

Return to Work Rates of Participants in Medical Rehabilitation: The Role of Fitness and Health

Authors : Julius Steinkopf, Eric Rost, Aike Hessel, Sonia Lippke

Abstract : Objective: This study examined possible determinants of return to work (RTW) in individuals who participated in a medical rehabilitation program longitudinally over a time period of six months. Design/methodology/approach: N=1,044 rehabilitants were included in the baseline measurement in terms of completing a questionnaire during their medical rehabilitation. About 30% (n=350) have remained in the study in terms of participating in computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) six months later. Frequency analyses and Regression analyses were run. Findings: About 70% of the rehabilitants returned to work six months after rehabilitation. Regression analyses revealed that the RTW rates were significantly predicted by gender (OR=0.12, men were more likely to return), perceived social support (OR=3.01) and current physical functioning (OR=1.25). Furthermore RTW motives, like expected monetary rewards (OR=25.2) and feelings of being needed (OR=0.18) same as motives for not returning to work (nRTW), like the wish to stop working in order to spend time with the spouse (OR=0.13) or a lack of enjoyment of work (OR=3.81), significantly predicted return to work rates. Life satisfaction, self-efficacy beliefs, mental health, current income, educational background or age did not significantly increase explained variance (all ps > .05). Practical implications: Taking these predictors into account provides options to increase the effectiveness of interventions aiming at increasing RTW: Medical rehabilitations should not only aim at improving the physical functioning but also to enhance beneficial motives and social support as well as support women specifically in order to improve the effectiveness of medical rehabilitation and public health interventions. Originality/value: Illness-caused work absences are related to high financial costs and individual burden. Despite of the public health and societal implications, this is one of the very few studies investigating systematically fitness and health for the return to work.

Keywords : gender, fitness, health, physical functioning

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