

Margins 2 Mainstream Submission Template

I Haven't Told Them, They Haven't Asked: The employment experiences of people with experience of mental illness

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Theme 1: Research and evaluation

Determinant: Freedom from discrimination

ABSTRACT

I Haven't Told Them, They Haven't Asked: The employment experiences of people with experience of mental illness (2007) was research undertaken by the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand in 2005. The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand is a national non-government organisation that promotes mental health, prevents discrimination, suicide and mental health problems. The research was part of the publicly health funded *Like Minds, Like Mine* programme to counter stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness. It is a follow up project to the nationwide discrimination survey, *Respect Costs Nothing* published at the end of 2004.

Face-to-face interviews with a total of 22 people were undertaken. People self-identified as having experience of mental illness, and the definition of 'being in employment' was wide, with an emphasis on paid work, which could be full-time, part-time, self-employment or casual employment.

The overarching research question for this study focused on what are the specific issues that affect people with experience of mental illness in employment. Many of the participants reported that they had been discriminated against either while seeking of while in employment because of their experiences of mental illness. Examples of discrimination included non-supportive workplaces, resulting in lowered self-esteem, job-loss and difficulties in gaining reasonable accommodations. Despite people's experience of employment discrimination, very few people made formal complaints due to fear of retribution

This presentation highlights the effects of mental illness on employment (and employment on mental illness) from the perspectives of people with experience of mental illness. It offers positive steps that employers, policy makers and people with experience of mental illness can take to improve their working situation.

Recommendations:

- Encourage people with experience of mental illness to enter and stay in employment
- Encourage people in the workplace to safely disclose their experiences of mental illness, and to complain if they are discriminated against.