Vocational rehabilitation in schizophrenia
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Authors' objectives
To determine if vocational rehabilitation interventions enhance the outcomes of persons with schizophrenia.

Searching
PsycLIT and MEDLINE were searched from 1966 to 1993 using the keywords 'vocational rehabilitation', 'sheltered workshops', 'employment' or 'employment supported' and 'rehabilitation counselling'. Reviews were included in this search.

Study selection
Study designs of evaluations included in the review
Comparative clinical trials were included.

Specific interventions included in the review
Treatment groups received the following various vocational rehabilitation interventions: assertive community treatment (ACT) and job developer; psychosocial rehabilitation; vocational counselling; hospital-based, intensive social and/or vocational programme; community transitional employment.

Comparison groups received various treatment regimes, including ACT and sheltered workshops, vocational counselling, custodial care and standard aftercare.

Participants included in the review
Patients with schizophrenia were included.

Outcomes assessed in the review
The outcome was vocational functioning.

How were decisions on the relevance of primary studies made?
The author does not state how the papers were selected for the review, or how many of the reviewers performed the selection. The included studies had to have the following: a comparison group; explicit inclusion criteria for patients and a minimum documentation of the proportion of the sample that were diagnosed as schizophrenic; evaluation of an explicit vocational rehabilitation intervention; and a systematic evaluation of defined and operationalised outcomes.

Assessment of study quality
Number of patients diagnosed with schizophrenia, and information about the relationship of diagnosis to intervention impacts. The author does not state how the papers were assessed for validity, or how many of the reviewers performed the validity assessment.

Data extraction
The author does not state how the data were extracted for the review, or how many of the reviewers performed the data extraction.

Methods of synthesis
How were the studies combined?
The studies were combined by a narrative review.
How were differences between studies investigated?
The author does not report how differences between the studies were investigated.

Results of the review
Twenty-four trials with 2,715 participants were included.

The results of the review are orientated towards answering 4 questions.

1. Do vocational rehabilitation interventions enhance the vocational outcomes of persons with schizophrenia?

Vocational rehabilitation enhances employment rates among persons with psychiatric disabilities. Supportive employment closely coordinated with clinical care can enhance the rate of competitive employment amongst these patients.

2. Do vocational rehabilitation interventions enhance outcomes other than vocational functioning?

Vocational interventions are associated with reduced hospital admissions. Vocational rehabilitation patients are more likely to be sociable, to socialise with friends and hold a driving licence, and are less likely to be heavy drinkers.

3. Are there differences in the effectiveness of the various types of vocational rehabilitation interventions for persons with schizophrenia?

Patients were more likely to work if paid. Accelerated supported employment is more effective than gradual entry into supported employment for competitive employment, competitive full-time employment, full-time jobs, total weeks worked and total earnings. There is no difference between accelerated supported employment and gradual entry into supported employment for employed at follow-up, ending hourly wage, employer ratings of job performance and job satisfaction.

4. What patient characteristics predicted response to vocational rehabilitation?

The nature of the literature prevents an adequate assessment of the impacts of patient characteristics on response to vocational interventions. There is a suggestion that patients with schizophrenia are less responsive to vocational interventions than patients in other diagnostic groups, and that past functioning, age at onset, and duration of employment are significant prognostic factors for vocational outcomes.

Authors' conclusions
Vocational rehabilitation programmes generally have a positive influence on work-related activities, but most have failed to show substantial and enduring impacts on independent, competitive employment. Supported employment suggests that vocational rehabilitation offers greater promise than do transitional and sheltered employment approaches.

Vocational rehabilitation may also positively influence medication compliance, symptom reduction and relapse.

CRD commentary
The author has tried to bring consensus to an area where it is difficult to draw conclusions from individual research studies. The inclusion and discussion of previous reviews devalues the quality of this review. The author should have evaluated the data separately and contrasted his findings with those of the previous reviews. The use of forest graphs or other visual diagrams would have helped to give an immediate indication of the effectiveness of interventions. Unfortunately this review does not offer sufficient detail or insight beyond that available in the individual included reviews.

Bibliographic details
Record Status
This is a critical abstract of a systematic review that meets the criteria for inclusion on DARE. Each critical abstract contains a brief summary of the review methods, results and conclusions followed by a detailed critical assessment on the reliability of the review and the conclusions drawn.