



## Research on the Working Life Cycle of People with Disabilities (The Eighth Research Period - Final Research Period)

-The Eighth Survey on the Working Life on Young People (2022) and Middle Aged and Older People (2023) with disabilities -

(Research Report No. 181) SUMMARY

### [Keywords]

Panel survey  
Longitudinal survey  
Career development  
Working life cycle  
Working life  
Working conditions  
Satisfaction level  
Physical disability  
Intellectual disability  
Mental disability  
Visual disability  
Hearing disability  
Physical motor disability  
Internal disability  
Reasonable accommodation  
Employment rate  
Middle and old age  
Increased severity of disabilities  
Great East Japan Earthquake  
COVID-19 pandemic

**[Abstract]**

The research project, *Research on the Working Life Cycle of People with Disabilities*, began in 2007. Over the period 2008–2023, the study was completed following the undertaking of eight research periods, with each period lasting for two years.

Utilizing the characteristics of the panel survey method throughout the eight research periods, this research report summarizes various analysis results that contribute to an understanding of the working life cycle of persons with disabilities.

Analysis was conducted on how employment rates, modes of employment, occupation, working hours, wages, bonuses, and reasons for working for persons with disabilities changed as individuals aged. These results are summarized based on age group (generation) and disability type. Furthermore, the effects of the increased severity of disabilities in middle and old age and the influence of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic are shown, respectively. This report also organizes information pertaining to issues to be addressed.

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## **2 Research period**

FY2022–FY2024

## **3 Structure of the report**

Chapter 1: Background, purpose, and methods of the survey research on the working life cycle of people with disabilities

Chapter 2: Simple tabulation regarding the working life cycle of persons with disabilities

Chapter 3: Influence of the increased severity of disabilities during middle and old age on working styles

Chapter 4: Analysis of the influence of major changes in societal trends

Chapter 5: General discussion

Results of the eighth period survey

## **4 Background and purpose of the research**

“Working life cycle” within the context of *research on the working life cycle of people with disabilities* (hereinafter “this study”) is a term created using the process that begins with birth and ends with death—the *life cycle*—as an analogy. It is used to refer to the overall picture encompassing various common experiences during working life, including employment, continued employment, leave of absence and returning to work, resignation and re-employment, career development, and, finally, retirement from working life.

For persons with disabilities to be able to have a smooth employment experience, simply paying attention to a narrow perspective—employment and situations involving tasks at work—is insufficient.

Rather, it is important to have a grasp of the overall picture regarding the working life cycle and an understanding of challenges arising in various situations in implementing detailed employment measures in response to these situations and challenges.

In this study, longitudinal surveys (panel surveys) targeting various persons with disabilities were conducted. Subsequently, simple tabulation was conducted to gain an understanding of the overall process related to the situation behind the working life cycle. This study was also conducted to gather basic information on the development of policies related to improvements moving forward so that smooth employment for persons with disabilities and improvements in employment management at companies can be realized.

## **5 Method**

### **(1) Subjects of this research study**

In this study, the “survey of the first half of professional life” (hereinafter “early survey”) was administered to younger individuals who had less experience in terms of working life (who were aged 39 or younger at the time this research study commenced in 2008). Moreover, the “survey of the latter half of professional life” (hereinafter “late survey”) was administered to individuals of middle or old age with some degree of experience with working life (who were aged 40 or older at the time this research study commenced in 2008). These individuals were selected as the subjects of this study over the research period of 16 years (2008–2023), where the researchers endeavored to gain an understanding of the working life cycle.

The subjects in this research study were individuals with visual, hearing, internal, intellectual, mental, or physical motor disabilities or a combination of said disabilities. The lower age limit for participants at the time this study commenced was set at 15 years, with this being the time at which compulsory education ceased to be mandatory, whereas the upper age limit was set at approximately 55 years. Individuals who worked 20 hours or longer per week, either with corporations or were self-employed, were selected. Participants were recruited with assistance from stakeholder groups, establishments at which numerous individuals with disabilities were employed, as well as vocational rehabilitation agencies. In addition to the 1,026 individuals registered at the time the first research period commenced, 241 individuals were registered during the third research period, leading to a total number of 1,267 subjects registered during this study. Even in cases of registered individuals who resigned from employment, these individuals continued to be studied as subjects to gain information about the conditions surrounding career development following resignation.

