THE INFLUENCE OF ATTITUDE, SUBJECTIVE NORMS, AND PERCEIVED BEHAVIOURAL CONTROL ON INTENTION TO RETURN TO WORK: A CASE OF SOCSO'S INSURED EMPLOYEES

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Intention to return to work is based on employees' perception of the likelihood or the probability of going back to work after a prolonged illness caused by work-related injuries or other illnesses. Based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, this study proposes that employees' attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control will influence their intention to return to work. Data were gathered through a questionnaire administered to 160 SOCSO's insured persons, located all over Malaysia. Using the partial least squares (PLS) analysis method, we found that attitude and subjective norms have positively influenced intention to return to work among respondents. Perceived behavioural control however, has a non-significant impact on respondents' intention to return to work. The study offers plausible explanations for the results and discusses the theoretical and practical ramifications of the results.

Keywords: intention to return to work, attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control

INTRODUCTION

One of the major problems that employees can possibly face during their employment is prolonged sickness and work-related injuries that forces them to go on leave. Absence from work not only causes financial setback to organisations, it also has severe consequences to the employees, themselves. For instance, employees who are absent due to long-term sickness will undergo the possible risks of social isolation, job insecurity, instability of income, loss of competency (Vlasveld et al., 2012). Prolonged duration of absence will affect employees' work efficiency and diminish work skills, which in turn affect the expected effectiveness when they return to work.

Since injured or sick employees need to be hospitalised for a certain period of time or stay at home to recover from injuries or illnesses, they are

bound to experience negative emotions, such as reduced self-confidence, low life commitment, loss of interest in meaningful activities, and "empty" moods. All these can have serious implications on their intention to return to work. If employees withdraw themselves from the workplace because of the aforesaid reasons, there will be substantial impact on organisations as employees are among the most valuable assets for organisations to gain a competitive advantage over others. Without adequate manpower, organisations would not be able to strategise and execute their action plans accordingly. This will yield unwanted repercussion related to their business performance (Taylor, 2002).

Besides, employees who undergo prolonged treatment contribute to increased operational cost because employers need to recruit new staff or train existing employees to undertake certain tasks. On top of that, employers are also responsible for employees' compensation, such as paid medical leave. Hence, the impact may be detrimental to organisations, especially in terms of financial standing and productivity if it involves a substantial number of employees.

In Malaysia, the Social Security Organization (SOCSO) which is a statutory body provides social insurance, such as medical and cash benefits, provision of artificial aids and rehabilitation to injured or ill employees by means to assist them to reduce the sufferings and to provide financial guarantees and protection to their family (Syed Raisudin, 2000). In 2007, SOCSO has launched "Return to Work Program" to help employees and employers in a more holistic approach of disability management. This program aims at preventing re-occurrence of turnover, fostering an early and safe return to employment, and allowing employees to maintain their benefits and income levels.

Based on SOCSO statistics from 2007 till 2011 (Figure 1), it can be noted that there has been a steady growth in the number of insured persons who have successfully returned to work via this program. This suggests that through effective treatment, rehabilitation and specific case management, people are able to return to work effectively although they had previously suffered from injury and/or illness. This, inadvertently, helps employers to benefit in terms of human capital.

