should be noted that unemployment rates for persons with disabilities are higher than persons without disabilities in every society across age groups. According to Powers (2008), a lot of disabled people are offered low-paying jobs or are employed in the informal sector. Furthermore, negative attitudes about disability and discrimination on the basis of disability are the most prevalent and primary obstacles to the successful employment of young people with disabilities. Viluckienė (2010a; 2010b) discloses that physical disabilities, especially gained after unexpected cerebral trauma or palsy, breakdown everyday practices of disabled people as well as change social roles. Moreover, disability becomes a significant factor that shapes the further biographical situation, profession and employment. Despite initiatives from the State, there is a stigma and negative attitudes towards people with disabilities in Lithuania that limits their possibilities to enter into the local labour market (Pocius, 2008; Šėporaitytė, Tereškinas, 2007; Ruškus 2007, etc.). Kuodytė and Pajarskienė (2012) emphasize that negative attitudes towards disability are related with the psychosocial working environment; moreover,

people with disabilities are exposed to psychosocial work conditions while seeking or trying to retain employment. According to Kriščiūnas, Samėnienė and Stapulionytė (2005), vocational rehabilitation could be helpful for increasing working capacity, professional competence and possibility in the labour market. However, the vocational rehabilitation is making its first steps and is a new issue in Lithuania (started in 2005). Zmitravičius and Grigas (2010) observed that a lack of support devices, special learning means, and a lack of specialists and assistants in the educational system create significant obstacles for disabled youth participation in the labour market. Authors (Pocius, 2008; Ruškus, 2007; Ruškus, Baranauskienė, 2004, etc.) disclose that centralized services like careers, counselling and financial advice are necessary for disabled students.

The aim of this paper is to disclose the experiences and attitudes of young people with disabilities towards their professional activities and finding a job and to discover what the main opportunities and obstacles are for the integration of the young disabled people into the Lithuanian labour market.

The **research questions** that define the research problem are as follows: What are the experiences of disabled youth in the Lithuanian labour market? How do disabled youth evaluate opportunities for entry/integration into the labour market? What are the main obstacles to finding a job for young people with disabilities in Lithuania? These research questions are focused on the personal experiences of disabled youth, their attitudes and real situations, and the evaluation of their personal conditions, strengths and limitations related with participation in the Lithuanian labour market.

Research methods: analysis of scientific literature, qualitative content analysis of in depth interviews.

Young disabled people at work: some implications of research

There is a focus on different issues and aspects in other countries related with disabled youths' situation/inclusion/transition into the labour market. Research is related to such aspects as the self-determination and career decision-making skills of disabled youth (Izzo, Lamb, 2003; Hernandez et al., 2008), school programs and its impact on employability and vocational success of disabled youth (Shandra, Hogan, 2008; Wagner, Blackorby, 1996), early work experience (work during the summer, volunteering, etc.) and its importance to develop job related priorities as well as the interests of youth with disabilities (Carter et al., 2010; Sum et al., 2008). There are a large number of studies focused on the patterns of the employment of disabled youth by gender (Jones, Latreille and Sloane,

2003; Feist-Price, Khanna, 2003; Rigg, 2005; Noonan et al., 2004 etc.). Finally, a systematic planning of transition into the labour market is analyzed, including the roles of specialists in education institutions and a legislative basis, as well as national initiatives to the successful participation of disabled youth in the labour market (Bowe, 2003; Izzo, Lamb, 2003; Magoulios, Trichopoulou, 2012; Levinson, Palmer, 2005; Charema, 2013; Fichten et al., 2012 etc.).

Cook and Burke (2002) stated that while participating in the labour market, the disabled are facing two types of problems. People with innate disabilities face an especially complicated form of discrimination in education and employment. Due to this reason ensuring the rights of the disabled and legal guarantees are necessary. Secondly, there is a considerably large group of the disabled that has become disabled due to an accident, illness, etc. Their integration/return to the labour market depends on their previous working experience, acquired skills and qualifications. The authors (Livermore, Goodman and Wright, 2007; Wittenburg, Loprest, 2007; Parker, 2008) note that only a small share of beneficiaries is employed or actively seeking employment. In some cases, social benefits are not a good way to encourage disabled people to begin/return to work (McConkey, 2005).

Levinson and Palmer (2005) argue that the transition into the labour market of youth with disabilities should be a systemically planned process that should begin in school and should be based on an interdisciplinary approach that integrates a variety of school and community agencies: teachers, counsellors, psychologists, employers, and business organizations, as well as students' parents. Muthumbi (2008) and Beresford (2004) agree with this approach and claim that a synergy between the educational system and labour market is a principal issue. Moreover, the author suggested that pre-vocational support as well school-to-work transition plans of disabled youth should be started for youth aged 14-15.

Shandra and Hogan (2008) and Unger and Luecking (1998) disclose that work-oriented school programs significantly increase the employability and vocational success of disabled youth. It is revealed that these programs can provide formal and informal skills, job tasks, and a better knowledge of specific career interests. The studies (Wagner et al., 1993; King et al., 2005) confirm that students with disabilities who took occupationally-oriented, vocational education during high school have a higher probability of finding a competitive job and earn higher salaries. Additionally, disabled youth are significantly less likely to drop out of school compared with disabled students who did not take vocational education in high school.

