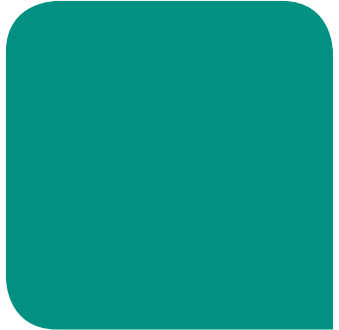


Supporting people in accessing meaningful work: Recovery approaches in community-based adult mental health services



Supporting people in accessing meaningful work: The use of recovery approaches in community-based adult mental health services

Background

Traditional clinical definitions understood 'recovery from mental health problems' as being 'free of mental health symptoms' (Anthony, 1993). The social model of recovery considered in this review stresses the importance of individuals having opportunities to take control of their lives and to engage in all levels of society regardless of whether mental health symptoms persist (CISP, 2007). The opportunity for people who use mental health services to have access to and engage in vocational and training interventions within adult community mental health services is one aspect of supporting people's individual journeys of recovery.

Research addressing the vocational and training needs of people who use mental health services, the conceptualisation of meaningful occupation and the development of social definitions of recovery and their incorporation into research, policy and practice has increased rapidly in the past 15 years (Tew, 2005). To acknowledge this

movement towards adopting recovery-based approaches to community-based adult mental health services, the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has produced a systematic map that identified research studies on recovery approaches in community-based vocational and training services. Following the completion of this systematic map, SCIE commissioned the current knowledge review on this topic.

Aims

This knowledge review aims to:

- synthesise research evidence on the process and impact of vocational and training interventions that are employing recovery approaches, in community-based adult mental health services
- survey current practice to identify vocational and training interventions being delivered in community-based adult mental health services in the UK that adopt recovery approaches.

Methodology

The research review

The review of the literature examines the relevant evidence and information on the topic and synthesises the findings to answer the research review question. This is predominantly

based on the definitions, searching, screening and findings of a systematic map on the topic recently undertaken by SCIE (Carr and Clapton, 2007).

The research review also examines further research produced since the map searches were completed.

The research review used the broad range of methods for reviews of the EPPI-Centre (2006) that conform to SCIE's recently published guidelines on conducting systematic reviews (Coren and Fisher, 2006), and was supported by EPPI-Reviewer software (Thomas and Brunton, 2006). Full details of the review methodology are included in the technical appendix.

The research review had two components:

- a review of the research evidence evaluating the impact of recovery-orientated training and vocational interventions on non-vocational outcomes, for example, self-esteem or quality of life
- a review of the evidence on the process of delivering interventions that aim to impact on both vocational and non-vocational interventions.

The knowledge review (practice survey and the research review) was informed by a Project Advisory Group and an academic consultant.

Key findings

Research review: outcome studies

The research review examined the research evidence on outcomes of recovery approaches to vocational interventions on non-vocational outcomes:

- Twenty-one outcome evaluations met the inclusion criteria and were judged to be methodologically sound; they were published between 1991 and 2006 and evaluated a range of community-based training and vocational interventions measuring vocational and non-vocational outcomes.
- The majority of studies were conducted in the US ($n=16$), three in the UK and one each in Canada and Europe.
- There was little evidence to suggest that different types of training and vocational interventions lead to differences in non-vocational outcomes.
- The research evidence was not conclusive. There were inconsistent findings of the impact of training and vocational interventions on self-esteem, social capital, engagement in daily living and quality of life (see Section 3.3.7).
- Although many studies reported an effect of an intervention there were many other studies reporting no evidence of effect.

- The areas where there seemed to be consistent effects was:
 - voluntary work and supported education programmes impacting on participants' self-reports of improved self-esteem
 - supported education helping participants' ability to cope with the stress of studying
 - most studies on integrated services and voluntary work and education showing an improvement in quality of life
 - most studies on integrated services showing an improvement in engagement in daily living activities and a reduction in mental health symptoms.

The findings indicate that although training and vocational interventions are shown to have an impact on vocational engagement, vocational engagement is often weakly related to non-vocational outcomes (Drake et al, 1996). It is likely that programme effects on vocational and non-vocational outcomes are specific to the content and delivery of the programme. Another possibility is that people who use services need more time in employment, training or education before vocational gains can be generalised to other non-vocational domains (Torrey et al, 2000).

Research review: process studies

- Six process evaluations met the inclusion criteria and were judged to be

methodologically sound; they were published between 1992 and 2006. Four were conducted in the US ($n=4$) and two in the UK.

- The studies identified a wide range of components of recovery approaches to vocational interventions.
- These studies were rich in suggesting components of recovery but provided minimal detail of the mechanisms by which these are achieved or what features would differentiate between successful and non-successful services.

Practice survey

The practice survey looked at the different ways in which training and vocational services can approach working with people who use services to support them in accessing employment, education or training to facilitate aspects of recovery. Findings indicated that practitioners used both person-centred and strengths-based approaches. Practitioners aimed at and believed in working with people to build on their strengths, competencies, accomplishments, goals and motivation and provided support with the wider aspects of people's lives including when they experienced setbacks in their mental health.

There were varying ways in which training and vocational services attempted to provide opportunities for people who use services to

support each other, but it featured more as an 'add on' to services than being integral to service delivery. The relationship between people who use services and practitioners was the mechanism for providing person-centred and strengths-based approaches, but there appeared to be a tension between developing positive working relationships with people who use services, and the pressure regarding funders to have measurable outcomes such as the number of people working and 'in a job'.

In many circumstances training and vocational services need to support people who use services to overcome barriers to employment. The most commonly cited issue was supporting people to navigate the complex and sometimes confusing route between receiving benefits and entering into employment or full-time education.

Recommendations

For policy and practice

- To deliver hybrid approaches that can support people at different points in their recovery process, as not everyone can be ready to enter competitive paid employment but may still want support to explore avenues towards obtaining meaningful occupation.
- To deliver integrated training and vocational services, such as the approach taken by the individual placement and support (ISP) model,

whereby vocational specialists join existing community-based mental health teams.

- To continue building peer support into services to enable people who use services to learn and benefit from other people's experiences and insights into their own recovery processes.
- To have secure forms of funding for training and vocational services that acknowledge and validate the importance of the work they do. To provide additional funds for more services to have open-door policies, whereby people who use services know they have access to services and are not considered closed and 'recovered' simply because they re-entered the workforce.
- That services continue to have a dialogue concerning and addressing issues of the power imbalance between people who use services and practitioners and the implications this has for recovery processes.
- To provide accurate advice on and support with the welfare benefit system. This needs to be an essential part of any service that aims to support people to access work, education or other forms of meaningful occupation.

For further research

- To explore the ways in which racism, sexism, ageism and other oppressive factors can affect the recovery process and how training and vocational services and models of recovery are addressing these issues.

- To conduct user-led research which looks at whether training and vocational services allow people to determine what meaningful occupation means to them, and what they really want out of life and the extent to which services have supported and can support people to do this.
- To conduct user-led research which explores the role of training and vocational services in influencing personal definitions of what counts as a recovery-based outcome.
- To conduct user-led research which explores perspectives and experiences of both practitioners and people who use services of recovery-orientated approaches in the delivery of training and vocational services.
- To conduct randomised controlled trials of the effectiveness of training and vocational services on non-vocational outcomes in the UK that builds on and tests the research evidence identified in the research review on outcomes.
- To undertake process evaluation research that develops models of recovery-orientated service delivery to differentiate the use of different combinations of service, service user and contextual characteristics.
- To explore the impact of vocational services, working with employers and potential employers both to support individuals and to promote further opportunities for employment of people with mental health problems.

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