In relation to the above discussion, it is important to explore all the factors that influence an employee's decision to return to work after prolonged leave to further enhance the effectiveness of organisational support systems such as the "Return to Work Program." Therefore, in accordance to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, this study aims at examining the influence of three predictors, namely attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, on intention to return to work among SOCSO's insured employees.
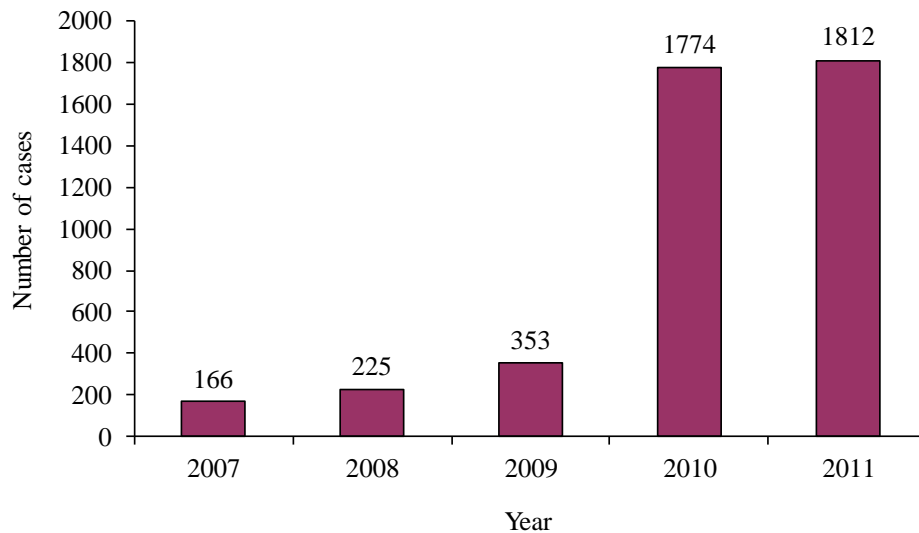
Figure 1: Number of successful return to work cases after undergoes "Return to Work Program," 2007–2011.
Source: Social Security Organization (2012).

INTENTION TO RETURN TO WORK

According to De Rijk et al. (2009), the intention to return to work can be conceptualised as the level of motivation to return to work. This could be influenced by one's attitude and commitment, and whether he/she is able to return to work based on the seriousness of injury and/or illness (De Rijk et al. 2009). In essence, a higher intention to return to work will lead to a higher level of motivation to get back to work after recovering from an injury or illness. In other words, the intention to return to work is employees' perception of their likelihood to return to work after a prolonged period of absence due to sickness or other work-related injuries.

A behaviour that indicates the extent to which an individual is willing to attempt or to prepare in performing particular actions is assumed to be the behavioural intention. Behavioural intention can be expressed via one's behaviour – whether he/she wants to perform a certain behaviour or action. Behavioural intention has been widely used in predicting the actual action, including return to work by scholars such as Vermeulen et al. (2011). Thus, the basic understanding of intention is that the higher the probability of the behaviours to be performed, the better the chances of the individual to have the intention to engage in that particular behaviours or actions.

ATTITUDE

Attitude is an individual's overall judgment and assessment of behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). This means that attitude towards behaviour can be reflected by the evaluation of behaviour together with its expected outcome. Individual attitude, an important component in human perception, influences individual behavioural intention. Thus, the intention to perform certain behaviour is contingent upon an individual's perceived attitude. Individuals tend to have intention to perform a particular action when attitude is formed based on the outcomes of evaluation. In the context of work inability, attitude has been defined as an individual's evaluation of their health status regarding their continued inability or capability to continue their employment, which may lengthen or shorten the period of work inability (Brouwer et al., 2009).

A study by De Rijk et al. (2009) found that employees' attitude will influence their behavioural intention to engage in a particular action, such as return to work after long-term sickness or absence. For instance, employees who suffered injury or illness may feel that they do not want to resume work immediately since they receive their salaries even though they are hospitalised. However, if they face financial constraints due to depleted savings etc., they may return to work quickly so that they are able to continue supporting themselves and their families. Hence, employees' attitude will influence their intention to return to work after prolonged absence due to illness or injuries. Based on the above discussions, it is theorised that:

H_1: Attitude has a positive and significant impact on intention to return to work.

SUBJECTIVE NORMS

Subjective norms are an individual's perception of the social pressure to perform or not to perform the target behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Francis et al., 2004). It can also be defined as the individual's perception of other people's views and thoughts on the suggested behaviour. These perceptions can play an influential role and put pressure on an individual to perform a particular behaviour, such as return to work. This means that subjective norms of an individual depend on his or her perception about the thoughts of significant others (e.g. family members, friends, colleague, and the immediate supervisor) on their performed behaviour (Brouwer et al., 2009; Vermeulen et al., 2011).

