

The experiences of active participation in returning to paid employment for adults with spinal cord injury in the United Kingdom

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Introduction

The literature has consistently shown that following a spinal cord injury returning to work has a positive influence on quality of life, well-being and it is an important part of the adjustment process following the injury. Previous research identified that returning to work is a process influenced by many factors such as environmental accessibility, welfare system, early and long term support, level of education and physical health. The majority of research has focused on the physical and environmental factors that may impact on the employment outcomes and predominantly quantitative by nature. This study aims to explore what are the main factors which hinder or motivate adults with spinal cord injury to return to paid employment in the UK.

Method

To explore the experiences of returning to paid employment participants were recruited who were in paid employment, forming part of the inclusion criteria. A UK based charity supporting people following spinal cord injury advertised the study recruitment poster via their social media channels. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three participants and qualitatively analysed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis. The same interviewer was used for all interviews to ensure the quality and consistency of this study.

Results

Four super-ordinate themes were identified from the interpretative phenomenological analyses; long term support, understanding the system and rights, acceptance of new identity and recognising the value of the work. Implications for clinical practice include fostering optimal use of social supports, cultural changes and strategies for navigating the system when returning to work following a spinal cord injury.

Conclusion

This was the first UK-based study exploring the factors influencing returning to work for adults with spinal cord injury in the UK. It is hoped that these findings will increase insight and understanding the complexity of returning to work for adults with spinal cord injury. It was identified there is need to investigate the policy development and education for all healthcare professionals supporting adults with spinal cord injury when undertaking returning to work to further assist the transition.



The experiences of active participation in returning to paid employment for adults with spinal cord injury in the United Kingdom



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Introduction

The literature has consistently shown that following a spinal cord injury (SCI) returning to work has a positive influence on quality of life¹, well-being and it is an important part of the adjustment process following the injury². It has already been identified that returning to work is a process influenced by many factors such as environmental accessibility, welfare system, early and long-term support, level of education and physical health^{3,4,5}. The majority of research has focused on the physical and environmental factors that may impact on the employment outcomes and were predominantly quantitative by nature^{6,7,8,9}.

Aim

To explore what are the main factors which hinder or motivate adults with SCI to return to paid employment in the UK.

Participants

Two men and one female with spinal cord injury were recruited. Participants had a variety of employment, age and background, see Table 1. All participants were employed as per the inclusion criteria.

Table 1: The demographic information of the SCI participants

Gender, Age and time since injury	Employment prior- and post-injury	Total years of employment after injury
Female aged 49, 8 years since injury	Prior: Full time healthcare professional in the community Post: Part time patient education coordinator	1 year
Male aged 26, 2 years since injury	Prior: Full time sales executive Post: The same position, initially part time, now full time	1 year
Male, aged 47, 12 years since injury	Prior: Full time foreign affairs reporter Post: Change of role - Full time Global affairs columnist	12 years

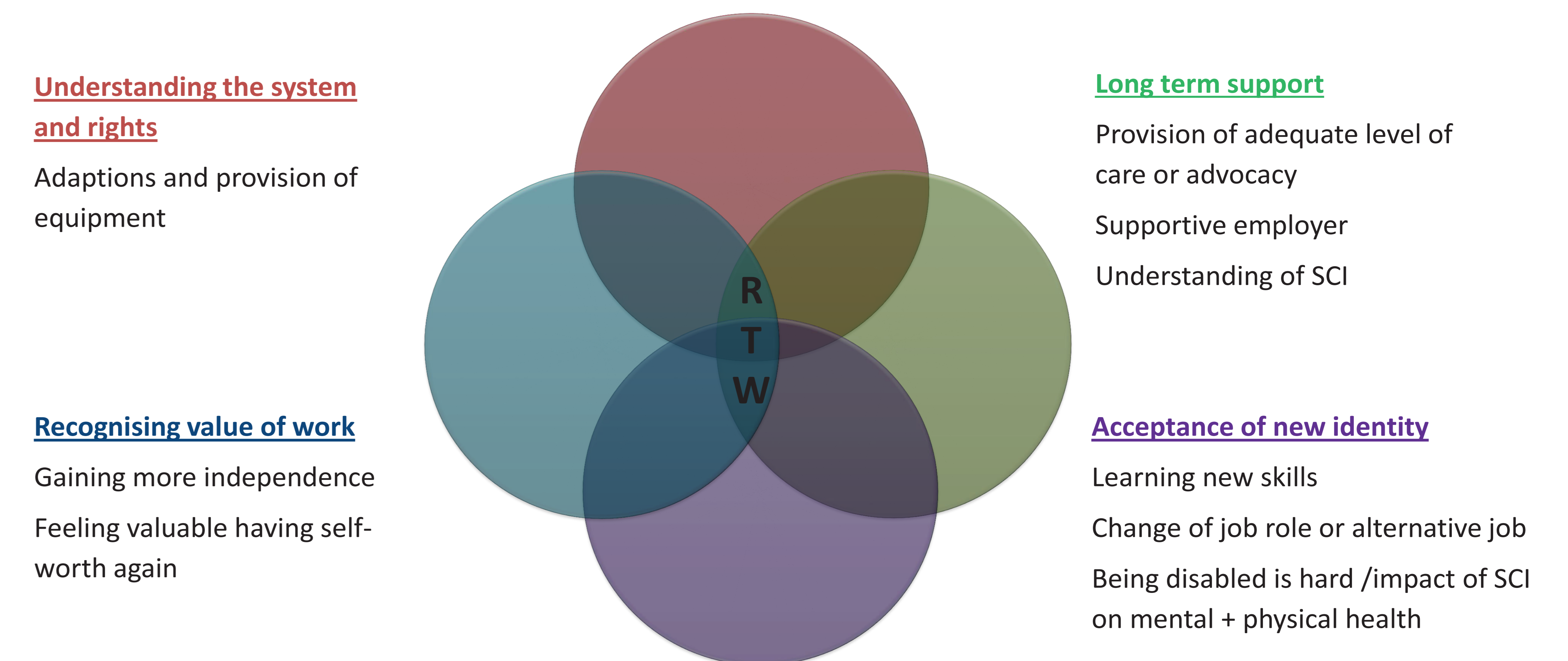
Method

A UK based charity supporting people following SCI advertised the study recruitment poster via their social media channels. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and qualitatively analysed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This method enabled the researchers to gain deeper understanding of the lived experience of individuals with SCI when undertaking return to work. IPA allowed the individuals to actively engage in the reflection on the significance of the major transition of their life¹⁰.

Results

Four super-ordinate themes were identified from the interpretative phenomenological analyses; **Understanding the system and rights**, **Long term support**, **Acceptance of new identity** and **Recognising value of work**, see Figure 1. Implications for clinical practice include fostering optimal use of social supports, cultural changes and strategies for navigating the system when returning to work following a spinal cord injury.

Figure 1: Themes identified that influence adults with spinal cord injury returning to paid employment in the UK



Conclusion

First UK-based study exploring the factors influencing returning to work for adults with spinal cord injury in the UK. Findings increase insight and understanding in the complexity of returning to work for adults with spinal cord injury. Identified a need to investigate the policy development and education for all healthcare professionals supporting adults with spinal cord injury when undertaking returning to work to further assist the transition.

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