

Return to Gainful Employment Among Singaporean Injured Workers

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Introduction:

This study was conducted to determine the return-to-work (RTW) status, work and financial impact of work-related injuries for Singaporean injured workers (SIWs).

Objectives: To understand the demographic and injury profiles of SIWs, medical and rehabilitation practices, direct medical costs and work-related outcomes.

Methods: A prospective cross-sectional observational study using data extraction and structured telephone interviews. Relevant data from a hospital's emergency department (ED) records of 150 randomly selected Singaporeans injured at work were retrospectively gathered. All statistical analyses was carried out using STATA (SE 10.0, STATA Corp, Texas, USA).

Results: 82.7% (124) of the 150 SIWs were male, 76.0% (114) were Chinese with a mean age of 41.5 (standard deviation (SD) 11.2) years at the time of injury. The majority (91.3%) of injuries were classified as mild on admission and 27 (18.0%) required hospitalization. At the time of telephone interview, 131 patients had returned to work giving a RTW rate of 87.3% and mean time taken was 32.9 (SD 62.0) days. 68.7% (90) returned to the same employer. 74.8% (98) had no job changes and 90.8% (119) of patients were working the same or higher number of hours post-injury. Univariate analyses showed that older patients, lower educational status, fewer years of education and those with severe injuries and longer inpatient length of stay (LOS) were significantly less likely to return to work ($p < 0.05$). Correlational analyses for factors which negatively affected RTW included a diagnosis of head injury (adjusted odds ratio O.R. 0.14), inpatient hospitalization stay (O.R. 0.45) and need for rehabilitation treatment (O.R. 0.85).

Conclusion: This study shows that majority of the work-related injuries were of mild severity and most SIWs return to work within 5 weeks of injury without a formal vocational rehabilitation program. Older, less educated workers, hospitalized and head injured patients had significantly poorer chances of RTW.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy: Case management and vocational rehabilitation program can be further explored in subsequent interventional study as a means to coordinate and further improve RTW services and multi-partied communication and collaboration for high-risk workers.