Individuals tend to act and perform the recommended behaviour as expected by their family, friends and immediate supervisor. For instance, an injured employee may lengthen the period of leave because his/her family wants him/her to rest at home. On the other hand, an employee, who has been

pressurised by the immediate supervisor on job security, may have the intention to return to work immediately after a long-term absence. Therefore, subjective norms may have a bearing on individual's behavioural intention. Based on the aforesaid assertions, it is hypothesised that:

H_2: Subjective norms have a positive and significant impact on intention to return to work.

PERCEIVED BEHAVIOURAL CONTROL

Perceived behavioural control is an individual's belief about his or her capabilities of exhibiting certain behaviours (Brouwer et al., 2009). Similarly, Francis et al. (2004), asserts that perceived behavioural control can be conceptualised as people's ability to have control over their behaviour and their level of confidence in their ability to perform or not to perform. Therefore, an individual's belief will influence the individual's behavioural intention and stimulate him/her to perform the target behaviour. In this context, perceived behavioural control may exert an impact on employees' intention to return to work.

As noted earlier, people's behavioural intention is strongly influenced by their level of confidence in performing the actual behaviour. For example, if employees feel that they are still weak to resume working, they might continue to be on medical leave. However, if they are positive about returning to work even though they may not have fully recovered from injury or illness, they might go back to work and perform their jobs in an effective and efficient manner. Therefore, this study proposes that:

H_3 : Perceived behavioural control has a positive and significant impact on intention to return to work.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Figure 2 depicts the proposed framework of this study. It consists of four variables, namely attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and intention to return to work. Based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Brouwer et al., 2009), it is posited that behavioural predictors, such as attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, have exerted a positive impact on individual intention. Accordingly, *a priori* proposition was made in which attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control may influence intention to return to work among SOCSO's insured employees.
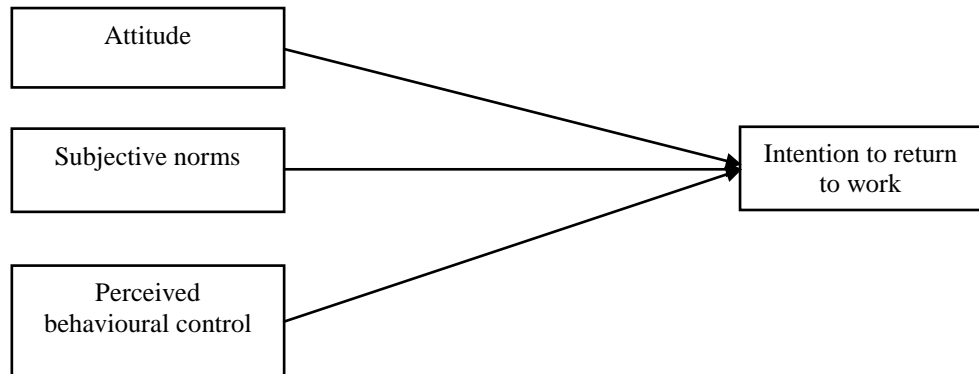
Figure 2: Research framework.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sampling

The unit of analysis in this study is SOCSO's insured persons, who participated in the "Return to Work Program". They comprise those who claimed for Employment Injury Scheme or Invalidity Pension Scheme, and have suffered from injuries or illnesses that lasted a minimum of four weeks of absence due to sickness. The data was collected from each person, who meets the aforementioned criteria.

Based on the number of SOCSO's insured persons in each branch, this study employed a stratified sampling method. This method was used because it can provide richness and accuracy of data from respondents of different stratums. This method is considered practical to this study because it is aimed at obtaining differentiated information from various stratums but with certain limitations, such as time and cost (Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran, 2001; Hair et al., 2007; Sekaran, 2003). Importantly, this sampling technique can help ensure homogeneity within a group, i.e. SOCSO's insured persons in a particular branch and heterogeneity across groups, i.e. different branches of SOCSO (Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran, 2001; Hair et al., 2007).

In the sampling process, respondents were first divided into mutually exclusive groups or stratum, i.e. branches. On this basis, it was assumed that there is heterogeneity across groups (i.e. SOCSO's branches) but there was homogeneity within each group (i.e. SOCSO's insured persons). Since the reported numbers of samples (i.e. SOCSO's insured persons) for each branch is not equal, disproportionate stratified sampling was employed.

