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A survey of occupational therapists using vocational rehabilitation for individuals with severe and enduring mental illness



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Defining vocational rehabilitation (VR)?

VR is a process:

- 'To overcome the barriers an individual faces as a result of injury, illness or impairment when accessing, remaining in or returning to purposeful activity, work and employment' (College of Occupational Therapists [COT] 2008, p3)
- Promotes recovery and social inclusion (COT 2010; Waghorn & Lloyd 2010)
- VR has been acknowledged as a key component in the delivery of mental health services for enhancing individuals' recovery, health and well-being (Department of Health [DoH] 2011)
- Occupational therapists have a key role in promoting recovery in relation to employment (COT 2006; Blank & Hayward 2009).

Background: mental health and employment

- In 2013, 40.9% of employment and Support Allowance recipients had a mental or behavioural disorder as their primary condition (Davies 2014)
- 60–70% of people with common mental disorders (such as depression and anxiety) are in work (Davies 2014)
- The unemployment rate for people with severe mental illness is four times that of people with no disorder; the rate for more common mental disorders is double that of people with no disorder (Davies 2014)
- Average disability employment rate is 33% compared to 71% of the overall UK population (Shaw Trust 2014)

Aim and Objectives



Aim:

- To explore the views of occupational therapists regarding the success of Vocational Rehabilitation [VR] to enable individuals with severe and enduring mental illness into employment.

Objectives:

- To explore occupational therapists' views on the success of VR as an intervention for individuals with severe and enduring mental illness.
- To determine the VR outcome measures used by occupational therapists with people with severe and enduring mental illness.
- To contribute to the evidence base for the development of future VR practice within the United Kingdom [UK].

