

Supported Education

1.2.7 Facilitators in choosing, getting and keeping a study

In order to find out what is helpful for (prospective) students, we asked the 27 participants (young adults with psychiatric disabilities) of the focus groups in the four countries what helps, helped or would help them with choosing, getting and keeping a study. Below, we will discuss the most frequently mentioned facilitators and some remarkable findings. Appendixes 1–4 present all the results.

Table 1.2: Most frequently mentioned facilitators in the four countries in choosing, getting and keeping regular (vocational) education.

Choose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear information about available support services at school • A decision making course • Support from social environment
Get	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from mental health professional with the application procedure and with finding special arrangements • Information about what to do, where to find information and where to go with questions
Keep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent personal contact about study related issues with professional • Flexible school system • Peer support group • Support with disclosing ones psychiatric background

In the choose phase, clear information about available support services_(on a website or through personal contact with a staff member) is helpful. Also, a decision making course and support from family, friends and mental health professionals would facilitate in making a choice.

Regarding getting a study, the students frequently mentioned that it would be helpful if their mental health professional could support them with the application and with finding special arrangements that are available to them. In this phase, it seems really helpful that the (prospective) student knows what to do, where to find information and where to go with questions.

Most facilitating factors were mentioned for the 'keep' phase. Frequent personal contact about study related issues with a staff member/professional with expertise was mentioned a lot by the participants—"the practitioner's support in organizing a study plan, doing homework, having a good place to study and guidance to goals." Preferably, this professional coordinates/cooperates with all stakeholders (for instance, mental health professionals, educational organizations, welfare functionaries). Also, a more flexible educational system would be helpful—for instance, optional attendance in class and possible adaptations during exams (oral instead of written exam, more time, other location, etc.). A peer support group was also mentioned. In such a group, one has the opportunity to speak freely about the challenges one faces with people who have the same experience. As one student from Norway stated, "The only place where I talk about my illness and how it affects my daily life is in this group. None of my fellow students at university knows about my illness."

Another facilitator that was mentioned is a course in study skills, such as planning, structuring, and time management. In this phase, support from family and friends is also important to be able to finish the study. Finally, it was mentioned that support with disclosing one's psychiatric background would also be helpful. Disclosure can be important, as it might eventually lead to more support from staff members, fellow students and friends. Participants would find it helpful to receive support with the decision to disclose and with how, what and to whom to disclose.

General Conclusion

In parts 1.2.6 and 1.2.7, barriers and facilitators of going (back) to school have been discussed. The findings of our research in the four partner countries give us input for the contents of the toolkit. With the barriers and facilitators in mind, we decided to put the following topics into the toolkit for professionals.

- A decision making course, to help prospective students with choosing and getting a study.
- Skills and resources: which skills and resources are important in an educational setting and how to assess and improve the skills and resources of students with psychiatric disabilities.
- Disclosure: an intervention to help students with the decision to disclose or not, and also with how and what to disclose.
- Peer support group: information about what peer support is, what the benefits are and how to organize it.
- Advice, consultation and coordination: support for educational staff. Information about where staff members can go to with questions related to studying with mental illness; how they can set up a network of professionals who are working with a specific student, etc.

Appendix 1

Barriers related to personal factors as identified in Portugal, the Czech Republic, Norway and the Netherlands. Between brackets, the method of research is given (L = literature review; E = questionnaire to experts; F = focus group interview). *Note that with this phase we mean the choice of a certain study, but also the choice to start studying again.

	Portugal	Czech Republic	Norway	The Netherlands
CHOOSE*		Difficulties with choosing a study (F)		Difficulties with choosing a study (E, F)
	Earlier negative experiences with going to school (F)	Earlier negative experiences with going to school (E, F)		Earlier negative experiences with going to school (E, F)
	Lack of self-esteem (F)	Lack of self-esteem (E, F)	Lack of self-esteem (E)	Lack of self-esteem (E, F)
	Fear of being stigmatized (E)	Fear of being stigmatized (E)	Fear of being stigmatized (E, F)	Fear of being stigmatized (E)
		Self-stigma (E)		Self-stigma (E)
				Difficulty accepting own disability (E)
				Difficulty estimating the study load and the own capacity (E)
				Fear of dropping out because of relapse (E)
				Concentration problems (E)
	Lack of financial means (E, F)			Lack of financial means (E)
				Pressure on executive functioning skills (E)
				Letting go of the secure base one has created for oneself (F)