Fichten and colleagues (2012) aimed to disclose how the professional path of disabled youth is constructed after higher school graduation and compared the employment status of junior/community college graduates with and without disabilities. The research showed that full versus part-time employment of these two groups was very similar. These results could be explained by an increase in anti-discrimination laws and support services offered to persons with disabilities. On the other hand, Fichten and colleagues (2012) reveal that the graduates with disabilities were employed less often in a job related to their field of study area. According to Carter et al. (2010) and Sum et al. (2008), early work experiences during high school could be one of the most consistent predictors of post-school employment for young people with disabilities. It is noted that employment during the summer, such as volunteering, could be helpful for disabled youth to gain work experience and develop their priorities, job related interests and create professional path creation.

Naugle and Campbell (2010) focused on the post-secondary transition of youth with disabilities and remarked that a high range of disabled youth decide to not continue their education after high school graduation. It is remarkable that dropping out of school generally experience negative outcomes—unemployment, underemployment, and incarceration—of youth with disability. Authors suggest that the path to dropping out should be understood as a multidimensional and complex process and, by focusing on family and school agents, efforts should be made to reduce the dropout rates of disabled youth.

According to Jones, Latreille and Sloane (2003), and Feist-Price and Khanna (2003), patterns of employment among disabled people vary significantly by gender. Disabled women face dual discrimination due to their gender and disability. Women are less likely than men to receive occupationally specific vocational training; in addition, there exist occupational stereotypes that create particular barriers of the employability of disabled women.

Rigg (2005) emphasizes that both age and gender are some of the most important issues that could determine transition success from school to work of disabled people. Rigg argues that younger disabled workers (aged 18 to 25 years) are considered as new entrants to the labour force. In comparison with the 26-49 age group, disabled individuals 18-25 years old find it difficult to establish a foothold in the workplace. However, there is a significantly lower rate of exits from work amongst the disabled people aged 18 to 25. It is supposed that disabled youth are more able to cope with the consequences of a disability. It could be

also remarked that men with disabilities are more than three times as likely to leave work as non-disabled men, whilst disabled women are more than twice as likely to exit work (Rigg, 2005).

Noonan and colleagues (2004) made 17 in-depth interviews with physically and sensory disabled women. The results showed that the vocational path of disabled women depend on parents and peer attitudes, influences and support. Furthermore, women are stereotypically considered as teachers, nurses, secretaries and housewives (Betz, 2005). It could be supposed that the common typology of *male* and *female* vocations limits women's (especially disabled) possibilities to find a job. Jones, Latreille and Sloane (2003) also emphasize that occupational sex segregation is a significant factor to the wage gap. Yaeda and Jindal-Snape (2011) state that youth with disabilities usually receive minimum wage and many do not work full time. The monthly wage is not sufficient for living independently; therefore, disabled youth tend to live with their parents.

Magoulios and Trichopoulou (2012) disclose that the battle against discrimination of the disabled in education and work on a legislative basis can achieve significant goals such as the accessibility to certain services but legislation alone cannot constitute the most effective means to increasing employment for the disabled people. On the other hand, the poor post-school outcomes of youth with disabilities are due to their limited development of self-determination and career decision-making skills (Izzo, Lamb, 2003; Hernandez et al., 2008). Gillies (2012) made open-ended interviews with 10 participants who had different types of disabilities (sensory, learning and physical disabilities). All participants graduated from three different universities in southwestern Ontario. Findings by Gillies (2012) disclose that university graduates with disabilities face structural, attitudinal and systemic barriers while seeking meaningful employment. Although many participants were employed, most of them felt underemployed and as if they did not live the life expected prior to graduation. Disabled youth described themselves as undervalued and these feelings clearly impacted their sense of self as well as their identity (professional/occupational, social, etc.).

To conclude this research, the transition into the labour market of disabled youth is caused by internal and external factors. On the one hand, a disabled person has rights to choose and create his personal well-being that depends in the most cases on personal motivation and early career consideration/planning. On the other hand, adequate conditions should be created in the educational system and work place that depend on legal regulation, social policy and

common attitudes toward disability and disabled people. In addition, research disclosed the importance of dialogue between the education system and labour market. A particular transition from the school to work system should be created that could provide advice and support to students with disabilities from secondary to higher education, at the beginning of studying, and at the end of higher education in the transitional phase to the labour market and career.