A total of 210 questionnaires were distributed to SOCSO's insured employees located all over Malaysia via 35 participating case managers (i.e. representative for the branches). A total of 160 sets were returned and usable for further analysis, which reflects a 76.2% response rate.

Measurement and Instrumentations

Self-administered questionnaires were used for data collection. The questionnaires comprised three sections with 15 items measuring both independent and dependent variables. Specifically, there were four questions to gauge attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, respectively while three items were used to assess intention to return to work. Each items used a 7-point Likert scale with the following responses: 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-slightly disagree, 4-neutral, 5-slightly agree, 6-agree and 7-strongly agree. All items for measurement were adapted from Mehrdad et al. (2010). The questionnaire also elicited demographic details, namely gender, age, marital status, education, monthly income, type of injuries and job status.

FINDINGS

Demographic Results

The respondents comprise 121 males and 39 females. A total of 35% of the respondents are between 31–40 years old. In terms of salary, 29.4% of the respondents receive a monthly income between RM500–RM1000. The majority of the respondents or 60.6% are married and 50% are Malaysian Certificate of Education (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia, SPM) certificate holders. Additionally, 68 or 42.5% of the respondents stated that they were still on medical leave while 42 of the respondents were on treatment or rehabilitation.

Validity and Reliability Analyses

Data were analysed using Smart Partial Least Square (PLS) 2.0. As shown in Table 1, the factor loadings of all observed variables or items are generally high, ranging from 0.635 to 0.957. However, SN2 (i.e. second item of subjective norms) was deleted from further analysis due to its low loading value and this factor also cross loaded onto other factors. Next, factor loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to measure convergence validity. As depicted in Table 1, the loadings for all items exceeded the recommended value of 0.50, as suggested by Hair et al. (2010). Besides that, composite reliability (CR) values were also observed to examine the degree to which the items consistently represent the hypothesized latent construct. The

value of CR for all factors ranged from 0.850 to 0.959, which are above the acceptable value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). The AVE for all constructs were also greater than the cut off value of 0.50 (Barclay, Higgins and Thompson, 1995). Thus, based on the results, it can be concluded that the measurement model of all variables in this study demonstrated adequate convergent validity.

Table 1: Results of measurement model

Model construct	Measurement item	Loading	CR[a]	AVE[b]
Attitude	Att1	0.867	0.855	0.600
	Att2	0.637		
	Att3	0.852		
	Att4	0.718		
Subjective norm	SN1	0.692	0.850	0.657
	SN3	0.843		
	SN4	0.883		
Perceived behavioural control	PBC1	0.857	0.852	0.592
	PBC2	0.772		
	PBC3	0.797		
	PBC4	0.635		
Intention to return to work	Intent1	0.927	0.959	0.887
	Intent2	0.957		
	Intent3	0.942		

[a] Composite reliability (CR) = (square of the summation of the factor loadings)/{(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)}
[b] Average variance extracted (AVE) = (summation of the square of the factor loadings)/{(summation of the square of the factor loadings) + (summation of the error variances)}

Table 2 displays the results of the discriminant validity of all variables in this study. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), AVE should be more than the correlation squared of the two constructs to support discriminant validity. As shown in Table 2, each AVE value is more than correlation squared, thus discriminant validity is supported, suggesting that there is no multicollinearity of items in representing their hypothesised latent factors. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the inter item consistency of measurement items. As depicted in Table 2, all alpha values are above 0.60, as suggested by Nunnally and Berstein (1994). As such, it can be concluded that all measurements in this study are reliable.

Table 2: Discriminant validity of constructs

Constructs	α	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Attitude	0.777	5.302	1.188	**0.600**			
2. Subjective norms	0.742	5.231	1.316	0.364	**0.657**		
3. Perceived behavioural control	0.779	4.480	1.332	0.415	0.362	**0.592**	
4. Intention to return to work	0.937	5.627	1.366	0.503	0.436	0.267	**0.887**

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha; Diagonals (in bold) represent the AVE while the other entries represent the squared correlations.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations were obtained from the independent and dependent variables. All variables were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The mean values for intention to return to work, attitude and subjective norms were 5.627, 5.302 and 5.231 respectively. Perceived behavioural control showed a relatively low mean values compared to attitude and subjective norms. Table 2 illustrates the mean and standard deviation values for all variables.

