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### **Presentation title**

Common mental disorders and work participation – the role of return-to-work expectations

### **Presentation format**

Oral

### **Authors**

Camilla Løvvik (PhD, Associate Professor), University of Bergen, [camilla.lovvik@uib.no](mailto:camilla.lovvik@uib.no)

### **Presenter**

Camilla Løvvik, PhD

### **Background**

Common mental disorders (CMDs), mainly anxiety and mild to moderate depression, are highly prevalent in the general population and major contributors to sickness absence and disability. Return-to-work expectations (RTW-expectations) have been found to be strong predictors of actual return-to-work (RTW) across diagnoses and conditions. More knowledge concerning factors contributing to or intertwined with RTW-expectations are needed, as is more knowledge concerning the role of RTW-expectations in CMDs.

### **Methodological approach**

A PhD thesis entitled “Common mental disorders and work participation – the role of return-to-work expectations”. The thesis was based on three individual papers that all employed data collected within a randomized multicenter trial (the “At Work and Coping” trial (AWaC), Clinicaltrials.gov, registration number NCT01146730). Participants (n=1193) were at risk of sick leave (n=334), currently on sick leave (n=529) or on long-term benefits (n=330). All reported CMDs as a main obstacle for work participation. Data were from baseline questionnaires and national registries on sickness absence and benefits (at baseline and 6-months follow-up). In the papers, correlates of RTW-expectations and RTW-expectations as predictors of later benefit reciprocity (sickness absence and long-term benefits) were investigated.

### **Main findings**

In CMDs, RTW-expectations seem to be strong predictors of sickness absence among those still at work, and predictors of prolonged sickness absence or disability among those already on sickness absence. RTW-expectations are related to personal factors, such as illness perceptions, but also to factors of a more contextual nature, such as workplace bullying.

### **Practice implications**

The present findings underscore the importance of RTW-expectations for work participation among people struggling with CMDs. However, the findings also point to the importance of including contextual factors, particularly those residing in the work environment, alongside RTW-expectations as part of RTW-interventions in CMDs.