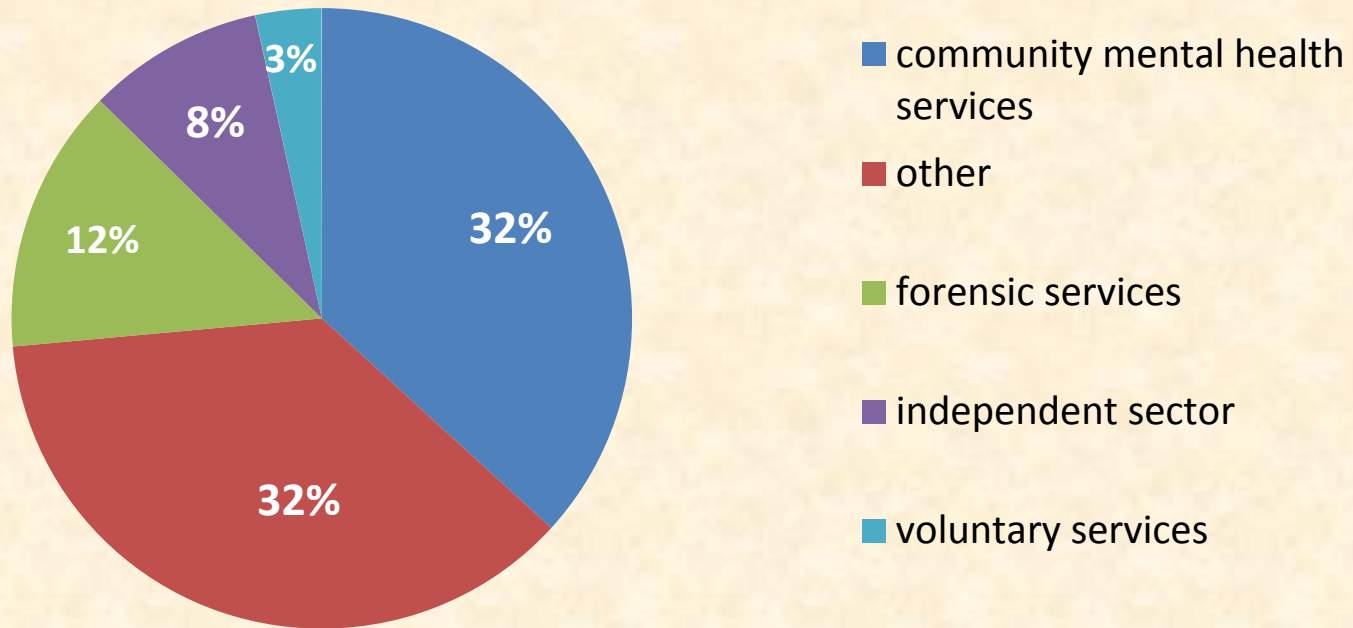
Method



- **Data collection:** Online Survey Monkey questionnaire (adapted from McQueen (2011))
- **Pilot:** Three OT educators with a background in mental health practice.
- **Sample:** 444 members of the College of Occupational Therapists' Specialist Section for Mental Health and Work (COTSS-MH and COTTS-W)
- **Data analysis:** Qualitative responses analysed using thematic analysis (Bowling 2009). Quantitative data analysed using descriptive statistics
- **Ethics:** Approved by the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Ethics Committee, York St John University and COT Research Development Committee

