

Psychosocial factors and return to work in midlife women  
following acute myocardial infarction (AMI)

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ABSTRACT

**Background:** Heart disease is the number one cause of death in women in the United States. Annually, 74,000 midlife women experience AMI, resulting in almost 20,000 deaths. Experiencing an acute myocardial infarction (AMI) may initiate fundamental changes in how women perform their social roles. Midlife women fulfill multiple roles in society including spouse/partner, caregiver to children/parents, and wage-earner. Little research exists about the nature of these social role changes following AMI, and how socioeconomic variables influence return to work status. In addition to physiological considerations involved in the decision to return to work, though subtle, psychosocial factors, although subtle, influence a midlife woman's return to work following AMI. For a woman, the number of years of education and the total family income is recommended as the best indicator of socioeconomic status (Eaker, 1998). **Purpose:** This prospective, longitudinal study described changes in midlife women's hours of work over time following AMI and examined how psychosocial factors influenced women's return to work. **Sample:** The convenience sample included 37 wage-earners out of a total of 50 women following AMI, mean of 52.24 years  $\pm$  8.20 years, 27% African American, 46% high school graduates or less, 57% with family incomes of less than \$40,000. **Method:** Baseline data were collected approximately one week following AMI with participants reporting pre-AMI work status/hours of work and between 2 to 3 months post hospital discharge. Relationships among hours of work, family income, participant level of education, satisfaction with life and return to work status were examined using descriptive statistics, t tests, linear and logistic regression. **Findings:** Hours of work significantly decreased over time ( $p < .001$ ). Using linear regression, pre-AMI hours of work and satisfaction with life explained 55% of the variance and significantly predicted the hours of work at 2-3 months among midlife women following AMI ( $p < .001$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Using logistic regression, living with others, higher level of education, more satisfaction with life and greater pre-AMI hours of work significantly explained return to work ( $p < .001$ ). **Discussion:** Data provide support for socioeconomic and satisfaction with life factors as important determinants of return to work in midlife women following AMI. Implications of this research include addressing psychosocial factors as well as physical function in the recovery process, encouraging the incorporation of such factors into the recommendation of return to work.