

**Background:** Studies on the impact of supportive relationships have demonstrated improved outcomes for individuals with serious mental health conditions for a range of measures including alcohol use, empowerment, confidence and functioning, lower rates of hospitalization and significantly increased consumer perceptions of motivation, knowledge of mental illness, confidence, and hope. Yet, we know very little about the role of supportive relationships in engaging transition age youth and young adults (TAYYA) with serious mental health conditions in vocational support programs.

**Objective:** This study examined the role of supportive relationships in engaging Hispanic and non-Hispanic young adult mental health consumers in vocational support programs and identified unique social and cultural factors to finding and keeping a job.

*Sample:* 57 TAYYA ages 18-30 (of which 28% identified as Hispanic) enrolled in vocational support programs.

*Methods:* This study embraced Participatory Action Research (PAR) by incorporating a partnership with TAYYA in the entire research process. One-hour audio-taped semi-structured in person interviews were conducted with TAYYA mental health consumers about their current or past experience with standard state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs, Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment and ICCD Clubhouse models in Central Massachusetts.

**Analysis:** Two coders used NVivo 8 to review texts and code instances where each theme occurred independently and compared findings for non-Hispanic white and Hispanic young adults.

*Results:* The majority of non-Hispanic white young adults expressed an appreciation for staff members who understood their mental illness and friends who shared in recreational activities. Compared to non-Hispanic white young adults, Hispanics were more likely to refer to program staff members as 'family' and expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to prove themselves to other people.

The majority of Hispanic young adults identified feelings of being judged by their appearance and past experiences as a barrier to finding work whereas non-Hispanic white young adults identified the stigma of mental illness as a barrier to finding work.

*Conclusion:* We identified the importance of perceived caring and connectedness in engaging young adults in these programs. Responsive and compassionate service providers and friends play an important role in engaging young adults in vocational support programs, however, cultural and contextual factors influence how these relationships are shaped.

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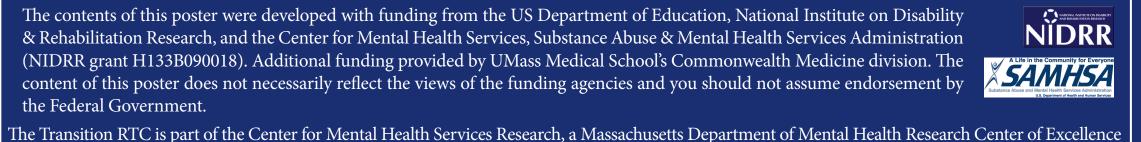
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# The Role of Supportive Relationships in Finding and Keeping a Job: A Study of Transition Age Youth & Young Adult Mental Health Consumers Enrolled in Vocational Support Programs

## Rosalie A. Torres Stone, PhD, Lisa M. Smith, BA, Jonathan Delman, JD, MPH, PhD, Jennifer Whitney, Amanda Costa, and Alicia Dinn

## Demographics of Study Population

DIAGNOSIS: CO MORBIDITY HIGH		
Participants with 1 Diagnosis	40%	
Participants with 2 or more Diagnoses	44%	
Participants with 3-4 Diagnoses	16%	
Bipolar	56%	
Depression	54%	
Anxiety	37%	
Schizophrenia	26%	
Schizo-Affective	5%	
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	4%	
Others (Mood Disorder & Hypomania)	4%	
WORK MOTIVATION (Range = 12-48)		
Non-Hispanic Whites	35.87	
Hispanic	36.25	

LANGUAGE SPOKEN MOST OF THE TIME	
English Only	77%
Spanish Only	0%
Both English & Spanish	21%
Both English & Other (German)	2%
MARITAL STATUS	
Never Married	82%
Married	11%
Living as Married	2%
Separated	0%
Divorced	5%
Widowed	0%

PHYSICIAN PRESCRIBED PSYCHIATRIC MEDICATION		
Yes	<b>96</b> %	
No	2%	
No Answer	2%	
<b>CURRENTLY TAKING MEDICATION</b>		
Yes	82%	
No	18%	
No Answer	0%	
HOSPITALIZED W/THIS DISORDER		
Yes	81%	
No	19%	
No Answer	0%	

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	57
Male	54%
Female	46%
Age range	18-30
Average Age	23
ETHNICITY	
American Indian/Alaska Native	5%
Black/African American	2%
Hispanic	28%
White (non-Hispanic)	59%
Multiracial	4%
Other (Did Not Know)	2%

