

An explorative study of the rehabilitation process of people with stress-related disorders

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Introduction: Stress and musculoskeletal pain have become two of the most prevalent causes for sick leave over the last ten years in northern Europe. Previous research has focused mainly on interventions for people with stress-related disorders who are still working but are at risk of progressing into a period of sick leave. However, it is also necessary to study the rehabilitation process of people that are unable to work due to stress-related disorders.

Objectives: The aim was to describe how former clients with stress-related disorders and rehabilitation team members experience the rehabilitation process, and to describe how experiences from the rehabilitation have been integrated into the former clients' everyday lives.

Methods: A qualitative grounded theory approach was used. The sample consisted of eight former clients and seven team members working at a vocational rehabilitation clinic who were interviewed. The participants were involved in four different rehabilitation programmes all of which used cognitive approaches. In addition, two of the programmes offered activities in a therapeutic garden.

Results: Two different modes of integrating experiences from rehabilitation into the former clients' everyday lives were identified; changing approaches to handling stressful situations in everyday life and changing occupational repertoire in everyday life. In addition, the result highlighted experiences from the rehabilitation that might have contributed to changes in the former clients' self-image, development of conscious strategies for handling stressful situations and changes in values attached to everyday occupations.

Conclusion: The participants that were offered activities in a therapeutic garden changed their occupational repertoire in everyday life after rehabilitation. Doing meaningful and enjoyable activities promoted relaxation and enjoyment during rehabilitation and experiences from these activities seemed to facilitate occupational balance in everyday life.

Contribution to the practice: Important implications might be to consider including meaningful and enjoyable activities in the rehabilitation of people with stress-related disorders in order to facilitate occupational balance and increase well-being. The findings from this study could be valuable for the purpose of reinforcing practice and contributing new insights into the rehabilitation of people with stress-related disorders.