Early Psychosis in College Students and Global Life Skills
Natalie Klages, OTD/S

Purpose

- According to Gutman, Kerner, Zombek, Dudle, and Ramsey, (2009) the onset of mental illness often occurs during high school or early in postsecondary education. This means many individuals will experience their first psychotic episode during college. While there are mental health resources available on campus, “many students could benefit from mental health services, but do not actively seek these services” (Cook, 2007). Park Center is developing a program to specifically address college students who experience their first psychotic episode during college and wish to return to school.
- The Greenhouse Ministries Occupational Therapy Global Life Skills Assessment has been designed to incorporate a wide range of life skills and with the idea to emphasize mental health. To prepare the assessment for publication the language and topics needed to be reviewed to ensure it is up to date and best evidence is being used.

Literature Review

- Mental Illness and College Students
  - Compared to the general student population, individuals with mental health problems experience greater disruptions in education (Kessler, Foster, Saunders, & Starg, 1995).
  - They experience barriers to enrolling, maintaining, and completing courses (Best, Still, & Cameron, 2008).
  - College life is full of contributing stressors such as: living in a new place, balancing workload, peer pressure, time management, sleep deprivation, greater academic demands, and many others. (Cook, 2007)

- Campus Engagement
  - Campus engagement and relationships with others are factors associated with academic problems and poor retention for any college student (Salzer, 2012).
  - A study by Anastasian (2008) found that students who were more engaged on campus had higher subjective well-being.

- Barriers
  - “Individuals who have a recent onset of schizophrenia are typically quite motivated to return to school or work” (Nuechterlein et al., 2008). However, during the initial period of illness they frequently lack insight into having a psychiatric disorder which leads to the tendency to discontinue treatment (Nuechterlein et al., 1998).
  - Individuals with schizophrenia face persistent cognitive deficits that interfere with academic performance (Chan, Klaumin, Wohsi, Ting, Chang, & Fua, 2014).
  - Impacts of mental illness on academic success include factors such as: concentration, motivation, and social interactions (Salzer, 2012).
  - Social and cognitive functioning are central for individuals with severe mental illness gaining employment (Savreda, Lopez, Gonzalez, Atius, & Crawford, 2016).
  - Common self-reported barriers in higher education include: fears, anxieties, lost motivation, and inability to concentrate (Schindler & Knies, 2013).

- Cognitive Remediation and Rehabilitation
  - Cognitive remediation is associated with significant improvements in cognitive performance, symptoms, and psychosocial functioning for individuals with schizophrenia (McGurk, Tswamine, Sizer, McGurk, & Meurer, 2007).
  - Studies show that cognitive rehabilitation can feasibly be integrated into supported employment programs and results show individuals demonstrate greater improvements (McGurk, Meurer, Feldman, Wolfe, & Pascaretti, 2007).
  - Cognitive restructuring is needed to alleviate self-stigma among individuals with schizophrenia (Mak & Wu, 2006).

- Supported Education
  - Supported education programs emphasizing goal setting, skill development, and cognitive training results in increased participation in educational pursuits. The level of student participation in supported education programs was found to be related to motivation, satisfaction, employment, and learning (Arbessman & Logsdon, 2011).
  - First episode of schizophrenia typically occurs from late teens through mid-20s, therefore, adapting Individual Placement and Support model to include education may be more appropriate for working with these individuals (Nuechterlein et al., 2008).

- Employment
  - The impact of serious mental illness early in an individual’s education and work careers can result in a long period of burdens for the individual and society (Ketup, 2007).
  - Education is important for achieving long-term vocational outcomes (Best et al., 2008).
  - For individuals with mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorder seeking employment, the most commonly reported perceived barrier was length of time unemployed (Harris, Mathews, Renrose-Wall, Alam, & Jaworski, 2014).
  - In a study by Kots, Bond, and Xie (2012), individuals with steady competitive employment had greater reduction in negative symptoms than those who did not work and greater improvement in social networks.
  - In a study of non-vocational outcomes in relation to steady employment over a 10 year period individuals with steady employment improved faster but those without employment were still able to reach similar long term outcomes, just at a slower pace (McHugh, Drake, Xie, & Bone, 2012).