### **(2) Survey contents and methods**

Aside from external circumstances, such as occupation type and situations regarding employment, information regarding internal factors, such as the significance of and satisfaction levels toward employment, was gathered with regard to the working life cycle of persons with disabilities. Additionally,

information related to the following was obtained: provision of reasonable accommodations, circumstances surrounding support in regional areas, as well as life cycle-related factors such as marriage, the birth of children, and changes in family situation. Furthermore, factors occurring due to and in close relation to major changes in societal trends were recorded. The above-stated information was gathered as comprehensive research contents for this study. In principle, all common details across the eight research periods were used in this study. Nevertheless, some questions were administered in alternating research periods. In some cases, questions or answer options were modified or added following changes in legal regulations as well as problem-related awareness.

## **6 Summarized results of the study**

### **(1) Simple tabulation regarding the working life cycle of persons with disabilities**

A major advantage resulting from the use of the panel survey method in this study was that this allowed the researchers to track individual subjects while gaining a wide perspective on the changes that occurred in the lives of working persons with disabilities due to age and period. Aside from general tendencies that can be observed in working life cycles due to age, certain characteristics of the working life cycle occur based on the period during which one is born.

Accordingly, the strengths of the panel research method were used to highlight tendencies in groups of individuals. Respondents were grouped based on the periods during which they were born (hereinafter “generations”), with these generations being those born in 1983–1992, 1973–1982, 1963–1972, and 1946–1962. Changes that occurred in each generation following the passage of time were tracked, and analysis was conducted to elucidate the characteristics of the working life cycle occurring in each generation.

#### **[Characteristics related to working life cycle based on age group and disability type]**

The following tendencies were observed following the analysis of the circumstances of persons with disabilities in various areas related to working life:

- Regarding individuals born in 1946–1962, a reduction in employment rate was observed, starting from the fifth research period (Figure 1).
- Individuals born in 1963–1972 had a higher rate of being full-time employees compared to other generations; generational influences, taking the form of high wages, were also observed in this generation.
- Trends related to occupation type included the following: high rates of employment in *occupations related to the fields of medicine and welfare* in the case of individuals with visual disabilities, as well as high rates of employment in *administrative jobs* for individuals with physical motor disabilities and internal disabilities. Individuals with intellectual disabilities were found to have high rates of employment within *service jobs such as those related to cleaning* as well as *jobs that involved the production of items*.

- Irrespective of generation, *personal circumstances* were commonly selected as a reason for resignation. Many individuals born in 1946–1972 were found to have resigned due to *poor health*. Internal disabilities were most commonly observed as the disability type of individuals who resigned due to *poor health*.

