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From School to Work: Long-Term Employment Outcomes for Former Special Educational Needs Students

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This is a study on the prospect of long-term employment for former special educational needs (SEN) students. It focuses on how the qualifications and selected life course changes in early adulthood influence the probability of maintaining employment in adult life. The life course perspectives provide the theoretical foundation for the study. The data refers to a longitudinal study of 253 former Norwegian SEN students, who were followed from the time they were in upper secondary school into their mid-thirties. The analysis shows that the probability of being long-term employed is quite low among former SEN students, especially women. However, the probability of long-term employment is significantly higher among women who have achieved a formal upper secondary education qualification when compared to those who have not. Such formal qualifications are important for men as well. Nevertheless, contrary to women, for men, holding a driver's license seems to be just as important as formal educational qualifications for maintaining employment.

Keywords: long-term employment; special needs education; life course; longitudinal study; transition; gender

Introduction

The difficulty regarding the transition from school to work faced by persons with disabilities is a well-studied subject (Schriner 2001; Danziger & Ratner 2010; Mavromaras & Polidano 2011). However, a study on the transition from school to work can capture only a small part of the life course of such an individual. Levine and Nourse (1998) emphasise that the time after leaving school is a period of 'trial and error'. The road from school to work might be long and cumbersome for some. An early transition might indicate the successful start of a career, but this may not necessarily always be the case. There is a reason to believe that securing long-term employment is particularly challenging for adolescents with disabilities, as their background might make them more vulnerable in the labour market. In any case, the study of long-term employment requires longitudinal studies. The following analysis represents such a study as it discusses long-term employment of persons with difficulty from their early adulthood into their mid-thirties.

Studies on long-term employment outcomes in people with disabilities are not common. As Rigg (2005: 27) pointed out, remarkably little is known about the progression of individuals with different kinds of disabilities in the labour market. However, some recent exceptions are, for instance, studies by Lindstrom, Doren, and Miesch (2011), Myklebust and Båtevik (2014), and Langøy (2017).

The following analysis addresses the question of employment outcomes for young people with special educational needs. In one way or another, these young people have experienced school as a disabling institution. The risk is that they, as a group, are more vulnerable when compared to their peers in their adult life as well. However, as individuals travel through life, changes might occur. In the course of time, most of us meet disabling as well as enabling situations and institutions. For instance, the transition from school to work might imply a change from a disabling to an enabling institution per se (Myklebust & Båtevik 2014). In other cases, making a transition from school to work might be problematic or even impossible. Regardless of a positive or negative outcome, such examples illustrate the importance of a long-term perspective in the study on such persons' transition from school to work.

This analysis is based on a study on former special educational needs (SEN) students who started upper secondary school in the mid-1990s. The first data were registered in the spring of 1996, and the collection of data happened over a period of 20 years. The use of a longitudinal approach makes it possible to consider the long-term outcomes regarding employment as well as other aspects of life. The study of long-term employment outcomes raises the question about duration. During early adulthood, the density of transitions is normally high (George 2003: 163). As life goes on, the time between transitions normally gets longer. A study on former SEN students for a period of 20 years offers an

opportunity to follow them through their late twenties and early thirties. Compared to early adulthood, this is a phase in life normally characterised by fewer transitions. Consequently, this is a phase in life suitable for data collection in a study on long-term employment.

Long-term employment concerns the probability of holding a relatively stable position in the labour market. This necessitates a discussion of the aspects that influence the chances of holding a long-term employment position. For instance, does a background as a SEN student influence the probability of being long-term employed?

Further, other changes occur with time. Hence, there is a need to discuss several determinants that might influence long-term employment of former SEN students.

