Unfinished business: student perspectives on disclosure of mental illness and success in VET — support document

Annie Venville

Annette Street

La Trobe University, Melbourne

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Level 11, 33 King William Street, Adelaide, SA 5000
PO Box 8288 Station Arcade, Adelaide SA 5000, Australia

**P** +61 8 8230 8400 **F** +61 8 8212 3436 **E** ncver@ncver.edu.au **W** <http://www.ncver.edu.au>

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Table 1: Student participants by site, course and diagnosis

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name, gender/age | Diagnosis | Site | Course |
| N-F -21 years | Depression | 1 | Cert IV in Hospitality management |
| S-F-24 years | Schizoaffective disorder | 1 | Bachelor of Digital Media |
| C-F-29 years | Depression | 1 | Advanced Diploma of Naturopathy |
| J-F-34 years | Depression | 1 | Diploma in Welfare |
| E-F-22 years | Anxiety | 1 | Advanced Diploma of Naturopathy |
| A-M-29 years | Depression and Anxiety | 1 | Bachelor of Communication and Design |
| C-F-24 years | Depression, PTSD | 1 | Bachelor of Hospitality and Tourism Management |
| SJ-F-27 years | Depression and anxiety | 1 | Advanced Diploma of Naturopathy |
| D-M-29 years | Asbergers, Anxiety | 2 | Certificate III in Network Administration |
| M –F-57 years | Depression, PTSD, Anxiety | 2 | Certificate III in Retail |
| M-M-55 years | Psychotic depression | 2 | Certificate IV in Welfare |
| B-F-52 years | Anxiety and depression | 2 | Certificate III in Retail |
| A-F-55 years | Depression | 2 | Certificate III in Visual arts |
| B-M-26 years | Anxiety, Substance Use disorder | 2 | Certificate III in Retail |
| K-M -36 years | Schizophrenia | 2 | Certificate IV in Information Technology |
| M-F-45 years | Depression | 3 | Certificate IV in Welfare |
| K-F -22 years | Depression and Anxiety | 4 | Certificate IV in Disability Work |
| F-F-35 years | Bi polar disorder | 4 | Diploma in Library Services and Information Technology |
| V-F-24 years | Psychotic depression | 4 | Certificate III in Visual Arts |
| J-F-27 years | Depression | 4 | Certificate III in Animal Companion Service |

Table 2: Staff participants by site and position

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Site 1 | Site 2 | Site 3 | Site 4 |
| Position |  |  |  |  |
| Teacher | 2 | 3 | 4 |  |
| Counsellor | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Specialist disability staff |  | 1 |  | 1 |
| Student support staff | 2 |  |  | 1 |

# Research interview questions

## Students

1. Tell me about the course you have enrolled in? What prompted you to enrol in your course?
2. How long do you think it will take to complete your course?
3. What might help you pass and complete your course? (prompts— self, others) Tell me about these.
4. What might prevent you from passing and finishing your course? (Prompts—self, others). Tell me about these.
5. Tell me about your mental illness and the influence it has on your experience of study at XXXX.
6. Have you told staff at XXXX about your mental illness? Can you tell me how and when you did this? Can you tell me how you decided who and how much to tell?
7. What difference, if any, has this decision made to your experience of study at XXXX?
8. Has this been a decision you have been pleased with? Tell me about that?
9. The next time you enrolled in a course, what factors would influence your decision to tell or not to tell?

## Staff

10 What are the factors you believe contribute to successful course completion for VET students with a mental illness?

11 What is your view on the role/place of disclosure of mental illness in VET?

12 What has been your experience of students disclosing a mental illness?

13 What has been your experience of students not disclosing a mental illness?

14 We are looking to develop a set of guidelines for VET staff to assist them in responding to students with mental illness. In thinking about these, what kinds of things would be helpful for you to have in the guidelines?

