Rehabilitation Psychology. A missing link in current Danish practices

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Publication date:
2017

Citation for published version (APA):
Objectives & Methods

In the mid-1990s, the psychosocial consequences following an acquired brain injury have been known as one of the biggest challenges facing rehabilitation. National best practice guidelines in Denmark for individuals suffering from acquired brain injuries recommend coordinated rehabilitation programmes to ensure safe service transitions and comprehensive rehabilitation practices. However, this recommendation for practice and the evidence informing its development are based on unexamined assumptions. Therefore, this study investigated bio-psycho-social outcomes and perceptions of a coordinated rehabilitation programme.

METHOD: In a prospective, randomized mixed-methods study rehabilitation outcomes for 82 adults (18-66 years) with moderate to severe acquired brain injury were investigated. Clients who received the coordinated rehabilitation programme KORE (n = 27) were compared to clients from the same area who received standard rehabilitation (SK) prior to the implementation of the KORE programme (n = 27) and clients who received other coordinated services (ALS) elsewhere (n = 18). The study employed quantitative data from standardized tests (Functional Independence Measure, Major Depression Inventory, Quality of Life, and Impact on Participation and Autonomy Questionnaire) as well as information on return to work and qualitative interviews with clients (N = 82) and their relatives (N = 40).

Objectives & Methods

RESULTS: Results found no support for the KORE programmes influence on bio-psychosocial outcomes. The clients level of difficulties as measured on RPM, MDI, QOL, and IPQ, and their return to work rate, were at the same level in the group who received the KORE programme as in the group who underwent standard rehabilitation before the KORE programme was implemented. With regard to psychosocial outcomes, one-third of all clients showed signs of depression and more than half (50-60%) of all clients experienced dissatisfaction with QOL. Furthermore, 50% of all clients reported problems in their family relations. Qualitative interviews suggested several barriers to improvement, such as unmet needs for psychological support, as rehabilitation services focused on physical and practical training.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION: Coordinated interventions do not guarantee comprehensive rehabilitation and better outcomes for clients with acquired brain injury. Psychological support may be the missing link. Rehabilitation psychology is a growing field in European practice that involves applying psychological knowledge to address psychosocial consequences related to individuals with disabilities. Therefore, based on this research, we have developed a new master’s programme, Clinic for Handicap and Rehabilitation Psychology (ChARe), at the Department of Communication and Psychology at Aalborg University. ChARe aims at qualifying students for future work as rehabilitation psychologists. The programme spans 4 semesters and is organized partly in relation to curriculum, partly in relation to clinical practice where students will offer a manual based intervention to clients with disabilities (acquired brain injuries) and their close relatives.

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Results, Discussion & Conclusion

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