Work and Disability

According to Taylor (2004), work and employment can be paid as well as unpaid, public as well as private, and formal as well as informal. Taylor's perspective represents a critique of more traditional studies of work essentially related to industrialism, in which the concept of work is considered to be synonymous with paid employment. Essentially, employment is a part of the public sphere. However, there are different kinds of work including voluntary work and housework. Furthermore, the importance of paid work is strongly emphasised in politics (Terum & Hatland 2014). This is the case in the Norwegian context as well as in many other countries. Work is associated with 'self-confidence, self-esteem, status in the community and economic well-being' (Noland & Gleeson 2017). Moreover, the relationship between work and payment might be multifaceted. Different combinations of work and disability benefits are available. Some people regarded as vocationally disabled might, for instance, be involved in activities that are more or less categorised as ordinary work (Olsen 2009). As a result, the delimitation of boundaries regarding what is paid work is not necessarily straightforward.

The low employment rates of people with disabilities from different countries have been thoroughly documented (Hansen, Andreassen & Meager 2011; Lergard 2012; Newman et al. 2011; Pallisera 2011). Even though Tossebro and Wik (2015) underpinned the uncertainty related to the figures regarding the employment of people with disabilities, they concluded that there is a significant difference between people with different kinds of disabilities and others. According to Bo and Håland (2017), 43% of those classified as people with disabilities aged 15 to 66 in Norway held paid jobs in 2017. The percentage has been approximately at the same level for several years. The corresponding figure of the population of the same age was 73%. Based on this, access to paid work appears to be particularly difficult for people with disabilities.

Long-term Employment from a Life Course Perspective

The life course perspectives provide a theoretical foundation for studies on long-term employment outcomes. The life course is '... consisting of age-graded patterns that are embedded in social institutions and history' (Elder, Johnson & Crosnoe 2004: 4). Historical, geographical, and social contexts as well as the individual ability to plan, to choose, and to act influences the individual life course. The school context is, for instance, important in this respect. Some questions, such as whether the students are placed in regular or special classes, whether practical or theoretical skills are emphasised, whether students succeed in acquiring formal vocational or academic qualifications, and so on, can be of vital importance. Timing – i.e., the point of time in a life course during which important transitions take place – is also crucial.

The transition from school to work is an essential part of becoming an adult. A critical aspect is, of course, whether such transitions take place at all. When it comes to the question of long-term employment, it is also relevant to consider what characterises the transition and the period following this transition. Is it, for instance, a clear cut or a more complex transition, or is it the starting point of durable employment?

A prerequisite for the study on the duration of employment is a more thorough clarification of the concept of long-term employment. First, it is a question regarding the kind of activity that should be included in the concept of employment. Furthermore, there is a need to discuss the concept of long-term employment in the context of the dynamic nature of the transition from youth to adulthood.

The study of long-term employment is concerned with duration and stability. Duration is the time between transitions (Elder, Johnson & Crosnoe 2004: 8). The period of the transition from school to work is, however, a part of life characterised by significant changes. This involves leaving the parental home, becoming a cohabitant, becoming a parent, and so on. Additionally, the historical context of such transitions influences the life course of different cohorts. As society changes, the lives of its members also change. The concept of emerging adulthood, referring to the period between the late teens through the twenties, reflects this (Arnett 2000). The distinction between adolescence and adulthood has become less evident than earlier. A significant reason for this is the growth of young adults with higher and further education. To some degree, such changes in the individual trajectories of young adults can be the result of individual choices (agency), for instance, when some travel the world as backpackers. For others, it might be the lack of available work in unskilled or semi-skilled work areas due to the de-industrialization of their countries.

The lengthened nature of the transition from youth to adulthood affects the chances of being long-term employed as well. The result, according to Bradley and Devadason (2008: 120), is a prolonging of the 'time it takes young people of all backgrounds to settle down into a steady "career path"'. Furthermore, they argued that 'movements between various work statuses' often characterise this part of life.

The Study of Long-term Employment

The lengthening of the transition period from youth to adulthood highlights an extension of the part of life referred to as a period of 'trial and error' (Levine & Nourse 1998). The labour force participation of youths is characterised by the overrepresentation of students, unemployed, and temporary employed (Bradley & Devadason 2008: 120). This raises the question of how different groups tackle the uncertainty of such a situation. A study of the process of transition in the period following secondary school could reveal some of the opportunities and barriers students face in their struggle to obtain a foothold in the labour market. Studies on the transition support young disabled adults need are examples for this (e.g., Lergard et al. 2016; Brooke et al. 2018).

