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What it is like for people with severe mental health problems to participate in a transitional employment course?

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Introduction: In current political discourses on the subject of welfare, the relationship between work and health is central. Many persons with mental-health problems experience difficulties obtaining employment and maintaining adequate work performance, although their desire to work is enormous. In order to improve their situation, we need to know more about which factors enable and constrain their work capacity.

The objectives of this study was to explore how people with severe mental-health problems experience 1) their personal occupational narrative, 2) their participation in a transitional employment course, 3) the value of employment, and 4) their need for support and adjustments.

Material and methods: A phenomenological design has been employed, which includes two in-depth interviews of a purposeful and a heterogeneous sample (age /gender) (n=5) chosen from the participants taking a vocational rehabilitation course.

Results: Four main themes were developed: (i) "all it takes to have a life", (ii) "learning from each other", (iii) "call for feedback", and (iv) "candidates - for what?"

Conclusion: These findings suggest that further standardization of vocational-rehabilitation programs in mental health may be counter-productive. In order to develop adequate adaptations of such programs, it is necessary that the modifications be founded on evidence-based studies of participants' experiences.

An implication of this study is that occupational therapists should be aware of their clients' everyday life expertise in their interventions, and more fully involve clients in deciding on individual goals.