

# Social Support, Depression, and Quality of Life for Individuals with Spinal Cord Injuries

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## INTRODUCTION

### Purpose of the Study

- It is estimated that the national incidence of spinal cord injuries (SCI) is 12,000 annual occurrences (The National SCI Statistical Center, 2008).
- Concerns exist that once patients are discharged and reintegrated into the community they will begin to face challenges that may ultimately impact their overall quality of life.
- Previous studies have concluded that peer and family support form an essential network and impact our activity involvement.
- Individuals who obtain a SCI are statistically at an increased risk for depression.
- Obtaining a better understanding of the relationships that may exist between these variables is critical to the development of appropriate interventions for community-dwelling individuals with a SCI.

## OBJECTIVE & HYPOTHESES

### Objective

- The aim of this study is to examine the relationships between social support, depression, and overall life satisfaction, for community-dwelling individuals with spinal cord injuries.

### Hypotheses:

- Persons with low social support will report significantly higher depression and significantly lower life satisfaction.
- Individuals with high scores on the depression scale will report significantly lower life satisfaction scores.

## RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS

### Research Design

- This study is an exploratory, secondary analysis of data obtained in a larger study pertaining to community-dwelling individuals with a mobility impairment.

### Participants

- 133 community-dwelling individuals with SCI who were at least 1 year post-discharge were included in this study.

### Measures

The selected measures for this study included:

- The Reintegration to Normal Living Scale (RNL): 11-item questionnaire used to measure life satisfaction.
- The DUKE Social Support Index (DUKE): 11-item self-report used to measure functional social support.
- Depression Items from the SF-36: "How often do you feel downhearted and blue?"
- Independent Depression Question: "Do you have depression?"

### Analysis

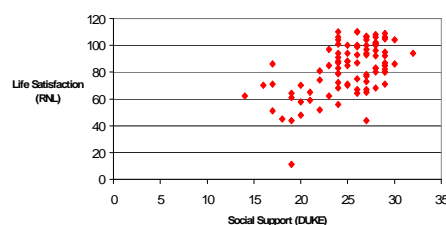
- A series of independent groups t-tests were conducted to examine any significant effects of social support on depression and life satisfaction.
- Additional independent groups t-tests were conducted to examine the effects of high and low life satisfaction on depression scores.
- High and low social support and life satisfaction scores were determined based upon a median split of the relevant frequency distribution.

## RESULTS

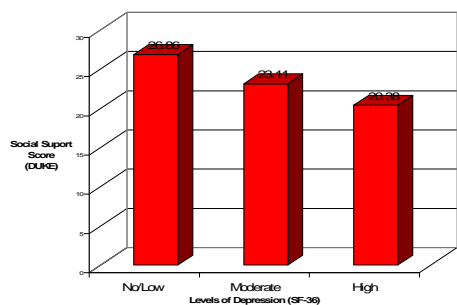
Table 1.  
Characteristics of Study Participants  
(N=133)

Variables	N	%
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	100	75.2
Female	33	24.8
<b>Race</b>		
White	114	85.7
African American/Black	17	12.8
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	0.8
<b>Type of Injury</b>		
Incomplete quadriplegia	41	30.8
Complete quadriplegia	25	18.8
Incomplete paraplegia	37	27.8
Complete paraplegia	30	22.6
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>		
Grade 12 or below	38	29.2
College 1-3 years	50	38.5
College 4 or more years	42	32.3
<b>Ages (y)</b>		
17-35	46	34.8
36-55	68	51.5
56-79	18	13.7
<b>Variable</b>		
Life Satisfaction (RNL)	82.24 ± 20.91	
Depression (SF-36)	1.47 ± 0.66	
Social Support (DUKE)	25.23 ± 3.69	

Level of Social Support and Life Satisfaction Scores



Level of Depression and Social Support Scores



Level of Depression and Life Satisfaction

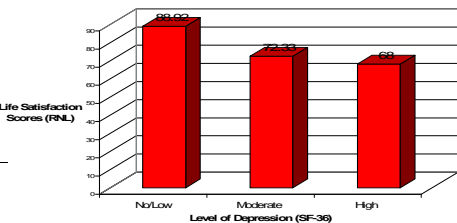


Table 2.  
Social, Support, Life Satisfaction, & Depression t-tests

Variable	High Social Support		Low Social Support		t	p<
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD		
RNL	88.94 ± 15.73	74.14 ± 19.98	-4.20	0.01		
Depression	1.17 ± 0.43	1.81 ± 0.71	5.12	0.01		
Depression	High Life Satisfaction		Low Life satisfaction		t	p<
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD		
Depression	1.34 ± 0.59	1.62 ± 0.72	2.33	0.05		

## RESULTS

- Individuals with low levels of social support reported significantly higher levels of depression ( $p < .0001$ ).
- Individuals with low levels of social support reported significantly lower life satisfaction scores ( $p < .0001$ ).
- Participants who reported low levels of life satisfaction reported significantly higher depression scores ( $p < .05$ ).
- Of the 133 participants, 50.4% ( $N = 67$ ) answered 'yes' to the survey question "Do you have depression?"

## CONCLUSIONS

- This study investigated the relationships that exist between social support, depression, and life satisfaction in a sample of community-dwelling individuals with mobility limitations due to the presence of a SCI.
- Results of this study suggest that significant relationships do exist between social support, depression, and life satisfaction.
- Participants who reported higher levels of social support were significantly more likely to report lower levels of depression and higher life satisfaction scores.
- Additionally, participants who report low levels of life satisfaction were more likely to report higher levels of depression.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Significant results will assist practitioners in identifying key lifestyle factors that might influence an individual's community reintegration following a SCI.
- Practitioners should be cognizant that an individual's perceived social support network can have a significant impact on both the existence of depression and their life satisfaction.
- Level of social support appears to function as a critical factor in a client's community reintegration.
- Practitioners can attempt to develop programs and treatment plans that encourage increased social interactions with peers who may or may not have a SCI.
- Practitioners should attempt to assess clients' participation in the community and any signs or symptoms of depression.
- Further research is needed to determine what factors or experiences might contribute to the presence of depression for certain individuals with SCI, such as monetary strains, limited community accessibility, or the age/cause of SCI.
- Additional research is required to further investigate what specific factors clients view as critical to their successful community reintegration.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (grant no. R04/CCR714134), David Gray PhD PI. A special thank you to Dr. D. Edwards and Dr. J. Wilbarger.