Mission: “Empower people who have mental illness and substance use disorders to live and work in their communities”

Guiding Principles: hope, choice, education, and quality

Agency Need: A program to specifically address the needs of college students trying to return to school after experiencing their first psychotic break, requiring a leave of absence.

Goals:
1. Identify a related TED talk or other informational webinar, podcast. Reflect on the implications for EC relating it to observations, experiences.
2. Identify and complete online learning modules on relevant leadership issues to support the EC and population served.
3. Complete a review of the literature on a designated topic, summarize and synthesize.
4. Identify, read, and understand federal and/or state legislation or practice acts that may influence services provided to population/focus area of interest.
5. Identify and complete a learning module in cultural diversity that will support EC performance with the population served.
6. Create an educational paper or power point on this topic, to be presented to Park Center administrative staff.
7. Justify the role and importance of occupational therapy with adults with chronic mental illness and within Park Center.

References

Greenhouse Ministries

Mission: Greenhouse Ministries, through local volunteers, provides relational services that are designed to inspire, give hope, and change lives.

Vision: “Our two-fold purpose: to serve the underserved through the power of God’s love, nurturing them in a safe place. To offer a community-based place for volunteers to share their gifts for the glory of God.”

Agency Need: Current assessment tool used with all client’s needs to be updated to focus on mental health and move evidence is needed to support the assessment as it is prepared for publication.

Goals:
1. Complete a review of the literature related to specific areas of the Global Life Skills assessment, summarize and synthesize.
2. Identify assessments currently being used to address skills found in the Global Life Skills assessment, summarize validity.
3. Identify language and topics within the Global Life Skills assessment which are out of date, use current research to update.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Christine Manville for her guidance throughout the experiential component process. I would also like to thank Julia Barlar at Park Center for sharing her expertise and support. Finally, I would like to thank Joseph Oldstead for his guidance and support during my project.

Early Psychosis

According to NAMI (2016), psychosis affects 3 in 100 people during their lives. “Psychosis temporarily interferes with the brain’s ability to make our reality and causes disconnection of thoughts and perceptions” (NAMI, 2016). In a study by Kessler, Foster, Saunders, and Stang (1995), 86% of students with mental illness withdraw from college prior to completing their degree. These researches also estimated that nearly 4.29 million people would have graduated from college if they had not experienced a psychiatric disability. Meanwhile, only 45% of the general student population withdraws from college prior to completing their degree (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). A first psychotic episode is frightening, confusing, and distressing for the person experiencing it and can also be challenging for their family to understand (NAMI, 2016).

While Park Center already has services for young adults experiencing mental illness, through providing these services they identified a need to develop a program specifically for college students wishing to return to school. Through reviewing the literature, I have found evidence that not only supports the need for addressing mental illness in college students but also examples of successful programs targeted college students separately. To help develop the program I created a brochure.

Life Skills

Greenhouse Ministries has been using a Global Life Skills assessment with all of the individuals who come into the Occupational Therapy program. The goal of the assessment is to address a wide range of life skills with an emphasis on mental health. In preparation for publication I reviewed the language and topics used in the assessment to ensure they are up to date and reflect the focus on mental health. To ensure the categories and questions are evidence based I reviewed the literature in regard to the categories of employment, education, and money management. The assessment will continue to be prepared for publication as a group of students take over to assess the validity.

Literature Review Continued

Life Skills

- A longitudinal study of the effectiveness of a life skills intervention for people with mental illness who had been homeless found improved and retained life skills knowledge over time for most participants (Herffinck, Chan, & Jabal, 2011).

Goal Setting

- In a statewide Medicaid-funded psychiatric rehabilitation program results found that individuals who set residential goals showed improvements in residential function as well as improvements in employment functioning. These results were independent from the individual’s level of participation in the program. Individuals who set employment goals only showed significant employment gains when they graduated from the program. (Anthony, Elliott, Rogers, & Leszer, 2014).

Money Management

- Issues of money management for individuals with mental illness. Proposes a recovery oriented approach to increasing money management skills to increase community functioning among consumers (Elbogen, Tiegrens, Vaungh, & Bradford, 2011).