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Introduction

Traumatic injury can be a life changing experience, and its residual consequence impact survivors' physical, psychological and social well-being¹. The effects can limit survivors' participation in major life areas, notably in employment.

In Ethiopia, the incidence of injury among working-age citizens is rising. However, there is limited understanding of its long-term consequences and what happen on survivors RTW journey¹.

- The trauma care and rehabilitation system is poorly coordinated to manage long-term effects of injury on survivors
- The country lack functional return to work (RTW) policy, strategies and readiness with professional to support their recovery pathways and manage RTW efforts.

Purpose

- Determine one-year post-injury RTW outcomes of injury survivors
- Identify factors associated with the RTW outcomes
- Understand the post-injury RTW process drawing from experiences of survivors and construct substantive theory, explaining what it takes to RTW after injury in the Ethiopian context.

Methods

Two complementary studies were conducted employing a multi-methods approach:

- **Quantitative:** Institution-based, cross-sectional study, using medical record review, followed by telephone interviews with 254 working-age (18-60 years) injury survivors.
- **Qualitative:** Constructivist grounded theory study, with face-to-face in-depth interviews of 14 working-age injury survivors

Key Findings

Quantitative Study

- 61% of injury survivors remain with residual impairment²
- 41% of participants failed to RTW up to a year after injury²
- Multiple factors influence the RTW success of injury survivors³
 - Severity and type of injury
 - Timely access to healthcare
 - Presence of residual disability
 - Motivation to resume work while in recovery
 - Presence of chronic illness
 - Access to compensation for injury
 - Pre-injury occupation

Key Findings

Qualitative Study

- Injured workers experienced weak formal RTW support and persistent structural barriers and social discrimination in their recovery pathway. Hence, they had to either adapt, fit, accept or follow new direction during their recovery journey.
- We constructed a substantive theory: **Synergistic Connectedness** – Spiritual-, Social-, and Self- connection – that catalyzes the RTW process, reflecting Ethiopian context and societal values⁴.

Key Findings

Qualitative Study Continued

- When an active working adult experiences injury and work disability, they pass through three iterative and non-linear stages: *dealing with the reality, meaning making, & navigating capability*.
- Resilience emerges through enduring sociocultural values linked to work as dignity, identity, & aspiration to fulfill social responsibility.

Take-home Message

- RTW for injured Ethiopian workers is a human, social, and spiritual journey.
- Fostering biopsychosocial-spiritual approach is essential to improve postinjury RTW outcomes
- For injured workers, holistic support, with a vocation-focused rehabilitation is essential.
- National return to work strategy and policy is urgently needed to guide further development.

Personal Message

Human beings are not commodities; please don't expel workers when impaired due to injury and illness!

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Theoretical Model of RTW After Injury: Synergistic Connectedness⁴

