

Understanding the needs of Options for Care service users

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Reasons

The people who receive Options for Care's services do so because of the complex difficulties they deal with. These difficulties can be a hurdle to service user's recovery. However, not much is known about the different needs of these service users, which makes providing specific support for them to overcome these difficulties problematic. As Options for Care regularly assesses service user's needs (risk assessment), this information was evaluated in this study to help guide the development of more focused treatments to enable service users in their recovery.

People involved in the project

This was a joint project carried out by psychologists working at the University of Birmingham Centre for Applied Psychology and Options for Care. To make sure the study was ethically sound and clinically important it was reviewed and approved by the University of Birmingham Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Ethical Review Committee and the Options for Care Quality Review Board.

Approach

Every resident of Options for Care is assessed using the Short-Term Assessment of Risk and Treatability, or START for short. This tool helps the team assess a range of risk behaviours and the factors relevant to understanding each of these. It is completed by the multidisciplinary team and records the things they have done that can be problematic such as being aggressive to others or drug use; both in the past and at the time of assessment. Judgments are made regarding the likelihood of risk behaviours occurring as well as how they might be better managed.

The study looked at the information gained from these START assessments of service users as a whole, in order to see if there were any shared patterns across the Units that could guide support. This was done using all service user data at both Montague Court and Dartmouth House. The data was analysed anonymously, so that no service user can be identified.

What the study found

The study categorised the information about risk behaviours into some key types. It also identified some of the strengths that protected service users from carrying out these behaviours, and vulnerabilities that put them at risk of them occurring.

The study found that the most common current risk behaviours observed were verbal aggression (e.g. shouting and swearing) and self-neglect (e.g. not washing).

The most important strengths included abstaining from substances, having enough money each week, and living somewhere where the factors that often led to these behaviours could be well managed.

The most important vulnerabilities included limited social support outside of Options for Care, poor insight into mental health, lack of recognition of the need to manage their own risk and having limited social skills (e.g. not knowing how to interact with people very well).

The key signs that a service user was doing well included access to and interest in recreational opportunities, showing good social skills, and having plans for the future that were realistic.

Key signs that were worrying for staff included showing poor mental health (e.g. hearing voices, low mood), not taking medication as prescribed, and showing signs of impulsivity (e.g. doing things without thinking it through first).

This is summarised in the Table below:

Most frequent historic behaviours	Most frequent current behaviours	Top 3 strengths	Top 3 vulnerabilities	Key signs of wellbeing	Key signs of relapse
Violence	Verbal Aggression	Substance use	Social support	Recreational	Mental state
Substance Abuse	Self-neglect	Material resources	Insight	Social skills	Medicine adherence
Self-neglect		External triggers	Social skills	Plans	Impulse control

An interesting finding was that service users general conduct was linked to recent incidences of physical aggression against others (e.g. making threatening gestures, hitting). What this suggests is that service users who are generally more disruptive are also more likely to engage in risk behaviours directed towards others.

What the findings mean for the service

The study was able to show areas in the service users' lives that may be useful to focus on to try to help them avoid risky behaviours in the future. It was also able to show areas that are considered signs of good wellbeing and areas considered to be potential signs of relapse.

This provides Options for Care staff with information about specific areas to monitor in service users, so as to promote the best state of mental health possible. Areas that are considered as signs of wellbeing, but were not frequently observed, can be actively encouraged. Areas identified as common signs of relapse can be monitored to help maintain wellbeing. With these findings, it is hoped that Options for Care will be able to continue to make their services as relevant and useful to the service users as possible.