

«Watch Your Steps»



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– Community mental health professionals' perspectives on the vocational rehabilitation of people with severe mental illness



- Employment rates for people with severe mental illness (SMI) in Europe and the United States continue to hover between 9% and 20%
- Vocational goals are frequently lacking in care plans
- Growing demands for mental health professionals to support their clients into competitive employment

Boardman, J., & Rinaldi, M. (2013). Difficulties in implementing supported employment for people with severe mental health problems. *Br J Psychiatry*, 203(3), 247-249. OECD. (2012). Sick on the Job?: Myths and Realities about Mental Health and Work

Kinn, L. G., Holgersen, H., Borg, M., & Davidson, L. (2016). "Watch your steps"—Community mental health professionals' perspectives on the vocational rehabilitation of people with severe mental illness. *Scandinavian Psychologist, 3*

In a Norwegian context, to promote competitive employment, systems are replacing traditional vocational rehabilitation programs with more effective, evidence-based models such as that of **Individual Placement and Support (IPS)**

This qualitative study *aimed* to explore Norwegian mental health professionals' views of their clients' potential for working and their understanding of local vocational resources

Method



- Community mental health professionals working in diverse areas in a larger city on the west coast of Norway were recruited to participate
- Three focus group discussions with 21 participants, covering supported housing, activity centers, and case management

The majority were females (n = 18)

- 11 held Bachelor's degrees in social work and two in occupational therapy, and eight held a postgraduate degree in mental health nursing

Interview guide

- “Is employment a topic you usually discuss with clients? ”
- “What is your knowledge of a person’s work history?”
- “Can you describe a situation when you assisted a service user to get a job?”
- “What is your understanding of local vocational rehabilitation programs when it comes to relevance and availability?”

Three Main Themes



1. Viewing service users as vulnerable and not ready for employment, with the discovery of their own lack of beliefs in clients' vocational potential as a latent barrier
2. The laying stepping stones by practitioners to everyday life activities, from which clients could be launched into the community and meet new role responsibilities
3. Displaying skepticism toward the competence of staff in vocational rehabilitation programs

DISCUSSION

- The participants' valued engagement in meaningful everyday activities as a helpful way of facilitating their clients' recovery
- However, they held a predominantly pessimistic views in relation to the vocational potential and job prospects of their clients
 - These findings are not so surprising – some of the main barriers to employment that have been identified in the research to date have been stigma, discrimination, low expectations, and lack of follow-up support by mental health practitioners

Kirsh, B., Krupa, T., Cockburn, L., & Gewurtz, R. (2010). A Canadian model of work integration for persons with mental illnesses. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 32, 1833-1846.

CONCLUSION

- Mental health professionals interviewed in these focus groups primarily viewed their clients as having no chance in the labor market
- To facilitate work integration, mental health professionals should analyze and value clients' occupational narratives, interest, and needs, not only those related to a workplace setting but also those pertaining to the time, use, and activities of daily living
 - Revise their knowledge base related to guidance from recovery-oriented-research place-then-train models
- Job specialist can be seen as change agents

Any
questions?

A graphic where the words "THANK YOU FOR LISTENING" are spelled out using M&M's candies. The word "THANK" is formed by dark brown candies, "YOU" by blue candies, "FOR" by dark brown candies, and "LISTENING" by blue candies. The candies are arranged in a slightly irregular, hand-drawn style. A semi-transparent grey horizontal bar is positioned behind the text, making it stand out.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

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