



# **2021 Mining Health and Safety Conference**

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# **Mining-Related Lower Back Injuries and the Compensation Process:**

## ***An Injured Workers' Journey***



# Presentation Outline

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Introduction

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Background

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Methods

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Findings

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Discussion

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Limitations

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Implications/Potential Impact

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Conclusion

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References

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Questions

# Introduction

- Risks and hazards associated with working in the mining industry are not only limited to physical injury
- Occupational Exposures
- Impact (psychosocial, occupational, financial, and physical)
- Workers' compensation



# Background/Rationale

- COPD
- Occupational Exposures
- Impact (psychosocial, occupational, financial, and physical)
- Workers' compensation



## **Research Question**

Determine the impact of a lower back injury and the compensation claim process experience expressed by some male underground workers in Sudbury, Ontario

# Methods

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Theory

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Reflexivity

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Sample/Setting

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Data Collection

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Data Analysis

# Findings

- Extreme Financial Hardship
- Compromised Family Relationships
- Feelings of Depression
- Unsafe Work Environments
- Punishment for Workers
- Denial of Illness and Compensation by the Employer



*“We went bankrupt while we were waiting for a response from compensation.”*

*“I was on social assistance and I lost all my credit, I had no money.”*

**Extreme  
Financial  
Hardship**

*“I went from being the most involved spouse and parent to being totally focused on pain and work. I became my pain and I didn’t know who I was without it. I lost friends and we went through marriage counselling.”*

*“My life is changing dramatically, my wife is pissed off at me all the time.”*

## **Compromised Family Relationships**

# Feelings of Depression

*“I was on anti-depressants, seeing a psychologist, psychiatrist, doctors, councilors, specialists, I did everything. The biggest thing that was shared with me was when you have an injury that goes on for so long, either you give up and kill yourself or you try to move forward.”*

*“My family went through hell during all this. It was probably my fault cause I wasn't in the right place. I was in a depression, you feel like your no good”*

## Unsafe Work Environments

*“It’s still rough. As far as I am concerned the money that you make underground is blood money, its blood money, simple as that.”*

*“It is known to be run like a German camp”*

*“They don’t care about anything else but their muck. The environment is toxic”*

## **Punishment for Injured Workers**

*“I had one boss who gave me a hard time. He told me they were going to let me go. They wanted me gone because I was on modified work and they didn’t want anyone on modified work.”*

*“My supervisor told me well you had a job and you couldn’t do it, you called an ambulance. You didn’t want to work, so your fired”*

*“I was denied because they said they didn’t think the injury happened at work, the company was trying to stop it”*

*“The general foreman wrote a letter to compensation saying that I was trying to get back at my boss for changing shifts, so the company is denying my injuries thinking that I am playing a game”*

**Denial of Illness  
and  
Compensation  
by the Employer**

*“So basically, they shut the door on you for everything. Compensation makes it very difficult for you and compensations standard protocol is deny. A system that you pay into your whole life is not about the worker, it is about the company.”*

## **Tough Fight for Compensation**

# Discussion



- Mistrust & legitimacy of an injury
- Punishment by the employer & compensation for sustaining a workplace injury
- Return to work still suffering from pain due to a fear of reprisal in the workplace
- Denial of their claim by the compensation office & process felt to be challenging & unfair to worker
- Breakdown in communication at all levels
- Participants felt powerless



# Study Strengths

Added value to previous research overall & in Ontario

Captured in-depth perspectives of injured workers who all had direct experiences with the compensation claim process

# Study Limitations

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Language

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Gender

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Selection bias

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Researcher bias

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Recall bias

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Small participant group

# Implications/Potential Impact



- Foster cohesive relationships with injured workers
- Injured worker advocate
- Formal communication training for all stakeholders (union, WSIB, employer)
- Development of resources for injured workers
- Creation/improvement of policies/procedures (return to work, compensation process, reporting an injury)

# Conclusions

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Peer supports, sharing of knowledge, & informed decision making were vital to reducing the economic & non-economic costs of a workplace injury

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Need for additional research about biopsychosocial consequences of an injury

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Importance of providing process, policy information

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Prevention education to all individuals involved in an injured worker's journey

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Person-centered form of treatment (return to work)

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# QUESTIONS

