

Working after spinal cord injury (SCI) in Australia

The purpose of this plain language summary is to help you understand the findings from a recent research publication.



1 What did this study look at?

This study looked at a range of work factors following SCI, including:

- the number of people who worked after their injury
- how long it took to return to work
- whether people used vocational rehabilitation services to help get work
- changes in the type and amount of work people were in.

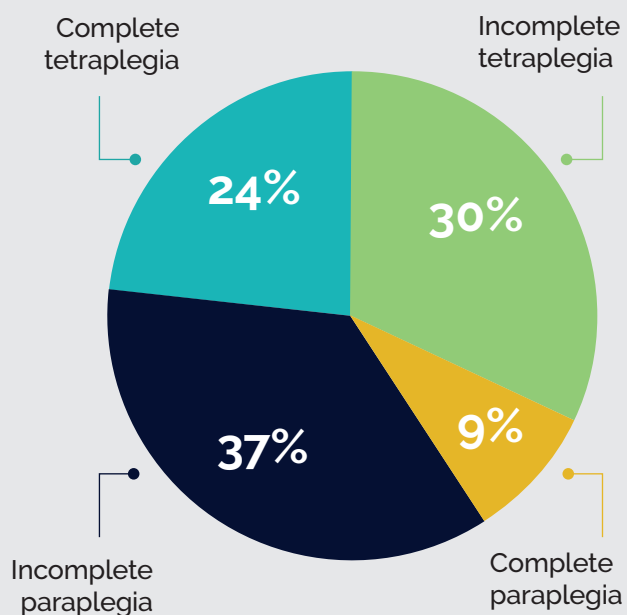
2 Why is this important?

- Many people struggle to find and maintain work after a spinal cord injury.
- Working can have many benefits, including better quality of life, financial security and social inclusion.
- Restarting work or gaining work with a new employer can be very difficult, meaning work rates for people with SCI are below the average for Australia.

3 Who took part in this study?

1579 people with SCI

across Australia completed the survey



Statistics

Age



%	Years
5	18-30
16	31-45
34	46-60
37	61-75
9	75+

Years with SCI



%	Years
23	<5
20	6-10
25	11-20
12	21-30
20	30+

Relationship

Married	50%
Single	25%
Divorced /Separated	12%
Partnership /Cohabiting	9%
Widowed	4%

Education

32%	Primary/lower Secondary
13%	Higher Secondary
19%	Post-secondary
12%	Tertiary
15%	Bachelor
9%	Master & higher

4 What were the results of the study?



50%

Worked at some time after SCI



29%

Working at time of survey



46%

Retired due to age or health



2%

Unemployed & looking for work



1 in 3

Used vocational rehabilitation services to find work

Time back to work

- 8% returned to work straight after rehabilitation
- For those not back to work straight after rehabilitation the average was 2.3 years to return to work or find a job
- Up to 5 years for those without a job before their injury

Reasons for not working

- 64% due to health or disability
- 18% unable to find suitable work
- 9% reported lack of access to work places for advertised roles
- 6% unsure how or where to seek work

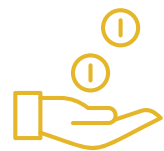
Types of work

- Less physical
- Increased managerial



Hours worked

- Average 30 hours per week
- 17% wanted more hours



5 What were the main conclusions reported by the researchers?

- There is often long periods of time before restarting or gaining work after injury, which comes with changes in the types and amount of work.
- The shift to less physical work may highlight the need to focus more help with returning to work for those with manual work roles before their injury.
- Better advocacy, education and support may be helpful for employers to address confusion about work capacity for people with SCI.
- The findings may be helpful to the various services and programs available in Australia to help them understand more about the SCI population in Australia and guide their services.

The full title of this article is Employment outcomes following spinal cord injury: a population-based cross-sectional study in Australia.

It is by S. Borg, T Geraghty, M. Arora, M. Foster, R. Marshall, A. Nunn and J. Middleton.

It was published in the journal *Spinal Cord* May 17, 2021.

This study was sponsored by:

Insurance and Care NSW (icare NSW)
Australasian Spinal Cord Injury Network Ltd (SCIN)
Spinal Research Institute (SRI)
Lifetime Support Authority South Australia
Division of Rehabilitation, Princess Alexandra Hospital
The Hopkins Centre, Griffith University

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