Research methodology

This research is targeted to analyse attitudes and personal experiences of the disabled youth in the Lithuanian labour market. The empirical data used in this article came from 18 in-depth interviews with 18-35 year old young people with physical disabilities. The interviews were carried out in September 2013 - April 2014. The average duration of one interview was approximately 50 minutes. The sample consists of physically disabled young people with different disabilities, educational degree, and position in the labour market (see Table 1):

Table 1

Characteristics of the Participants

Gender	Women	10
	Men	8
Nature of disability	Innate disability	11
	Acquired disability	7
Education level	Tertiary education (university or college)	11
	Vocational training	3
	Secondary education	3
	Pre-secondary education	1
Position in the labour market	Employed	6
	Unemployed	12

An *in-depth interview* is a flexible and sensitive method that enables the “personal voice” of disabled youth because there is an unrestricted freedom and opportunity to express a unique personal experience. Moreover, the in-depth interview method creates favorable conditions to emphasize as well as to purify issues and aspects that are important or essential for Participants. It is remarked that the inquiry was based on intensive in-depth interviews of physically disabled young people that transforms the interviewer-interviewee relationship into one of narrator and listener. The aim of the interview was to create the best available communication atmosphere and allow each Participant to disclose his/her opinion, viewpoints, etc. Research was based on flexibility and openness principles; i.e., the researchers didn’t follow a concrete question sequence. Questions were asked in respect of the situation and necessity.

The interviews with physically disabled young people were not restricted by early guidelines. However, we attempted to “touch” such aspects as self-assessment, evaluation of personal possibilities and expectations, and attitudes towards labour market/work place (restrictions, challenges etc.). Youth with physical disabilities were also asked about the role of social policy, about the programs they have taken a part of in the past or take a part at this moment, and how education and work policy could/should be improved.

Research results

Analysis of the in depth interviews allows us to disclose the experience of young disabled people in the labour market as well as to indicate the main obstacles/issues related to the possibilities of physically disabled youth in the Lithuanian labour market. Stereotyping and negative attitudes towards disabled people and its impact on the employability of the disabled are also discussed. Moreover, the evaluation and attitudes towards Lithuanian social policy are revealed. Finally, particular insights are disclosed about the improvement of disabled youth employability by young people with physical disabilities.

Negative experience in the labour market

The transition into the labour market is particularly critical for young persons with disabilities, a disproportionate percentage of whom leave high school and neither work nor continue their education despite the majority having transition goals to the contrary (Cameto, Levine and Wagner, 2004). There is also a common trend that the disabled who graduated from schools for further education choose professional training centres or professional schools (Ruijs, Peetsma, Van der Veen, 2010; Gudonis, Mockevičiūtė, 2008). According to data from the Lithuanian Department of Statistics in 2013, less than twice the disabled young people choose tertiary education or vocational training institutions. According to the opinions of the Participants, disability restricts their educational opportunities: “*The disability didn’t allow me to finish studies*”, and “*most educational institutions are not ready to create appropriate conditions for the disabled students*”. However, it is argued that higher education or education in generally is not a cause of the unemployment of disabled youth:

“... in my view, employers are not concerned with employing disabled youth. That is my opinion. Does it depend on education? It does not. You can try and pursue higher education at any time, there are a lot of education programs and you can get a degree through distance learning as well. Youth with disabilities

cannot get a job, not because of their low education degree; they cannot find a job because employers do not want them." (Participant 3)

By analyzing the working capacities of the disabled, as well as participation in the labour market, it is essential to note that the disorder/disease suffered by the individual and the testing of the efficiency level often restricts the functional capabilities of the person to perform the work, though disability appears at the moment when the society (or employer) doesn't create required conditions in order to employ the disabled (e.g., unsuitable work place or access to the working place, etc.). When the disabled strive to find a job, the attitudes of the employer linking disabled and disability play an essential role. During Kaye, Jans and Jons' (2011) research, almost 70% of people participating in the research pointed out that employers often avoid the employment of disabled persons, and do this for fear that he will be unable to perform the appointed task properly and will independently fail in his duties. The financial fear of the employers that fitting the work place for the disabled will cause notably large financial expenses that will not be repaid by the work quality is emphasized as well:

"The accident that had happened, or the disease, doesn't mean that somebody has the right to leave and lock the disabled at home by thinking that fitting the disabled to the work place is not worth the trouble, because nonetheless it will not be any good for him nor the way he will be able to do something." (Participant 8)

"I know the issues of subsidy. Employers would get more than fifty per cent of financial support if I would be employed. Maybe all places where I went to, most employers did not even know about these subsidies." (Participant 7)

"As I intended to work in an enterprise and I filled out the documents, I said that I have an impairment. I was told that I shouldn't mark the particular item related with fees because in that case I could only be able to work just part time. They told me that employees for part-time employment is not needed and I wouldn't get a job due to this reason. So, I didn't mark that item." (Participant 2)

Disabled workers also face economic discrimination within the capitalist system, stemming from employers' expectations of encountering additional nonstandard production costs when hiring a disabled worker as opposed to hiring a worker with no need for special accommodation (Rioux, 2003; Russell, 2002). It could be said that the special needs of disabled workers such as environmental modifications, limited workload or even health care coverage or health care could be described as some of the most important reasons for the high

unemployment rate of people with disabilities. Existing red-tape restrictions, such as employment, governs the disjuncture of the disabled from the labour market if the efficiency level is at least 45% and by filling out various documents that justify *"agreement between employer and the disabled on work conditions, providing which functions he is able to follow and which functions not"*. Moreover, it is emphasized that employers without disabilities do not understand what it means to be disabled:

