

Positioning IPS in the multifaceted world of employment and mental health

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Paradoxes in mental health and work

- In Western societies different generations have different values about work, but for all generations work is “a crucial mental health issue”
- WHO World Mental Health Day 2024 on “Mental Health at Work”.
- Employers suffer from lack of skilled and motivated workers
- Millions of persons in the EU are outside from the labor market for years (the long-term unemployed issue) and develop serious mental health problems
- The matching demand-offer paradigm is clearly ineffective.
- Need to shift from “placement” to “individual accompaniment” to work
- IPS is the best example so far of this paradigm.

Individual Placement and Support

- More than thirty years of expertise.
- Outcomes replicated in more than 50 countries.
- Effective, sustainable, recovery and human rights oriented.
- Relatively easy to implement.
- National policy in some countries (UK, NL, S, N, ISL, DK, IRL, B...)
- Regional and local programs in other (I, E, F, D, CZ....).
- Need to advocate for equal access to IPS in all EU countries and...

Taking IPS to a higher level by...

- Better implementation of the current IPS model (model fidelity)
- Further development of the IPS model (enrichment)
- Working with new populations
- **Working on supportive contexts for IPS (this is our focus).**



Context:

- The circumstances in which something (= IPS) exists or takes place
- The environment in which something (= IPS) acquires meaning.

When work is negative for mental health (not only unemployment is harmful)

- PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK EXPOSURE (PRE)
 - Job strain (Karasek, 1990)
 - Effort-Reward Imbalance (Siegiest, 1996)
 - Job insecurity
 - Long working hours
 - Bullying, harassment, violence....
- 7.9% of all CHD and 26.3 of Depression in EU attributable to PRE
 - (Sultan-Taïeb et al., 2022)

Working on supportive contexts for IPS (participants)

- Providing decent work and creating mentally healthy working conditions
- Offering high-quality, recovery-oriented mental healthcare
- Building a regional/local network of multiple employment and daytime activities
- Destigmatizing mental illness
- Promoting citizenship and an adequate standard of living
- Taking socio-cultural diversity into account.

From precarious balance
to supportive contexts



- Focus op probleem
- Variatie uitschakelen
- Continue monitoring
- Direct ingrijpen
- Statisch evenwicht



- Focus op systeem
- Variatie benutten
- Zelfregulatie stimuleren
- Indirect sturen
- Dynamisch evenwicht

Note: This is not an exhaustive list of relevant contexts.

The importance of employment for people with mental health problems

- For most people *employment* plays a central part in their recovery stories
- While expressing interest in obtaining paid employment, most service users are also ambivalent about this because they (correctly) anticipate problems:
 - financial (loss of benefits)
 - interpersonal (stigma issues) from employers and workmates
 - ‘illness-related’ (worries about precipitating relapses, ‘becoming ill again’).

The Janus face of employment:

- “For all people, regardless of whether they have a mental health condition, workplaces can be places that enhance or undermine mental health.” (WHO & ILO, 2022).



Decent work

ILO (International Labour Organisation)

“Productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity”

The Capability Approach (Sen, 1999): To identify important work-related values, and how people are enabled and able to achieve these values at work

1. Using knowledge and skills
2. Developing knowledge and skills
3. Involvement in important decisions
4. Meaningful contacts at work
5. Setting own goals
6. Having a good income
7. Contributing to something valuable

(Abma et al., 2016)

Mental health at work

(WHO & ILO, 2022)

Support workers with mental health conditions in their work through reasonable accommodations, return-to-work programmes and supported employment initiatives (IPS).

Enabling context:

- **Prevent work-related mental health conditions** through psychosocial risk management, using organizational interventions to reshape working conditions, cultures & relationships.
- **Protect and promote mental health at work**, especially through training and interventions that improve mental health literacy, strengthen skills to recognize and act on mental health conditions at work, and empower workers to seek support.
- **Create an enabling environment** with actions to improve mental health at work through leadership, investment, rights, integration, participation, evidence and compliance.

