



Racial/Ethnic Minorities and Post-Injury Employment: African Americans with TBI

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A Brief Background

- Annually between 2002 and 2006, approximately 1.7 million people in the US experienced a traumatic brain injury (TBI). Of those, 52,000 died, 275,000 were hospitalized and discharged, and approximately 1.4 million were treated and released from the emergency room.
- These statistics hold true for TBI overall; however, they change when TBI is examined by race/ethnicity.
- It has been found that compared to non-minorities, some racial/ethnic minority groups have higher incidences of TBI. For example, between 1989 and 1998, African Americans had the second-highest rate of TBI-related deaths. Also, despite being a prominent portion of the US population, the TBI rate among African Americans is higher than for both Hispanics and Caucasians.
- In fact, some studies claim that simply being a minority increases one's risk for a TBI.

What Affects Returning to Work?

- The main goal for a patient of any background with TBI is returning to a functional life, and for most individuals this means returning to work.
- Patients experience several devastating changes post-injury. Often, behavioral, emotional, and psychological changes are more incapacitating than post-injury physical limitations. Thus, physically being able to return to work is not necessarily enough to do so.
- Factors that affect returning to work include:
 - Short-term memory impairments
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Physical impairments
 - Impulsiveness
 - Aggression
 - Trouble gauging own and others' behavior

Why Return to Work?

- Post-injury employment can significantly improve a patient's quality of life in several areas, such as:
 - Insurance coverage
 - Self-actualization
 - Confidence
 - Monetary relief
- Many times patients with TBI struggle with their disability and lack insight to prepare for returning to work.
- Before a patient with TBI can return to work, they must ask themselves:
 - *Am I accepting of my disability?*
 - *Am I aware of my limitations?*

African Americans, Employment, & TBI

- While most patients with TBI value employment post-injury, it has been found that African Americans especially consider employment a significant part of their quality of life.
- One study, however, found that African Americans were over 2.5 times more likely than Caucasians to be unemployed post-injury.
- African Americans from urban areas suffer the bleakest employment outlook for several reasons, such as:
 - TBI more likely to be caused by violence
 - More likely to have a lower level of education
 - More likely to experience unemployment pre-injury
 - Less access to vocational resources
- If an urban African American obtains employment post-injury, they are more likely to suffer additional setbacks relating to transportation and familial needs (e.g. child care). Thus, it is important to utilize vocational resources and communicate with potential employers about all circumstances surrounding employment.
- Another factor closely tied with African American quality of life is family support. Thus, if urban African Americans with TBI have sufficient family support, they should be better able to return to work.
- Similarly, African American quality of life has been linked to church affiliation. In a post-injury context, religious communities can provide additional support when making the decision to return to work and when searching for employment.

Supported Employment

- Supported employment services are vocational resources for persons with disabilities. It is common for patients with TBI to utilize these, especially African American patients.
- These services are designed to:
 - Help patients find employment
 - Build necessary skills
 - Mainstream patients with non-disabled co-workers
 - Maintain contact with patients post-employment

Future Recommendations for African Americans with TBI

- Utilize family members to help find vocational resources and/or jobs, and even contact potential employers. It is not recommended that family members be asked to provide employment.
- Take into consideration all of your circumstances, ranging from transportation issues to childcare. Do not hide these factors from potential employers.
- Request culturally competent service delivery among social service agencies addressing employment needs of African Americans with TBI. Most states have a Department of Social Services with trained professionals designated to assist racial and ethnic minorities; however, these services might have to be specifically requested.
- Identify African American communities (e.g. churches, community centers, etc.) and link with outside resources for more effective and shared support.

- Use alternative forms of brain injury support programs, such as brain injury clubhouses, that provide peer support and job readiness skills through volunteerism.
- Access brain injury resources that could assist with return to work. To access location-specific resources, contact the Brain Injury Association of America at www.biaa.org.

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