

REVIEW PROTOCOL FOR UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REEMPLOYMENT TOPIC AREA

Highlights

- The objective of this systematic review is to determine the quality of existing causal evidence on the effectiveness of approaches to promote reemployment of unemployment insurance (UI) claimants.
- The review considers research on whether interventions focused on UI claimants reduce their UI benefit receipt while also improving their employment and earnings outcomes.
- Only research with causal designs is reviewed for this topic area.

The topic area originally covered research published in 1978 through 2013. It was later updated to include research published through August 2018.¹

Introduction

The topic area for this evidence review protocol is approaches to promoting reemployment among unemployment insurance (UI) claimants. UI is designed to provide temporary financial support to individuals unemployed through no fault of their own as they seek new employment.² Long-term unemployment increased substantially during and after the recent recession, which is reflected in longer UI claim duration. The proportion of claimants who exhausted their regular UI benefits grew from 35 percent in the final quarter of 2006 to 53 percent by the end of 2010. Despite subsequent improvements in labor market conditions, the exhaustion rate for regular UI benefits declined only to 45 percent by the end of 2013, well above pre-recession levels.³ Slower return to employment is harmful both for individuals, who experience short-term financial losses and potentially diminished long-term employment prospects, as well as for the fiscal strength of the UI system, which is strained by longer spells of benefit receipt. During the recession, the reserve ratio—that is, net state trust fund reserves as a percentage of total payrolls—declined to its lowest level ever.⁴

Helping UI claimants return to work with minimum delay is an important priority for the Office of Unemployment Insurance (OUI). States and the federal government have tested approaches to promoting reemployment that include assisting claimants with job searches or increasing the incentives to return to work. Those approaches prominently include providing or requiring job search assistance to help UI claimants identify promising job options, greater enforcement of eligibility requirements, and providing claimants with incentives to find employment. The UI Reemployment Evidence Review Protocol from the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR)

¹ In October 2018 the text of the protocol was further revised for comprehensiveness, clarity, and consistency with current protocols.

² See <http://workforcesecurity.doleta.gov/unemploy/uifactsheet.asp> for additional details.

³ Exhaustion rates taken from the Department of Labor's Quarter 4 Unemployment Insurance Data Summaries for 2006, 2010, and 2013, available at <http://workforcesecurity.doleta.gov/unemploy/content/data.asp>.

⁴ Vroman, W., and S. A. Woodbury. "Financing Unemployment Insurance." *National Tax Journal*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2014, pp. 253–268.

examines research on the effectiveness of those efforts.⁵ Specifically, the evidence review focuses on the following research questions:

- To what extent have interventions been shown to be effective in helping UI claimants return to work?
- To what extent have interventions been shown to be effective in reducing UI claimants' UI benefit receipt?

Because of concerns that returning to work more quickly may involve a trade-off with the quality of employment obtained, the review will also examine the following secondary research question:

- What effect do interventions aimed at promoting reemployment among UI claimants have on individuals' longer-term employment and earnings?

The goal of this review is to determine the extent to which research demonstrates effects of interventions on UI claimants' subsequent employment and UI benefits received. Therefore, the outcome domains—and outcomes within them—of primary interest include:

- **UI benefit receipt.** This domain includes outcomes such as average claim duration, total benefits received, the proportion that exhausts benefits, and similar outcomes.
- **Short- and long-term employment.** This domain includes indicators of how quickly UI claimants return to work, the percentage employed during a particular period, and similar outcomes.
- **Short- and long-term earnings.** This domain includes average earnings from paid work and similar outcomes that encourage basic skills development, educational attainment, completion of training programs and/or acquisition of certificates or credentials, employment, employment retention, and career advancement.

The rest of this evidence review protocol sets forth the criteria by which research is determined to be eligible for review, the topic area–specific causal evidence guidelines used to evaluate the quality of the causal evidence, and an outline of review procedures and study report contents. Appendix A describes the methods used to identify the research for this topic area.

