



Benefits of working after spinal cord injury

What is the study about?

Spinal cord injury (SCI) can present barriers to obtaining and retaining employment, as unemployment rates sometimes exceed 80% for persons with more severe injuries. Yet, many, if not most, people with SCI can and do work; even those who have the most severe physical limitations. Our objective is to identify the employment outcomes that are most important to people with SCI.

Who participated and how was the study conducted?

There were a total of 44 participants with SCI who were at least 18 years old and who worked at some point after SCI onset. The majority were identified through an ongoing study of SCI and were initially enrolled through rehabilitation and specialty hospitals in 2 states, Minnesota and Georgia. To allow for new insights on quality outcomes of employment, focus groups were conducted at the 2 sites and were audio and video recorded. Focus groups lasted between 2 and 3 hours. Participants were asked what constituted quality employment outcomes. The primary question associated with this area was, “Over the years, what employment outcomes have meant the most to you?”

What did the study find?

Results from this study suggests that people with SCI stress the importance of employment as a means of financially supporting one’s self and family, and getting health insurance and other fringe benefits. The participants also identified important other aspects of working that included developing relationships and social networks, having a sense of purpose and accomplishment, and feeling that they had better mental health. They also reported feeling better about themselves when they had a reason to get up in the morning, a place to go, and activities to accomplish that they view as important and valued by others.

Implications and/or recommendations?

Policies are needed that help people to have better chances to be employed and to have better jobs in terms of money and benefits. Some policies place limits on the amount of money people can make without losing other benefits, including the support they need for their healthcare. These policies may have unintended consequence that negatively affect both quality of life and life expectancy (being employed and level of earnings are related to longevity).

Reference:

Meade, M. A., Reed, K. S., Saunders, L. L., & Krause, J. S. (2015). It's all of the above – Benefits of working for individuals after spinal cord injury. *Topics in Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation*, 21(1), 1-9.

This article contains full references to all pertinent information, including details of previous research by other investigators, instruments used, and more detailed findings.

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