



## Perceptions of policies and programs and their impact in supporting employment among individuals with spinal cord injury

### Introduction

Spinal cord injury (SCI) is associated with unacceptably high unemployment rates that are impacted by the environment in which employment and vocational activities take place. The goal of this study was to use the qualitative approach, by hosting six focus groups at two sites, to identify key components of programs and federal and state level policies which support employment outcomes. A semi-structured interview format asked participants, who had been employed at some point since injury, questions about policies and program related factors influencing how people get jobs, keep jobs, and advance in their jobs following SCI.

### Key Findings

- In terms of program components, five themes emerged: 1) funding postsecondary education, 2) facilitating the development of job seeking skills, 3) assisting with job placement, 4) offering practical experience through internships and on-the-job training, and 5) providing instrumental support were important in allowing individuals to engage in employment.
- One of the most important findings was the range of awareness among participants.
- Individual awareness was often necessary in order to be able to identify, access, and benefit from the relevant programs or policies.
- The location of the participant's inpatient rehabilitation experience affected their awareness and perception of various policies and programs.

### Conclusions & Implications

Participants in this study perceived policies as having the potential to both benefit and limit their overall functioning. In particular, policies aimed at the individual (i.e.: disability benefits) were appreciated as a safety net that could also trap a person into a not working mindset. Researchers, program developers, and policy makers should consider the areas of need addressed by these policies, awareness of them, and if they are sufficient to address the concerns of individuals with diverse backgrounds and levels of impairment. The program components identified as critical to individual success appear to support continued prioritization of vocational rehabilitation departments and services. They reflect the diversity of needs that, if met, may dramatically improve employment prospects.

**Reference:** Reed, K. S., Meade, M., Aust, R., & Krause, J.S. (2018). Perceptions of policies and programs and their impact in supporting employment among individuals with spinal cord injury. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 48(3), 403-415. 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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