

'Life journey'; processes of choosing and experiencing occupational engagement in mental health recovery

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Introduction: Recovery for people experiencing mental health issues is a journey of living a meaningful and contributing life, which involves meaningful occupational engagement. However, the processes of choosing and experiencing occupations that can support recovering are not yet clearly understood.

Objectives: This presentation discusses the processes of choosing and experiencing occupations in mental health recovering. It shares findings from a participatory research that explored these processes in collaboration with the participants.

Methods: This participatory research used Photo-Voice methods to collect data. It recruited twenty-nine participants from a Community Mental Health organization in Melbourne, Australia. Data were collected through in-depth individual interviews and a Photo-Voice course. The course involved weekly Photo-Voice group discussions between which participants were asked to take photographs about their occupational engagement and their recovery. The interview and group discussion transcripts, photographs and group activity materials were analysed using constant comparative methods.

Results: Recovering is an ongoing and unique life journey that can involve disengaging from and participating in meaningful occupations. Participants talked about disengaging when life is getting difficult or feeling stuck, and as a strategy towards taking care of and being gentle to themselves. Participating in meaningful occupations requires taking an active role, making changes and connecting with others to move forwards in life. Recovering is a process of balancing these two to keep well and flourish.

Conclusion: Recovering and engaging in occupations are mutually linked. Occupational therapists can support mental health recovery through providing opportunities for choosing, engaging in and experiencing a range of occupations.