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Young adults with a chronic disorder at work: development and evaluation of an intervention.

Joan Verhoef^{1,2}, Harald Miedema^{1,2}, Marij Roebroek²

¹*Rotterdam University, Rotterdam, Netherlands,* ²*Erasmus Medical Center, Rotterdam, Netherlands*

Introduction

Young adults with a chronic disorder often experience substantial difficulties in finding and keeping a job. Although more young adults with a chronic disorder reach a working age, there is little experience yet with this age-group and interventions aimed at improving participation in work are very few. To fill this gap, we developed such an intervention.

Objective

To evaluate the applicability and feasibility of an OT-intervention to improve the participation in work of young adults with chronic physical disorders (16-25 years).

Method

Based on a literature review an intervention with vocational services was developed for young adults, in a rehabilitation setting in the Netherlands. The program is based on the Model of Human Occupation and offers group and individual sessions by an occupational therapist, jobcoach, and several experts (e.g. psychologist, role-models) during one year. In a pilot-study nine young adults with a chronic disorder received the intervention.

In a pretest-posttest design the intervention was evaluated. Primary outcome is participation in work, secondary outcome is a change in work status or work abilities.

Outcome measures are participation in work (Prodisq), occupational identity, competence and settings (OPHI-II), self perception of occupational performance (COPM), work limitations (WLQ), work ability (Work Ability Index), and health-related quality of life (Rand-36). Feasibility of the intervention was assessed using questionnaires and interviews with participants and professionals.

Results

All participants were very satisfied with both the group and the individual sessions. The group program contributed to better information (about work, regulations, personal motivation) and increased self-confidence.

Post treatment 2 participants were in gainful employment, 3 fulfilled voluntary (unpaid) work, and 2 started further education. Four participants show substantial improvement on OPHI-II and COPM after 1 year, 3 showed minor or no changes, 2 persons were lost to follow-up.

Conclusion

The intervention is applicable for young adults with chronic physical disorders, and feasible in a rehabilitation setting. Participants and professionals are very satisfied with the program.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

This study provides an intervention to improve the participation in work of young adults with a chronic physical disorder.