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Feasibility of implementing a structured vocational rehabilitation program for persons with severe mental disorders in a tertiary care hospital in India



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Background: Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services help persons with disabilities, prepare for, find and sustain a vocation. This helps them integrate back into society by being gainfully employed and contributing to their family/ community. In countries such as USA, state specific VR services are made accessible to persons with SMD's. In India, there is a need for structured VR services to facilitate the recovery and rehabilitation process of persons with SMD's through employment and career growth.

Methodology: A vocational program was designed based on extensive review of available literature in terms of listing the organisations working for the VR of persons with mental disabilities, the tools of assessment and the process and inputs from the experience of mental health professionals who dealt with persons with SMD's. It involved: 1. assessment of vocational potential, 2. vocational counselling, 3. networking and liaising with prospective employers, 4. job related training and placement, 5. continued support and job retention, 6. other services to facilitate employment goals.

Results: N=61 were assessed for the program. Those willing to actively engage in the rehabilitation process, with a CGI score of 4 or less were enrolled for the counselling process (25) and n=18 were placed. Through networking and liaising 19 employers were identified. Major challenges in successful vocational rehabilitation were: denial of jobs perceived to be of a lower level, unclear vocational plans, compliance, stigma, disclosure of illness status, etc.

Conclusion: A vocational program in a tertiary care centre is viable and feasible with adequate human resources. However employment rates and access rated to VR in India continue to be poor due to lack of resources, stigma and less job options available for persons with SMD's.

Biography

Nikitha Harish is currently pursuing her PhD in Mental Health Rehabilitation at the Department of Psychiatry in the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bengaluru, India. She holds a BA from Bengaluru University and an MSc in Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Counselling from the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences. She is Recipient of a Gold Medal in Psychology and at both the Universities she studied with the top rank. Her PhD research is titled by, "Pilot testing of a vocational program for persons with severe mental disorders in remission; assessment, counseling and follow-up". Her research interests include Psycho-social Rehabilitation, Vocational Rehabilitation, Recovery and Hope, Advocacy and Rights of Persons with Severe Mental Disorders.

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