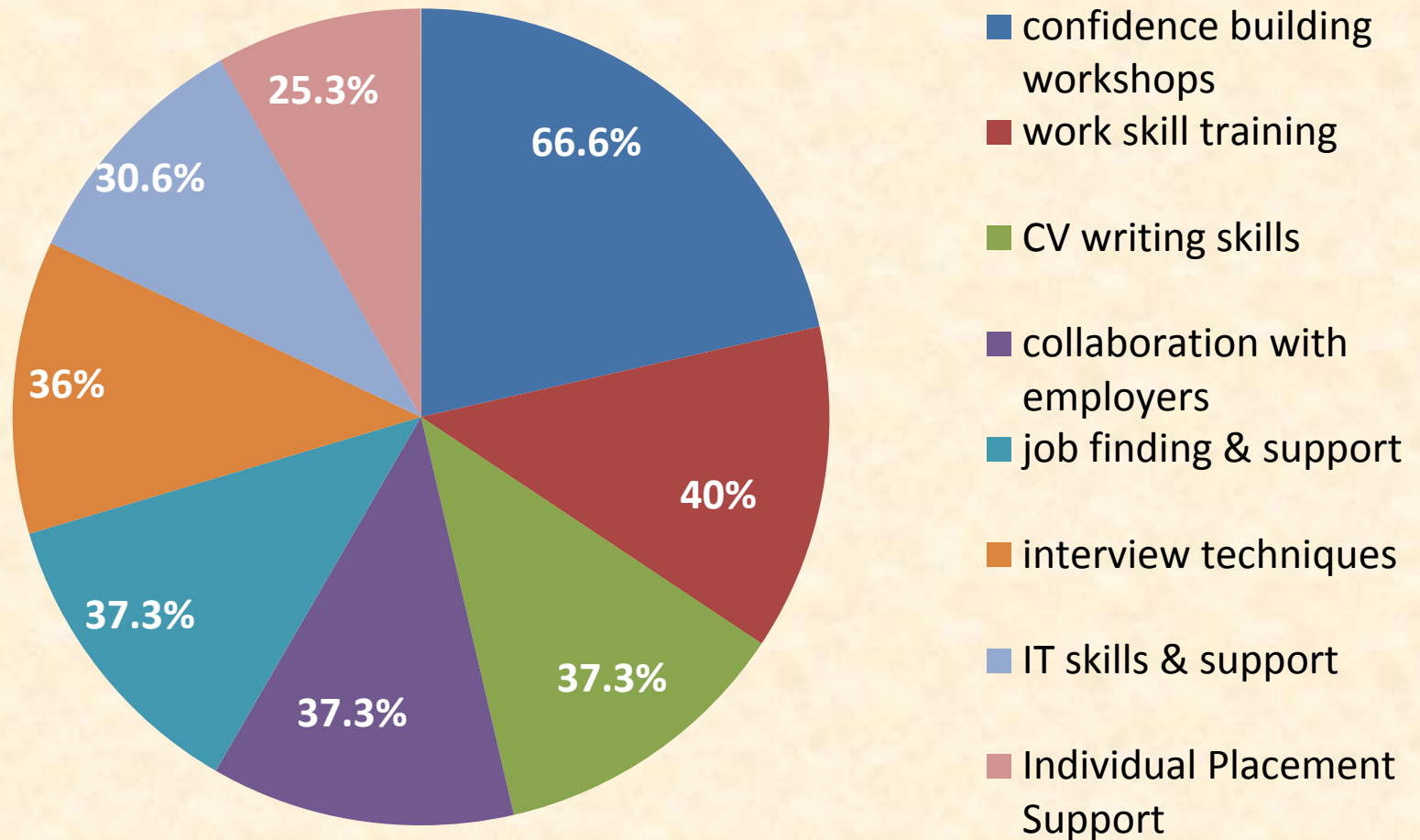
Results: participant information

➤ Sample = 75 / 444 respondents (17%)



- 84 % (n=63) of the sample indicated that aspects of their role included VR.
- Over a third (26.7%, n = 20) of the respondents indicated that they had received post graduate training in VR.
- Around a half (49.3%, n=37) had received no form of post graduate training.

Interventions offered to service users



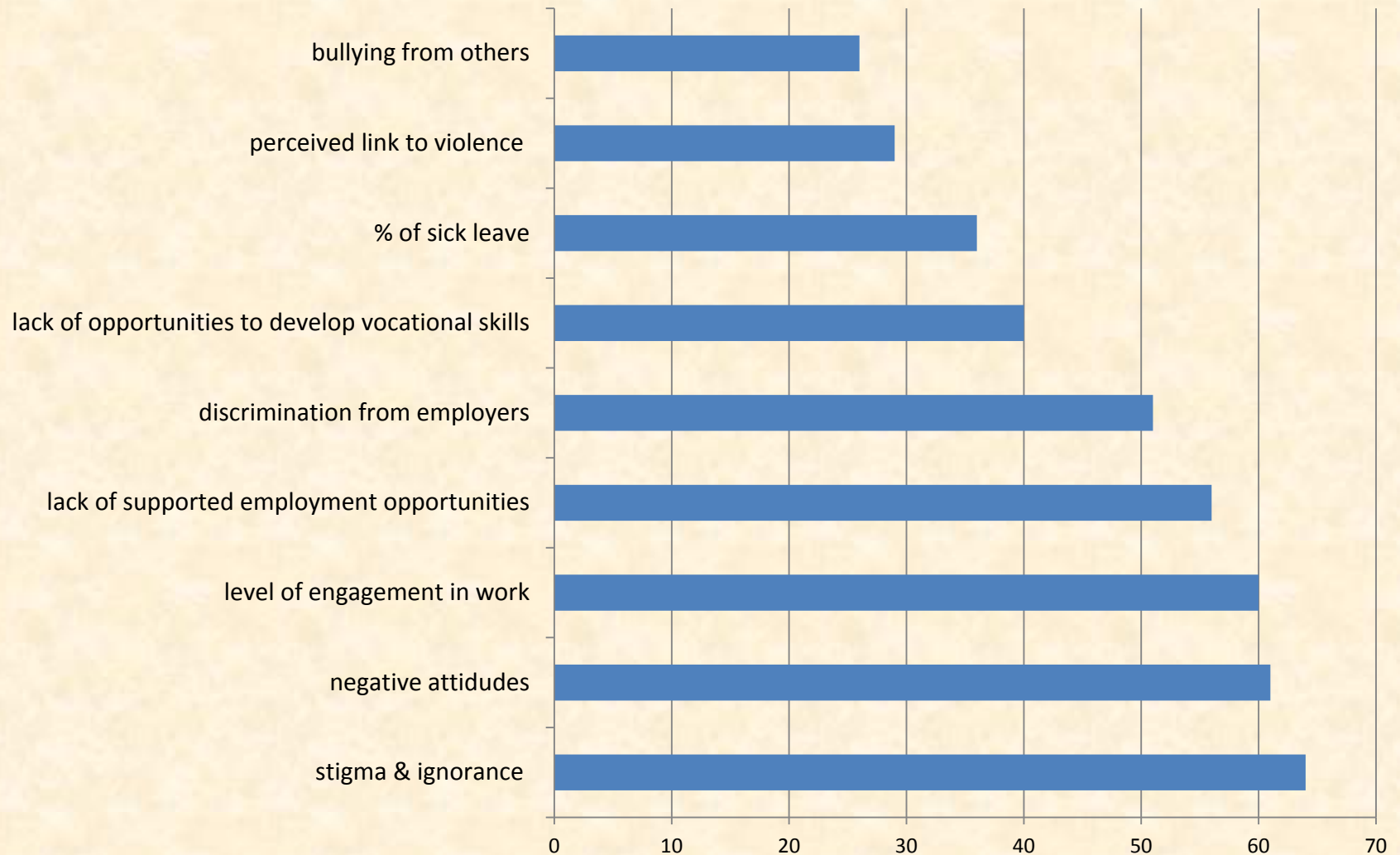
What category best defines your client group?