15 Thinking more broadly, what kinds of things might be helpful to some of your colleagues?

# Participant information

**Summary statement:**Researchers from La Trobe University are investigating the factors affecting successful course completion for Vocational Education and Training (VET) students with a mental illness. This research which has been funded by the National Council for Vocational Education, Research (NCVER) forms a major part of a PhD thesis for the chief investigator, Annie Venville.

**The research aims to:**

* Increase our understanding of the factors contributing to successful course completions by students with disclosed or non-disclosed mental illness in the TAFE and private VET provider sectors
* Explore the factors influencing decisions about disclosure or non-disclosure of mental illness and their implications for successful or non-successful TAFE course completion
* Understand the role of disclosure of mental illness in the experience of successful and non-successful TAFE course completion
* Develop a set of guidelines for VET staff to assist in managing key aspects of the student experience, including disclosure.

**Who can participate in the interviews?**You are eligible to participate in this study if you are 18 years or over, enrolled at TAFE at Certificate 3 and above, and you have a diagnosed mental illness. You also need to be willing to talk about your experience of student life, mental illness and disclosure or non-disclosure.

**How will the information be obtained?**Students will participate in a semi-structured telephone or face to face interview during which they will be asked to answer questions about their experience of mental illness and learning, their experience of disclosure of mental illness or non-disclosure and the role of disclosure in assisting with successful course completions. It is expected that this interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Students will also be asked to take part in a follow-up telephone interview close to the end of their course. This second interview is likely to take no more than 45 minutes. Both interviews will be tape-recorded.

**What about confidentiality?**Because we are interested in gaining a better understanding of the factors affecting successful course completion for students with a mental illness, students’ words will express this better than we can. Students may therefore be quoted but names will be changed through transcription and stored separately from the audio recording. It is possible that you may recognize words you have used but because all information will be de-identified before being used in any report or publication your anonymity will be protected.

**Are there any possible risks if you choose to participate?**While it is unlikely, it is possible that you may experience some emotional distress while talking of your experiences. All care will be taken for this not to occur however you should not participate if you are anxious about this happening. If you do experience any distress, or if you simply want to talk about the process of being interviewed, you may choose to speak with the counsellor at your campus or a counsellor at a local community health service. You will be provided with contact details for these counsellors before the first interview commences and these services are free of charge. You have the right at all times to interrupt or withdraw from the interview and the study and there will be no effect on any of your relationships with VET staff or access to educational or support services whether you decide to participate or not.

**What are the benefits of the study?**We cannot guarantee that you will receive any personal benefits from your participation in this project, but it is possible that the telling of your story may be useful in itself. It is also possible that you and other VET students who have a mental illness will benefit from the greater understanding this study hopes to provide of the factors affecting successful course completion. It is also expected that findings from this study will educate teachers, counsellors and other professionals, ensuring as many people as possible gain benefit from your participation.

**What do I do if I am interested in participating?**Simply email Annie Venville at La Trobe University a.venville@latrobe.edu.au or call or SMS her on 0418711409. Annie will email or post you a detailed information sheet that will help you decide if you wish to take part.

Important points to remember:
**Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw will in no way affect your studies.**

If you have any complaints or queries that the investigator has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the secretary, Human Ethics Committee, Research and Graduate Studies Office, La Trobe University, Victoria, 3086, (Ph: 03 9479 1443 or email humanethics@latrobe.edu.au).

