

Multi-Phase Veteran Engagement to Develop a Spinal Cord Injury Employment Survey

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What Is the Purpose of this Study/Review?

- To adapt an employment survey for veterans living with spinal cord injury (SCI).
- To describe the process and outcomes of actively engaging veterans living with SCI in the revision of an employment survey.

What Is the Problem?

- Seeking, obtaining, and maintaining employment are some of the most difficult economic challenges reported by persons living with an SCI.
- Few SCI employment studies have examined striving to work strategies used by veterans with SCI to overcome employment barriers.
- Although there are employment surveys for people living with disabilities, none exist for veterans living with an SCI.
- This project will adapt an existing employment survey to better understand the employment experiences of veterans living with SCI who are striving to work.

What Are the Findings?

- Veterans described the following barriers looking for and at work: 1) concern about losing government assistance or benefits; 2) employers assumed you cannot do the job because of your disability; and 3) negative attitudes on the part of supervisors and co-workers.
- Veterans described the following ways to overcome barriers: 1) strong social networks; 2) supportive supervisors and co-workers; and 3) strategies to manage and prevent medical complications.
- Engaging veterans in multiple phases informed the revisions of an employment survey about the lived experience of veterans seeking, obtaining, and maintaining employment after a SCI.

Who Should Care Most?

- Veterans living with a SCI.
- Employers of veterans living with SCI.
- Vocational rehabilitation service employees.
- Rehabilitation researchers and clinicians interested in using a veteran-centered approach to improve employment outcomes of veterans living with SCI.

Recommendations for Action

- Engage veterans living with SCI throughout the research process, from planning to disseminating, to improve survey tools and other outcomes.
- The strategies used in this study to engage veterans living with SCI may be applied to research with other disability groups: 1) involve existing stakeholder groups, 2) create a study-specific engagement group, and 3) collaborate with participants to inform study procedures and materials.