

Does Gender Impact Perspectives on Successful Return to Work After a Work-Related Musculoskeletal Injury?*

S. Gaspard¹ and I. Nastasia^{1,2}

¹ Centre de recherche de l'Hôpital Charles LeMoine, Université de Sherbrooke, Canada

² Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité au travail (IRSST), Canada

Summary This study reanalyzes the data originally collected in a study by Nastasia *et al.* (2017) to determine whether gender has an impact on the formation of workers' perspectives on return to work after a work-related injury, and if it plays a role in creating and sustaining a gap between practical experiences and exemplary return-to-work practices. Expanding the scope of the original project's results by focusing on gender as an essential dimension of analysis, our study tangibly reinforces the notion that the impact of gender should constitute a standardized aspect of analysis in high-quality academic research.

1. Relevance

The painstaking process of returning to work after sustaining a work-related injury constitutes a challenge faced by 5.1 % of all Canadian workers (Statistics Canada, 2011). Our review deepens insight into a prevalent problematic within Canadian workplaces, refining knowledge concerning the formation of gaps between exemplary and actual return-to-work practices by bringing considerations of gender to the forefront of scientific investigation.

2. Aims and Objectives

This exploratory study aims to determine if, for workers returning to work after suffering from a work-related injury, gender impacts 1) the differences between exemplary return-to-work practices identified by the research literature and actual implemented practices observed in the workplace and 2) workers' perception of the return-to-work process.

3. Methods

In the context of the original project, 14 workers based in four different workplaces who returned to work after a work-related musculoskeletal injury participated in semi-structured interviews. Ten workers identified as female, four as male. We performed a gender-based comparative analysis of verbatim of the above-mentioned interviews, focusing on perceptions of return-to-work conditions.

4. Results

While the implementation gaps between exemplary and actual return-to-work practices did not vary according to differences in gender, gender-based variances arose when analyzing workers' perception of factors as facilitating or impeding return to work, as well as formation of perspectives on support and temporary assignment. For workers who identified as female, conditions of support were not exclusive to validating factors within the workplace, as they were with workers who identified as male. Specifically, whether or not the effects of the injury and of the supervisor's follow-up negatively disrupted the functioning of the family unit strongly influenced female workers' perception of factors facilitating and impeding return to work. Moreover, negative conceptualizations of temporary assignment were sometimes characterized by negative tropes of femininity (i.e. Being "humiliatingly reduced to the job of a cleaning lady with a pink duster").

5. Conclusions

This review contributes to establishing the importance of gender as a standard aspect of scientific investigations of return to work after suffering from workplace-related injuries.

6. Contact Details

Sarah Gaspard, sarah_gaspard@hotmail.com ; Iuliana Nastasia, iuliana.nastasia@irsst.qc.ca