

I'm pulling through because of you: lessons from people who returned to work following serious injury

WHY AND HOW THE RESEARCH WAS CONDUCTED:

Employers, insurers, and workers struggle with the costs of work injuries. Workers may fall behind in their earnings and careers. Businesses are less competitive. Insurance companies must charge higher premiums to offset compensation costs. This study reported the experience of Saskatchewan workers (n=110) who were off work for more than 50 days (n=100) or had a mental health claim (n=9), received comprehensive rehabilitation, and returned to work, to determine what workplace factors helped them return to work.

KEY FINDINGS FROM RECOVERING WORKERS:

1 I'M NOT 100% BUT I'M PRESSING ON

- I have pain (23%) and I'm not healed yet (19%)
- I fear re-injury (14%) and lack confidence 6%
- I'm stressed (13%) and tired (11%)

I'm managing pain and being careful not to re-injure myself.

I still struggle with anxiety at work and end each day exhausted.

It's very frustrating and hard to figure out new ways to do the things I used to do so easily.

2 I'M NOT THE SAME AS I WAS BUT HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO WORK

- Not being in control and having no say hurts too.
- No one listens to me.
- Conflict and low support from employers doesn't help.

I just couldn't perform at the same level anymore. I am still struggling to get to that same level. ...I don't think it will ever be the same again.

They should listened to me more... sending me back at all while I'm still at this level of pain ... I'm afraid of damaging my back more returning to work so early.

My opinion and experience didn't really factor in when I was on my road to wellness.

3 YOU SEE ME & CARE ABOUT ME. THAT REALLY MATTERS

- My supervisor and co-workers see me and recognize my situation.
- You trust me to manage my work duties and pace.
- 34% of people felt low support from their employer (11%), felt their employer didn't understand their injury (11%) or forgot about them, or invalidated their injury (9%).

My supervisor expressed concern and asked how I was managing.

He allowed me to do the things I could still do and decline the things that I could no longer do.

My supervisor never even asked how I was doing.

I never felt cared about personally. If anything I felt ignored, unimportant

My supervisor is the best. He is concerned about my health so he doesn't give me certain jobs because he is concerned that I will re-injure myself. He is very good about letting me know I need to do what's best for me.

My manager did regular check ins to make sure I wasn't overdoing it.

Co-workers accepted me and my new physical limitations. They understood that I worked hard to return to work.

4 TAKE AWAYS: WHAT CAN WE FOCUS ON?

- Workers: you can expect returning to work takes effort: build supportive relationships now.
- Employers: be human and recognize or empathize with your employees' difficulties.
- Supervisors: check in often. Offer employees control in their modified work.
- Co-workers: include returning people in the group. Lend a helping hand: they never asked for the injury. They are doing the best they can with what they have.

Researcher: Ian Lewis M.Sc.

Everyday Ian sees the positive and negative impact of work on people's health. He envisions future workplaces where the norm is that people flourish, health is protected, and those with challenges are supported so they can maintain employment. This vision motivated him to complete his Masters of Science in Workplace Health and Wellbeing and this research was part of that degree. He gratefully acknowledges the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board for inviting their claimants to participate in research and for disseminating results among the stakeholder community. Scan the QR code below to learn more.



[About Ian Lewis](#)



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