

Focus on Experiences of Return to Work after Spinal Cord Injury - Using Photovoice

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Introduction: An important role for occupational therapy is enabling meaningful participation in everyday life and to aim for research involvement of health care users in design of services. Involving persons with spinal cord injury (SCI) is important to incorporate expertise in the design of interventions for return to work. The aim of this study was to explore experiences of hindrances and possibilities in return to work among working adults with SCI using photovoice methods.

Method: Photovoice methods aim to capture significant events using photos and narratives to involve participants as collaborators in the research process. Participants (n=6) consisted of 3 men and 3 women with SCI, 28-52 years of age, 3-10 years after injury, and working after SCI. Participants met weekly during 2 months to share and discuss images and stories related to return to work and working life after SCI. Both visual and thematic analysis were used to look at the data.

Results: Five themes were identified: 1) there is only one way, 2) welcome back-or not, 3) to be like anyone else or to be perceived as someone else, 4) friction- in the absence of clarity and, 5) integrating strategies in everyday life. Return to work was illustrated as a bumpy road due to lack of coordination of resources, insufficient knowledge about SCI and unclear distribution of responsibility between stakeholders. Work was made possible through finding own paths to work.

Conclusion: Interventions for return to work after SCI need to be person-centred and more efficiently coordinated between stakeholders.