"As I have communicated with social enterprises, none of the directors were disabled; all of them were healthy. Perhaps they do not understand our needs; maybe the director of the social enterprise might have some impairment. Someone should represent persons with disabilities; make some professional unions for disabled employees. A professional union plays an important role in the world, compared with Lithuania; they're somehow trying to crush all unions <...>" (Participant 1)

By discussing the employment opportunities and existing working place search experience it was stressed that searching for a job *"it is essential to feel the understanding and support of relatives"*. The vast majority of the Participants pointed out that they get a job *"with the help of acquaintances"*, or *"by using offers of friends"*. Only a few participants indicated that they have performed a job search independently (by reading job posters in the internet at website for the disabled, etc.):

"<...> My mother told me that a disabled worker is planning to be employed at her office, so I came for a meeting in order to know whether I have any possibility to get a job." (Participant 4)

"I used to send my CV during the summer after graduating college. Unfortunately, I didn't receive any calls. Thanks to a professor, I found a workplace as a cosmetologist. There was a professor at college. She has her own beauty salon. Thus, she told me that one beauty salon is looking for new employees. I made a call and I was called in for a job interview. I was employed after that." (Participant 9)

"My godfather informed me that there was some enterprise. It was specialized in the production of wood; this area is really related with my vocational training. Thus, I decided to go and to find out about vacancies. And so I went, filled out the request forms and was employed after that." (Participant 11)

Research results performed by Kaye, Jans and Jons (2011) also showed that persons with disabilities, while participating in the labour market, encounter various problems and obstacles that commonly relate both difficulties based on the evaluation of the working possibilities of the disabled person and disinterest/unwillingness of the employers to employ

the disabled person and, additionally, with the lack of working motivation of the disabled themselves. According to the opinions of the participants, the unwillingness of the employers to employ the disabled persons is based on the utility principle; in most cases relevant work conditions are required for the disabled as well as relevant work atmosphere (e.g., work assistant services), and this becomes an economically unfavourable factor in respect of the employer. It was emphasized that not only “*encouragement ..., which provides more trust while striving for something, because you know, not all are ready to live just by receiving social benefits*”, but also “*self-support while operating appointed work and responsibility in respect to the duties applied in work place as well as diligence*” of the disabled are clearly essential aspects. However,

“*...The employers should be promoted to employ the disabled employee and that discrimination and restrictions on working opportunities should be prevented.*” (Participant 14)

Stereotypes towards disability and disabled people

One of the major factors restricting employment opportunities of the disabled young people are stereotypes that are dominant in society as well as the negative attitudes of the society members in respect to the disabled. According to the opinion of disabled persons, the society is “*rather darksome and illiterate*” where “*the disabled unfortunately seems inferior to many people*”. Looks given by people, a reflective pity, and compassionate feeling humiliate the dignity of the disabled, enhancing the feeling of their own disability:

“*I am a woman and body disability negatively affects me a lot. As I go to some kind of institutions, for instance, a bank, I always face all women working at the bank and they are tall, beautiful. In addition, in any municipality, at any school I can see physically very beautiful women, ladies. And you can't compare to them physically, because it is required even in content of job advertisements that employee should be immaculate-looking. This is the sentence that is actually very discriminating because person who has a disability is undervalued by himself.*” (Participant 18)

Participants point out that the dominating stereotypes of society are deeply rooted inside a collective consciousness; the disabled is still perceived as care and compassion subjects, and areas of the life, such as work, is meant as a “*privilege of the disabled*”, unless in a utopia. According to participants, they lack maintenance as well as encouragement instead of the undervaluation of society members:

“*I am sitting in the wheelchair. Then it seemed like I'm in a dream, because I couldn't believe that I, being healthy and positive, have become weak, helpless and totally dependent on other people*”, “*What is necessary that a man, who sits in a wheelchair, might act as a director instead of being a freeloader? – this is only a car, the lift and fitted work place.*” (Participant 12)

“*I do not think that something could be changed. An image of “a weak disabled person” predominates in Lithuania. Maybe it came from Soviet times that people with disabilities cannot or are not able to do anything to change it.*” (Participant 15)

The stress is laid that the disabled are “*undervalued by others*” and this is the reason of feedback; i.e., the lack of self-confidence of the disabled person, the undervaluation his abilities, etc. Personal diversity and otherness (appearance, capabilities, personal properties, etc.) create conditions for the obstacles for integration of disabled people into the labour market:

“*I can say it very simply – I did not ever disclose the information. Why should I disclose that? Why should I talk about my negative side? I mean that you do not know how it would be reacted to. When you go to a job interview and it means that you actually sell yourself and you cannot tell the bad points unless you are asked specifically about the negative aspects. But when you're in a job conversation, you must emphasize your strengths and abilities.*” (Participant 13)

Physically disabled youth disclosed that disability is an obstacle to realize their goals. It should be remarked that the wheelchair has become a part of the self for youth with physical disabilities; however, it is described as a disadvantage in particular situations/ areas, including the labour market. This empirical evidence could be illustrated in the context of Goffman's stigma (labelling) theory. Goffman (1963, cit. Stuenkel, Wong, 2013) discerned two kinds of stigma: discredited and discreditable. A discredited stigma is described as an obvious mark that is easily perceived. It means that people can clearly see that the individual is different, objectionable, and inferior. Some examples of discredited stigma might be a wheelchair or other obvious disabled condition. On the other hand, there are some disabilities such as mental illness or learning disabilities which could be described as discreditable stigma. Discreditable stigma is a secret stigma of individual and it is not readily apparent and must be found out along the way. Goffman argues that a person with a discreditable stigma tends to do a lot of information management. Since a disabled person can cover his stigma up and hide it, he selects with whom he talks about it (Stuenkel, Wong, 2013).

