



Identifying predictors of return to work and the duration of time off work in first responders affected with musculoskeletal or mental health injuries

We wanted to know what factors predicted when first responders with injury claims returned to work.



What is the problem?

First responders perform dangerous and stressful work which put them at risk of injuries and illnesses that require time off work to recover. Because the duties performed by first responders are crucial for community safety, they need to return to work as soon as possible. There is a lack of research looking at what factors (also known as “predictors”) predict when first responders with musculoskeletal or mental health injuries return to work. The purposes of this study were to: 1) identify predictors of return to work for first responders with a disability management claim; 2) determine what factors predicted their claim closures.

How did the team study the problem?

We obtained 67 first responder claims that were collected between January 2 2012 to July 25 2017 from a private national disability management company. For each of the claim, we calculated how long the injured first responder was absent from work. Statistical analyses were performed to identify predictors (age, sex, injury or illness diagnosis, years of service, claim lag, medical report lag, and the return to work duties) of return to work and claim closure.

What did the team find?

We found that first responders with musculoskeletal injury claims had an increased likelihood of returning to work and a shorter absence from work compared to first responders that had mental health claims. Delays/lags in claim and medical reports both decreased the likelihood of the returning to work. Returning to work was associated with an increased likelihood of claim closure. Only 45 of the 67 first responders returned to their pre-absence duties.

How can this research be used?

This research can be used by disability managers and other involved stakeholders in the return-to-work process of first responders to ensure that claim lag and medical report lag are minimized. Disability managers, employers and first responders should keep in mind that the return-to-work process for first responders with mental health claim tended to be longer in duration when planning for accommodations in the workplace.

Cautions

We only analyzed 67 first responder claims which is not representative of the total population of injured first responders in Canada.

Reference: Killip S. (2018) Identifying predictors of return to work and unique aspects of disability management in first responders affected by musculoskeletal injuries and mental health. (Master's Thesis, McMaster University, Canada)

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