

Title Vocational outcomes of an integrated supported employment program for individuals with persistent and severe mental illness

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Target Population Individuals with severe mental illness

Key Words employment, social skills training, severe mental illness

Brief Description This study suggests that supplementing Individual Placement and Support (IPS) with social skills training can lead to better employment outcomes for individuals with severe mental illness.

Article Summary

This research supports the use of enhancing supported employment programs with social skills training to help individuals with severe mental illness achieve employment. This research further supports the value of social skills training in vocational rehabilitation.

The study, conducted in Hong Kong and published in *The Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, compared the effectiveness of traditional vocational rehabilitation (TVR), Individual Placement and Support (IPS), and integrated supported employment (ISE) in aiding adults with severe mental illness to gain and maintain employment. Eligibility criteria included having a diagnosis of severe mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, schizo-affective disorder, bipolar disorder, recurrent major depression, borderline personality disorder); being unemployed; having completed primary education; being able to give consent; lacking cognitive impairments; and having a desire to work. A total of 163 participants were randomized into TVR, IPS, or ISE groups.

Researchers used the Employment Outcome Checklist to assess employment outcomes, the 21-item Chinese Job Stress Coping Scaling to assess coping strategies, and the Chinese Job Termination Checklist to assess reasons for job termination.

Participants in the TVR group received a vocational assessment plus training to increase specific work skills. IPS focused on a variety of work-related issues including: (a) obtaining competitive employment (over alternatives such as day training centers); (b) exercising client choice; (c) starting a job search; (d) integrating an employment specialist into the mental health treatment team; (e) utilizing individualized support and job training; (f) negotiating with employers (e.g., for job accommodations); and (g) counseling. ISE consisted of the same components as IPS, as well as an additional 10-session work-related social skills training. This social skills training taught interview skills, basic conversation and social skills, non-verbal communication skills, and grooming and personal appearance skills. Each session was 1.5 to 2 hours long. IPS and ISE were conducted by an occupational therapist.

Results indicate that compared to TVR and IPS only, participants who received ISE were significantly more likely to obtain employment. For example, 78.8% of the ISE participants were employed at the 15 month follow up, compared to 53.3% of IPS and 7.3% of TVR participants. Additionally, participants in the ISE program were less likely to have job turnover, and only 7.7% of job terminations occurred because of interpersonal difficulties, whereas 25% of terminations in the IPS group were due to interpersonal difficulties.

These results have several implications. Individual Placement and Support can be even more effective if social skills training is added to the intervention. A focus on teaching appropriate social skills can reduce

interpersonal problems at work that may lead to job termination. Social skills such as verbal and non-verbal communication, social perception, assertiveness, personal appearance, greetings, and problem-solving skills can be successfully taught using a variety of instructional modalities, including demonstration, role-play, feedback, and homework assignments. In addition, providing opportunities to practice these social skills, giving feedback on this practice, and continuously updating behavioral goals can aid participants to appropriately navigate the work environment and to solve problems when they arise.

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