The chicken and the egg: whether interventions to alleviate financial stress affect the experience of schizophrenia or whether addressing the mental illness improves the financial situation.

Paulysh, De Gannes and Ana-María Guerrero

Abstract

Background: Schizophrenia is a mental disorder characterized by disorganized and delusional thinking, faulty perceptions and inappropriate emotions and actions. Although the presence of schizophrenia is often of a lower socioeconomic status due to a variety of factors including higher rates of unemployment. Objective: Through a structured review of the literature, this review aimed to differentiate whether interventions to alleviate financial stress affect the experience of schizophrenia or whether addressing the mental illness improves the financial situation.

Methods: The review used a series of keywords to find articles from the past decade on the research question. Medline and the University of Ottawa general library search engines were used to find articles in English. Grey literature was also included to broaden the scope of the review. The articles were then mixed findings. The review revealed that persons with schizophrenia who were employed had lower levels of relapse and outpatient psychiatric treatment. Findings also suggest that employment does not worsen outcomes for persons with schizophrenia. Employment status may also be associated with improved well-being, satisfaction in life, and a better prognosis. On the other hand, research suggests that employment outcomes are influenced by the research improvements.

Conclusion: From a sociological perspective, community health professionals can consider implementing employment programs targeting persons with schizophrenia in order to help manage their illness and integrate into society. The findings of this review can be used for policy amendments to address potential outcomes for persons with schizophrenia in terms of their employment status.

Introduction:

• The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 26 million people in the world have schizophrenia and is one of the most burdensome illnesses.
• It causes a high degree of disability and it is the 8th leading cause of DALYs worldwide in the age range 15-44 years old.
• Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness that affects about 300,000 Canadians.
• Psychosis, being a common symptom of schizophrenia, is when an individual loses sense of reality and experience hallucinations and delusions. Individuals with schizophrenia have difficulty organizing thoughts.
• Medication is recommended in the treatment, particularly for psychotic symptoms, but therapy is also important.
• The cause of this disease is unknown, but epigenetic factors may be triggered by environmental stimuli.
• According to the WHO, social and economic conditions account for the highest rates of unemployment in the world, and 70-90% of people with schizophrenia are unemployed.
• Two theories explaining the link between socioeconomic status and schizophrenia: social causation theory and social selection or social drift theory.
• Social causation theory proposes that the social environment, including poverty, triggers the onset of mental health disorders.
• Social selection or social drift theory proposes that the presence of a mental disorder causes a person’s socioeconomic status to decrease.
• The purpose of this study is to use what the research intervention yields the best results for people with schizophrenia: interventions based on the social causation theory or interventions based on the social drift theory.

Results:

• A total of 7 studies were included in the final analysis.
• Socioeconomic status was defined as occupation, education, income of the household or of the individual.
• When looking at mental illness as a whole, it was found that mental health interventions relatively improved economic outcomes.
• When looking at just schizophrenia specific literature supports that theory and that providing employment and economic opportunities also improves the outcomes of schizophrenia.
• One study found that employment outcomes were enhanced due to active cognitive improvements.
• Must integrate neurocognition and social cognition into treatment.
• Neurocognitive improvements: mediated the cognitive and physiological improvements in the brain as it pertains to mental illness. Attention, memory and problem-solving abilities are enriched as a result of neurocognitive improvements.
• Social cognitive improvements explain how people process, store and apply information about other people and other situations. Persons taking social context approach, and recognizing emotional cues would improve as a result of the social cognitive therapy.
• Both areas of cognition contributed to improved employment.
• In contrast, three other articles suggested that employment is necessary to support the person with schizophrenia.
• The incidence rate of schizophrenia has remained constant as a result of many full time employment opportunities.
• More job opportunities lead to a decrease in symptoms.
• No statistically significant relationship between employment and worsening outcomes.
• One study found that employment status was related to a reduction in outpatient psychiatric treatment in addition to improved self-esteem.
• Employment status was also found to be a significant factor in the well-being of persons with schizophrenia and their prognosis.
• Greater risk of relapse for persons with schizophrenia if they are unemployed.

Discussion

• Inconclusive findings about which program type yields better outcomes for individuals with schizophrenia: if the impact employment has on mental health is greater and more positive than the effects of other psychosocial interventions.
• None of the studies showed that there were negative outcomes for either program type. It is suggested that both psychological and employment programs be used in unison.
• The results of this study show that better outcomes were achieved.
• Stigma around schizophrenia and Mental Health must be addressed.
• Implementation of development goals would help educate and support the global community as a whole.
• Of all disabilities, those with mental health conditions have significantly lower employment rates.
• Social grants are a type of grant distributed by the federal government and they have been designed to fit the community.
• Social grants specifically target persons with disabilities by providing them with money to support themselves. However, when these grants are given, they’re only available to those with physical disabilities. This puts persons with mental health conditions, especially schizophrenia, at a disadvantage as they are not able to employ themselves.
• Since results from this literature review were inconclusive, we summarized the more rigorous research that was done.
• In future instances there should be a control group included to provide a baseline of comparison for improved outcomes.
• The three systematic reviews that found the supporting the finding that employment improves the mental illness included studies of different research designs.
• One of the reasons that found that employment improves the outcomes of schizophrenia used a longitudinal approach to monitor outcomes over the two year period. However, there wasn’t a control group to compare and it is not clear if this significant improvement could be attributed to the employment or other factors.
• The three studies that concluded that employment outcomes were impacted by treatment of schizophrenia were conducted using the Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs).
• Systematic Reviews and RCTs hold high levels of rigor; therefore one range of study can hold more value than the other in answering the research question.
• It was surprising to see that some literature highlighted the importance of having the targets of both interventions combined, not separate.

Conclusion

This literature review revealed that neither approach to schizophrenia and socioeconomic status is more effective. It is important that both the mental illness and employment are addressed in union for optimal health outcomes. More research should be done to determine whether one method takes precedence over the other. Schizophrenia, being one of the world’s most burdensome disabilities, is an important public health matter and economic development issue.

Works Cited


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4. Rössler W


