

Balancing Resources and Demands in Activation Work with Young Adults: Exploring Potentials of the Job Demands-Resources Theory

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Abstract : Internationally, many young adults not in education, employment, or training (NEET) remain in temporary solutions such as labour market measures or other forms of welfare arrangements. These trends have been associated with ineffective labour market measures, an underfunded theoretical foundation for activation work, limited competence among social workers and labour market employees in using ordinary workplaces as job inclusion measures, and an overemphasis on young adults' personal limitations such as health challenges and lack of motivation. Two competing models have been prominent in activation work: Place-Then-Train and Train-Then-Place. A traditional strategy for labour market measures has been to first motivate NEETs to sheltered work and training and then to the regular labour market (train then place). Measures such as Supported Employment (SE) and Individual Placement and Support (IPS) advocate for rapid entry into paid work at the regular labour market with close supervision and training from social workers, employees, and others (place then train). None of these models demonstrate unquestionable results. In this web of working life measures, young adults (NEETs) experience a lack of confidence in their own capabilities and coping strategies vis-à-vis labour market- and educational demands. Drawing on young adults' own experiences, we argue that the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory can contribute to the theoretical and practical dimensions of activation work. This presentation will focus on what the JD-R theory entails and how it can be fruitful in activation work with NEETs (what and how). The overarching rationale of the JD-R theory is that an enduring balance between demands (e.g., deadlines, working hours) and resources (e.g., social support, enjoyable work tasks) is important for job performance for people in any job and potentially in other meaningful activities. Extensive research has demonstrated that a balance between demands and resources increases motivation and decreases stress. Nevertheless, we have not identified literature on the JD-R theory in activation work with young adults.

Keywords : activation work, job demands-resources theory, social work, theory development

Conference Title : ICSW 2023 : International Conference on Social Work

Conference Location : Tokyo, Japan

Conference Dates : September 04-05, 2023