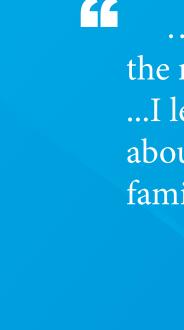


For more information contact: **Rosalie A.Torres Stone, PhD** ssistant Professor of Psychiatry enter for Mental Health Services Research artment of Psychiatry niversity of Massachusetts Medical School one: (508) 856-8692 ail: Rosalie.Torresstone@umassmed.edu The Role of Supportive Relationships

#### Sharing in recreational activities

I have friends here... other members around my age that we go to the movies and we hang out downtown and... people that I've known for almost a couple years now that I become really good friends with and that's been great for me to have people in my life to care about and um... you know that someone cares about you.

~ non-Hispanic white female, age 20



It's a neat place, it's a good place for young adults; there's no doubt about that. If young adults come in here, seriously, they can leave with a lot of things in there. ...they're willing to give them a chance, help them, involve themselves in the work here so then they can prove themselves worthy of working outside the house. What I like about it is they teach you the basics like good communication skills, how to manage your illnesses while at work, how to take care of that so it doesn't affect your work...

Opportunity to prove themselves

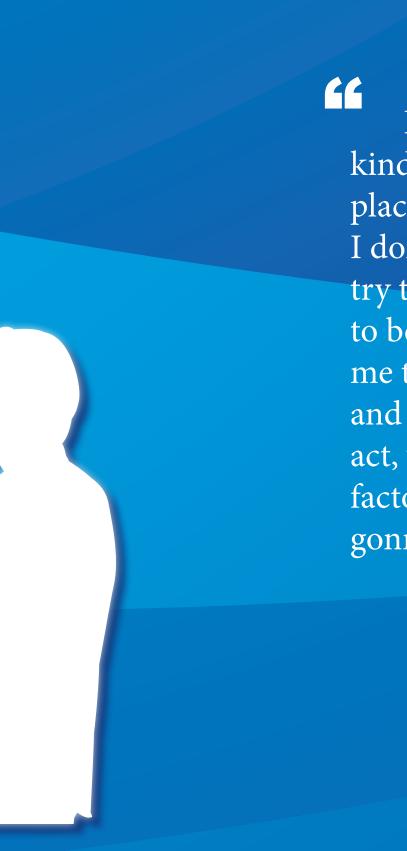
*~Hispanic male, age 22* 

#### Perceived Barriers to Employment

#### Stigma of mental illness

...when you go into any place, no matter what, no matter where, the minute it's discovered you have a mental illness, people take a step back. The minute they hear that word, *mental illness*, everybody takes a step back and they're like 'oh wait, mental illness, hold on.' Nobody really wants to get involved because they think mental illness, that somebody that is mentally ill cannot help themselves. I've worked along with some of my fellow young adults, we've worked very hard to erase the stigma of mental health. A number of us are on Facebook and we, you know, we get discussion groups going, we set up things and we believe it's wrong to segregate people that have mental health issues. It's as wrong as segregating black and white back in the 50s and 60s, you know.

~ non-Hispanic white male, age 25



#### Staff members as family

...I learned a lot for myself, I learned a lot how to be in the real world, I learned how to respect myself and others, ...I learned about love you know. That was one big thing about me, why I was ...depressed, and [Program X] is a family that just grows; it grows on you.

*~Hispanic female, age 23* 

### Understanding their mental illness

It's very straight forward, very honest. Nobody tried to hide anything here. We work together and um, that people understand that you have an illness but that it doesn't have to hold you back and that it doesn't have to dominate your life and you don't have to be treated like you have an illness. Almost like the illness isn't important in a sense because we are all in the same boat, we are all people together. Some of us just have different challenges than others.

~non-Hispanic white male, age 22

#### Feelings of being judged

I guess you could say it's my anxiety, my mental illness because like I kind of have a fear like nobody likes me or people judge me when I walk into places. I don't know how to carry myself – have a mean face, a smiley face, I don't know how to be. Like I've been in jail having to be a mean person or try to smile at people and being put down by the people that are supposed to be helping me, ya know, so it's like they bring me down instead of helping me the way they supposed to so, I don't know. I go in a building to get a job and it's like, I don't know how they looking at me so I don't know how to act, ya know? I'm having a hard time so I'm thinking I can only [work] in a factory or a construction site or something like that where people ain't really gonna judge me, I'm just doing hard labor.

vic male, age 29