

MEDIA RELEASE

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Process impacts on workers compensation outcomes

The timely processing of workers compensation claims and the support of employers result in better outcomes for seriously injured employees, a University of Tasmania study has found.

The study examining the health, social and economic outcomes for longer-term workers compensation claims in Tasmania conducted by researchers from the University of Tasmania's Social Inclusion and Policy Research Network in the School of Sociology and Social Work has been released by the WorkCover Tasmania Board.

Report co-author Associate Professor Douglas Ezzy said overall, the study paints a picture of the significant financial, social, and health challenges faced by people who have serious workplace injuries.

“The study involved a mail survey of workers compensation recipients who lodged claims between July 1999 and June 2007 and received compensation payments of \$20,000 or more,” he said.

“Many of these workers, some of whom were still unable to return to work, were experiencing significant financial, social, and health difficulties. For example, the majority of respondents reported worse family life post-injury and/or illness and they were financially worse off.

Professor Ezzy's co-authors were Dr Maggie Walter and Dr Allan Welch.

Dr Ezzy said satisfaction with the claims process was identified as an important influence on social, financial, and health outcomes. This, in turn, was influenced by employer support.

“There has been some debate over whether better outcomes are achieved by lump sum payments or ongoing weekly benefits. This study suggests that the nature of the payment, whether a lump sum or weekly benefits, is not that important. Rather, satisfaction with the claims process and the adequacy of the payment were more influential determinants of outcomes,” he said.

Dr Ezzy said the report was the first phase of a larger study.

“We are currently conducting in-depth interviews with workers compensation claimants who were awarded a lump sum in Tasmania before 1 July 2003 as part of the next phase of the research,” he said.

“The final report due at the end of next year will provide a comprehensive statistical analysis along with a detailed examination of people’s stories and experiences of the workers compensation process.”

Media contacts:

Dr Maggie Walter 6226 2874

Dr Allan Welch: 6226 2550

Information Released by:

Media Office, University of Tasmania

Phone: 63243218 Mobile: 0438 510616

Email: Media.Office@utas.edu.au