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REINTRODUCTION INTO THE JOB MARKET OF FORMER WORKERS WITH RSI OF AN ELECTRONICS INDUSTRY IN SÃO PAULO METROPOLITAN AREA, BRAZIL

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Objectives This study addresses chronic illness due to work as a factor of social and economic exclusion, analysing the process of reintegration into the labour market of workers with repetitive strain injuries (RSI) that were employed originally in an electronics company in the metropolitan region of São Paulo, Brazil.

Methods We considered initially 722 workers, who had received communications of work accidents (CAT) due to RSI from 1987 to 1992. Information collected through questionnaires sent by mail and by interviews conducted in 1994 and in 2000 was analysed with regard to the disease process, the discrimination suffered until job termination, and the search for a new job, based on the theory of social representations.

Results Of 250 questionnaires, the vast majority of respondents were women (98%) and young (67.2% were under 34 years old). Among laid-off workers (n=195), fired mostly between 1991 and 1992, 89.2% were still unemployed in 1994. The most frequently cited difficulties for reintegration in to work were symptoms in the arms, functional limitation, the stigma of the disease, and of being a former employee of the company.

Conclusions These issues raise the need to rethink the system of health protection and surveillance of workers, as well as to establish a public policy on occupational rehabilitation.