

IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN ON DISABLED PEOPLE

Early evidence from the UK

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INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the UK experienced one of the most devastating shocks to the economy in living memory. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and the urgent need for social distancing, major changes to the way we live and work were enforced as the UK entered lockdown. While the lockdown has affected everybody, this joint research project by the University of Sheffield and the University of York shows how people with chronic health conditions and disabled people (defined as those whose health reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities) may be disproportionately impacted.

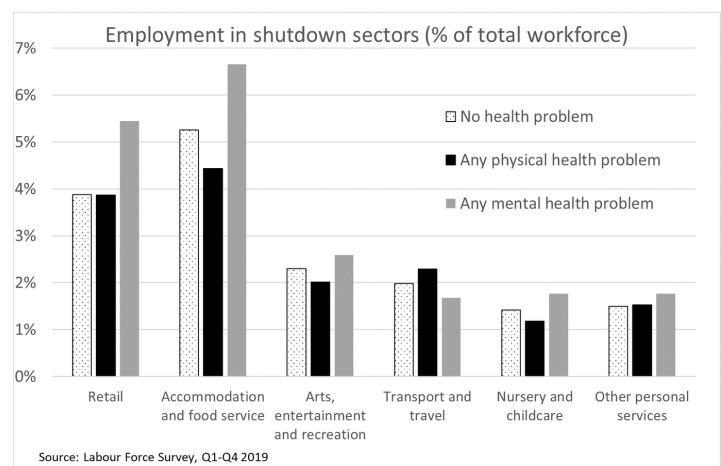
HEALTH IMPACTS

It is well documented that people with certain **pre-existing chronic health conditions** are at particular risk of serious illness or death if they become infected with COVID-19 (1). Moreover, the wider effects of the pandemic, for example increased isolation and uncertainty about the future, can have a significant impact on mental well-being, particularly for those with **pre-existing common mental disorders**, such as depression or anxiety (2).

SHUTDOWN SECTORS

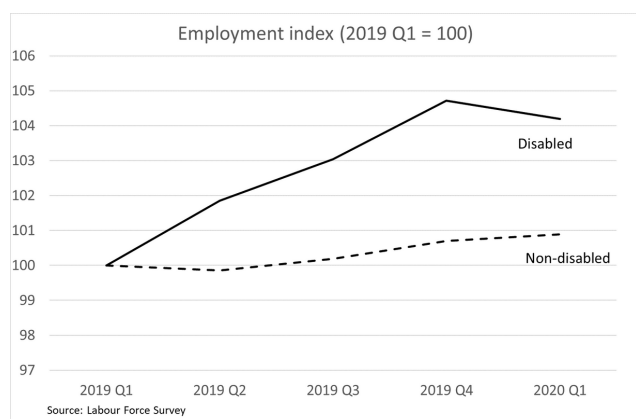
However, it is not just the pandemic itself but also the government's response that can have an adverse effect on the lives of people living with chronic health conditions.

The lockdown measures introduced by the government in March 2020 led to many businesses (e.g. non-essential retail, accommodation and food services) having to stop trading altogether, while many others (e.g. passenger transport and childcare) had to scale down their operations substantially. The graph shows that **working people with a mental health problem are more likely to be employed in a "shutdown sector"** (3) than those with no health problems, and hence are **more vulnerable to the adverse labour market consequences of lockdown**.

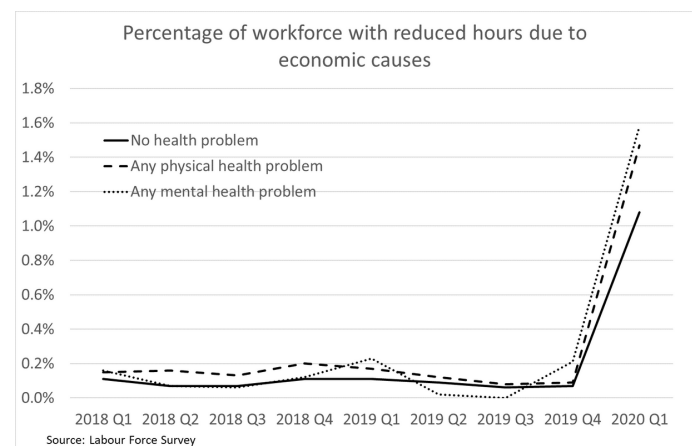


EMPLOYMENT AND WORKING HOURS

Disabled people are much less likely to be in work than non-disabled people but this gap has been falling in recent years and the government has set a target of getting one million more disabled people into work by 2027 (4). Lockdown risks reversing this trend and missing the target. Early evidence suggests that **employment rates of disabled people fell slightly in the first quarter of 2020.**



Although lockdown only started at the very end of Quarter 1, there is evidence that hours worked dropped significantly compared to the same period last year (5). Moreover, our analysis shows that **people with chronic health problems were more likely to have experienced reduced hours due to economic disruption.**



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

While the lockdown was necessary to protect health, our early findings suggest that disabled people and those with chronic health problems have been particularly vulnerable to the labour market effects. We also know that economic hardship has a profound impact on health (6), creating another unwanted legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic (7). Therefore, there is a **significant risk that lockdown may widen existing health inequalities in the long term** and policy must focus on protecting the jobs of those most at risk.

NEXT STEPS

The available data so far only includes the very early days of lockdown so our next step is to continue tracking the labour market outcomes of disabled people as the country fully entered lockdown. We also intend to explore the long run effects of the pandemic as the economic recovery is likely to be slow, particularly for those in shutdown sectors.

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