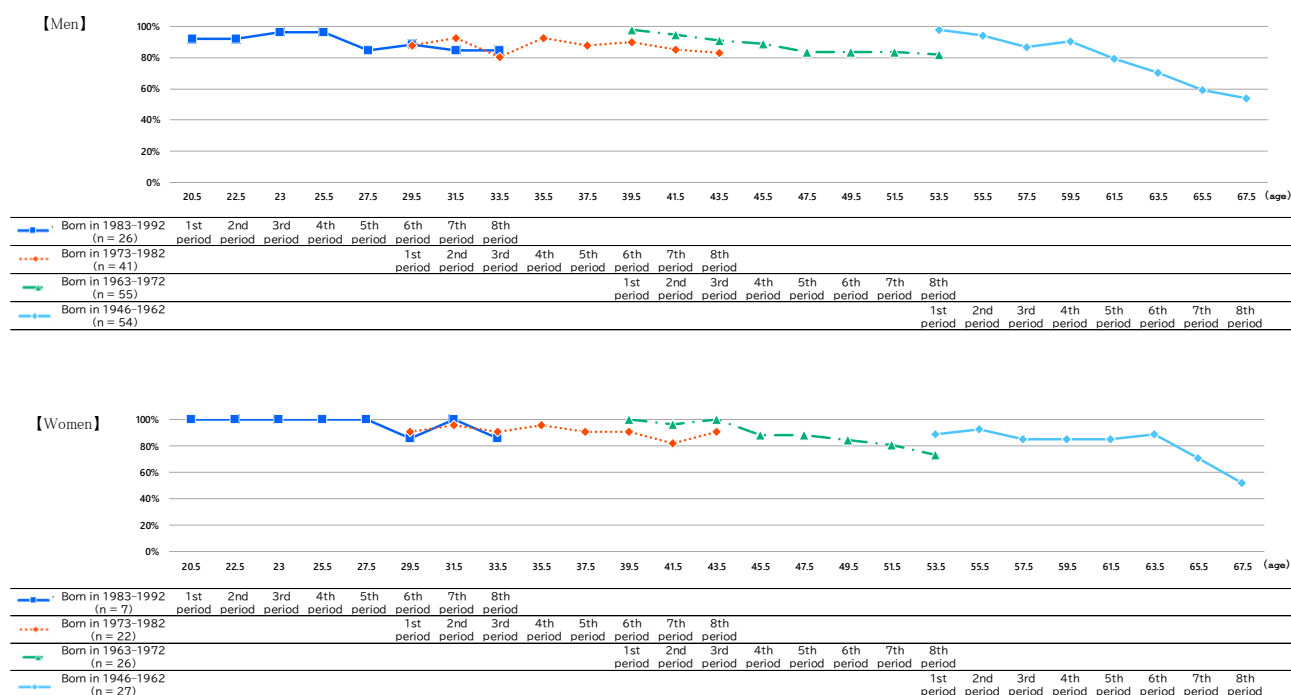


Figure 1: Changes in employment rate occurring with the passage of time in all four generations (the horizontal axis illustrates the median value of the age range)

### [Significance of employment for persons with disabilities]

The following tendencies were identified in examining the significance of employment for persons with disabilities:

- *To obtain income* was most commonly selected as the reason for employment; *wages and benefits* was least commonly selected regarding the degree of satisfaction with one's work.
- In relation to what individuals prioritized regarding work, persons with visual disabilities tended to prioritize *being able to utilize one's abilities and experiences* as well as *the contents of work*, whereas those with intellectual and mental disabilities tended to prioritize *working hours and holidays*.

### [Environmental factors related to individual disabilities and workplaces, as well as local regions]

The following tendencies were observed following the analysis of environmental factors assumed to be related to the working life cycle:

- In the case of individuals with physical motor, internal, and mental disabilities, tendencies were observed where many individuals would explain the details of their disabilities to *only a select group*

*of people* at the workplace or in companies, regardless of generation and age.

- *Making work instructions easy to understand, as well as making jobs easy to perform* was found to have been commonly selected by the youngest generation—individuals born in 1983–1992—as necessary accommodations in the workplace. For this generation, this item was also commonly selected as being accommodated for and understood in the workplace.
- Regardless of generation, age, and disability type, *family members and close individuals* were commonly chosen as parties with which consultations regarding work were conducted.

### **[Daily life related to working life]**

In analyzing daily life factors assumed to be related to the working life cycle, the following tendencies were observed.

- The rates of marriage and having children gradually increased in individuals born in 1973–1982.
- Regardless of generation and disability type, the rates at which individuals cohabited with others increased.
- Family members and close individuals were chosen as the primary party with which discussions concerning financial matters took place.

### **[Discussion]**

Following the tabulation of results in this study, specific conditions related to employment, work retention, changes in work environment taking the form of reasonable accommodations, as well as experiences, such as life events, occurring during working life became clear. These results are assumed to be significant in that they illustrate the importance of supporting persons with disabilities in adapting to changes that occur in the working life of said individuals.

## **(2) Influence of increased severity of disabilities during middle and old age on working styles**

### **[Purpose and methods of the survey]**

Within the panel data gathered during this research study, the longest duration during which changes affecting a single individual was tracked was 14 years. During this period, some individuals might have experienced an increase in the severity of their disabilities. Through the analysis of changes in working style and employment-related needs that occurred before and after increases in the severity of one's disabilities, where subjects experiencing an increase in severity of symptoms were grouped into one of two groups based on the age at which increase severity occurred (44 years and below or 45 years and older, respectively), analysis was conducted to identify notable points regarding required accommodations, as well as employment-related needs in cases where increases in the severity of disabilities occurred in middle or old age.

The subjects of analysis were individuals whose responses signified an increase in the severity of symptoms and who provided responses for three consecutive research periods (prior to, during, and following the increase in severity). These individuals were grouped by the age at which their symptoms worsened (44 or younger and 45 or older). By comparing changes in working style and employment-

related needs before and after the worsening of symptoms, the researchers examined notable points regarding accommodations related to the increased severity of disabilities in middle and old age.

## **[Results]**

The main research findings are presented as follows:

- Among those who were full-time employees before their symptoms worsened, the proportion of individuals aged 45 years or older who transitioned to non-full-time work when their symptoms worsened was low, compared to those aged 44 years or younger.
- Multiple individuals aged 45 or older underwent personnel relocation before their symptoms worsened, while no individuals aged 44 or younger were observed to experience such a transition.