However, a relevant question is regarding the happenings at the end of the 'trial and error' period. To what extent is long-term employment, for instance, an option for former SEN students when they are in their late twenties and early thirties? Furthermore, what influences their chances of achieving a more stable position in the labour market as adults? This does not mean that their early adulthood experiences are insignificant; rather, it indicates the contrary. A successful transition from school to work could be the beginning of a positive spiral of change, whereas a less successful change could mean the opposite. The experiences of school years, as well as other experiences from youth and early adulthood, can be of crucial significance in the ensuing life course.

Previous studies on long-term employment outcomes, including those on groups of youths at risk, took different approaches regarding their methodology or thematic content. The study by Lindstrom, Doren, and Miesch (2011: 424) is 'an in-depth examination of critical influences that contribute to career advancement and employment in living wage occupation'. The study followed former special needs students up to 10 years after these young adults left high school. Only youth who had entered higher-wage occupations were included. The quantitative study by Myklebust and Båtevik (2014) addresses the question of the economic independence of former special needs students who hold a job in their late twenties. Langøy (2017) interviewed 21 former special needs students in their mid-thirties, all of whom were classified as having general learning disabilities or psychosocial difficulties. Her study confirms that the transition from school to work has been long and cumbersome for some. The trajectories leading to work could be linear as well as circular as they move through what she describes as the tension between coping and helplessness (Langøy 2017: 60).

Langøy addresses the long-term processes leading to work for some and the lack of work for others. The perspective this paper adopts is somewhat different. The probability of holding a stable position in the labour market is in question. The data is quantitative. However, the understanding of the processes leading to long-term employment is critical irrespective of whether the study is quantitative or qualitative.

Method and Materials

The following analysis includes former special needs students who started their upper secondary education in the mid-1990s. A comprehensive registration form provided detailed information on 760 students, representing more than 40% of the special needs' students in six Norwegian counties, in the spring of 1996 (Myklebust et al. 2016). Yearly reports were given about the situation through upper secondary education. The teachers were the source of information at this stage. As adults, the former students were contacted four times to answer a structured questionnaire. Due to severe communication difficulties, parents or guardians in a few cases gave the information on behalf of persons in question. The basis for the following analysis is the information from secondary schools as well as the surveys of 2007 and 2015.

In 2015, at a point of time in which most of the former special needs' students were at the age of 36 to 37 years, 253 were still included in the study. The reduction of the participants reflects various problems related to follow-up studies. First, some refrained from responding. However, this is not the only challenge to a follow-up study such as this. Some schools that originally kept lists of the names and identification numbers of the students would not or could not provide the contact details of 118 people after they had finished upper secondary school. Additionally, 13 of the participants died during the period under investigation.

The high dropout rate is a special challenge when it comes to longitudinal studies. Though the study started with 760 students (the basic data set), only 253 were left in 2015. The risk of biased results is obvious. However, this has been controlled for in a separate analysis (Myklebust et al. 2016). In fact, the most significant bias appears when the basic data set (760 students) is compared to the total data set (1,844 students). According to the total data set, 60% of the SEN students attended mainstream classes whereas only 51% of the students represented in the basic data set did the same. In the sample of 2015, the corresponding figures were 53%. Similarly, students from some counties have been under- or over-represented in the basic data set when compared to the total basic data set.

The differences regarding variables such as the branch of study or gender were significantly smaller. In fact, the gender balance in the analytic sample of 2015 is almost the same as the total and the basic data set of 1996. The overall impression is that the consistency of the data seems quite high from one registration to another, especially when compared to the basic data set. Moreover, there is the advantage of knowing the way in which the data is biased.

The Model of Analysis

Compared to most studies concerning young people with disabilities, the present study has some assets. The sample is relatively large, and the time span ranges from the ages of 16 or 17 in 1995 to 36 or 37 in 2015. Studies spanning such a long period are quite uncommon. Gerber (2012: 41–42), for instance, concluded that studies of people with learning disabilities almost exclusively focus on people younger than thirty.

