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Explaining Exit to Work among Social Assistance Recipients in Norway: Heterogeneity or Dependency?

Espen Dahl, Thomas Lorentzen

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Abstract

In this paper we ask why some Norwegian social assistance recipients move to work, while others do not. The aim is to shed new light on the heterogeneity/dependency issue in welfare research by defining work as the destination of interest, adopting methods that allow for assessment of the effect of time, and that take into account observed variables as well as unobserved heterogeneity. The sample includes all first time recipients aged 30–60 years in 1995 ($n = 15,837$). This entry cohort is followed up for 5 years, i.e. through 1999. About 10 per cent of the social assistance recipients experience a first transition to work ($n = 1563$). Individual characteristics like education and ethnicity, and structural factors like national unemployment rates are important predictors of exit to work. The adjusted effect of time on exit to work has a bell-like shape: first it increases sharply and then declines slowly. Thus, the ‘time dependency’ hypothesis that assumes a steadily declining hazard rate, is not supported. Our interpretation of the bell-shaped exit rate focuses on the labour market conditions, job search efforts, and (changing) characteristics of the long-term social assistance recipients.

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