

Research strategy for Rehabilitation Science 2015-2018

RESEARCH STRATEGY FOR MID SWEDEN UNIVERSITY

Research at Mid Sweden University focus on strategic areas where the University can conduct research of high international quality and where there are strong research needs in the region or in the society. Added to this is research that is vital to ensure the training of scientific extension. The research includes both subject-based basic- and applied research. The main vision is; "**Forest and mountains as resources for business and quality of life.**" Central to **Forest** is research in the areas *Forest as a resource* and *Information technology industries and digital services*. Central to **Mountain** is research in *Health and Sport* and *Tourism and experiences*. The vision is divided into two thematic areas, **Enterprise and Growth** and **Quality of Life and Welfare**, which cuts right across disciplines and faculties. The vision includes both strong areas where the University currently conducts research of high scientific quality and development areas where the university sees a strategic need of strengthening research.

Research at Mid Sweden University should have high academic quality and be of relevance to the community. Collaboration with external stakeholders and increased external funding will be sought. The research will be operated in international collaboration and of high international quality. Within profiled areas should scientists at Mid Sweden University be among the internationally leading.

RESEARCH STRATEGY FOR REHABILITATION SCIENCE

The research in rehabilitation science is strongly connected to thematic area **Quality of Life and Welfare** and the central research area *Health and Sport*. Research is concentrated around issues concerning health in working life. Main goals with the research are to analyse and identify factors in working life that lead to good health and a sustainable working life, and factors that increase the chances of returning to work from sick-leave and unemployment. The research team is multidisciplinary and use both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research is produced in collaboration within the unit and together with national and international researchers and stakeholders.

This research area is important and highly motivated from different perspectives. For the individual, gainful employment and inclusion in working life are important factors for well-being. Thus, an inclusive working life characterized by good working conditions is a prerequisite for good public health in general. Several governmental investigations, e.g. the comprehensive Socialförsäkringsrapport from March 2015, highlight issues of health/illness, work environment and work organisation, and these aspects association with sick leave and termination of employment. Many investigations have shown that the exclusion from the labour market due to long term

sick leave and early retirement will contribute to major labour shortages in the near future. For the organization, a shortage of qualified workers in combination with demographic change presents new challenges and needs for strategies to retain internal labour force. Strategies to counter this development need to be promoted.

Further, studies show that poor health and sick leave is higher among women in most sectors and regions in working life, giving rise to studies that attempt to analyse gender differences. Research suggests that some of the difference between men and women in terms of welfare levels can be traced to men's and women's different conditions in work and family life. Therefore, it is a need for research that analyses the factors that can facilitate for employees to create a balance between work and family life, and thus reduce the risk of stress and ill-health and promote good health.

Today there is also considerable uncertainty about the factors, methods and models that are effective in terms of rehabilitating people back into work once they become sick or unemployed. Many reports and articles have pointed to the fact that we still know very little about the rehabilitation methods that work well and what works less well. Some reports even suggest that people who have not undergone any vocational rehabilitation have greater chances of returning to work than those who have undergone rehabilitation. It is therefore a need for research that can increase knowledge about the methods and models that lead to good results in vocational rehabilitation.

In conclusion, there is a great need for more knowledge about the factors and models that contribute to health promotion processes and good health in the workplace, and factors and methods that can increase chances of returning to work from sick leave or unemployment.

In view of the above introduction, main goals of the research in Rehabilitation science is to analyse and identify factors that lead to good health and a sustainable working life and increased chances of returning to work from sick leave and unemployment. This means that both factors that contribute to a healthier working life and the success of vocational rehabilitation are in focus. Research focuses on three key aspects of modern working life and what they mean for the possibility of creating a healthier and sustainable working life and effective vocational rehabilitation: 1 Health-promoting working life, 2 Work-family balance, 3 Disability management and Vocational rehabilitation.