Figure 1 illustrates the assumed relationships between the six selected independent variables and the probability of being long-term employed in a period between the former students being in their late twenties and mid-thirties. The covariates of gender, social background, and functional level represent the starting point for the analysis; it represents some of the characteristics of these young people as they entered upper secondary education. The other three covariates represent the experiences and life course changes through late youth and early adulthood, earlier described as the period of trial and error.

Gender is an important topic with respect to education or employment. A review of the role of gender in securing and maintaining employment indicates that young disabled men in most cases are more fortunate than women (Lindsay et al. 2018). Lindsay et al. provides a systematic review of the role of gender in securing and maintaining employment among youth and young adults with disabilities. Another study indicates that women move in and out of the workforce as time goes by at a higher degree when compared to men (Lindstrom et al. 2011: 430).

The risk of exclusion from education and employment due to social disadvantages is another interesting issue (Hyggen et al. 2018: 38). The question of employment is, in this respect, related to the discussion on the social origin and social inequality. Thus, having, for example, a parent with higher education or who holds a leading job position might influence the probability of the student gaining a foothold in the labour market.

The third covariate is the functional level. The information provided by the teachers presents a picture of the students' functional levels as perceived by the school when the students started upper secondary education. This gives an opportunity to understand how different perceptions about disabilities in a school context influence further life with regard to the transition to adulthood and long-term employment. According to Kittelsaa et al. (2016), very few Norwegian studies thematise the interaction between gender and disability. Kittelsaa and her co-authors discussed the relevance of the concept of intersectionality in such studies by highlighting the interconnection between social categorizations, such as disability and gender. Such interconnections might increase as well as decrease the probability of marginalization. However, in a quantitative analysis, the concept of interaction might be more relevant than interconnection and intersectionality.

The subsequent covariate represents the significance of upper secondary education. Achieved academic or vocational qualifications by the late twenties should give a reasonable indication of the importance of secondary education. With regard to the share of upper secondary students that graduated from vocational programmes, there is a substantial variation in the OECD countries (OECD 2017: 57). Norway is far below the OECD average of graduates younger than 20 years. By the age of 25, the share is more than doubled but still below 60%. Some even graduate when they turn thirty. Our point of measuring is 28–29 years, which implies that we can register a substantial part of the changes but not all.

The formation of a new family is a significant transition for many when they are in their twenties. Having children is a crucial part of this transition. The average age of first birth among the women in Norway was 25.5 years in 1990 and three years higher in 2014 (Lappegård and Dommermuth 2015). Therefore, the chances of having a child at the age of 28–29 were quite high for those who were youths in the 1990s.

The procurement and maintenance of employment require various kinds of qualifications. Having a driver's license is a relevant example. In a literature review, Aretun and Nordbakke (2014) demonstrated that holding a driver's license is of particular relevance for youths without higher education. Hence, a person is more employable if they are allowed to drive a car.

All covariates in the following analysis refer to registrations no later than 2007. The dependent variable, long-term employment, refers to former SEN students registered in permanent work in 2015 as well as in 2007. Permanent work includes, in this case, different combinations of work and disability benefits. Those on maternity leave at any of these two points of time or engaged in education in 2007 and work in 2015 are included as long-term employed as well. The employment status in the years between 2007 and 2015 are unknown. The degree of stability could indeed be variable with respect to the employment status of each individual. While some might have held the same job from their late twenties to mid-thirties, others might have experienced unemployment, change of employer, attending school for some time, and so on. However, there is a reason to believe that holding a permanent job in both in 2007 and 2015 is a strong indication of long-term employment.