The role of social policy

For the development of the further employment possibilities of disabled, it is very important not only individual factors (professional competences, training, working experience), but also employment policy and initiatives of the state to encourage the employment of people with disabilities. Participants indicated that Lithuania has adopted necessary laws that regulate the equal opportunities of the disabled by promoting/supporting the employment of the disabled. As the participants point out, such means as giving grants for the employers for their willingness to employ the disabled worker seems to be a relevant step in promoting the employment of the disabled. Disabled youth affirmed that “employees with more severe disability need specially suited work places” also that “not all disabled are able to work a full working day and for this reason they cause excess troubles for employers—that’s why state supported employment of the disabled is “certainly required.””

Professional rehabilitation for the disabled is one of measures of an active labour market policy applied in Lithuania for the disabled as well as part of the system targeting the social integration of the disabled which is characterized as a “restitution and increase of person’s capabilities, professional competence and ability to participate at the labour market by training, social, psychological and rehabilitation means” (the Law on the Social Integration of the Disabled, Article 1). Further, following the main professional rehabilitation services for the disabled, aspects should be pointed out that are intended for recreating the capability of the disabled person and the possibility of getting employed, such as a) professional advising; b) assessment of his professional abilities and their restoration or training new ones/re-skilling; and c) job search support. However, disabled youth who have finished professional rehabilitation disclosed a negative attitude toward these programs. It was claimed that disabled people are trained on unsalable occupations that aggravate their inclusion into the labour market:

“...You should know everything by yourself and you have to say ‘this and that belongs to me’. As the commission for capacity level was made for me, nobody mentioned some kind of professional, nobody mentioned this. Thus, I went and said that I have a right to get a professional rehabilitation and they said ‘Well, it is alright, maybe we should send you to a rehab’. As you are requesting it now. They’re trying to avoid uproar...” (Participant 15)

“I do not see any possibilities. It is declared that qualifications offered to disabled people are promising. The truth is that those qualifications couldn’t be adopted anywhere nor anyhow, especially

being impaired. I was told that corpses aren’t needed at Labour exchange. There are a lot of people with disabilities who have finished professional rehabilitation. However, knowledge as well as qualifications is not in great request. There is not any demand for jewellers, woodworkers or accountants in the labour market because knowledge gained through professional rehabilitation do not reflect that of a real specialist. People are educated for many years, not half a year.” (Participant 9)

“Unfortunately, except for computer skills, nothing else is included to professional rehabilitation program that I could learn. I doubt very much whether the person who learned how to create a mail box should be meant as “duty rehabilitated” for work. It is stressed that the disabled, because of exceeding requirements and legal restrictions are forced to do a ‘black job.’” (Participant 16)

On the other hand, professional rehabilitation significantly increased the employability of one disabled young women. As she emphasized,

“Professional rehabilitation gave me a lot, first of all, it developed my self-confidence, I have gained valuable experience. I developed myself as a specialist, an employee. Support is provided to find a job for disabled people through teenage days after finishing this program. Agency workers are helping out between the disabled person and employer. In fact, social workers give a lot of advices on how to communicate with the employer or how to act while having a job conversation.” (Participant 5)

Considerations about the improvement of disabled youth employability

Participants also pointed out that they miss a professional career planning system (acquiring education, professional practice, training in professional skills, employment, raising qualification/re-skilling, etc.), with respect to which, in their opinion, positive improvements concerning employment of the disabled might be made:

“More opportunities as well as a dialogue between institutions should be done, especially, universities should collaborate with Labour exchange offices. Some kind of institution is necessary so that one could represent disabled people in labour market.... Some coordinator, a person should be responsible for the employment of people with disabilities. It should be organized in a particular practice that could help disabled people find a job.” (Participant 13)

“...particular conditions should be prepared so that people with disabilities would be educated with some kind of handicraft. It is prepared at the 5th vocational school in Kaunas, that’s a good example. There are appropriate conditions for disabled people. There is

a lot of money invested in professional rehabilitation and the benefits are small." (Participant 7)

"Educational institutions could make contracts with enterprises where disabled youth could be employed after graduation. Some guarantee could be created that disabled youth would get a job after graduation." (Participant 17)

According to Meister (1998), ideally each country should create and maintain such inter-institutional collaboration network, with the help of which consultancies and support might be provided to the disabled on actual questions during three of their living stages: 1) supporting secondary and high schools, 2) at start of the studies, and 3) during the transition from educational institution to the labour market.

