Key findings

Four core categories reflecting the processes of occupational therapy supported education and mental health recovery were constructed from the individual stories of service users:

**Challenge** related to ensuring each service user had an agreed action plan detailing their recovery plans, supporting their ability to make informed choices with a full understanding of the impact their symptoms may have on day to day educational activities.

**Knowing Self** related to service users exploring their own identity, roles and habits with a view to exploring their future possibilities and work potential.

**Knowledge** related not only to service users but to educators. The overwhelming desire by the service users was not only to improve their illness prevention awareness and understanding but also to improve the illness prevention knowledge of the others involved in their education, such as subject tutors and college student support staff. This was also the main category highlighting the unique contribution of the occupational therapist as a mediator and facilitator of the service user's practical engagement in education.

**Social Network** related to the high importance placed on the development and maintenance of social networks as part of the education experience. The emphasis service users placed on peer support, in both the educational class room environment and the wider social setting, was very compelling. This became increasingly important when the service user role was challenged and eroded through repeated transitions, which was further impacted by financial instability. A model diagram was developed to show how these core categories are constructed and the points of connection they have with each other.

Project aims

The aim of this study was to explore, through the use of grounded theory, an integrated approach to the critical analysis and theory development of the occupational therapy supported education and recovery experience of service users.

The objectives were to:

- Explore service user experience of being in education and recovery through their own stories.
- Generate an abstract analytical schema or theory of the process of occupational therapy supported education in relation to enduring mental health and recovery, from the perspective of the service user.
- Develop recommendations that will inform occupational therapy practice and enable mental health occupational therapy services to develop service user focused supported education services.

Background


There is, however, limited research exploring the complexity and interaction of these interconnecting processes from the service user’s perspective.

Fundamental to this study was a focus on the importance of occupational therapy supported education and recovery from the perspective of the service user.
Methodology

A constructivist paradigm was chosen to support the research in relation to both the service user and the researcher. Through the participants’ stories, a constructed understanding of the processes involved is revealed making transparent how these processes come together to support recovery through participation in occupational therapy supported education programs.

Participants were recruited from the only two NHS Health Board areas in Scotland that have an occupational therapy supported education program involving higher education services: NHS Fife Focus Education Service and NHS Tayside Moving Forward Service. Research participants were 6 women and 4 men, with ages ranging from 33 to 47 (mean 39), who had an enduring mental health diagnosis including social anxiety disorder, psychotic depression, bipolar depressive disorder, schizoaffective disorder and schizophrenia. Their duration of illness ranged from 5 years to 26 years (mean 16) requiring frequent inpatient episodes. All participants were required to judge themself to be in the process of recovery; consider education to be an important aspect of their recovery; and have taken part in an occupational therapy supported education programme involving higher education services within the last 5 years.

Recommendations

- To test the occupational therapy supported education model utilising the tools identified by the service users through their collective stories.
- To explore the use of social media within mental health services as an aid to developing social networks as part of the education experience.
- To develop mental health awareness training and guidance information to enable educators to be part of the service user illness prevention strategies.
- To develop an emerging practice placement targeting final year occupational therapy students to raise awareness of this area of clinical practice.

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References