Partial Least Square (PLS) Analysis

Figure 3 depicts the structural model derived from the partial least squares (PLS) analysis and Table 3 presents the results of the PLS analysis. The R^2 value was 0.588 indicating that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control explained 58.8% of variance in the intention to return to work.

The results of the study also showed that attitude had a significant and positive influence on intention to return to work among respondents ($\beta = 0.503$, p < 0.01). In a parallel fashion, subjective norms were also found to have a substantial impact on intention to return to work ($\beta = 0.378$, p < 0.01). Conversely, perceived behavioural control was found to be a non-significant predictor of intention to return to work among SOCSO's insured individuals ($\beta = -0.035$, p > 0.01). Hence, H_1 and H_2 were supported whereas H_3 was rejected. Additionally, of all the three predictors examined in this study, attitude was found to be the most significant factor in determining intention to return to work among SOCSO's insured employees.
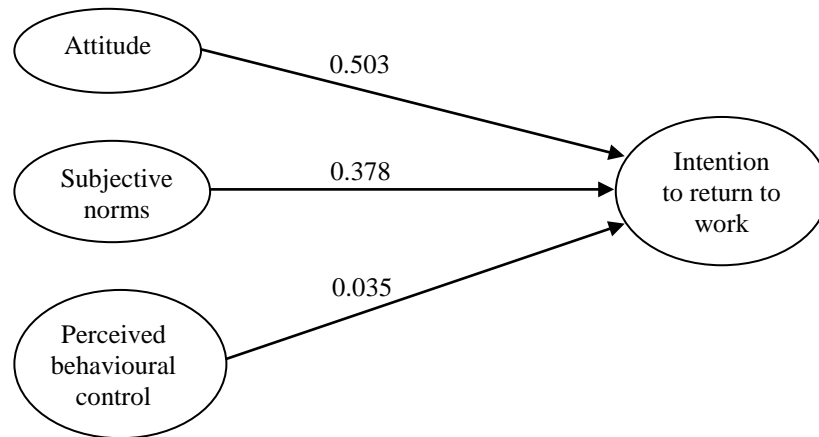
Figure 3: Hypothesised structural model: Relationships between attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and intention to return to work.

Table 3: Path coefficients and hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	t value	Supported
H_1	Attitude → Intention to return to work	0.503	5.748	Yes
H_2	Subjective norms → Intention to return to work	0.378	5.219	Yes
H_3	Perceived behavioural control → Intention to return to work	–0.035	0.515	No

DISCUSSION

Based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the research framework theorised that individual attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control impacted their intention to return to work. The results of this study provide a modest support for the model. The statistical results showed that attitude and subjective norms had influenced intention to return to work. Importantly, attitude was reported to be the most important factor that predicted the intention to return to work among respondents. This finding is consistent with Brouwer et al. (2009), who found that employees' attitude is related to their intention to return to work. This suggests that SOCSO's insured persons tend to possess a high level of intention to return to work after long-term sickness or absence, if they have positive judgment towards such behavioural outcomes. This means that insured persons will firstly assess their health status before they decide on whether or not they are able to return to work after long-term sick leave. If they perceive that

they are in healthy condition, they will be more likely to be back at work and perform their job responsibilities once their medical leave ends.

Besides individual attitude, subjective norms are also significant predictors of the intention to return to work. In this study, the respondents also took into account the social pressure from their surroundings. The pressure from family, friends, colleagues, and immediate supervisor potentially influence employees' behavioural intention, which is to return to work immediately after long-term sickness or absence. The results indicate that respondents are concerned and influenced by the opinion and thoughts of others regarding their intended behaviour. Therefore, they tend to behave in accordance with the expectation of these individuals. For instance, immediate supervisors may want their subordinates to return to work immediately after they have recovered from injury or illness. This is to ensure that human capital costs can be minimised and the individual's job security is maintained. In a similar vein, such views may be shared and supported by one's colleagues, friends and family, which will indirectly urge an employee to return to work after long-term sickness or absence. This notion has been supported by the study of Vermeulen et al. (2011), who reported that injured or ill employees tend to have high intentions to return to work, if they continue to experience pressure or encouragement from their significant others. Hence, it is evident that social pressure had substantially influence the respondents' intention to return to work.

