

# Work ability in young adults

Akademisk avhandling

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av

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## Avhandlingen baseras på följande delarbeten

- I. Boström M, Dellve L, Thomée S, Hagberg M. Risk factors for generally reduced productivity - a prospective cohort study of young adults with neck or upper-extremity musculoskeletal symptoms. *Scand J Work Environ Health* 2008; 34(2): 120-132.
- II. Boström M, Sluiter J, Hagberg M. Changes in work situation and work ability in young female and male workers. A prospective cohort study. *BMC Public Health* 2012, 12:694.
- III. Boström M, Holmgren K, Sluiter J, Hagberg M, Grimby- Ekman A. Experiences of work ability in young workers - an exploratory interview study. *Int Arch Occup Environ Health* 2016;89(4): 629-640.
- IV. Boström M, Sluiter J, Hagberg M, Grimby-Ekman A. Opportunities for recovery at work and excellent work ability - a cross-sectional population study among young workers. *BMC Public Health* (2016) 16:985.

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# Work ability in young adults

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## Abstract

Young adults may need special attention in their shift from student life to working life, to guarantee work ability. Being new at the workplace, they may encounter high expectations, resulting in high job demands. Also, they can expect to have a long working life and therefore need to have good work ability when entering the labor market. The overall aim of this thesis is to understand work ability in young adults. Two prospective studies, one cross-sectional and one qualitative study, were included in the thesis. Young workers were examined using questionnaires and individual interviews, and students were investigated using questionnaires. The results showed that workers 25–30 years old experienced work ability as complex and as one's own responsibility. To be alert and have energy, to possess sufficient education, skills, and working life experience and to experience meaningfulness and engagement in work were perceived to be fundamental for work ability. Work circumstances and private life could reduce or improve work ability. Similarly, changes in the job control and in the negative influence of job demands on one's private life could reduce or improve work ability, and increased social support at work could improve work ability, among workers 21–25 years old. Opportunities for recovery at work, such as having varied work, were found to be associated with excellent work ability for male workers aged 18–29 years. Finally, widespread and long-lasting symptoms were established as possible risk factors for generally reduced productivity due to musculoskeletal pain or ache among students 18–25 years old. In sum, work ability can be seen as one's own responsibility and complex, including, besides occupational factors, private life, and work–life balance. Having varied work could promote excellent work ability for young men, while widespread and long-lasting musculoskeletal symptoms can reduce general productivity. This thesis can be used as a basis for prevention and promotion programs of work ability, including adapted introductory education and mentorship for young adults.

**Keywords:** Sustainable work ability, working life, prevention, young workers