Eligibility Criteria

CLEAR conducts broad literature searches (see Appendix A for details) to identify all the research papers and reports that use causal designs to examine the effectiveness of programs designed to improve participants' employment-related outcomes. In the course of conducting these searches, CLEAR also identifies literature that is not directly applicable to the topic area. Therefore, the CLEAR team uses the following criteria to screen identified studies to determine eligibility for review under this topic area:

1. **Does the research examine an intervention aimed at promoting the employment of UI claimants?** To be eligible for review, the research must examine some type of effort to help UI claimants return to work, including (but not limited to) offering job search

⁵ Aspects of the UI program's design, such as weekly benefit amounts and availability of benefits beyond 26 weeks, may influence reemployment of UI claimants. The availability of UI itself may also influence reemployment of unemployed individuals more broadly. This review does not address those questions, but rather focuses solely on approaches aimed at specifically promoting reemployment of UI claimants.

assistance, requiring in-person use of such assistance, or applying greater enforcement of UI eligibility requirements.

2. **Is it a study of effectiveness?** To be eligible for review, the research must use quantitative methods to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. Research that solely describes the characteristics or implementation of the intervention, or is a case study of states' or claimants' experiences with the intervention, is not eligible for review under this protocol.⁶
3. **Does the research examine a population of interest?** To be eligible, the study must examine outcomes of UI claimants. Those claimants include individuals claiming benefits through any of the following components of the federal-state unemployment compensation system: regular state UI, Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees, Unemployment Compensation for Ex-service members, extended benefits, and congressionally legislated emergency unemployment benefits. If a study examines both UI claimants and individuals not receiving UI, the review will report findings only on UI claimants. If the sample includes both UI claimants and non-claimants and the study does not report results for the subset of UI claimants in the sample, UI claimants must comprise at least 50 percent of the sample for the study to be eligible for review.
4. **Does the analysis include at least one outcome of interest?** The research must examine impacts on UI benefit receipt, short- and long-term reemployment, and short- and long-term earnings. For this review, *long-term* is defined as outcomes at least one year from the start of UI benefit receipt. A study must examine an outcome that is categorized in at least one of the domains above to be eligible for review.
5. **Was the research conducted in a relevant setting?** All research must have been conducted using data from the United States, including the 50 states, the District of Columbia, territories, and tribal entities. Originally, the topic area covered research published through 2013. The literature search was not restricted to reports published within a specific time period, but rather included all publications published through 2013. The earliest report identified that was eligible for review was published in 1978. The literature search was later updated to include research published through August 2018.

Causal Evidence Guidelines Specific to the Topic Area

Attrition in randomized controlled trials (RCTs). The causal research in this topic area includes studies with both experimental and nonexperimental designs. CLEAR assesses the quality of evidence for RCTs using standards adapted from those of the Institute of Education Sciences' What Works Clearinghouse.⁷ RCTs can receive a high causal evidence rating if there are no obvious confounding factors to the design and if the level of attrition is low. This topic area uses a conservative attrition standard, based on the assumption that attrition in studies of employment and training programs might be linked to participants' labor market or educational outcomes. If CLEAR determines that an RCT cannot receive a high causal evidence rating, it uses the CLEAR nonexperimental causal evidence guidelines to review the study.

⁶ Causal studies in this topic area were reviewed according to CLEAR Causal Evidence Guidelines, Version 2.0. The full set of guidelines are available at <http://clear.dol.gov>. CLEAR also has guidelines for reviews of descriptive and implementation research; however, this topic area is limited to causal studies.

⁷ See <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/InsidetheWWC.aspx> for details.

Control variables for nonexperimental designs. CLEAR causal evidence guidelines for nonexperimental studies were developed in consultation with a technical working group of methodological experts. The guidelines cover most nonexperimental designs, including fixed effects, difference-in-differences, instrumental variables, and regressions. Nonexperimental designs and RCTs with high attrition can receive a moderate causal evidence rating if they include adequate controls and can demonstrate or adjust for anticipating the intervention and confounding factors. To meet the requirements for a moderate causal evidence rating, nonexperimental studies and RCTs with high attrition in this topic area must include statistical controls for the following:

- Age
- Race/ethnicity
- Gender
- At least one pre-intervention measure of earnings or occupation. This could include earnings over a set period (such as the UI base period), average hourly wage, or occupational category (based on the Standard Occupational Classification System or other standardized system).
- At least one pre-intervention measure of employment status that captures employment stability. Examples include how long the claimant had been with the most recent employer or number of weeks worked during the base period.

Regression methods that incorporate a matching design, in which statistical methods are used to create a comparison group that is as similar as possible to the group receiving the intervention, must match on the above-listed control variables or, if they do not, must include them as controls in the regression. If multiple states are included in the study, then it must be demonstrated that each study group has similar representation of claimants from each state. This can be established either by showing the percentage of the sample that is from each state or by matching within states, which would create identical representation of states by construction.