## **[Discussion]**

The frequent occurrence of personnel relocation following increases in the severity of disabilities in middle and old age were observed to be significant. However, it was unclear whether these relocations were undertaken as a measure in response to reduced levels of functioning arising alongside the aging process or if they were performed for career development that considered individual age. Further evaluation is necessary.

### **(3) Analysis on the influence of major changes in societal trends**

#### **[Purpose and methods of the survey]**

Questions were added to investigate the effects of the Great East Japan Earthquake (March 2011) and the COVID-19 pandemic (2020~) that occurred during the study's research period on the employment and lives of persons with disabilities. Open-answer questions focusing on qualitative aspects related to the effects of the disaster and pandemic were also added. Investigation related to the Great East Japan Earthquake was conducted during the third research period, whereas that related to the COVID-19 pandemic was conducted during the late-stage survey during the seventh research period, as well as the early-stage survey during the eighth research period.

#### **[Influence of the Great East Japan Earthquake]**

Open-ended responses obtained from respondents in relation to the Great East Japan Earthquake regarding personal experiences, occurrences in the workplace or within the family, as well as what respondents found especially challenging during these experiences revealed that challenges related to being told to stay at the workplace, difficulties in returning home, and disruptions of essential services were commonly experienced during a disaster. The impact felt in relation to the abovementioned challenges was not limited to the effects on one's employment or daily life. Regarding challenges faced in relation to disability type, many responses gained were provided by individuals with visual disabilities; responses related to internal disabilities were relatively more common during the late-stage survey. Responses pertaining to psychological content, including those related to the occurrence of emotions such as sadness, were relatively more common during the early-stage survey. Responses that

detailed changes in one's worldview and values were also obtained. Responses related to direct changes in one's career, such as those detailing a reduced workload or resignation, were relatively more common during the early-stage survey in particular. Additionally, responses regarding disaster prevention, nuclear power, as well as aid provided to areas affected by disasters, such as that taking the form of donations or that provided by volunteers, were obtained. Responses were also obtained where individuals stated that no particular impact was being felt.

#### **[Influence of the COVID-19 pandemic]**

Similarly, regarding the influence of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, where individuals responded that changes had been experienced at work or in daily life due to measures against the pandemic, further responses regarding specific details surrounding these changes in the form of open-ended answers were requested. Consequently, it was found that the pandemic had a profound impact on the daily and working lives of persons with disabilities. Respondents also described situations related to the effects of stay-at-home requests and countermeasures against the pandemic, as well as a lack of exercise, restrictions on social interactions, and disrupted daily routines that occurred because of reduced opportunities to leave the house. Changes in work environment, such as increased time spent working from home and an increase in online work tasks, alongside reductions in working hours or wages and the occurrence of long-term closures were reported as employment-related impacts of the pandemic. Nevertheless, for certain occupations, requirements related to specific responses to the pandemic led to increases in workload.

#### **[Discussion]**

The results stated above show that local support providers and corporations should predict, prepare for, and be equipped to deal with circumstances during emergencies and normal times in the provision of employment support for persons with disabilities. The same can be said for responses taken by businesses. The results from this research period should be implemented as key information in evaluations conducted to this end.

#### **(4) General discussion**

Throughout this research report, in conducting analysis on changes in time affecting single individuals, the impact of increased severity of disabilities in middle and old age on working style, as well as that of major changes in social trends, analysis that employed the strengths of the panel research method was undertaken in identifying characteristics related to the working life cycle of working persons with disabilities, as well as various factors thought to influence said life cycle.

#### **[Characteristics of working life cycle]**

The working life cycle must be viewed as the interactions that occur between individual factors, such as individual disability or employment experience, and environmental factors, such as work environment or reasonable accommodations provided by business owners. Furthermore, as one's working life cycle is affected by the life events that one experiences, the working life cycle must be recognized as not

being solely related to situations in the workplace but as having interactions with factors such as aging, familial situation, and personal challenges. The relationship between the working life cycle and related factors must be clarified while striving for improvements in the provision of comprehensive support—in terms of employment and personal life—to working persons with disabilities, who are also individuals with personal lives. Moving forward, the characteristics of the working life cycle must be expounded based on the analysis of these interactions.