Table 3: Student disclosure patterns by site

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Site | 1 Private Inner city | 2 Public Outback/rural | 3 PublicRegional | 4 PublicOuter metro |
| Disclosure of mental illness at enrolment and tick box for helpHelp provided? | 1/8No | 0/7 | 0/1 | 2/4Yes x 1- referred by external agency and disclosure encouraged. Student not comfortable with the reasonable adjustments offeredNo x 1 (distance education student) |
| Disclosure of mental illness at enrolment and not seek help |  | 2/7 |  |  |
| Disclosure of other condition at enrolment and tick helpHelp provided? | 1/8Issues of chronic pain-non visibleNot from point of enrolment but from in class discussion with teachers | 1/7Severe and visible physical disability.Access issues accommodated | 1Language difficultiesNote taker provided | 2/41 Significant hearing loss- referred by external agency.Provision of note taker assisted non-disclosed mental illness and led to later informal disclosure of mental illness2 Learning disability-insufficient support offered |
| Later disclosure of mental illness and effective reasonable adjustment provided | 1/8Assistance to reapply for VISA | 3/7Altered and extended assessment tasks | 0 |  |
| Later disclosure of mental illness and ineffective reasonable adjustment provided | 2/8Insufficient time allowed |  | 0 |  |
| Non disclosure of mental illness at end of study period | 4/8 | 1/7 (contact lost with 3 students, 2 of whom had not disclosed at time of first interview) | 1/1 | 0/4 (contact lost with one student who had not disclosed at time of first interview) |

Table 4: Timing, reasons and outcomes of disclosure for students

| Name, gender, age | Diagnosis | Disclose at enrolment & request help | Disclose at enrolment & not request help | Later disclosure & help received | Later disclosure & no help received | Reason for disclosure | Reason for non disclosure | Course completion or effective progression | Would disclose in future? |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| D-M-29 years | Asperger’sAnxiety | No |  | Yes – extension |  | Obligation – “I need more time” |  | YesCompletionRequired longer time | Maybe |
| M-F57 years | DepressionPTSD, Anxiety | No |  | Yes – extension | Yes | Obligation (had to tell something) |  | YesCompletion | Probably |
| N-F21 years | Depression | No |  | YesOpportunity to re-apply for visa |  | Desperation(visa) |  | NoFail most subjects | Prefer not to |
| S-F24 years | Schizoaffective disorder | No |  |  |  |  | Risk of rejection | YesProgression | No |
| K-F22 years | Depression and Anxiety | No |  | Yes – extension |  | ObligationExplain absence |  | YesProgression | Probably |
| F-F35 years | Bi polar disorder | Yes |  |  | Yes | Advocacy – integration of illness into self |  | YesProgression | Probably not |
| M-M55 years | Psychotic depression |  | Yes | Altered assess tasks  |  | Advocacy |  | YesCompletion | Yes |
| C-F29 years | Depression | No |  |  |  |  | Risk- and regret what do you say? | YesCompletion | No |
| J-F34 years | Depression | Yes |  |  | Yes | Desperation |  | NoFail most subjects | Probably not |
| E-F22 years | Anxiety | No |  |  |  |  | Risk – not serious enough | YesProgression | No |
| M-F45 years | Depression | No |  |  |  |  | Risk of rejection | YesProgression | No |
| A-M29 years | Depression and Anxiety | No |  |  | YesExtension but too little | Desperation –fear of failure |  | No-fail one subject | No |
| V-F24 years | Psychotic depression | Yes |  |  |  | Desperation – fear of failure |  | YesCompletionBut took 2 years instead of 1 | Probably |
| B-F52 years | Anxiety and depression | No |  |  |  |  | Regret – ‘what could anyone do?” | NoFail most subjects | No |
| C-F24 years | DepressionPTSD | No |  |  |  |  | Disclosed physical condition | YesCompletionBut took 6 years instead of 3 | No |
| SJ-F27 years | Depression and anxiety | No |  |  |  |  | Protection of selfRisk to reputation | YesProgression | No |
| A-F55 years | Depression | No |  | Yes |  | Desperation |  | Lost contact |  |
| B-M26 years | Anxiety, Substance  | No |  |  |  |  | Risk to reputation | Lost contact |  |
| K-M36 years | Use disorder Schizophrenia |  | Yes |  |  |  | Honesty – “most people already know” | Lost contact |  |
| J-F 27yrs | Depression | No |  |  |  |  | Risk of rejection | Lost contact |  |