



Vocational interests after spinal cord injury

What is the study about?

Rates of unemployment in those with spinal cord injury (SCI) are unacceptably high. Vocational interests reflect the types of work environments in which people prefer to work and are highly related to vocational choice. They offer a potential reason for the high rate of unemployment. Studying the interests of individuals with SCI is important, as disability resulting from SCI may limit job opportunities and make it difficult to find enjoyable employment.

Who participated and how was the study conducted?

Between October 2012 and December 2015, approximately 10 years after an initial study phase, 247 participants completed a 291-item 2004 edition of the Strong Interest Inventory (SII). The SII measures vocational interests via General Occupational Themes (GOT), which reflect personality type. The SII also assesses specific tasks or activities that may be rewarding to the individual (Basic Interest Scales; BIS), and are organized within each GOT.

What did the study find?

Gender differences were seen on two of the GOT, with male participants scoring highest on the Realistic theme (reflective of preference for working in physically challenging jobs) and females scoring highest on the Social theme (reflective of interests in caring for others). White participants scored highest on the Realistic theme, whereas Black participants scored highest on the Conventional theme, reflective of interests in organizational systems (e.g., information systems, accounting). Gender differences were also noted on 12 of the 30 BIS (Men scored higher interest in Mechanics and Construction, Computer Hardware and Electronics, Military, Protective Services, Nature and Agriculture, Finance and Investing, and Athletics, whereas women scored higher in Culinary Arts, Counseling and Helping, Teaching and Education, Healthcare services, and Office Management). Race differences were observed on the Enterprising and Conventional GOT, with Black participants endorsing greater interest on both themes. Race differences were also indicated on 11 of 30 BIS (with black participants scoring higher on Office Management, Taxes and Accounting, Programming and Information Systems, Finance and Investing, Sales, Management, Computer Hardware and Electronics, and Politics and Public Speaking, and white participants scoring higher on Nature and Agriculture, Medical Science, and Human Resources and Training).

Implications and/or recommendations?

These findings support the need for early identification of individuals with high interests in the Social, Enterprising, and Conventional Themes to promote education and further training.

They stress the importance of helping people with SCI to find opportunities that are consistent with their interests. This will be challenging for those whose interests are in occupations that are difficult for them to do after SCI, such as those that require physical strength and dexterity.

Reference:

Clark J.M.R., Krause J.S. (2017) Vocational Interests by Gender and Race 10 Years After Spinal Cord Injury. *Rehabilitation Psychology*,19.

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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