#### **[Influence of the increased severity of disabilities during middle and old age on working styles]**

The study suggested that experiences related to personnel relocation were common after disabilities became more severe in middle and old age. Moreover, young individuals who experienced increased severity in disabilities had increased tendencies to request accommodations related to *making work instructions easy to understand and making jobs easy to perform*. Furthermore, a certain number of individuals falling under this group experienced changes in modes of employment. It is important to evaluate modes of support that consider individual age while having an adequate understanding of the reasons behind such influences that occur due to generational differences.

#### **[Influence of major changes in societal trends]**

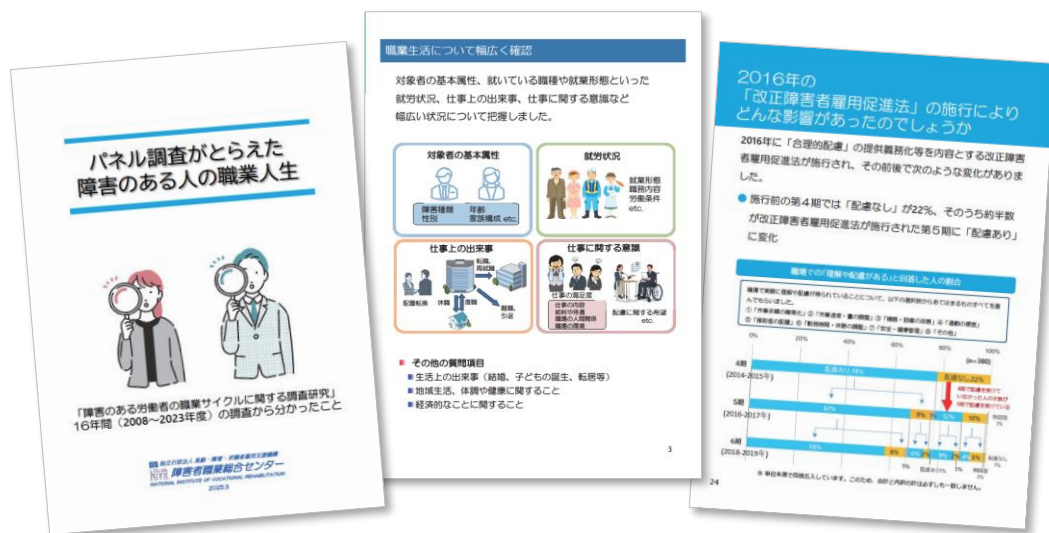
During large-scale disasters, such as the Great East Japan Earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic, the safety of persons with disabilities within their working lives are threatened. To deal with such emergency situations, business owners must respond in ways that guarantee the safety and health of persons with disabilities while strengthening information provision and maintaining employee retention. Additionally, support organizations should prepare in advance and establish systems that can meet the work-related needs of people with disabilities during large-scale disasters, as suggested in this study.

#### **[Suggestions for further research]**

This study ended in 2023, following 16 years of research. The analysis results from this study must be utilized effectively. Furthermore, as relationships between factors (such as working hours and wages) are expected to exist, such interactions must be analyzed to obtain a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness—the nature of factors and influences that affect the working life cycle of individuals with disabilities. Subsequently, evaluations regarding employment management at workplaces that can respond to individual and diverse support needs, as well as the provision of specialized support, can be conducted on an increasingly comprehensive level.

### **7 Methods of application and dissemination of research products**

The results from this study could be beneficial for governmental agencies, organizations with which persons with disabilities are affiliated, business owners, affiliated organizations, and employment support organizations. Additionally, the results from this study have been summarized and used in the creation of *The Working Life Cycle of Persons with Disabilities, as Examined through a Panel Survey*—a document future research must utilize effectively to raise stakeholder awareness.



<https://www.nivr.jeed.go.jp/research/kyouzai/kyouzai84.html>



## 8 Relevant research products

- The research and study on the working life cycle of people with disabilities: The first survey on the working life of young people with disabilities; Material Series No. 50 and No. 54, 2010
- The research and study on the working life cycle of people with disabilities (The second stage); Research Report No. 106, 2012
- The survey and research on the working life cycle of people with disabilities - The third survey on the working life of young people with disabilities; Research Report No. 118, 2014
- Research on the working life cycle of people with disabilities (The fourth research period); Research Report No. 132, 2016
- Research on the working life cycle of people with disabilities (The fifth research period); Research Report No. 148, 2019
- Research on the working life cycle of people with disabilities (The sixth research period); Research Report No. 160, 2021
- Research on the working life cycle of people with disabilities (The seventh research period); Research Report No. 170, 2023
- The working life cycle of persons with disabilities, as examined through a panel survey; 2025