1. Health-promoting working Life

In the area of a health-promoting working life, the emphasis is on analyses of health-promoting factors, methods and models that prevent illness and generate conditions

for employee health and positive organizational outcomes. Our research in this field is focusing on workplace health promotion and prevention programs in both private and public organizations, health-promoting factors in female dominated workplaces, leadership and health, and health and psychosocial working conditions in small enterprises and among self-employed.

2. Work family-balance

Since there today is a policy goal that both men and women should engage in a professional career while at the same time taking active responsibility for home and children's issues of balance and conflict between work and family life is an important research area. Key questions in focus are: What does the division of paid and unpaid work within couples mean for wellbeing? What do work-family conflict/balance means for the wellbeing? What measures should be taken to make it easier for parents to combine work and family life in a healthy way?

3. Disability Management and Vocational rehabilitation

Research within this area focus on questions related to Disability Management (DM) and vocational rehabilitation. DM is a valuable approach, not only for improving rehabilitation and return-to-work programs and thereby retains employees, but also to improve working conditions and organisational development. Research also concerns the development of new models and methods for practical use in vocational rehabilitation and health consequences and coping strategies among sick-listed and unemployed.

Management and organisation of research

The research environment in Rehabilitation Science consists of researchers from different scientific disciplines who are engaged in partly common research problems. It allows for new knowledge that is not likely to be generated if research is produced by researchers from a common discipline. The scientific excellence of Rehabilitation Science is in the current situation good. Most persons have extensive experience in education and/or research in Rehabilitation Science and a majority of lecturers, associate professors and professors have internal and/or externally funded research in the service. All lecturers and professors have undergone supervisor training or have been deemed by the faculty to have equivalent qualifications.

The large majority of the researchers on all levels are men which means that there is a need for recruiting more women. This will be done by encouraging promising researchers that are women to apply for lectureships that will be announced within the nearest future. A step in this direction is a newly recruitment of a promising female researcher as a post-doc in rehabilitation science.

The research is done both by researchers individually and by research groups; some are more informal and some are more formal. Sometimes there are no sharp boundaries between the different research groups and interactions in-between research groups and individuals occur frequently. The main responsible person for the management and organisation of research is the “ämnesansvarige”. This person also chairs the “ämneslag” where questions regarding education and research at the unit are discussed. “Ämneslag” is held continuously several times each semester. Research is also discussed at seminars that are held continuously for all researchers and Ph D students at the department.

Strategy for future research

A major goal is that all researchers within rehabilitation science should be active on the international research arena and that some will be among the international leading within the research area Health in working life. The research activities will be of high academic quality, done in international collaboration and be of relevance to the community. Collaboration with external stakeholders and increased external funding will be sought.

The researchers will continue to develop research within the area of health in working life. Focus is both on factors that lead to good health and a sustainable working life and factors that can increase the chances of returning to work from sick leave and unemployment. The research within these areas is still under developed and a number of reports and political statements have pointed out the importance of more research and knowledge about factors that can lead to a more inclusive, healthier and sustainable working life. These gaps in research and knowledge are an opportunity for the unit.

Future development of main research areas

This part present some perspectives of the strategic planning priorities regarding future research in the areas of “Health-promoting working life”, “Work-family balance” and “Disability management and Vocational rehabilitation”.

1. Health-promoting working life

In the area Health-promoting working life future intentions are to continue and develop research in on-going projects together with other researchers at Mid Sweden University and researchers from other universities. Although extensive research has identified key working environment factors related to negative health consequences among employees, the knowledge about how to achieve a more health-promoting

working life is unsatisfactory. Research areas and studies that we will develop are as follows.

Although small business research are a fast growing research area, current knowledge about health, well-being, psychosocial working conditions and work life balance is insufficient. This fact is surprising due to that of the private enterprises in the European Union, about 99 percent are solo (no employees), micro (< 10 employees) or small (< 50 employees). These types of organizations are considered to be socially and economically important as they provide jobs and contribute to entrepreneurship and innovation. Therefore we plan to continue and develop studies concerning health and working conditions among micro enterprises and self-employed.

