

Mental Health Day Centres: The Service Users Perspective

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Objective:

The main objective of this research was to elicit the views of the service users of the mental health day centres in one health region in Ireland. The purpose of ascertaining these views was twofold, firstly to allow the respective day centre to identify high achievement areas for prioritising in the future and secondly, to highlight areas of the existing service requiring improvement.

Methods:

A thorough review of the literature was undertaken and contact was made with any authors who had undertaken research within the area of day centres for patients with mental health problems. During the review of the literature a questionnaire by Philip & Stewart (1999) on service users' perspectives of day centres was identified as a possible research instrument. The basis of this instrument was the ServQual model which looks at five dimensions of service provision namely; empathy, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and tangibles. Philip and Stewart (1999) also added an outcomes dimension to the model. All statements within the questionnaire were assessed using seven point likert scales. A total of eight day centres were identified for participation in the study. The principle researcher then met and consulted with staff from each of the participating day centres and asked them to nominate a staff member to participate in a focus group. The aims of the focus group were to identify aspects of the service provided considered important by staff, to obtain an insight into the overall service provided and to review and critique a number of potential questionnaire instruments. Following the focus group it was decided that the Philip and Stewart (1999) instrument would be used in four of the day centres while an amended questionnaire would be developed for use in the remaining four centres. The second questionnaire, based on feedback from the staff focus group, included more statements on the aspect of community based care. The drive in Ireland is for the provision of more community based mental health services. The client satisfaction questionnaire (CSQ-8) was also administered as part of this research in both questionnaires. All service users were invited to participate in this research and consent was on a voluntary basis. Respondents either completed the questionnaire themselves or were interviewed one-on-one by a researcher. All data was entered into SPSS and analysis was undertaken.

Results:

A total of 177 service users agreed to participate in this research corresponding to an overall response rate of 45%. Although the overall sample size is quite small, this study was unique as it was the first piece of this type of research undertaken in a mental health day centre setting in Southern Ireland. This research while examining the dimensions included in the ServQual Model also looked at overall global satisfaction with day centres services. A total of 89% of service users stated that they were satisfied with the service they received at their day centre. Eighty eight percent of those who completed the first questionnaire (Philip and Stewart, 1999 model) were satisfied with the service they received compared to a slightly higher figure of 90% for those who completed the amended questionnaire. A similar question was asked as part of the CSQ-8 and in response to this statement a total of 93% stated they were mostly or very satisfied with the service they received. Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide suggestions for improving the existing service. Suggestions included extended opening hours such as offering a weekend service, more educational programs e.g. creative writing courses and the provision of additional services namely an out of hours contact service.

Conclusions:

In general, research findings from all eight day centres indicated high levels of satisfaction with the service received. However, it is important to look at the level and degree of dissatisfaction among service users as a means of identifying those areas where improvements could be made. Inadequate levels of outdoor activities and a lack of community based activities were identified as particular areas of dissatisfaction with the service provided. This highlights the need to examine alternative activities which can be provided through day centres but which would bring service users in closer contact with the wider community. For this health region, this research offered service users their first opportunity to voice their opinion about the service they received and for these views to be taken into account. It is envisaged that improvements to the service will be made based on this research.

Philip G. & Stewart J. (1999), "Involving mental health service users in evaluating service quality", *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance*, 12/5, pp. 199-209.