On the other hand, the results of this study show that perceived behavioural control had no influence on intention to return to work among SOCSO's insured employees. One plausible justification for the non-significant empirical linkage between perceived behavioural control and intention to return to work is attributed to respondents' present health status. Since data were collected during the period where respondents were still undergoing medical treatment or in the process of recovering from injury and illness, they might feel that their present health and physical statuses do not allow them to return to work. This perception, to a certain level, would influence their behavioural intention of not returning to work after long-term sickness or absence. This finding was corroborated by Brouwer et al. (2009) and Smith et al. (2008), who asserted that perceived behavioural control had a non-significant relationship with employees' behavioural intention. In other words, respondents may plausibly feel that they are not fit enough to resume working and this bears no substantial impact on their intention to return to work after long-term sickness or absence.

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings of this study provide theoretical as well practical ramifications. Based on the literature, the Theory of Planned Behaviour has been used extensively in predicting various behavioural outcomes, such as consumers' buying behaviour

(Haghighi, Rahrovy and Vaezi, 2012), Internet tax filing intention (Ramayah et al., 2009), occupational choices (Arnold et al., 2006), job search intention (Van Hooft & De Jong, 2009), gambling behaviour (Martin et al., 2010), and business decision (Southey, 2011). However, there is very limited research on intention to return to work that has adopted the Theory of Planned Behaviour as its underlying theory. As such, in terms of theoretical ramification, this study has to some extent contributed to the knowledge in this field of research. More importantly, this study has successfully filled the research gap pertaining to the assessment of injured or ill employees' intention to return to work, particularly in the context of safety and health. In other words, this study has given additional empirical evidence in the growing body of literature on intention to return to work and Theory of Planned Behaviour from the occupational safety and health perspective.

As for practical implications, this study has contributed in terms of developing guidelines on the improvement of SOCSO's rehabilitation plan and "Return to Work Program." The findings showed that employees' attitude and subjective norms will influence their intention to return to work after long-term sickness or absence. By identifying the predictors of the behavioural intention of the injured or ill employees, various parties such as doctors, therapists, counsellors, and service providers could join efforts with the management of SOCSO's "Return to Work Program" in designing a more comprehensive rehabilitation plan for employees at large. In addition to treatment facilities and medical treatments for injured or ill employees, the management of "Return to Work Program" must also get help from doctors, therapists, especially counsellors and service providers to give continuous psychological treatment, such as social and emotional support to injured or ill employees. Importantly, family members of injured or ill employees also need to get involved to provide support so that affected employees build a positive attitude to return to work. The success of SOCSO's "Return to Work Program" and rehabilitation plan will benefit both the organisations and employees. Through such programs, injured and ill employees can develop a higher level of confidence in their ability to take up job responsibilities when they are back at work. Furthermore, such programs can facilitate and assist injured or ill employees to become more committed and productive after enduring certain injuries or illnesses. Employers can also benefit from this program because various costs related to employee development, such as training and staffing, can be minimised.

On the whole, the findings of this study have paved opportunities for future research. Firstly, future researchers may consider collecting qualitative data to gather a more in-depth understanding of this particular issue. Researchers can also focus on the type of injuries or illnesses, which may serve as a moderator on the relationship between behavioural determinants and the actions of return to work.

Taken together, the research results provide support for the key propositions. Most importantly, this study has succeeded in achieving its objective to analyse the empirical link between attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and intention to return to work. The results have suggestive evidence for injured or ill employees' perception in the prediction of their behavioural intention. This finding might be useful in assisting related parties to develop various intervention programs in encouraging employees on long-term absence to return to work.

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