Youth with physical disabilities noted that there are positive changes in educational system. In their view, the education environment has become more available for disabled students and conditions have been created to choose an appropriate learning style; for instance, distance learning, etc. A disabled student in a wheelchair argues that,

"The education system is moving in the right direction. More and more universities are becoming accessible for disabled students; distance learning programmes are developed and adapted dormitories as well. I am glad that professors looked at me as a full-fledged student, didn't make any concessions. The educational institution was very friendly for me and for my needs; there were great conditions for studying." (Participant 5)

According to the opinion of participants, for a successful integration into the labour market, it is especially important to acquire professional competences and evaluate himself/herself as an employee. Bender (2001) argues that there are two types of self-evaluation of the person: 1) common self-evaluation that includes various areas of personal and social life of the individual, social roles, etc., and 2) self-perception and perception/evaluation of his own competence in different fields (e.g., learning process, work, etc.).

Conclusions

The analysis of scientific literature and in-depth interviews with 18 participants allows us to conclude that despite the appropriate legal infrastructure, young people with physical disabilities have limited possibilities of integration into the Lithuanian labour market. The research results revealed that these possibilities first of all are limited by the individual factors: lack of appropriate education, necessary employability skills, etc. An education degree (especially tertiary education) plays the most important role in the successful transition into the

labour market. On the other hand it is emphasized that disabled youth critically evaluated their employment possibilities.

The disabled youth disclosed particular issues at the institutional level that limit their opportunity to be employed. It is noted that "health" directors who do not understand needs as well as the situation/experience of disabled employees create social enterprises for disabled people. Moreover, such institutions as the Lithuanian labour exchange are not described as a "trustworthy institution" because it provides poor information about rights as well as the possibilities of disabled people. Disabled youth emphasized that social ties (*strengths*: parents, brother, etc., and *weak*: professors, friends, colleagues, etc.) broaden an opportunity to find a job. Young people with physical disabilities revealed that they miss a professional career planning system that could improve their employability as well as broaden their opportunities in the labour market.

The negative attitudes of the employers are also a significant aspect of successful transition and participation in the Lithuanian labour market of physically disabled youth. It is believed that the work productivity of disabled workers will be lower in comparison with "healthy" workers. Employers in Lithuania are unwilling to employ disabled people due to some special requirements; e.g., the working conditions are required for the disabled as well as relevant working atmosphere, such as work assistant services, special requirements for the workplace, or shorter working hours. However, one of the most important issues is the stigmatization of the disability and disabled people that causes an unfavourable situation for young people with physical disabilities in the Lithuanian labour market. People with disabilities are "marked" by labels with negative connotations, such as "disabled", "unemployed", "restricted capabilities".

In addition, the strategies of the Lithuanian social policy and active labour market measures (professional rehabilitation, subsidized employment, etc.) are significant for better employment possibilities of young people with disabilities. On the other hand, youth with physical disabilities expressed negative attitudes towards professional rehabilitation programs for the disabled because of unpromising occupations in the labour market as well as short-term education (up to 230 days).

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Fizinę negalią turinčių jaunų asmenų užimtumas Lietuvoje: patirtys ir požūriai

Santrauka

Straipsnyje pristatomos fizinę negalią turinčių jaunų asmenų (18–35 metų amžiaus) perėjimo į darbo rinką patirtys, atskleidžiamos pagrindinės problemos ar kliūtys, su kuriomis negalią turintis jaunimas susiduria ketindamas įsitraukti į Lietuvos darbo rinką ir joje dalyvaudamas. Tyrimo nagrinėjamas visuomenės ir darbdavių požiūris į fizinę negalią turinčius asmenis, pateikiamas neįgaliųjų požiūris į Lietuvos socialinę politiką ir neįgaliųjų įdarbinimo iniciatyvas, nuomonės ir siūlymai, susiję su fizinę negalią turinčio jaunimo įsidarbinamumo gerinimu.

Kalbant apie neįgalių asmenų lygių įsidarbinimo galimybių užtikrinimą ir diskriminacijos dėl sveikatos būklės ar negalios prevenciją, Lietuvoje per pastaruosius 20 metų įvyko teigiamų poslinkių – pradėtos aktyviai kurti ir įgyvendinti neįgaliųjų politikos strategijos. Lietuvos valstybės nepriklausomybės atkūrimas (1990 m.), narystė Jungtinėse Tautose (nuo 1991 m.) ir Europos Sąjungoje (nuo 2004 m.) buvo svarbus indėlis kuriant ir įgyvendinant neįgalių žmonių socialinės įtraukties strategijas, gerinant neįgaliųjų gyvenimo kokybę ir didinant visaverčio gyvenimo galimybes. Vienas iš svarbiausių veiksmingos ir neįgaliuosius orientuotos viešosios politikos aspektų yra šalyje kuriama ir įtvirtinama įstatymų bazė. Šiuo metu Lietuvoje galioja daugiau nei 70 teisinių dokumentų, kuriais reglamentuojamos neįgalių asmenų galimybės įvairiose socialinio gyvenimo srityse. 1991 metais priimtas Lietuvos Respublikos invalidų socialinės integracijos