We are also planning for more studies concerning workplace health change processes in organizations and relations between leadership and health, with particular focus on female leaders. Although, we have published some articles from on-going projects analyses of longitudinal data will give more knowledge about effects of studied change processes. Results so far provides evidence concerning differences between co-workers and leaders health and psychosocial working conditions in public sector workplaces, which indicate the importance of different workplace health measures for these two categories of employees. The results also indicate that relatively extensive workplace health interventions have limited effects on co-workers and leaders perception of their health and psychosocial working conditions. Conclusions are therefore that it is important to develop more high quality workplace health interventions focusing on individual and organizational based measures in public sector workplaces.

There is also a lack of knowledge concerning effective workplace change programs in working life and different organizations. In two on-going projects, we are performing qualitative and quantitative studies of support from occupational health services in small enterprises and interventions concerning alcohol and drug problems among seasonal employees. An ambition is to extend these studies in new projects together with national and international researchers.

Together with other researchers from Mid Sweden University we also plan for studies concerning relations between leadership and outcomes concerning health, quality and effectiveness among temporary workers and workers in enterprises based on data that we have collected in earlier research projects. These relations are not so well investigated and it is also a need for more research about leaders own health promotion activities and working conditions.

In the area of a health-promoting working life we also study health-promoting factors in other sectors in working life and disability management strategies in Swedish organizations. A strategy is to maintain and develop more contacts with researchers from research networks that we are participating in, e.g. The Swedish Forum for Working Life Research (FALF) and WOLF (Work-Lipids-Fibrogen) with the purpose to develop our research activities in this research area.

2. Work-family balance

Questions regarding gender equality in working life and work-family balance are central aspects of the modern working life and in the struggle for creating a sustainably and healthy working life for both women and men. Therefore this research will be further developed as a major research area within the unit.

A lot has changed regarding the levels of involvement in working and family life among women and men during the last decades. In one sense we have come closer to achieving gender equality. On the other hand however, one can conclude that it is mainly women who have changed their behaviour. Even though men have taken on more of the responsibility for household work and childcare it has not been to the same extent as women's increased engagement in paid work. Women still have the main responsibility for housework, caring for children and for emotionally dealing with relationships

This development has resulted in the fact that most women today earn their own living and therefore have more influence over their lives. On the other hand there is an obvious risk for experiencing role conflicts and role overload. One question, which is still partly unanswered, is what the level of asymmetry or equality within relationships means for the wellbeing of women and men.

Thus, the future research within this research area will attempt to fill knowledge gaps by analysing how the distribution of unpaid and paid work within couples is associated with subjective wellbeing in a comparative and longitudinal perspective, when controlling for measures of gender ideology, dissatisfaction with the division of labour and work-family conflicts. Also relationships between policies, division of labour within couples and indicators of wellbeing and life-satisfaction will be done. Studies will be done together with researchers from Mid Sweden University, other Swedish universities and universities outside of Sweden that are already research partners.

The research will be based on both longitudinal and internationally comparative datasets. Examples of comparative datasets are "The European Social Survey Program" (ESS), which is an ongoing comparative study conducted in around 30

European countries, and the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), which is an ongoing comparative study of a number of countries worldwide. One longitudinal survey that will be used is a combination of ULF (Survey of Living Conditions) and the register database LISA (Longitudinell Integrationsdatabas för Sjukförsäkrings- och Arbetsmarknadsstudier).

An equal distribution of work within couples, a critical component to gender equality, is an important political target in most parts of the Western world. Therefore it is essential to increase our understanding of the relationship between the distribution of paid and unpaid work within couples, work-family balance and women's and men's wellbeing. An equal distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women is assumed to be positive for both individuals and society. However, it is important to verify this assumption with empirical research. Also, results that highlight problems and stressful conditions may be important when trying to overcome obstacles in the struggle for gender equality. Knowledge about the association between gender equality, work-family balance and wellbeing is also central in the struggle to create good public health.

