

# Analysis of Engagement between Ethics and Return-to-Work Discourses in Respective Academic Literature

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## Acknowledgements



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# **Background Information**

# Return-to-Work (RTW) Process

Where professionals assist clients to recover and integrate back to work after they acquire impairments

(The Government of Canada, n.d)



## **Return-to-Work (RTW) /Back-to-Work (BTW)**

- Professionals try to support clients back to where they worked before acquiring an injury
  - Requires coordination between various professionals to agree on accommodations such as modified work hours, workstation modifications (Saunders, MacEachen, & Nedelec, 2015)



## Implication for People with Disabilities

- Employment is a relevant topic for disability communities and disability management professionals
  - Yet, the participation rate of people with disabilities in employment is much lower than for the general population (U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2018)
- What social barriers exist for returning to work as an “ideal objective”?

## In the United States...

### HOUSEHOLD DATA

**Table A-6. Employment status of the civilian population by sex, age, and disability status, not seasonally adjusted**

[Numbers in thousands]

Employment status, sex, and age	Persons with a disability		Persons with no disability	
	Apr. 2017	Apr. 2018	Apr. 2017	Apr. 2018
<b>TOTAL, 16 years and over</b>				
Civilian noninstitutional population	30,612	30,307	223,976	226,965
Civilian labor force	6,166	6,337	153,652	154,942
Participation rate	20.1	20.9	68.6	68.3
Employed	5,509	5,828	147,754	149,520
Employment-population ratio	18.0	19.2	66.0	65.9
Unemployed	657	509	5,898	5,423
Unemployment rate	10.7	8.0	3.8	3.5
Not in labor force	24,447	23,970	70,324	72,022

(U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2018)

# Ethics

A discourse on what individuals and societies ought to do and ought not to do

(Wolbring, 2012)

Ethicists should examine whether opportunities to access and reach social equity are maintained in the real world

(Sherwin, 2011)



**Ethics  
concepts,  
principles,  
and theories**

The diagram consists of two overlapping circles. The left circle is light green and contains the text 'Ethics concepts, principles, and theories' and 'Conceptual terminology (ex. autonomy, consequentialism)'. The right circle is a darker green and contains the text 'Applied ethics fields' and 'How other fields can ethically act (ex. bioethics and medicine)'. The circles overlap in the center.

Conceptual terminology  
(ex. autonomy,  
consequentialism)

**Applied ethics  
fields**

How other fields can  
ethically act (ex.  
bioethics and medicine)

**How Ethicists Can Guide Others**

“We [ethicists] lack the appropriate intellectual tools for promoting deep moral change in our society...”

(Sherwin, 2011)

## RTW Challenges and People with Disabilities

### ***Automation***

Will Robots reduce the number of employment positions available for people with disabilities?

(Wolbring, 2016)

### ***Alternative Occupations***

What other jobs might be available to clients if RTW is not an option? (Saunders et al., 2015)

### ***Universal Basic Income (UBI)***

Could a new, widespread source of income reduce the need to be employed? (Straubhaar, 2017)

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# Methods

# Conceptual Engagement

“...The special attention, interest, and exploration or questioning of a term or phrase that goes beyond a simple mention or fact about the term or phrase.”

(Lisitza & Wolbring, 2016, p. 4 of 22)

## Our Approach

**Selection of Databases  
(EBSCO all, Scopus,  
Web of Science)**

**Selection of  
Keywords  
("Back to  
work", "return  
to work",  
n = 33 ethics  
terms)**

**Scoping  
Review  
Approach  
in Peer-  
Reviewed  
Academic  
Literature**

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# Results

Term	Total amount of Search Results in	Total number of articles downloaded	Downloaded articles that contained conceptual engagement
<b>n = 13 Ethics Concepts in RTW Literature</b>			
<b>Autonomy</b>	162	ND (not determined)	ND [not downloaded]
<b>Beneficence</b>	5	2	1
<b>Bioethics</b>	3	3	1
<b>Dignity</b>	17	6	2
<b>Ethic*</b>	654	126	14
<b>Feminist ethics</b>	5	1	1
<b>Harm</b>	140	ND	ND
<b>Justice</b>	57	ND	ND
<b>Moral</b>	161	ND	ND
<b>Philoso*</b>	101	ND	ND
<b>Value</b>	2953	ND	ND
Maleficence	0	0	0
Public Health Ethics	0	0	0



<b>Term</b>	<b>Total amount of Search Results</b>	<b>Total number of articles downloaded</b>	<b>Downloaded articles that contained conceptual engagement</b>
<b>n = 20 ethics theories in RTW Literature</b>			
<b>Care Ethics</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Deontology</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Egalitarianism</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Socialism</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>

- The following ethics theories generated no results:
  - Consequentialism, cultural relativism, deontology, female care based ethics, individual relativism, moral relativism, psychological altruism, psychological hedonism, rights theory, Samuel Pufendorf, WD Ross, virtue ethics, virtue theory, utilitarianism

## Search Approach 2

<b>Term</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total number of articles downloaded for qualitative analysis after removal of duplicates</b>	<b>Downloaded articles that contained conceptual engagement between ethics and RTW</b>
<b>"Return to work" or "back to work" in journals with "ethic*" in their titles</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1 (article also represented in Table 1)</b>



## Qualitative Analysis Results

### Care as a way of seeing and being

The subject of care is at the centre of what is now thought of as feminist ethics: a body of work which has critiqued the dominant mode of moral discourse based on justice, abstract rationality, and individual autonomy (see Held, 1995). In this ethical frame, care is more than “merely an empirically present tendency among women” (Held, 1995, page 1); it presents a philosophical and political challenge to entire ways of being and thinking traditionally associated with masculinity. Those associations arise from a public sphere of justice and economy historically constructed to produce ‘worker citizens’ and to confine the possibilities of citizenship for those outside of formal work relations. Those traditionally responsible for caring outside of the paid economy of work—women in families—have therefore been relegated to a lesser form of citizenship, manifest across social, political, economic, and cultural realms. Social isolation,



- Downloaded n = 147 articles from RTW-related literature
  - Only n = 41 articles (28%) demonstrated conceptual engagement of ethics concepts
- Downloaded n = 4 articles from ethics literature
  - Only n = 1 (25%) article demonstrated conceptual engagement of RTW

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# Implications

## Our Findings

RTW academic literature less so engages with ethics theories compared to ethics concepts

Ethics literature minimally engages with RTW

Given Sherwin (2011)'s views, ethicists could study RTW to examine how both discourses can promote social equity and vice versa



## The Lived Situations of People with Disabilities

- People with disabilities might benefit from RTW and disability management professionals developing a *coherent, systemic* response to future employment trends using ethics guidance
- However, if disability management experts, RTW professionals, and ethicists do conceptually collaborate, it has to involve a people with disabilities' rights approach to ethics – *with a social model of disability frame of thinking*
  - Ex. Consequentialism – should we deem certain acts unethical due to *consequences* for people with disabilities?

## Study Limitations

### ***Grey Literature***

We did not study grey literature

### ***Conceptual Engagement***

We did not examine cases where authors did not explicitly mention an ethics term or RTW rather than “finding work”

### ***Qualitative Analysis***

We did not analyze articles from most search combinations with more than n = 100 search results

## Disclosures

Neither authors have any conflicts of interest to declare.





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