



Racial/Ethnic Minorities and Post-Injury Employment: Hispanics 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.
- When such statistics are examined by race/ethnicity it becomes clear that incidence rates fluctuate between groups.
- It has been found that compared to non-minorities, some racial/ethnic minority groups have higher incidences of TBI. For example, Hispanics are one of the fastest growing racial/ethnic minority groups in the United States. It is expected that by 2050, 1/3 of the population will be Hispanic, with a TBI incidence rate higher than the national average.
- In fact, some studies claim that simply being a minority increases ones risk for a TBI.

Rehabilitation for TBI, the Hispanic Culture, & Employment

- Despite being a significant portion of the US population, Hispanic individuals tends to be underserved in the area of rehabilitation for TBI.
- Standard rehabilitation treatment for TBI tends to be based on a Caucasian perspective. Consequently, aspects of the Hispanic culture are often not incorporated into treatment plans for Hispanic patients.
- Employment outcome is a significant component which has both cultural and rehabilitative impact for TBI survivors. When Caucasian patients lose a job due to an injury, they a) may come from a higher socioeconomic status pre-injury and appear to have more to “lose,” and b) are quicker to return to work due to the nature of their pre-injury employment status.
- Conversely, Hispanic patients tend to a) come from a lower socioeconomic status pre-injury and thus do not appear to “lose” as much from an injury, and b) are more likely to be employed pre-injury in hazardous jobs which are harder to return to post-injury.

Return to Work Benefits

- There are many benefits to seeking post-injury employment, such as:
 - Improved well-being
 - Improved sense of identity
 - More community involvement
 - Less reliance on healthcare services
 - Decreased social isolation
 - Increased quality of life

Post-Injury Employment & Community Integration

- Hispanic individuals face several disadvantages that are only confounded by having a TBI. These include socioeconomic status, language barriers, and acculturation.
- While there are several services and agencies that help patients of all backgrounds with TBI return to work, the above barriers make Hispanics less likely to utilize them. For example, family (both nuclear and extended) is extremely important in the Hispanic culture and individuals with TBI might rely more on family connections than vocational resources to search for work.
- Recent literature urges counselors, hospitals, and employers to become more culturally sensitive toward Hispanic patients with TBI returning to work. As a result, efforts have been improving but are not perfect. For example, it has been found that simply increasing communication with potential employers boosts long-term retention of employees with TBI.

Adjustment & Preparation for Employment

- Post-injury employment can significantly improve a patient's quality of life in several ways, from increasing confidence to easing monetary burdens. Many times, however, patients with TBI struggle with their disability and lack insight to prepare for returning to work. Hispanics especially need help in this preparation process.
- 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?*
- For Hispanic individuals, there are several factors specifically affecting employment outcomes at one year post-injury that must be taken into consideration.
 - *Pre-injury employment* – Being employed pre-injury increases the chance of finding work post-injury.
 - *Pre-injury education level* – Higher levels of pre-injury education increases the chance of post-injury employment.
 - *Cause of injury* – TBI caused by violence decreases chance of post-injury employment.
 - *Scores on standard functional tests* – Better scores increase the chance of post-injury employment.

Vocational Resources

- Despite language and cultural barriers, there are several resources for ethnic/racial minorities with a TBI who feel ready to return to work. These include:
 - Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services
 - Support groups specific to Hispanic patients with TBI
 - Job site training with individualized support
 - Bilingual resources
- Recent research highlighting the importance of Hispanic cultural sensitivity makes these resources more useable for Hispanics suffering from TBI than in the past.

Future Recommendations for Hispanics with TBI

- Utilize family to help find jobs and contact potential employers. It is not suggested that family be asked to provide employment.
- Request culturally competent service delivery among social service agencies addressing employment needs of Hispanics with TBI. Most states have a Department of Social Services with trained professionals designated to assist racial and ethnic minorities. Please note that these services might have to be specifically requested.
- Encourage the identification of resources from the ethnic communities in which Hispanics with TBI reside (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.
- Encourage family and/or Hispanics with TBI to 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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