

**EXPERIENCE OF MEANING IN DAILY OCCUPATIONS AMONG UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS**

Elisabeth Argentzell, Carita Håkansson, Mona Eklund  
*Lund university, Lund, Sweden*

**Abstract**

**Background.** Local authorities in Sweden are responsible for providing meaningful daily occupations for people with mental illness. However, many people within this group lack daily occupations that they perceive as meaningful. People with mental illness usually perceive greater well-being when engaged in paid work. However, this group often lack paid work and other daily activities should thus be investigated regarding their potential in terms of providing meaningful daily occupations. **Purpose.** To examine the meaning daily occupations may bring to those who are mentally ill and unemployed. **Methods.** Twelve unemployed people with mental illness were interviewed regarding their experience of meaning in daily occupations. The data were analysed using thematic content analysis. **Results.** Meaning was experienced in having a balance between occupations that helped the informants control their mental illness, i.e. by being socially engaged, competent and accepted by society, by creating routines and being productive and by being creative and seeking knowledge. Meaning was also experienced when taking care of body and mind by for example enjoying rest and relaxation. Substitutes for paid work were found, among other things, by taking care of a household or being productive at a day centre. **Conclusion.** Meaning could be found in all aspects of daily life. Having a balance between occupations was important in order to achieve meaning. Also to have a feeling of being competent and accepted was important, showing the impact the societal view has on the target group. People with mental illness should be allowed to play a more active role in their rehabilitation process. Further empowerment spirit should be applied. Contribution to the practice of occupational therapy. People with mental illness should be given the opportunity to use the occupational therapist when addressing such aspects as forming daily routines and structure, having balance between occupations and finding just the right challenge in occupational performance. More opportunities should be created for supported work placement programmes and work-related occupations in order to give the opportunity to develop a competent role.