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Assessment of Competency Status of Residential Mental Health Support Workers

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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Abstract

The present study explored the current competency status of residential mental health support workers (n=121). Competency was assessed through the domains of skills, attitudes and perception of the work environment. Consistent with a recovery model, the National Mental Health Workforce Development Coordinating Committee (1999) put forward 10 basic core competencies that they recommended that all mental health workers should be able to demonstrate in their work practice. Skills and attitudes self-report measures were developed to assess participant performance on these competencies. In addition, a standard measure (Ward Atmosphere Scale) was utilised to evaluate the perceived atmosphere of the participants' work environment. The aggregated results of this study appeared to show that participants were generally competent in a number of areas of work practice. However, deficiencies in critical areas of client support were identified on closer examination of the data. With regard to participants' reported skills, shortcomings were found in particular in the core competencies knowledge, assessment and intervention. Similar deficits were found regarding participant attitudes with shortcomings found in the core competencies knowledge, culturally appropriate practice, assessment and safe/ethical practice. While superior education and training did appear to influence performance on certain competencies, some deficiencies were nevertheless reported by the more highly educated and trained participants. In addition, participants generally characterised their work settings in a very negative manner such that it appears that many settings are not adhering to the philosophies of rehabilitation and recovery. Despite the identification of deficiencies, many participants did demonstrate a number of competencies combined with a commitment to professional growth. In fact, one of the most positive findings in this study was the importance practically all the participants placed on promotion of their own professional growth.

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