


## How is Psychiatric Disability and Work Conceptualized in Canadian Disability Policy?

### An Analysis of Key Documents

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## Project Investigators

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## Purpose

- To describe the values and underlying ideology of policy directed at work integration for persons with mental illness
- To determine the 'Canadian strategy' to work integration




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### Why is a look at policy important?

- Sends messages about the value of work and social impact of psychiatric disability
- Provides direction for legislation and other actions
- Discloses attitudes, values, beliefs



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### Research Questions

In the context of Canadian disability policy:

- What are the expected outcomes in the work domain?
- How is psychiatric disability defined and described?
- How is the relationship between work and psychiatric disability developed?



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### Method

- Content analysis of 14 federal (Canadian) disability policy documents related to work integration and mental illness in Canada
- Excluded provincial/territorial documents and documents that only addressed mental illness



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FINDINGS



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### Work as the Expected Outcome

- Work is consistently represented as full employment in the community based labour market
- Guided by equal opportunity/anti-discrimination focus of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, the Canadian Human Rights Act and Employment Equity Act
- Achieving full employment viewed as a particularly challenging life domain for persons with disabilities



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### Expected Work Outcomes

- Focus on initiatives that demonstrate **preparation** for economic/labour market participation
- Some inconsistencies in what constitutes “preparation for economic/labour market participation”



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### Expected Workplace Outcomes

- To achieve workplaces that meet the standards set out by the CHRA and EEA
  - Employers follow the laws
- Recruitment: To provide the largest possible pool of qualified candidates to employers
  - e.g. Removal of “discriminatory barriers in the workplace” (A Place for All, 2003)




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### Expected Federal/Government Outcomes

- Governments that work together
  - “a coordinated approach is required to ensure effective policies and programs for Canadians with disabilities. ...requires Ministers of Social Services to involve other Ministers such as those responsible for the issues of health, labour, employment, education, training, learning, finance, aboriginal affairs, women, justice, housing, transportation, Workers' Compensation, and citizenship. Together, we will work to set new disability priorities and explore potential actions, in particular joint federal/provincial/territorial actions, consistent with the document.” (In Unison 2000)




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### Descriptions of Psychiatric Disability

- Definitions of “psychiatric disability” are absent or problematic
- Lack of conceptual clarity and inconsistent use of language
- Descriptions of psychiatric disability tend to be:
  - Poorly developed
  - Equated with illness with little focus on the functional implications associated with work




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### Groupings by Function: Profile of Disabilities in Canada

- mobility 72%
- pain 70%
- agility 67%
- hearing 30%
- seeing 17%
- Psychological 15%
- learning 13%
- memory 12%
- speech 11%
- developmental 4%
- unknown 3%

(Advancing the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities)




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### Documents included broad, vague “grouping” of psychiatric disability

“For organizations that coordinated or delivered programs and services, the most common disability for their client group was **mental/intellectual disabilities** (72 percent), followed by mobility (53 percent), agility (29 percent), sight impairment (29 percent), hearing impairment (26 percent) and speaking impairment (18 percent).”

(Evaluation of the Opportunities Fund)




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### Who is being discussed?

- “For delivery organizations that provided a work term, the most frequently cited type of disability of the employee(s) placed was **mental** (41 percent), followed by mobility (35 percent) and agility (17 percent). Hearing impairment or sight impairment was cited by 14 percent and 10 percent of the organizations respectively.”

(Evaluation of Opportunities Fund)




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**Terms used within a single document:**

- Mental impairment
- Mental infirmity
- Mental condition
- Mental illness
- Mental disability

(Advancing the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities)




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**How is the relationship between work and psychiatric disability developed?**

- The impact of psychiatric disability on functioning at work is not addressed
- There are few concrete examples of people with psychiatric disabilities working in the community based labour force
- There are few concrete examples of employment supports for people with psychiatric disabilities
- The influence of stigma on work participation is specifically connected to psychiatric disability




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**How is the relationship between work and psychiatric disability developed?**

- Accommodations are sometimes linked to the type of disability
  - This is not readily done for psychiatric disability because of the overall lack of development

“...not all deaf people require sign language interpreters; not all blind people read braille; and not all people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Without proper communication and assessment of needs, effective employment accommodation cannot be achieved.” (Barrier Free Employers)




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## Summary of Findings

1. Expected outcomes in work domain:
  - Focus on full employment in community
  - CRF, CHRA, and EEA form basis for our workplace standards
  - Governments that work together
2. Description of psychiatric disability:
  - Lack conceptual clarity
3. Relationship between work and psychiatric disability:
  - Impact of psychiatric disability at work is not addressed



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## Policies Analyzed

- Federal Task Force on Disability Issues (1996). *Equal citizenship for Canadians with disabilities: The will to act*.
- HRDC (1997). *Multilateral framework on employability assistance for people with disabilities*.
- HRDC (1998). *Evaluation of the Opportunities Fund for persons with disabilities*.
- Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services (1998). *In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues*.
- HRDC (1999). *Future directions to address disability issues for the Government of Canada: Working together for full citizenship*.
- Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services (2003). *Multilateral Framework for Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities*.
- *Employment Equity Act* (1995, c. 44)
- Evaluation & Data Development, Strategic Policy & HRDC (2001). *Summative evaluation of the opportunities fund for persons with disabilities*.
- HRDC (2002). *The Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities [EAPD] National Report 2002*.
- Office for Disability Issues (2002). *Advancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities*.
- Young, W. R. (2002). *Current disability issues in Canada: a background paper*. Ottawa, Ontario: Library of Parliament.
- Canadian Human Rights Commission (2002). *Barrier-free employers: practical guide for employment accommodations for people with disabilities*.
- Canadian Human Rights Commission (2003). *A place for all: A guide to creating an inclusive workplace*.
- HRDC (2001). *In Unison 2000: Persons with disabilities in Canada*



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