Employment Barriers and Support Needs of People Living With Psychosis

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This thesis is submitted to Bond University in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This thesis represents my own original work towards this research degree and contains no material which has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at this University or any other institution.
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The design and methods used in this research were approved by the Bond University Human Research Ethics Committee. APA 6 style has been used throughout except where organisational regulations stipulate otherwise.
Abstract

Despite the de-institutionalisation movement which commenced in the latter half of the last century, people living with a psychotic condition remain one of the most marginalised groups in society. A major barrier to their social inclusion is a low rate of competitive employment. Surveys have found that most people living with psychosis desire to work, and there is increasing awareness that participation in meaningful employment may indeed constitute an integral part of their recovery. Although enhanced models of employment service provision have demonstrated improved ability to gain employment, rates of competitive employment for this group remain very low. This Australian study aimed to extend knowledge concerning employment barriers and support needs of people living with psychosis by investigating the subjective experiences of multiple key stakeholder groups. This included clients diagnosed with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, carers of people living with these disorders, employment service providers, employers, health professionals and community members. A purposive sample of 137 participants representing these 6 stakeholder groups participated in 14 focus groups and 31 semi-structured interviews to explore their views on the perceived employment barriers and support needs. Focus groups consisted of four to ten participants drawn from the same stakeholder group. Qualitative data obtained from focus groups and interviews were analysed and interpreted using a social constructionist approach and assisted by the use of NVivo 10 software. Visualisations of the data in the form of tree maps, charts and models were generated to demonstrate salient findings. Three broad categories of barriers were identified: individual factors, interpersonal factors and systemic barriers. The most frequently referenced barriers to employment
were interpersonal in nature, notably stigma, followed by individual factors and systemic barriers. Among individual factors, personal attributes such as motivation and self-management skills were more commonly referenced than impacts of the condition itself. The most frequently referenced systemic barriers related to aspects of government policy. Support needs identified by participants were broadly conceptualised in terms of the need for culture change, employment support and systemic changes. The most commonly referenced support needs were for improved employment support, culture change to improve societal awareness and attitudes, and systemic changes, particularly in government policy. The results of this study were used to develop a broad theoretical understanding of the relationships between factors maintaining the status quo and to identify some possible directions for future developments to improve employment outcomes. The findings of this study indicate that broad-ranging changes would be needed to improve the employment rate of people living with psychosis.

Keywords:
Psychosis, Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder, Employment, Barriers, Support
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