įstatymas (pakeistas 2004 m.), 2002 m. birželio 7 d. Vyriausybė patvirtino Nacionalinę žmonių su negale socialinės integracijos 2003–2012 metų programą, o 2012 m. patvirtinta naujoji Nacionalinė žmonių su negale socialinės integracijos 2013–2019 metų programa. Neįgalių asmenų teisės ginamos ir neįgaliųjų užimtumo galimybes reglamentuojamos Lietuvos Respublikos lygių galimybių įstatymu (2003), Socialinių įmonių įstatymu (2004), Neįgaliųjų socialinės integracijos įstatymu (2004), Užimtumo rėmimo įstatymu (2006) ir kt. Lietuvos autorių darbuose vis dažnesni neįgaliųjų padėties darbo rinkoje tyrimai, o darbo rinka ir užimtumas – viena iš svarbiausių Lietuvos ir kitų šalių viešosios politikos tyrimų kryptių. Tačiau, nepaisant neįgalių asmenų užimtumo iniciatyvų, Lietuvoje neįgalieji susiduria su daugybe kliūčių, trukdančių įsitraukti į šalies darbo rinką ir joje įsitvirtinti.

Kaip teigia Pocius (2008), Šėporaitytė, Tereškinas (2007), Ruškus (2007) ir kt., neįgalių asmenų įsidarbinamumą didžiąja dalimi riboja šalyje vyraujantis neigiamas požiūris į neįgaliuosius ir negalios stigmatizacija. Kuodytė ir Pajarskienė (2012) pabrėžia, kad neigiamas požiūris į neįgaliuosius taip pat yra susijęs su nepalankiais psichosocialiniais darbo aplinkos veiksniais, su kuriais neįgalieji susiduria ketindami įsitraukti į šalies darbo rinką ir joje įsitvirtinti. Dėl negalios negalintys įsitvirtinti darbo rinkoje asmenys, ypač neturintys reikiamos darbo patirties, tampa pažeidžiami ne tik finansiniu (gauna nepakankamai

pajamų, reikalingų bent minimaliems poreikiams užtikrinti), bet ir moraliniu aspektu (neigiamas darbdavio požiūris į neįgalų darbuotoją, nenoras įdarbinti darbo patirties neturinčius neįgaliuosius). Remiantis Kriščiūno, Samėnienės ir Stapulionytės (2005) požiūriais, naudinga priemonė, gerinanti negalią turinčių asmenų įsitraukimo į darbo rinką galimybes, yra profesinė rehabilitacija. Zmitravičiaus ir Grigo (2010) nuomone, negalią turinčių asmenų įsidarbinimo galimybės didele dalimi yra susijusios su švietimo sistema, neįgaliųjų profesiniu konsultavimu, neįgaliesiems reikalingomis priemonėmis ir specialistų paslaugomis. Autoriai, nagrinėjantys neįgaliųjų įsidarbinimo galimybes ir padėtį Lietuvos darbo rinkoje (Pocius, 2008; Ruškus, 2007; Ruškus, Baranauskienė, 2004; ir kt.), pažymi, kad šalyje stinga centralizuotai neįgaliesiems teikiamų paslaugų ir švietimo įstaigų, darbo organizacijų ir nevyriausybinių sektoriaus institucijų tarpinstitucinio bendradarbiavimo. Panašios pozicijos laikosi ir kitų šalių autoriai, pavyzdžiui, Meister (1998) akcentuoja, jog neįgalių asmenų dalyvavimo darbo rinkoje galimybės kur kas pagerėtų, jeigu būtų sukurtas ir palaikomas toks tarpinstitucinio bendradarbiavimo tinklas, per kurį neįgaliesiems būtų teikiamos konsultacijos ir parama trimis lygmenimis (etapais): 1) pereinant iš bendrojo lavinimo mokyklos į aukštąją mokyklą, 2) studijų pradžioje ir 3) pereinant iš švietimo institucijos į darbo rinką.

Išnagrinėjus skirtingų šalių autorių darbus neįgalaus jaunimo įsitraukimo į darbo rinką ir dalyvavimo joje tematika, galima teigti, kad šis reiškinys detalai tirtas dėmesį teikiant skirtingiems aspektams: negalią turinčių jaunų asmenų savo profesinio tapatumo ir karjeros planavimo įgūdžių analizei (Izzo, Lamb, 2003; Hernandez et al., 2008), ankstyvos profesinės patirties (savanoriško darbo, darbo vasaros metu ir pan.) reikšmės neįgalaus jaunimo profesiniam keliui analizei (Carter et al., 2010; Sum et al., 2008). Jones, Latreille ir Sloane (2003), Feist-Price, Khanna (2003), Rigg (2005), Noonan et al. (2004) ir kitų autorių tyrimai orientuoti į negalią turinčių jaunų moterų ir vyrų įsidarbinimo ir dalyvavimo darbo rinkoje skirtumus. Taip pat nemažai dėmesio skiriama neįgaliųjų užimtumo politikos analizei, neįgaliųjų užimtumo ir įdarbinimo tarptautinių iniciatyvų perkėlimo į nacionalinį lygmenį vertinimui ir pan. (Bowe, 2003; Izzo, Lamb, 2003; Magoulios, Trichopoulou, 2012; Levinson, Palmer, 2005; Charema, 2013; Fichten et al., 2012).

