

Title Supported Education for Adults with Psychiatric Disabilities: Effectiveness of an Occupational Therapy Program

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Target Population adults with psychiatric disabilities

Key Words education, psychiatric disabilities, occupational therapy

Brief Description A supported education program called the Bridge Program increased educational, professional, and social skills in adults with psychiatric disorders enrolled in this study.

Article Summary

This study provides results of a trial of the Bridge Program, a supported education program for adults with psychiatric disabilities that is designed to help participants pursue educational or vocational training. The study, published in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy, compared outcomes for participants randomized into either the Bridge Program group (n = 21) or a control group (n = 17) who received standard care. Eligible participants had to (a) be at least 18 years old, (b) be diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder by a physician, (c) be receiving medication management, (d) demonstrate interest in pursuing education, (e) have a minimum of 10th grade reading and writing level (assessed by the Wide Range Achievement Test, 1993), (f) be committed to attend all sessions, (g) be functioning adequately in most daily living activities, and (h) be their own legal guardian.

Demographic information was collected from participants following consent to participate in the program. The Participant Comfort with the Student Role Scale, developed specifically for assessing the Bridge Program, was administered to participants at the beginning and end of the program to measure participants' fit in an educational setting. Researchers reported that this measure was tested and found to have high levels of reliability and validity. The Participant Overall Satisfaction Scale, also developed specifically for this program, was administered on the last day of the program. During the second and final weeks of the six-week program, standardized observational evaluations (i.e., the Task Skills Scale, Interpersonal Skills Scale, and School Behavior Scales) were administered by double-blinded investigators to participants to assess changes due to the program. Finally, the OT Student Comfort with a Mental Health Population Scale was administered to the occupational therapy students before and after the program to evaluate how comfortable they were while working with this population.

The Bridge Program assisted participants to build their skills in basic areas of education, professional behaviors, and social skills; and provided opportunities to practice these skills in a controlled setting. It was delivered over a six-week period and consisted of 12 modules, nine of which occurred in a classroom setting, two in computer labs, and the last in the university library. Each module consisted of a lecture and lab activities to facilitate skill practice. The modules covered such topics as time management, effective reading skills, basic writing skills, basic computer skills, basic math skills, and the use of library resources. Each module lasted two hours with two 10-minute breaks. Following each module, participants met for one hour one-to-one sessions with mentors (occupational therapy students supervised by faculty) who further guided participants through strategic practices and the completion of forms, tasks, or studies. These occupational therapy students adapted activities to help participants function at a higher level in the community and make progress towards

their academic or professional goals. Standard care services for the control group included medical management, case management, group and one-to-one counseling, and various activity groups, such as recreation and life skills groups.

Results of measures from all modules showed a significant difference between pre- and posttest scores for those who participated in the Bridge program. Sixteen of the 21 experimental participants (76%) completed the program. Most significantly, 10 Bridge program participants who completed the program (63%) had enrolled in an educational program or job training, were employed, or were in the process of applying to a program at 6-month follow-up. In the control group, only one participant reported being involved in school coursework at follow-up. Those who were most successful in the program reported adhering to their medication routine, holding a stable residence, and attending the program regularly. The program also benefited the OT students, with results of the OT Student Comfort with a Mental Health Population Scale indicating that students were statistically significantly more comfortable with clinical work after gaining the Bridge program experience.

The researchers noted that the small sample is a limitation of the study. However, the positive results also lay the groundwork for further development of the Bridge Program. Researchers mentioned plans to collect 1-year follow-up data to discover whether participants in the Bridge Program maintained gains achieved through the intervention. Additionally, they noted plans to assess the effectiveness of the program with people with traumatic brain injury, and to assist community mental health facilities to implement the program in collaboration with local colleges.

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