

## **Mental Health Clients' Experiences of Social Inclusion in their Community Occupations.**

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### **Introduction**

Social inclusion as a human rights issue seeks to develop fair access to opportunity for marginalised groups (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004). With its links to social justice, it is a major goal for occupational therapists who work in mental health services (College of Occupational Therapists 2006). Evaluations of progress towards social inclusion recognise the importance of listening to clients' experiences of inclusion or exclusion in their local communities.

### **Objectives**

This research sought to discover the experiences of social inclusion for mental health clients when engaged in everyday, community occupations and to identify possible factors which influenced the client's experience. The study was carried out towards an MSc Occupational Therapy and received ethical approval.

### **Method**

Eight in-depth, qualitative interviews with mental health service users were carried out using interpretative phenomenological analysis to recount participants' life world perspectives (Finlay 1999, Smith et al 1999).

### **Results**

The results revealed three themes: *The Outside Experience* describes features of the social, physical and economic environment that influenced inclusion; *The Internal Disability* describes features within participants themselves that influenced inclusion and *An Active Lifestyle* describes how features of occupation influenced inclusion.

### **Conclusion**

Service users' feelings of inclusion or exclusion were predominately linked to the response received from others which was at times stigmatising and hostile.

### **Contribution to Practice**

Given the potentially devastating impact of the reactions of the social environment, occupational therapists may need to consider prioritising adaptation of society's attitudes over individual, client skill acquisition in order to facilitate social inclusion.

### **References**

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