

Title: A Return to the Worker Role After Injury: Firefighters Seriously Injured on the Job and the Decision to Return to High-Risk Work

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Major Finding: Two firefighters' decisions to return to their jobs after sustaining work-related injuries was influenced by their social support system and their motivation and enjoyment for their job.

Participants:

- Two male firefighters from the New York metropolitan area who had been injured at work
- Participant 1
 - Injury– burn to the head, face, and legs
 - Injury acquired after 18 years of service (24 total years as a firefighter)
 - Out of work for 3 months
 - Received physical therapy services and counseling
- Participant 2
 - Injury– fractured vertebrae
 - Injury acquired after 6 months of service (14 total years as a firefighter)
 - Out of work for 7 months
 - Received physical therapy and occupational therapy, chiropractic services, and massage therapy

Method: In-depth interviews with questions based upon the Model of Human Occupation

Analysis: A coded interview schedule was created. Audio taped interviews were transcribed and coded to identify major themes.

Findings: Four emerging themes that influenced their decisions—

- Family: The firefighters had developed strong bonds with their co-workers due to the amount of time spent together and the risky nature of their work environment.
- Interest in different careers: Both firefighters were unable to identify an alternative career that interested them.
- Disability: Although eligible for lifetime disability, neither participant accepted this option.
- Personal gratification: Both participants conveyed that the job was rewarding for them.

Conclusion: The social environment and volition impacted the decision to return to work.

Implications for future research: Interviews with larger numbers of individuals and individuals from other professions might further elucidate how one's decision to return to work after injury can be framed using the Model of Human Occupation as a guiding theory.

Evidence– based practice implications:

- **When providing services, therapists should consider a client's occupational environment and the meaningfulness of occupations.**
- **The Model of Human Occupation can help therapists understand a person's occupational choices and behavior with respect to job-related decisions.**

