



Abstract Title: Employment of occupational concepts within return to work (RTW) literature

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Introduction

The return-to-work (RTW)/back-to-work (BTW) discourse generates and promotes best practices and identifies occurring problems when supporting individuals to return to work (Kvam & Vik, 2015; Soeker, 2016). Humans, as occupational beings, continually spend time to acquire new occupations and maximize their potential abilities (Asaba & Wicks, 2010). RTW professionals primarily focus on paid work, which is beneficial for one's well-being and sense of belongingness (Kvam & Vik, 2015). Yet, RTW does not have adequate methods to support individuals who have substituted an alternative occupation, such as raising a family, in lieu of old formal employment (Kvam & Vik, 2015). Therefore, RTW does not effectively promote equitable outcomes and inclusion for clients who less so embrace paid work, compared to those who do. Different occupational concepts, such as occupational integrity, are employed by various fields (e.g. occupational therapy and occupational health and safety) who participate in RTW/BTW. Utilizing such terminology can determine what social determinants of health RTW professionals should consider when supporting clients in attaining occupations (Švajgera & Winding, 2009). They are also relevant when considering to what extent paid work should be pursued in RTW interventions, given the diversity of occupations that can promote recovery (Kvam & Vik, 2015).

Objective

To investigate which occupational concepts are employed in the RTW/BTW academic literature, and to probe which occupational professional fields are collaborating in the RTW process.

Methods

A scoping review was conducted, investigating the presence of n=48 occupational concepts (n=27 obtained from (Chai & Wolbring, 2016)) in RTW/BTW literature. We searched three academic databases (EBSCO all, itself covering over 70 databases, Scopus, including the full Medline collection, and Web of Science), generating both thematic qualitative and descriptive quantitative data.

Results

Occupational Therapy was mentioned n=1379 times, occupational health and safety n=408 times and occupational science n=22 times. Occupational health (n=5020 results) and occupational rehabilitation (n=2583 results) were the terms present the most in RTW literature. Furthermore, occupational health and safety related concepts, such as occupational hazard, were mentioned considerably more than concepts used in the occupational therapy and occupational science fields (Chai & Wolbring, 2016). Concepts illustrating the impact of occupation on personal identity, the perceived quality of occupations, as well as occupational participation as a right, rarely appeared in the covered literature.

Conclusion

The RTW discourse might benefit from incorporating a more diverse set of occupational concepts to investigate social determinants of attaining occupations.

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Cite this document in APA:

Li, W. & Wolbring, G. (2018, September). *Employment of occupational concepts within return to work (RTW) literature*. Paper presented at the Healthy Living, Healthy Life: Collaborative Health Conference on Research, Practice and Community Innovations Conference, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS. Retrieved from <https://ojs.library.dal.ca/HLHL/>

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