

Using the ICF as a framework to explore mental health users' experiences of activities, participation and environment: An international study

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Introduction

People with long-term mental illness are among the most excluded in society (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004) negatively experiencing exclusion in their daily lives. This paper presents the Phase One results of a study that explored mental health users' experiences of participation and social inclusion in their communities utilising the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) framework (WHO 2001).

The ICF has been used as a statistical, research and clinical tool. Within occupational therapy there has been much interest in the ICF, as it reflects occupational therapy concepts for example the emphasis on activities, participation and environment (Britnell 2002; Haglund and Henriksson 2003; Hammell 2004). Within occupational therapy the ICF has been used in physical settings to explore rehabilitation outcomes (Stucki et al 2002), the participation of older adult populations (Levasseur et al. 2004) and in needs assessments (Haglund and Henriksson 2003). However, use of the ICF in mental health settings has been limited. Haglund and Daremo (2008) used the ICF to explore the experiences of patients in an acute mental health setting.

Method

This international study examined the experiences of mental health service users living in Limerick (Ireland), London (Canada) and Newcastle (Australia).

The research objectives were to:

1. Examine participation and the environment as experienced by mental health service users in Ireland, Canada and Australia.
2. Explore the clinical utility of ICF within the mental health arena.

The ICF was used as a framework focusing on the factors that influence clients' recovery journeys, especially participation and environmental factors in their own communities. Data was collected by interview using a structured questionnaire.

Results and Conclusion

Data are being collected analysed through 2009. Initial findings indicate that the ICF is effective at identifying participants' level of difficulty with activities and participation although patterns have not emerged currently.

This study will contribute to practice/evidence base in several ways:

- The ICF framework will allow for comparability across the three locations.
- Clinical usefulness of the ICF components will be examined within the mental health field.
- Add to the mental health evidence base.