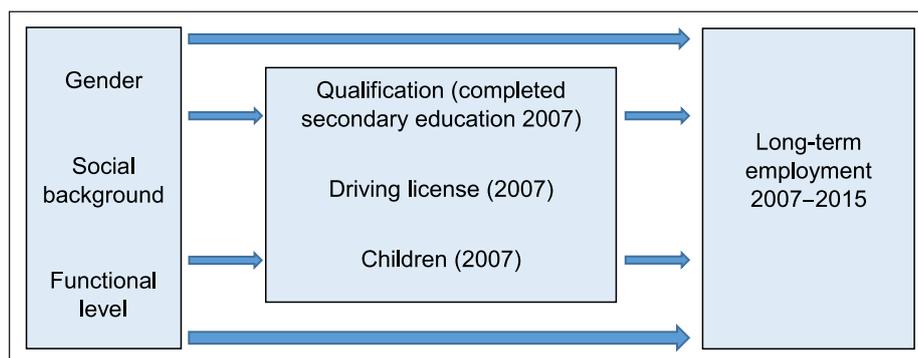


Figure 1: The assumed relationship between six covariates and long-term employment.

The Probability of Being Long-term Employed

Of the 253 former SEN students, 65.2% were long-term employed. Observing the covariates one by one, we can consider how each of the five independent variables separately influences long-term employment.

Table 1 indicates the importance of gender, functional level, social background, the qualification from upper secondary education, and the status of holding a driver's license with respect to long-term employment.

The percentage of long-term employed men are relatively high (73%). The corresponding figures for women are significantly lower (55%). Similarly, 71% of those labelled as having the relatively smallest functional challenges (first to the third quartile) when entering upper secondary school are long-term employed when compared to the 45% of those with the largest functional challenges (fourth quartile). Four out of five (80%) of those who have achieved academic or vocational qualifications in their late twenties are long-term employed whereas this is the case only among 49% of those without such qualifications. Further, almost three of four (74%) of those who had achieved a driver's license are long-term employed. Among those lacking it, only 45% were long-term employed. 76% of those who were parents by 2007 were long-term employed, while this goes for 60% of those without children. Finally, the differences concerning social background are insignificant.

The bivariate analysis indicates the importance of the selected covariates. However, there is a possibility of a correlation between two or more of the independent variables. The former students reported as having the most severe disabilities when starting school might, for instance, also be those who, to the greatest extent, fail to obtain a driver's license or academic or vocational qualifications. A separate analysis (not shown here) confirms this. Multivariate analysis is thus necessary to control these kinds of covariances. We need to know whether the importance of formal qualification as well as a driver's license is still relevant when controlled for the other variables included in our analysis. In our case, logistic regression is useful as an analytical tool for further analysis.

When controlled for each of the other variables, the probability of long-term employment is more than twice as large for men when compared to women (**Table 2**). Those labelled as having the smallest functional challenges at the start of upper secondary school have a non-significant higher probability of being long-term employed when compared to their counterparts. There seems to be no correlation between the social background and long-term employment of these former special needs students (to be characterised as high, at least one parent should have higher education or be holding a leading job position). Furthermore, the probability of being long-term employed is more than three times higher for those who have achieved academic or vocational qualification in the period leading up to their late twenties when compared to those who have not obtained such qualification within this period. Similarly, the probability of those holding a driver's license or having children in their late twenties being long-term employed is almost two times higher when compared to those without a driver's licence or children. Overall, the six covariates explain 24% of the variance in the dependent variable.

As described earlier, young disabled men in most cases are better off than women when it comes to long-term employment. To investigate the interaction of the covariates further, a separate analysis is needed. These analyses illustrate how covariates influence the probability of long-term employment differently for men and women. For women with the smallest functional challenges, the probability of long-term employment seems to be two times higher when compared to those with the largest functional challenges. For men, the corresponding figures are smaller. However, neither of these differences is statistically significant. Regarding social background, the situation for women and men is quite similar and shows no statistically significant differences.

Table 1: Bivariate analysis: Percentage of former students who were long-term employed 2007–15 (n = 253).