Integrating IPS and mental health care

Benefits:

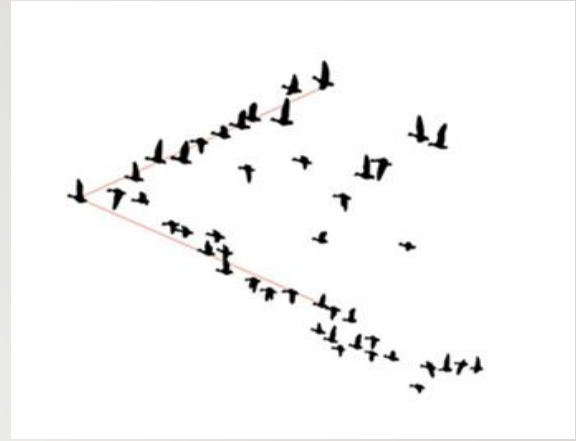
- Clients, especially those with more severe problems, are more easily reached
- Employment counseling and other interventions with the client are better coordinated
- Other team members are more likely to be convinced of the benefits of work for the client
- Knowledge of therapists and treatment interventions (CBT, cognitive remediation, trauma treatment, etc.) adds value to employment supports.

(Becker & Drake, 2003)

Note: "Good mental health care" is a very broad topic.

Integration with mental healthcare

- Not just about treatment add-ons
- Large practice variation
- Many mental health services typically view IPS as a parallel service to begin with, rather than a mutual interest (Ulrika Bejerholm, 2025)
- Collaboration challenges exist due to contrasting values, logics, regulations and practice (Ulrika Bejerholm, 2025)
- What if integration with MH care doesn't come about at all?



Enabling Mental Health care

EUCOMS position paper: “Recovery for all-in the community” (2019)

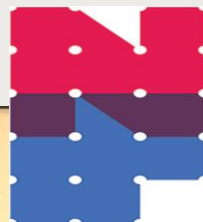
Principles and key elements:

- Human rights
- Public health
- Recovery
- Effective interventions
- Community network of care
- Peer expertise.



Keet, R., Vetten-Mc Mahon, M. de, Shields-Zeeman, L., Ruud, T., van Weeghel, J., Bahler, M., Mulder, C.L., Zelst, C. van, Murphy, B., Westen, K., Nas, C., Petrea I., Pieters, G. (2019). Recovery for all in the Community; Position Paper on Principles and Key Elements of Community-Based Mental Health Care. BMC Psychiatry.

Network MH care



Integration of employment support and mental health care

Concluding remarks

In IPS practices, employment support and community mental health care are mutually dependent and mutually reinforcing:

- Offering IPS employment support to clients will add an essential service to the community mental health care system, which will help realize its mission of promoting its client's social recovery and full citizenship
- Treatment interventions offered by community mental health care can truly help working clients in their clinical recovery and in learning to better self-manage their mental health problems in the workplace.

30 January:

Prevention of psychosocial risks, stress and burnout at work

31 January:

Start-Stay-Return to work

*Epidemiology and Psychiatric
Sciences*

cambridge.org/eps

Editorial

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Mental health and work: a European perspective

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Abstract

Among the many social determinants of health and mental health, employment and work are getting momentum in the European political agenda. On 30–31 January 2024, a ‘High-level Conference on Mental Health and Work’ was held in Brussels on the initiative of the rotating Belgian Presidency of the European Union. It addressed the issue developing two different perspectives: (1) preventing the onset of poor mental health conditions or of physical and mental disorders linked to working conditions (primary prevention); (2) create an inclusive labour market that welcomes and supports all disadvantaged categories who are at high risk of exclusion (secondary and tertiary prevention). In the latter perspective, the Authors were involved in a session focused on ‘returning to work’ for people with mental disorders and other psychosocial disadvantages, with particular reference to Individual Placement and Support as a priority intervention already implemented in various European nations. The themes of the Brussels Conference will be further developed during the next European Union legislature, with the aim of approving in 4–5 years a binding directive for member states on Mental Health and Work, as it is considered a crucial issue for economic growth, social cohesion and overall stability of the European way of life.

Thank you for your attention!

