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Vocational rehabilitation in job training centers for mentally ill persons

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- Revised abstract -

Introduction

Job training centers in Germany pursue vocational rehabilitation and re-integration of persons who suffered from serious mental illness, some of them were chronically handicapped. These formerly psychiatric patients have been mostly unemployed for many years and did not take part in the job market. Our specialized training courses last about one year and are financed by the German social insurance system. Results of a multi-centered study of more than **1201** participants who finished their training in one of the 11 German training centers in the year 2006 are presented.

Vocational training

First, trainees participate in a setting of learning which reduces fears of failure and helps to regain psychic stability. Trainings focus on clients' individual aims and are ruled by schedules for integration. The surroundings provide opportunities to try out new behaviour, to adapt one's self concept and to boost self-confidence. Modern facilities are available – consequently adequate vocational techniques can be acquired during the qualifying program. Later on in the *second* phase the progress of training is verified via external work placements which give the trainee hands-on experience.

Statistical methods

The index of success is based on restored ability to work or refreshed knowledge to start a new vocational education. Employment rates are calculated before the start of the program, at the end and at several intervals of inquiry by questionnaires; nearly 81 percent (leaving the training center) and 64 percent (1/2 year later) answered.

Results

- Far more than two thirds (74 percent) of the participants finished the training process regularly.
- Graduates who aimed at re-entering the job market and who completed this course of job and career rehabilitation successfully restored their employability. The majority (about 54 percent) have found so called regular jobs (in Germany employees and employers have to pay for social insurance and taxes) half a year after the end of participation.
- Graduates who prepared for following vocational or professional education or retraining reached their individual aims up to 97 percent and started their next step of qualification.
- The participants of short assessments (special psychosocial and occupational diagnostics) achieved a diversity of outcomes according to their different plans.
- Furthermore some so called weak data show the impressive improvement in several psychological and social variables such as enhanced psychic stability, decreased demand for medical help or therapy and better income situation. Participants report they are more content with their overall social life conditions.

Conclusion

Job training centers put into practice the classic ideas of vocational rehabilitation - learning and behaviour modification and integrated training on the job. Motivated clients are engaged in individualized but nevertheless demanding and supportive vocational training programs. Our formerly mentally ill patients increase their personal fitness and adaptability for permanent reemployment or successful partaking in further education.