Covariates	Values	Long-term employed (%)	n
Gender	0. Women	55	96
	1. Men	73**	157
Functional level (secondary school)	0. Fourth quartile (lowest level)	45	47
	1. First to the third quartile	71***	206
Social background	0. Low	67	176
	1. High	66	77
Qualification (completed secondary education 2007)	0. No qualification	49	109
	1. Academic or vocational qualification	80***	144
Driver's license (2007)	0. No driver's license	45	67
	1. Driver's license	74***	186
Children (2007)	0. No children	60	101
	1. Children	76*	152

* $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2: Logistic regression: How different covariates influence the long-term employment of former students who started upper secondary education with special educational needs. Odds ratios*.

Independent variables		Odds ratios		
		All (n = 253)	Females (n = 96)	Males (n = 157)
Gender	0. Women			
	1. Men	2.2*		
Functional level (secondary school)	0. Fourth quartile			
	1. First to the third quartile	1.7	2.0	1.6
Social background	0. Low			
	1. High	1.0	0.8	1.1
Qualification (completed secondary education 2007)	0. No qualification			
	1. Academic or vocational	3.2***	3.7**	3.0**
Driver's license (2007)	0. No driver's license			
	1. Driver's license	1.8 ⁺	0.9	3.3**
Children (2007)	0. No children			
	1. Children	1.8 ⁺	1.4	2.6 ⁺
Nagelkerke R Square		0.24	0.18	0.25

⁺ $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. For each independent variable, the value 0 is the reference category.

* The dependent variable is defined in this way: 0 = not long-term employed; 1 = long-term employed.

Furthermore, the probability of long-term employment of those who have achieved academic or vocational qualification is significantly higher when compared to those without such qualifications, irrespective of gender. However, academic or vocational qualifications seems particularly important for women. Women with such qualifications are almost four times more likely to be long-term employed when compared to those without the same. Corresponding figures for men indicate that having such qualifications triples their probability of long-term employment.

Holding a driver's license seems particularly crucial for men. Men holding a driver's license are more than three times more likely to be long-term employed when compared to those who don't. For women, there are no statistically significant differences in long-term employment whether or not they hold a driver's license.

Finally, having children might reduce the probability of being long-term employed, especially among women. However, the analysis instead indicates that men having children are more likely to be long-term employed than those without children. Overall, the covariates explain more of the variance in the dependent variable when it comes to long-term employment for men (25%) than women (18%).

The analysis reveals the importance of education as well as other kinds of qualifications – in this case, the importance of holding a driver's license in the probability of former SEN students being long-term employed. Furthermore, the analysis reveals certain interesting differences concerning how these covariates influence the probability of long-term employment in men versus women. Women's probability of long-term employment depends on academic or vocational qualifications to a larger degree when compared to men's. The opportunity to complete upper secondary education as adolescents or in early adulthood seems particularly important for women. Holding a driver's license seems to be an alternative route to long-term employment to a higher degree for men than for women. Therefore, the importance of a driver's license for men might as well be one of the reasons why more men acquire such employment than women.

Discussion

The time span of this study is twenty years so that it is well suited for the analysis of long-term employment through a life course perspective. We can capture changes through an important part of the life course of young people who, in our case, started upper secondary school as SEN in the mid-1990s. The analysis reflects that the transition from school to work is a long-term process.

However, the study has some limitations as well. The distinction between youth and adulthood is blurred. This is a challenge to any attempt to divide life into age-limited phases as in the case of our analysis. One example relates to the opportunity of a second chance to achieve upper secondary vocational qualification through apprenticeships and experience-based trade certification for adults (Bratsberg, Nyen & Raaum 2017). This opportunity does not apply exclusively to young adults in their twenties. In fact, the number of former special needs students in our study holding a diploma of upper secondary education increased from 56.9% in 2007 to 62.5% in 2015. Former SEN students do not necessarily follow a linear trajectory from school to work (Langøy 2017: 62). Given the research design of our analysis, changes applying to the covariates, such as formal qualifications, are only registered until

2007. Regardless of such shortcomings and other methodological limitations discussed earlier, the longitudinal data of this study still has some obvious advantages – the long timespan of study being one of them. Moreover, the risk of heavy biases common to longitudinal data has been controlled as demonstrated by a separate attrition analysis presented earlier in the paper.