This topic area can also include analyses conducted at the group level (an aggregation of entities, such as institutions, employers, or communities). For group analyses, it is typically necessary to include group-level controls for the same variables as in the individual analyses.

APPENDIX A

LITERATURE SEARCH

The CLEAR literature search process consists of four phases: a database search, a grey literature search, a snowball search, and a Google Scholar search for specific intervention names. Originally, the literature searches covered research published in 1978 through 2013. The searches were later updated to include research published through the time of the literature search in August 2018.

1. Database Search

For the UI reemployment topic area, CLEAR searched the electronic citation databases listed in Table A.1.

Table A.1. Electronic citation databases

Platform	Database
EBSCO	Academic Search Premier
	Business Source Corporate Plus
	Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews
	E-Journals
	EconLit
	Education Research Complete
	SocIndex with full text
ProQuest Dialog	ERIC
	PsycINFO
ProQuest LLC	ProQuest Dissertations and Theses
Scopus	Scopus

In the database search, CLEAR searched for eligible literature using concepts, or groupings of keywords. Each concept was ANDed with all of the other concepts. Within each concept, the keywords were ORed together.⁸

Concepts for database search

- Design: Terms to identify potentially eligible study designs
- Impact: Terms to identify types of impacts that eligible studies would measure
- Outcome: Terms to identify key outcomes for the topic area
- Topic: Terms to identify types of programs or interventions (or program/intervention components) relevant to the topic area

⁸ The searches were restricted to studies conducted in the United States (rather than where the analysis was done or published). Specifically, we restricted the searches using these additional location keywords: United States, U.S., U. S., US, or the names of any of the 50 states or the District of Columbia.

CLEAR searched for terms within these concepts in the following search fields where available:

- Title
- Abstract
- Subject
- Keywords

If a study has at least one of the keywords from each of the concepts, in any of the database search fields listed above, it will turn up in the results.

In the database search, CLEAR searched for eligible literature using the search terms in Table A.2.

Table A.2. Terms used in database searches for UI reemployment topic area

Concept	Keywords
Design terms	regression, quasi-experiment*, quasiexperiment*, nonexperimental, non-experimental, experimental, cause, causa*, statistical*, correlat* <i>Proximity searches</i> random* and assign* within two words of each other random* and trial within two words of each other
Impact terms	efficac*, effect*, impact, benefit, improv*, progress, growth, increas*, gain
Outcome terms	employment, reemployment, re-employment, earnings, weeks of benefits, benefit weeks, return to work <i>Proximity searches</i> exhaust* and benefit* occurring within four words of each other claim and duration occurring within four words of each other
Topic search terms	<i>Key intervention terms</i> unemployment insurance, unemployment compensation, unemployment benefits <i>Other intervention terms</i> eligibility assessment, work search, labor market information, career information, Wagner-Peyser Act, employment service*, labor exchange, American Job Center*

Note: An asterisk indicates that all results containing the word string are returned in the search results. For instance, “effect*” captures “effect,” “effects,” and “effectiveness.”

2. Grey Literature Search

CLEAR searched for a limited set of keywords (see Table A.3) based on the terms from the

database search using a custom Google search engine developed by Mathematica Policy Research containing the organizational websites listed in below. CLEAR also searched for the same limited set

of keywords in Think Tank Search, a custom Google search engine developed by Harvard University.⁹ Custom Google searches return only 100 results, sorted by their relevance according to Google.

Organizational websites for grey literature search

- Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab
- Abt Associates
- Administration for Children and Families
- American Enterprise Institute
- American Institutes for Research
- Association for Public Policy and Management
- Booz Allen
- Brookings Institute
- Cato Institute
- Center for Economic Policy and Research
- Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
- Center for Poverty, Work, and Opportunity
- Center for Public Policy and Administration
- Center for Science and Engineering Partnerships
- Center for Study of Urban Poverty
- Congressional Research Service
- Heritage Foundation
- IMPAQ
- Institute for Policy Studies
- Institute for Research on Poverty
- Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University
- IZA
- Joblessness and Urban Poverty Research Program
- Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
- Joint Center for Poverty Research
- Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center
- Mathematica Policy Research
- Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC)
- Multidisciplinary Program in Inequality and Social Policy
- National Bureau of Economic Research
- National Center for Children in Poverty
- National Center for Health Research
- National Center for Policy Analysis
- National Poverty Center
- NORC
- Pacific Research Institutes
- Public Policy Associates
- RAND Corporation
- Ray Marshall Center
- Resources for the Future
- RTI International
- Social Policy Research Associates
- SRI International
- The Center on Poverty and Inequality at Georgetown University
- The Center on Poverty and Inequality at Stanford University
- University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research
- Urban Institute
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
- U.S. Department of Labor
- U.S. Department of Labor Employment & Training Administration Research Database
- U.S. Government Accountability Office
- W.E. Upjohn Institute