Tyrimo problema sudaro šie klausimai: kokios yra fizinę negalią turinčio jaunimo patirtys, susijusios su įsitraukimu į Lietuvos darbo rinką ir dalyvavimu joje; kokios yra fizinę negalią turinčių jaunų žmonių įsidarbinimo galimybės Lietuvoje; su kokios kliūtimis susiduria fizinę negalią turintys jauni asmenys ieškodami darbo ir pradėdami profesinį kelią.

Šio straipsnio tikslas yra atskleisti fizinę negalią turinčių jaunų asmenų patirtis ir požiūrius, susijusius su įsitraukimu į Lietuvos darbo rinką ir dalyvavimu joje galimybų, kliūčių ir gerinimo būdų analize.

Tyrimo metu buvo atlikta 18 giluminių interviu su fizinę negalią turinčiais jaunais asmenimis (18–35 metų amžiaus). Atliekant empirinį tyrimą taikyta tikslinė ir

sniego gniūžtės atranka. Interviu buvo vykdomi 2013 m. spalio–2014 m. balandžio mėnesiais. Vidutinė giluminių interviu trukmė – 50 minučių. Tyrime dalyvavo 10 moterų ir 8 vyrai, turintys fizinę negalią. Didžiosios dalies (11) informantų negalia buvo įgimta arba atsiradusi ankstyvoje vaikystėje, 7 informantų gyvenime fizinė negalia atsirado dėl nelaimingo atsitikimo, ligos ar kitų priežasčių. Išsilavinimo požiūriu, didžioji dalis (11) informantų buvo įgiję aukštąjį išsilavinimą arba tuo metu dar studijavo Lietuvos aukštosiose mokyklose, vidurinį arba profesinį išsilavinimą buvo įgiję 6 fizinę negalią turintys jauni asmenys, 1 informantas turėjo pagrindinį išsilavinimą. Pagal statusą darbo rinkoje nedirbančių informantų skaičius buvo du kartus didesnis negu ekonomiškai aktyvių (atitinkamai 12 ir 6 fizinę negalią turintys jauni asmenys).

Empirinis tyrimas parodė, kad fizinę negalią turinčio jaunimo nepalankią padėtį Lietuvos darbo rinkoje lemia platus spektras individualių ir kontekstinių veiksnių, pvz., profesinio pasirengimo ir kvalifikacijos trūkumas, sunkumai atliekant paskirtą darbą, baimė patirti diskriminaciją darbo vietoje, tačiau ne mažiau reikšmingas – stigmatizuojantis visuomenės ir darbdavių požiūris į neįgalų darbuotoją, menkas darbdavių suinteresuotumas (pvz., dėl specialaus darbo vietos pritaikymo neįgaliesiems, apribojimų dėl negalios dirbti visą darbo dieną), neįgaliojo profesinių gebėjimų nuvertinimas ir pan. Tokiomis sąlygomis neabejotinai svarbus tampa valstybės politikos vaidmuo ir parama neįgalių asmenų užimtumo skatinimo ir į(si)darbinimo galimybių didinimo procese. Fizinę negalią turinčio jaunimo nuomone, Lietuvoje įgyvendinamos aktyvios darbo rinkos politikos priemonės, pavyzdžiui, įdarbinimas subsidijuojant, profesinė rehabilitacija ir kt., yra reikšmingos gerinant negalią turinčių asmenų užimtumą ir įsitraukimo į darbo rinką galimybes, bet profesinės rehabilitacijos trukmė per trumpa, o profesinės rehabilitacijos programose siūlomos specialybės nėra patrauklios ar paklausios Lietuvos darbo rinkoje. Neįgaliųjų socialinės įmonės vertinamos kaip reikšmingos institucijos, sukuriantys palankias sąlygas ir galimybes negalią turinčiam jaunimui įsitraukti į darbo rinką, tačiau pažymima, kad paprastai (neįgaliųjų) socialinės įmonės statusą turinčios organizacijos įkuriamos sveikų vadovų, kurie, neįgalaus jaunimo nuomone, ne visuomet realiai suvokia negalią turinčių darbuotojų situaciją ir poreikius. Pažymėtina, kad Lietuvos darbo birža fizinę negalią turinčio jaunimo nėra traktuojama kaip institucija, kuria galima pasitikėti, joje pasigendama teikiamos informacijos išsamumo ir didesnio neįgaliųjų teisių atstovavimo. Remiantis neįgalaus jaunimo patirtimis, neretai didžiausios paramos ir pagalbos įsitraukiant į darbo rinką sulaukiama iš pažįstamų asmenų ar šeimos narių (tėvų, draugų, dėstytojų ir pan.). Kaip atskleidė giluminiai interviu, fizinę negalią turintis jaunimas pasigenda ankstyvo ir sistemingo profesinės karjeros planavimo, kuris, jo nuomone, galėtų pagerinti negalią turinčių asmenų įsidarbinamumą ir galimybes įsitraukti į šalies darbo rinką.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: fizinė negalia, neįgalus jaunimas, darbo rinka.

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