3. Disability Management and Vocational Rehabilitation

In Sweden, sickness absence rates increased in the late 1990s to the highest level in Europe and there has also been a shift from short-term absence to more long-term sickness absence. Despite decreased sickness absence figures during the following period, sickness absence still means great economic burdens for society, organizations and individuals. Sickness absence is a complex phenomenon and there is no single factor that explains the great differences and fluctuations between and within Sweden and other European countries.

There are also great differences concerning different groups in working life when looking at sickness absence, sickness presence and other health outcomes. For example are women close to twice as much absent from work than men, which is in line with observed gender differences on self-reported health and differences in labour supply. Other vulnerable groups are individuals with disabilities, foreign born individuals and individuals with low education.

Year 2015 is the last year in an on-going Disability Management project with researchers from University of Linköping. The overall aim of the study was to investigate the nature of the contact between the employer and the employees during long terms sickness absence. The results support the hypothesis that good contact and support are important for chances to return to work. The project has resulted in three international publications. Also, the earlier mentioned project about workplace health

interventions in small enterprises will study rehabilitation processes with a workplace perspective.

At present, several researchers at our department are involved in an international comparative project on Disability Management. In that project we co-operate with researchers from Australia, Switzerland, Canada and China and the aim of the project is to describe, compare and analyse Disability Management strategies in large private sector companies. The project is financed through 2015, and we have applied for external more funding from FORTE and AFA.

Our intention concerning future research more specific on vocational rehabilitation is to continue and increase intervention studies about case management related models and models for co-operation between rehabilitation actors. Together with other researchers, an ambition is to follow on-going regional EU-projects where developed models for co-operation are implemented, both with quantitative register studies and qualitative case studies. We will also particularly focus on vocational rehabilitation for vulnerable groups and people with disabilities, and development of functioning rehabilitation methods for these groups.

In an interesting on-going project focus is on activities and positive emotions in the rehabilitation process. Preliminary results so far show that these factors play an important role for individual's recovery processes. Another project is a development of case management related models. The project is focusing on the role of so-called Personliga ombud (PO) and how these persons can increase the chances of returning to work among sick-listed by focusing on the individual's strengths and capabilities and being recovery-oriented and supportive.

General goals

One general goal for the unit is to maintain and *increase the amount of research funding*. This is central for the possibility to do research for the researchers and PhD students in rehabilitation science. The development of the PhD education is more or less dependent on external financing. The unit is already today relatively successful in the process of receiving research money but it can be to a higher extent and more spread among the researchers. The strategy is to continue to search for research funding from national and international research councils but also to increase the number of applications for other types of research founding, such as EU:s regional foundation.

Another goal is to *increase the cooperation with other research teams at the Department of Health science*, in Sweden, abroad and with actors outside the academia. Rehabilitation science is one out of three subjects (the other two are Public health and Sports science)

within the new Department of Health science. All these subjects also have Health science as a common PhD subject, which means that all of our PhD students are PhDs in Health science with emphasis on Rehabilitation science, Public health or Sports science. One main goal for the future is to increase the collaboration with the other subjects within the department. This is of great importance because all the separate units within the department are relatively small by themselves which makes it hard to be competitive one by one. An increased collaboration is also motivated by the fact that there are relatively few PhD students within each subject, which makes it hard to create a critical mass of students if we do not cooperate around the education of PhD students. If we will succeed to collaborate between the subjects at the Department of Health science the research can be a driving force for increasing good health in the population.

The researchers within rehabilitation science are also a driving force in the process of creating a network (the Network for Working Life Research, NAFS) at Mid Sweden University within the area of working life research. There are at the moment meetings continuously at the university where questions of how to best co-ordinate the research around working life. The goal for the unit is to be a key-actor in this network or centre and to work for the creation of a strong and competitive research group at Mid Sweden University in the area of working life and health. The NAFS network is related to the national network FALF (Network for Working Life Research) and we will lead the FALF conference 2016 in June at Campus Östersund. This activity makes it possible for us to further develop contacts with researchers from the Nordic countries.