⁹ Think Tank Search is a custom Google search of over 700 think tank websites. For the purposes of this search, think tanks are defined as institutions affiliated with universities, governments, advocacy groups, foundations, non-governmental organizations, and businesses that generate public policy research, analysis, and activity. Inclusion is based upon the relevancy of subject area to HKS coursework and scholarship, the availability of the think tank's research in full-text on the website, and the think tank's reputation and influence upon policy making. The list represents a mixture of partisan and non-partisan think tanks (source: https://guides.library.harvard.edu/hks/think_tank_search).

Limited set of keywords for grey literature search

Table A.3. Limited set of keywords used in grey literature searches for UI reemployment topic area

Concept	Keywords
Impact terms	effect, effective, effectiveness, impact
Outcome terms	reemployment, re-employment, earnings, return to work
Topic search terms	<p><i>Key intervention terms</i></p> <p>unemployment insurance, unemployment compensation, unemployment benefits</p> <p><i>Other intervention terms</i></p> <p>eligibility assessment, work search, American Job Centers</p>

Note: This type of search does not support truncation (for example, "effect*" capturing "effect"), so the search used the specific keywords above. The strategy searched for any of the key intervention terms AND any of the impact terms AND any of the outcome terms or other intervention terms.

In addition, CLEAR searched for the keywords in Table A.3 in research clearinghouses and working paper databases housed on the following publicly available websites: The Campbell Collaboration, NBER Working Papers, RePEc, Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse, and Social Science Research Network.

3. Snowball Search

CLEAR conducted a snowball search using previously identified relevant articles, citations, or authors.

List of snowball search references for the UI reemployment topic area

Corson, W., & P. T. Decker. (1995). *Using the Unemployment Insurance system to target services to dislocated workers*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research.

Davidson, C., & S. A. Woodbury. (1996). *Unemployment Insurance and unemployment: Implications of the reemployment bonus experiments*. Upjohn Institute working paper no. 96-44. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

Johnson, E. R. (1990). *Reemployment services to unemployed workers having difficulty becoming reemployed*. (Unemployment Insurance occasional paper 90-2). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration.

Wandner, S. A. (2008). Employment programs for recipients of Unemployment Insurance. *Monthly Labor Review*, 17-27.

4. Google Scholar Search

CLEAR also conducted a Google Scholar search of specific intervention names. These include the general program names plus specific intervention names that were developed based on a list of studies OUI sent. Studies were included in the search results if they contained any of the following:

- “Nevada Claimant Placement Program”
- “Charleston Claimant Placement and Work Test Demonstration”
- “Wisconsin Eligibility Review Pilot Project”

- “New Jersey PDL Experiment Project”
- “New Jersey” AND “perceivable demand list”
- “New Jersey UI Re-employment Demonstration Project”
- “New Jersey” and “unemployment insurance” and “reemployment demonstration”
- “Washington Alternative Work Search Experiment”
- “Illinois UI Incentive Experiment”
- “Illinois unemployment insurance incentive experiment”
- “Illinois” and “unemployment insurance” and (“claimant bonus experiment” OR “claimant experiment” OR “employer bonus experiment” OR “employer experiment”)
- “Pennsylvania Re-employment Bonus Experiment”
- “Pennsylvania reemployment bonus” or “Pennsylvania re-employment bonus”
- “Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment”
- “Re-employment and Eligibility Assessment”
- “Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment”
- “Re-employment Services and Eligibility Assessment”
- “job search assistance” and “District of Columbia” OR “Washington D.C.”
- “job search assistance” and “Florida”
- “Worker Profiling and Re-employment Service*”
- “Worker Profiling and Reemployment Service*”

APPENDIX B

REFERENCES

Studies with a High causal evidence rating

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Black, D., Smith, J., Berger, M., & Noel, B. (2003). Is the threat of reemployment services more effective than the services themselves? Evidence from random assignments in the UI system. *American Economic Review*, 93(4), 1313-1327.

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