

Why Should Employers be Interested in Hiring People with Mental Illness? A Review for Occupational Therapists

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A quick look: ■

The employment of people with mental illness is low worldwide. Even as the discussions about mental illness have evolved, and in many cases, become a national discussion in the United States, the stigma and discrimination of individuals with mental illnesses seeking employment remains as a huge impact on their employment. A review of the last 25 years of the employment of people with mental illness reveals many employer benefits when hiring someone with a mental illness disability. The authors also provide recommendations for occupational therapists who work with those individuals.

Key Findings: ■

The author of this article looked at previous research over the last 25 years on the topic of the employment of people with mental illness, employer attitudes toward people with mental illness, and recommendations for occupational therapists. Here are some of the key findings:

- ▶ Less understanding, flexibility, and support from society are associated with the stigma and discrimination toward people with mental illness.
- ▶ The generalized view that people with mental illness are “dangerous” or “unpredictable” is also associated with negative views from employers.
- ▶ Many employees with mental illness do not disclose their disability to their employers for fear of the repercussions.
- ▶ In many cases, low-level or entry jobs are the only jobs available to individuals who disclose their mental illness prior to employment acquisition.
- ▶ Many employers view individuals with mental illness as frightening and consider them more aggressive and threatening, as well as being incompetent and needing more supervision.
- ▶ Employers who have previous positive experiences with employees with mental illnesses are more likely to have positive attitudes toward these individuals.

Putting It into Practice: ■

- ▶ Research has shown that meeting face to face with people with mental illnesses can be an effective way of breaking some of the stigma of mental illness.
- ▶ The overall performance of employees with disabilities was found to be close to equal to that of employees without a disability.
- ▶ Many accommodations needed for an employee with a disability to be productive cost little or nothing to the employer.
- ▶ In adjusting the work environment for employees with disabilities, employers reported overall improved work relationships and higher productivity as a result of their hiring.
- ▶ Despite many of the benefits of hiring a person with a disability, studies found that employers are still reluctant to hire individuals with mental illness.

More about this Article (Where to go from here?) ■

- ▶ Anti-stigma programs can be used to show employers the value in hiring a person with a mental illness disability, as well as providing more information to employers to help them understand that people with mental illness can be competitive and successful if afforded the opportunity.
- ▶ In many instances, people with mental illness are also reluctant to apply for jobs for fear of discrimination; therefore, it is important for occupational therapists to inform both the employer and the person with the mental illness about the benefits of employment of people with mental illnesses.

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