Another goal is to *extend the collaboration with national and international researchers outside of Mid Sweden University*. Researchers already today collaborate with external researchers, but this can be developed even more. A goal is to develop the research collaboration that is currently going on within the two large EU-projects that the unit is involved in. This is a solid base for further international research collaboration and founding. One major goal for the future is to stimulate researchers and PhD students from the unit to go abroad as research fellows for longer periods. That is an important way of creating contacts with international researchers. Another goal is to attract international researchers to become research fellows at our unit.

The same thing can be said about the *collaboration with external partners outside of the academia*; there is already some cooperation but it can be more developed. One good example of such cooperation is the ongoing research project "Models for occupational health service in micro enterprises" which is a collaboration project between researchers from the unit and the occupational health service in Sweden and Norway. There is a major goal to increase the number of these kinds of collaborative projects

because they give good opportunities for creating practical knowledge that can be implemented directly into the working life.

Criteria for goals achieved 2015-2018

Areas of importance	Criteria for goals achieved
• External research funding:	
- Research applications	The majority of the department's researchers submit at least one research application per year
- Research founding	At least 50 percent of the department's research is externally funded
• International and national collaboration:	
- Co-publication with national and international researchers.	At least 80 percent of publications co-authored with external researchers
- Participation in international and national research projects/programs	The majority of the department's researchers involved in at least one external project/program every year
• Activity on the international research arena:	
- Publications in international pre-reviewed journals	At least 80 percent of publications in international pre-reviewed journals
- Participation at international research conferences	Each researcher should participate in at least one international conference per year
- Arranging research conferences	Arrange one major national or international research conference
- Visiting researcher from our department at international research institutions and visiting researchers at our department	At least one visiting researcher at an international research institutions or a visiting researchers at our department per year
• Co-production with non-academic actors:	
- Co-funded Ph D students and research projects with external actors	At least one co-founded Ph D student or research project each year
- Co-publication with non-academic actors	At least one publication together with a non-academic actor
• Relevance to Society:	

- Publication and participation in the media and popular science	At least one publication in popular science per year
- Attention and influence in politics, the media and among other external actors	Research results cited by an external actor at least once a year
- Presentation of research for external actors	Arrange two seminars for external actors where research is presented

God forskningssed

Inom ämnet rehabiliteringsvetenskap diskuterar vi kontinuerligt i lärarkollegiet hur vi kan bidra till att forskningens kvalitet höjs och hur forskningen på ett ansvarsfullt sätt kan användas till att utveckla vårt samhälle. Alla forskningsprojekt som kräver etikprövning skickas till Regionala etiska kommittén i Umeå för granskning. På forskningsseminarier i lärarkollegiet är såväl forsknings- som forskareetik ett tema när manuskript, projekt eller ansökningar diskuteras. En av professorerna har under många år haft ett särskilt intresse för frågorna och har mer eller mindre självantagit sig att på lärarkollegiets vägnar bevaka frågorna lite mer noggrant.

Etiska överväganden och riktlinjer spelar en mycket viktig roll och vi genomför kontinuerligt 3-timmars seminarium på grundutbildnings- och magisterprogrammet i förbindelse med uppsats-skrivandet. Teman som tas upp och diskuteras är: varför forska, hur bedrivs forskning samt kvalitetskrav i forskningen, vem har ansvaret för kvaliteten, nytta med forskning, olika källor och deras tillförlitlighet, hur man hänvisar till olika källor, vetenskaplig oredlighet, etik och moral, lagstiftning och etiska kodex samt hur en granskningsprocess går till. I övrigt diskuteras forskningsetik i alla metodkurser under de båda utbildningsprogrammen.