Experiences of returning to productive roles following traumatic brain injury: Influence of the social environment

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ABSTRACT

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) has the potential to dramatically disrupt and alter a person’s life. Literature has shown that returning to work is an important part of the adjustment process post-TBI, and that many factors may influence success of return to work. As yet, limited information is available on the influence of the social environment, particularly from a personal perspective. This study used in-depth interviews to explore individuals’ experiences of returning to productive roles following a TBI. In particular, it focused on the influence of the social environment on the meaning of these experiences. Following thematic content analysis, three themes predominated within the data. These related to: the social meanings of having a productive role, the role of social supports external to work, and the influence of social aspects within the workplace. Participants highlighted a number of issues within each theme. These findings add to the depth of knowledge within the literature on return to work following TBI. It is concluded that the social environment has a considerable influence upon whether the experience of returning to work post-TBI is positive or negative. Consideration of such aspects within vocational rehabilitation and supported employment settings is recommended, to enable a smoother and easier transition into a productive role for individuals following TBI.