The empirical analysis reveals, in short, the significance of formal qualifications as well as the importance of holding a driver's license, considering the probability of long-term employment of former students. These results are of course fundamentally relevant but even more remarkable if related to gender.

For instance, the probability of being long-term employed is higher for men than for women. This gap is a manifestation of the conclusions in a review on the employment and gender of people with disabilities (Lindsay et al. 2018). Many studies revealed that men with disabilities have better employment outcomes than their counterparts. This finding is notable in its own right. However, the objective of our study goes beyond this.

As individuals travel through time, their lives, as well as the context of their journeys, change. The cohorts of this study have probably benefited from the overall favourable situation in the Norwegian economy in the years of their early adulthood. They might as well have benefited from belonging to the small birth cohorts of the late 1970s (cf. Easterlin 1987). Nevertheless, the probability of being long-term employed is quite low for women, even though the analysis includes part-time workers and those on maternity leave. Therefore, this study is a manifestation of the findings of many other studies concerning employment rates among people with disabilities, especially women.

The differences men and women experience during the transition from school to work are visible at an early stage. A previous study of this transition illustrates this (Båtevik & Myklebust 2006). When the former SEN students were in their early twenties, the differences between men and women were prominent. Several factors significantly influence women's transition from school to work at this stage of the life course. Early motherhood dramatically reduced the probability of the transition to work. Furthermore, the functional level, as reported by the teachers, significantly influenced these young women's early transition to work. None of these covariates seemed to be of decisive importance when referring to men. However, in their early twenties, qualifications based on upper secondary education seemed to be far more crucial for men than women.

Returning to the situation of the late twenties and up to the mid-thirties wherein long-term employment is in question, the role of different covariates is somewhat changed. Nevertheless, differences concerning the employment of men and women are still evident. Certain circumstances of life change for men as well as women when they are in their late twenties and in their thirties. The composition of the group alters with time. Some of those who had no children in their early twenties became parents. Some of those who had no formal academic or vocational qualification in their early twenties acquired such competence in the ensuing years, and so on.

As underpinned by Borg (2008), education is particularly important when it comes to people with different kinds of disabilities. The role of formal, academic, or vocational qualification in the current study confirms this. The probability of being long-term employed is significantly higher for those holding such qualifications regardless of gender. This represents a significant change when compared to the situation of the early part of the transition from school to work. At an early stage, such qualifications are particularly important for men (cf. Båtevik & Myklebust 2006). It is interesting to note that this picture is somewhat altered when in their thirties. Educational qualifications seem particularly important for the long-term employment of women.

Moreover, it is notable that only men benefit significantly as long-term employees from holding a driver's license. This makes them privileged when compared to their female counterparts as they profit both from having completed their secondary education and from holding a driver's license.

The importance of a driver's license is at least twofold when it comes to employment (Aretun & Norbakke 2014; Lindsay 2017). Firstly, there is a wide range of jobs where a driver's license is a prerequisite to perform basic work. Transport workers and, in many cases, artisans are obvious examples. These are mostly male-dominated occupations. In this respect, the results might be interpreted as a reflection of a gendered labour market. Second, a driver's license might be a prerequisite for commuting to work every day. Hence, a driver's license is an asset for the employment of both women and men.

Conclusion

This study shows that the probability of being long-term employed is quite low for women who were SEN students in upper secondary education. However, the probability of long-term employment is significantly higher for both men and women who have achieved formal upper secondary education qualification when compared to those who have not. However, contrary to women, holding a driver's license seems to be just as important for men in order to maintain employment.

If the objective were to secure long-term employment for as many SEN students as possible, one option to do the same is to ensure diversity regarding the opportunities for completing secondary education. This study, as well as other life course studies on people with different kinds of disabilities, illustrate that the trajectories leading to work might not always be linear. As such, it is important to secure social institutions, including an education system that ensures flexibility.

Ethics and Consent

The study was approved by NSD Data Protection Official for Research.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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