
54) 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 and 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 and 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.