



The Needs and Experiences of Injured Workers: A Participatory Research Study

Bonnie Kirsh, PhD. (University of Toronto)
 Barbara Beardwood, PhD. (York University)
 Pat McKee, Lynn Cockburn, (U of Toronto),
 Michael Polanyi, Catherine Fenech, Gerry LeBlanc,
 Alfred Jean-Baptiste



Purpose of Study


- to enhance the capacity of injured workers to identify, understand, analyze and address their experienced concerns
- to understand the needs and experiences of injured workers in Ontario
- to develop recommendations for policy and practice in compensation system

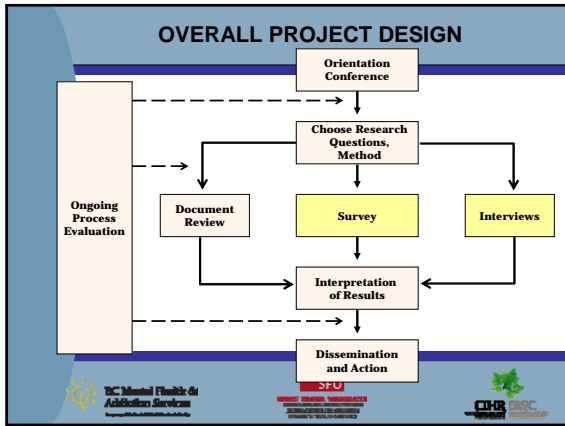


Participatory Research

- Collective process of issue analysis/action
- enables marginalized groups to address problematic social and economic issues
- values alternative, non-dominant systems of knowledge production
- emphasizes subjectivity, involvement, consensual validation in research

(Tandon, 1988)





Our research illustrates that...

- Attitudes toward workers who do not return to work in a predictable and timely way are characterized by blame, suspicion and marginalization
- These attitudes are cloaked within a discourse of return to work and rehabilitation
- Results in anger, frustration, despair and depression

The Survey

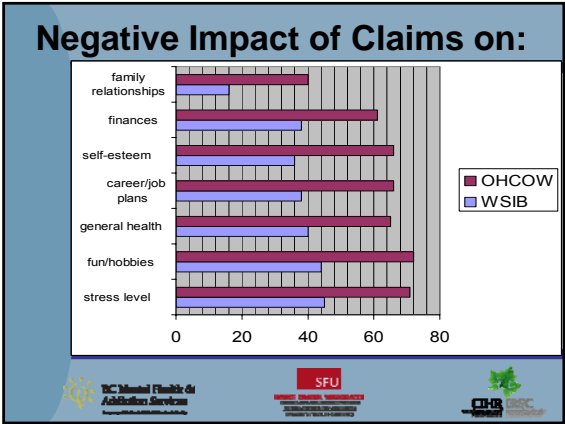
To examine:

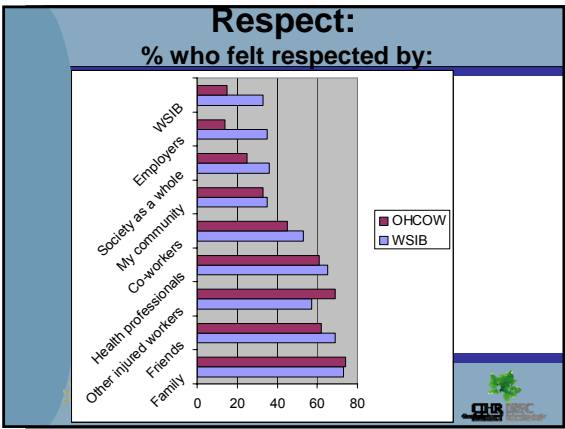
- key issues re: health and compensation systems affecting IWs
- factors influencing return-to-work

Two sample sets:

1. WSIB (random) n=165
2. Occupational Health Clinics for Injured Workers (OHCOW) n=125

Total N=290





Depression

“I have felt depressed on a regular basis since my injury”

- 35% of WSIB respondents agreed
- 58% of OHCOW respondents agreed

Logos: BC Mental Health & Addictions Services, SFU, CHS, WRC

The Qualitative Component

- Semi structured interviews
- To explore the lived experiences and perceptions of injured workers.
- To explain the anger and frustration expressed by many injured workers.



Pathways to Becoming Injured

- Unsafe practices, lack of health and safety policies/procedures
 - Lack of information re:dangers of the job
 - Lack of knowledge re:claims
 - YET a sense of obligation to complete the job despite the risks
- Anger




“Well, we had absolutely no education that the wet chemical getting on your hands that there was problem with that. I mean we had service people come in and they cleaned the tanks and they never wore gloves. They never wore a respirator. So the Ministry of Labour told me that the danger of chemical exposure existed. I had explained to them previously about my health problems. And they told me you have to file for WCB.”




Seeking Treatment

- “Desperate for a diagnosis”
- Difficulty accessing appropriate treatment
- Conflicting advice
- Lack of control over treatment
- Negative attitudes of health practitioners, dismissal of concerns
- ▶ Frustration, Anger, Confusion, Pain




“I’ve had people say it’s pulled muscles, spinal alignment ...my hips are supposed to be out of alignment, and then the third specialist ...says it’s a slipped disc and that I have to get a CT scan then I have to go for an MRI scan, and they are also saying its arthritis. I just want an answer so that I can deal with it.”




Seeking Fair and Adequate Recognition and Compensation

- Negative assumptions and suspicion
 - employers, bureaucrats, doctors
- Lack of respect
- Need to prove commitment to work
- Lack of choice and control over vocational future
- ▶ Fear, Anger, Confusion, Pain



"They instil fear in you. You're already injured so your defences are down. You're now sort of backed into a corner because they're the ones that are supposed to be paying the money. And yet they're not paying you properly. Or they're threatening to take it away. So you feel like you're alone and you have no recourse. And it's a rotten thing to be in."




Living as an Injured Worker

- Financial hardship
- Family and marital discord
- Role loss
- Limitations in self-care activities
- ▶ Desperation, Dependency, Depression



Injured Workers:Victims Twice Over

- First they are victims of the workplace.
- Second, they are victims of a system that implies they are fraudulent and which in their eyes refuses them support and impedes their rehabilitation



Recommendations

- Include IWs in determining treatment and rehabilitation plans
- Take a holistic approach to treatment and rehabilitation
- Create a supportive climate
- Improve knowledge of rights, access to information.
- Recognize the legitimacy of IWs' claims and issues
- Ensure increased sensitivity, accountability on the part of the compensation system