Which employability/work category defines your client group?



In your opinion (OT), what are the barriers experienced by the service user group?



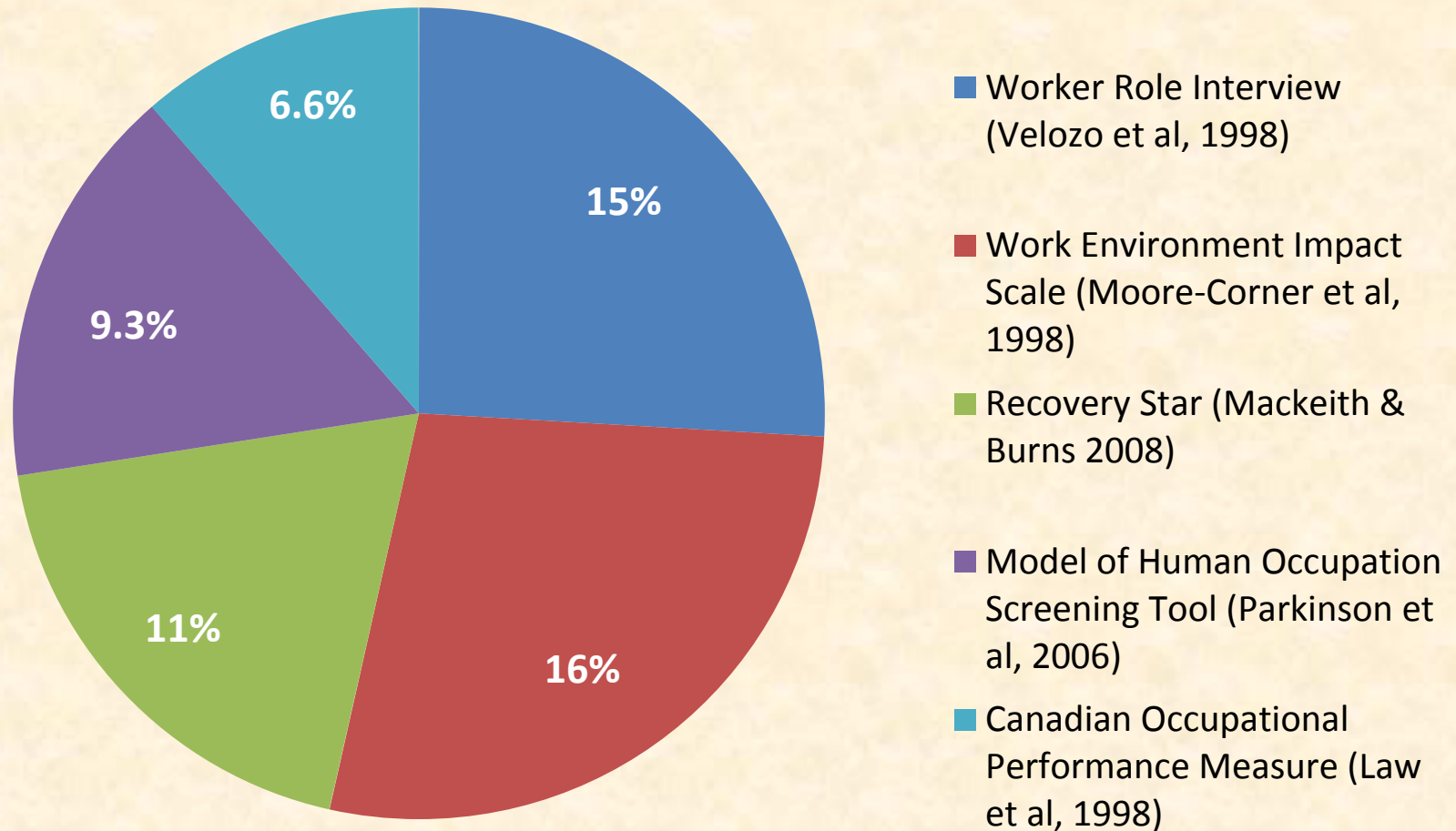
What barriers do you experience in assisting service users to achieve their vocational goals?

