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Review Article

Impact of Mental Illness Related to Employment

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Abstract

Work is a major component of mental health and a socially integrating force that is highly valued. People with mental illness are less likely to report full-time employment than people without mental illness. Possessing a psychiatric diagnosis can immensely restrict career improvement as employers are less likely to recruit and hire people with mental disorders to hold positions in executive, administrative, managerial, or professional specialty occupations. Ample research shows that many mental disabled persons are recruited and hired into the secondary labor market where jobs are unskilled, part-time and temporary. These jobs often have high turnover rates and few benefits. Individuals who have a history of severe and persistent mental illness can receive job assistance through mental health rehabilitation programs. Compared to individuals with physical disabilities, twice as many people with mental disabilities expect to experience some type of employment-related stigma. Policy makers and politicians must identify this discrimination towards the mentally disabled that occurs in the labor market and find solutions.

Key Words: Mental illness, Employment, Impact, Policy implications, Discrimination

Introduction

Work is a major component of mental health and a socially integrating force that is highly valued. No single social activity conveys more of a sense of self-worth and social identity than work [1]. Persons with mental illness may be limited in their ability to work. Nevertheless, many mental health programs seek to assist persons with mental illness gain and retain employment by focusing their efforts on placing clients where less competitive skills are needed. Many employers are

disinclined to recruit persons with a history of mental illness because of their concern about unpredictable performance, work absenteeism, and possible disruptions in the workplace. Historically, competitive employment has not been a major focus of the mental health system. There has been a tendency to adopt minimal expectations and lower standards of achievement for people with a mental disorder. Socio-structural barriers and disincentives have also made it difficult for people with a mental disorder to get in and stay in the competitive workforce [2]. This review summarizes employment related mental health issues by people with mental disabilities.

Full time and part time employment

People with mental illness are less likely to report full-time employment than people without mental illness. When comparing the differences in full-time work by mental illness severity, differences in unemployment and part-time employment are much smaller. Rather than working part-time or seeking work, people with mental illness who are not working full-time appear to be displaced from the labor force entirely [3]. There are many explanations why so many individuals with mental illness are out of the labor force entirely. People with serious mental health issues have fewer incentives to seek work because disability policies often restrict eligibility to those not working in any significant capacity. However, the most severely enfeebled persons with mental illness are capable of part-time work when provided with opportunistic supports. Persons without mental illness who are more often employed are those who have reached young adulthood (18-25) to middle age (26-34). After reaching age 50, people with moderate and serious mental illness are less likely to work than those with mild or no mental illness [4].

Primary level employment

Possessing a psychiatric diagnosis can immensely restrict career improvement as employers are less likely to recruit and

hire people with mental disorders for upper-level positions in executive, administrative, managerial, or professional specialty occupations. Higher levels of education are often needed for these jobs and degree of educational attainment can be the most important factor in retaining such jobs. In contrast, higher-levels of employment with more educational preparation are more common for the general population than for persons with serious mental illnesses.

Secondary level employment

Ample research shows that many mentally disabled persons are recruited and hired into the secondary labor market where jobs are often unskilled, part-time and temporary, with high turnover and few benefits. People with mental disabilities working full-time in the primary labor market receive base financial incentives. Even the money they make frequently shifts towards their disability benefits, by creating a benefit deception. Studies confirm that people with mental disorders who receive disability payments are less likely to be employed competitively and, if employed, likely to earn less [5]. A lack of education and training in the secondary labor market also may lead to exclusion due to mental illness [6]. If so, greater attention needs to be given to people with mental disabilities to promote an increase in their level of education and training, rather than focusing on immediate employment. The promotion of supported employment programs for the mentally disabled may reduce the rate of underemployment and improve job tenure [7].

Employment discrimination

People with mental disorders identify employment discrimination as one of their most frequent negative experiences. Compared to individuals with physical disabilities, twice as many people with mental disabilities expect to experience employment-related incivility. Most persons with mental illness are conscientious and reliable employees who require no special consideration or accommodation. If a person with mental disorders witnesses incivility, these individuals may fear discrimination and possibly hide their mental health history from the employers. In order to decrease the incidence of discrimination among individuals with a mental disorder, organizations should promote employment equity for all people. So, identifying and managing mental health issues among workers, institutions or organizations needs to take precedence in order to promote an institutional culture that is supportive of mental health and psycho-social recovery [8].

Policy implications

Individuals who have a history of severe and persistent mental illness often receive job assistance through mental health rehabilitation programs. Traditional programs include pre-vocational training such as specialized job skill training, how to work under sheltered conditions, and how to follow progressive steps toward competitive employment. For those who are unable to work for a long period of time due to a mental health problem, disability payments may have an additional benefit.

However, the acceptance of such payments often indicates a transfer out of the economically active population. In some countries this constitutes a hurdle to future access to employment strategies [9]. People with mental disabilities must have equal access to employment opportunities and access to community-based treatment and rehabilitation services according to their skills, interest and training [10].

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Conclusion

One of the aims of this article is to showcase the employment related issues of mentally ill people in the job market. The evidence shows that mentally ill persons are facing discrimination as one of the main barriers to seeking and maintaining employment. Policy makers and politicians must identify this discrimination towards the mentally disabled that occurs in the labor market and find solutions.

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