

SURVEY OF FOUR MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMERS AFTER COMPLETION OF A POST-SECONDARY DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM

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OBJECTIVE

To examine positive effects and characteristics of completion of a distance learning program or course at the post-secondary level by four adult mental health consumers using qualitative analysis

DESIGN & METHODS

Four mental health consumers were selected who completed a post-secondary distance learning program. They complete a qualitative survey that asks information on how they completed their courses. How it benefited them. What were the unique hurdles faced due to their mental illnesses and how they overcame them

RESULTS

Three of the subjects completed distance learning degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The fourth completed a post-secondary undergraduate course. They all express satisfaction and also feel that they could not have completed their course or courses and degrees in a traditional bricks-and-mortar educational institution due to problems within themselves relating to how they are able to complete their courses due to their illness and potential stigma from in person encounters from students and faculty.

CONCLUSIONS

That distance learning might be a very suitable alternative for the education of persons with a mental illness due to removing scheduling and environmental stresses found within the traditional educational in person system. Many traditional educational programs have components that include distance learning or on-line computer learning. It is the social pressure cooker of in-person learning that can be a hindrance to completing educational programs and distance learning avoids that problem entirely.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE OR POLICY

Alberta has Canada's leading Open University Athabasca University and it might be possible for government retraining and upgrading to focus at cooperation with that institution. Many job training programs for the mentally ill focus on low skill and low level training. Distance learning might give the opportunity to focus on skills and potential jobs that come after a university degree.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The future direction could be to use existing funding programs through Alberta Student Funding to allow mentally ill consumers to pursue broader distance learning opportunities.

The subjects of this study were as follows. Three received undergraduate degrees and the fourth received a graduate degree.

Subject One: Received an undergraduate degree from Athabasca University by assessment for previously done college level work. The degree was in applied arts. His previous degree was over 15 years old and it updated his qualifications. No additional work needed to be done just a transfer of transcripts. He did not work in the field but because of the boost to his self esteem he continued to look for competitive employment and works 30 per week now. The cost was negligible. If he leaves his current job he intends to use the degree acquired on his resume for less physical work. He is on AISH and has social anxiety disorder.

Subject Two: Received an undergraduate degree from Athabasca University with the majority of courses being done by distance learning. The degree was in business. This is his only degree. He worked in the field that he was trained in. His self esteem and social standing increased remarkably. He afforded the program part time using part time student loan bursaries from the government to pay for the courses. He was on AISH before during and for a short period of time afterwards and then was able to get

competitive full-time employment then going off of AISH and suffers from schizophrenia.

Subject Three: Received an undergraduate degree from Newman University Kansas with the last two cap courses being done. The degree was in pastoral ministry. This is that person's third degree. She uses it to volunteer and assistance teaching at her church. The degree was started 15 years ago before they became disabled. Their self esteem improved remarkably and has become more active. They paid for the course out of their own pocket without subsidy. They are still on assistance and they suffer from physical disabilities and traumatic brain injury.

Subject Four: Received a graduate degree from Greenwich University, Australia with half of the courses being transferred in from in class transcripts. The degree was in political geography. This is the person's fourth degree. They have used it to acquire successively important volunteer and adjunct positions. The degree was done after the disability. Their self esteem improved remarkably. They paid for the course out of their own pocket without subsidy. They are still on AISH and they suffer from schizophrenia.

SUMMATION

Interviews were done with the subjects and in summation self paced learning without bricks and mortar education seems to fit the problems that the mentally ill encounter in the traditional educational system. Education like with many in society seems to be a key to reintegration once disabilities are stabilized.

Part time attendance rather than full time also seems to be a key finding.

It might have implications for how student funding for the disabled occurs with a decided bias against distance learning be re-examined.

Other References

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