Answer Options	Response Percent, n=number
There is limited resources available within my service to enable me to develop or maintain my vocational rehabilitation skills	32%, n=24
I do not have enough time to address vocational issues with my client group.	29%, n=22
There are few employability services available to my clients in my locality	29%, n=22
The employability services in my area are not able to offer adequate support for my client group	26%, n=20

What barriers do you experience in assisting service users to achieve their vocational goals?

Answer Options	Response Percent, n=number
Employability outcomes were not considered to be a priority for service users within the service	24%, n=18
I am unclear about welfare rights and legislation	16%, n=12
I do not have good awareness of the employability services available within my locality which can help my client move towards employment or other vocational goals	12%, n=9
I am unclear about issues around disclosure of criminal convictions	11%, n=8
I am unclear about issues around disclosure of mental health	9.3%, n=7

Summary of outcome measures used in VR



Recommendations



1. Need for **professional training in VR** at undergraduate & postgraduate level.
2. Recognition regarding the **crucial role of occupational therapist** for enabling the successful transition into work.
3. **Collaborative working to improve inter-agency working** across employment specialists and **increase opportunities for employment** for people with severe and enduring mental illness.
4. Need to address the **complex barriers** for people with severe and enduring mental illness accessing work.
5. Need for the development of **Independent Placement Support** within the UK.
6. The development of **vocational focussed outcome measures**.

Limitations



- The survey was disseminated to four hundred and forty potential participants were members of the COT SS mental health and work. Only 75 (17%) of respondents started the survey.
- The sample obtained is not fully representative of the population of occupational therapists working in VR within the UK consequently affecting the richness of the results (Bowling 2009; Robinson 2011).

Final thoughts...



- ‘The maintenance of work ability (a person’s capacity to do the work tasks they are required to do) and return to ‘good’ work should be a key clinical outcome for all care pathways formulated for people of working age’ (The Council for Work and Health 2016, p.10).
- AHP mental health leads should work with key stakeholders to ensure the provision of alternative occupational, leisure and educational activities for service users whose vocational goals are not employment-focused’ (Scottish Government 2010).
- Key focus upon promoting recovery and optimising an individual’s true potential in occupational skill and work capacity.

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