

Work Before Love:

HOW GETTING A JOB FACILITATES RECOVERY IN BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

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Outline

- ▶ Why do we fear asking BPD individuals to get a job?
- ▶ What does the research say about getting a job and accompanying difficulties?
- ▶ Review of proposed treatment to target this difficulty/fear of getting job.
- ▶ How getting a job directly targets each symptom of BPD

Commons Fears: Why Don't We push for jobs?

1. Families and treatment teams may feel that the stress of working or trying to work could “lead to an upsurge in suicidal urges or episodes of self harm”
2. Others may believe that a borderline patient should not attempt to work until most of his or her more serious symptoms are fully resolved
3. Will my family member lose access to the psychiatric treatment provided by Medicare provided to those receiving Social security disability benefits?

What the research says!

- ▶ Recovery defined as “61+ GAF” (Global assessment of functioning higher than 61, on scale of 100) including:
 - ▶ “one emotionally sustaining relationship with a close friend or life partner/spouse, and be able to work or go to school consistently, competently, and on a full time basis.”
- ▶ “Borderline patients achieve recovery at a significantly slower pace than axis II comparison subjects” (avoidant, dependent, narcissistic)
- ▶ “Borderline patients have far more difficulty functioning consistently and competently in the vocational arena than Axis II comparison.”
- ▶ “Good social and vocational functioning is more difficult to attain than a substantial reduction in symptom severity
- ▶ “Significantly more likely to support themselves through federal disability benefits than comparison subjects”

What should we do about it?

- ▶ Research and experience suggests that:
 - ▶ “A **rehabilitation model** of treatment for these psychosocial deficits” is indicated focused on “helping patients become employed, make friends, take care of physical health, and develop interests that would help fill their leisure time productively”
 - ▶ Having a job “might also alleviate some of the feelings of worthlessness and failure that permeate the self-concept of many borderline patients who have failed to achieve the life that they once expected for themselves”

Symptoms of BPD directly addressed through paid work

(1) Fear of abandonment/rejection sensitivity:

- ▶ Applying for work and asking “Are you hiring?” is exposure to possible rejection but not necessarily personal rejection
- ▶ Help the person mentalize:
 - ▶ Are there other possible reasons why I didn’t get hired? maybe not hiring, don’t have room in the budget, so many candidates they had to choose one

(2) Unstable and intense interpersonal relationships (idealization and devaluation):

- ▶ Once employed, dealings with boss, coworkers
 - ▶ Patience
 - ▶ Practice with effective communication
 - ▶ Must follow through and show up, problem solve to preserve job

Symptoms of BPD directly addressed through paid work

(3) Unstable self-image or sense of self:

- ▶ Even if not a career job, provides an amazing **sense of purpose** through responsibility and accountability
- ▶ Promotes improved self esteem, view of oneself as competent and capable
- ▶ Exposure to new fields, possible interests, people who may become friends

(4) Impulsivity (e.g. spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating and (5) recurrent suicidal behavior, self injury:

- ▶ Responsibility to show up
- ▶ Be accountable to coworkers and boss
- ▶ Slow down urges to act out in ways that could have large consequences (loss of income/job/ failure)

Symptoms of BPD directly addressed through paid work

(6) Affective instability (marked reactivity of mood):

- ▶ Promotion of mood independent behavior
 - ▶ No matter what you are feeling, you have to show up and perform, others relying on you, consequences of being fired, reprimand from boss, loss of pay or responsibilities at work, may lose references

(7) Chronic feelings of emptiness:

- ▶ Getting up and out, being counted on, and doing something to at very least distract and at best find interest in, can counter feelings of emptiness
- ▶ Exposure to new tasks and fields can help develop sense of identity through gaining purpose

Symptoms of BPD directly addressed through paid work

(8) Inappropriate intense anger or difficulty controlling anger:

- ▶ Individuals are challenged to manage interpersonal conflicts effectively and thoughtfully
- ▶ Work gives ample opportunities to practice communication strategies and problem solve.
- ▶ Avoidance is less possible when at work, when work must be completed. Not an option to isolate or avoid

(9) Transient, stress-related paranoid ideas or severe dissociative symptoms:

- ▶ Tasks at work require focus, concentration which can be grounding and can challenge dissociation
- ▶ Being in the world, with others, is a good distraction from escaping, avoiding

Resources

Bostoncares.org

- ▶ Organization in Massachusetts, centered in Boston with thousands of volunteer opportunities from one time volunteer to weekly, recurrent opportunities with local homeless shelters, businesses, libraries, schools, adults, children, elderly, animals
- ▶ 1 hour in person orientation requirement to start volunteering

Mass Rehabilitation Commission: <https://www.mass.gov/vocational-rehabilitation>

- ▶ Helping people who have problems in communication, work tolerance, and work skills
- ▶ Interest and aptitude testing
- ▶ Job placement assistance

Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation: <https://cpr.bu.edu/>

- ▶ Coaches help with setting goals to live, learn, work and live well in the communities
- ▶ Online resources, reading materials and in person recovery classes offered

References

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Questions?