GET				Fear of failure (F)
	Difficulties with executive functioning skills (E))			
	Lack of financial means (F)			
			Difficulty enrolling because of stigma about mental illness (F)	
	Presence of (residual) symptoms and side effects of medication (F)	Presence of (residual) symptoms and side effects of medication (F)		
	Fear of stigma (F)			
KEEP	Difficulties with executive functioning skills (L, E, F)		Difficulties with executive functioning skills (E)	Difficulties with executive functioning skills (L, E, F)
	Lack of self-esteem (F)	Lack of self-esteem (E)		Lack of self-esteem (E, F)
	Direct consequences of the psychiatric disability (F)	Direct consequences of the psychiatric disability (E, F)	Direct consequences of the psychiatric disability (E, F)	Direct consequences of the psychiatric disability (L, E, F)
	Difficulty with choice to disclose or not (E)			Difficulty with choice to disclose or not (L, E)
	Lack of financial means (E)			Lack of financial means (E, F)
	Impact of being stigmatized (E)	Impact of being stigmatized (E, F)		
			Not fitting in (F)	

Appendix 2

Barriers related to educational environment as identified in Portugal, the Czech Republic, Norway and the Netherlands. Between brackets the method of research is given (L = literature review; E = questionnaire to experts; F = focus group interview). *Note that with this phase we mean the choice of a certain study, but also the choice to start studying again.

	Portugal	Czech Republic	Norway	The Netherlands
CHOOSE*	Lack of support (E)	Lack of support at school (F)	Lack of support at school (E)	Lack of support at school (L, E)
	Educational offer doesn't match with student's needs (F)	Educational offer doesn't match with student's needs (F)		Educational offer doesn't match with student's needs (E)
				Difficulty with educational methods (E)
				Lack of (or too little) information about available support services (L, F)
				Uncertainty about promises that the school makes (F)
	High study tuition fees (F)			
GET	Difficulties with application procedure (E, F)	Difficulties with application procedures (F)	Difficulties with application procedures (E)	Difficulties with application procedures (E, F)
				Information to be received from several institutions (F)
				The institutions do not communicate (F)
	Lack of information about the school (F)			

KEEP	Lack of support (L, E , F)	Lack of support (E, F)	Lack of support (E)	Lack of support (L, E)
		Lack of understanding, expertise and empathy of staff (E, F)	Lack of understanding, expertise and empathy of staff (E)	Lack of understanding, expertise and empathy of staff (L, E, F)
	Structure of educational system (F)	(Inflexible) Structure of educational system (E, F	(Inflexible) Structure of educational system (E)	(Inflexible) Structure of educational system (L, E, F)
				Lack of information about available support services (L, E)
	Lack of mentor or peers with lived experience (E)			

Appendix 3

Barriers related to social environment as identified in Portugal, the Czech Republic, Norway and the Netherlands. Between brackets the method of research is given (L = literature review; E = questionnaire to experts; F = focus group interview). *Note that with this phase we mean the choice of a certain study, but also the choice to start studying again.

	Portugal	Czech Republic	Norway	The Netherlands
CHOOSE*	Lack of social support (financial, practical and emotional level) from family and mental health professionals (F)	Lack of social support (financial, practical and emotional level) from family and mental health professionals (E, F)	Lack of social support (financial, practical and emotional level) from family and mental health professionals (E)	Lack of social support (financial, practical and emotional level) from family and mental health professionals (E, F)
			Stigmatization by mental health professionals (F)	Stigmatization by mental health professionals (E)
	Stigmatization/ discrimination by co-students (E, F)			
		No cooperation between mental health professionals, family, educators (E)		
		Stigmatization in society (E)		
GET			Lack of knowledge of staff members about rights of people with psychiatric disability (E)	
	Fear of being stigmatized (F)			

KEEP	Little or no support from the family, co-students, and/or mental health professionals (F)	Little or no support from the family, co-students, and/or mental health professionals (E)	Little or no support from the family, co-students, and/or mental health professionals (E)	Little or no support from the family, co-students, and/or mental health professionals (E)
	Stigmatization/discrimination by co-students and/or teachers (E, F)	Stigmatization/discrimination by co-students and teachers (F)		Stigmatization/discrimination by co-students and/or teachers (L, F)
			Lack of knowledge of staff members about rights of people with psychiatric disability (E)	

Appendix 4

Facilitators of choosing, getting and keeping a study as identified in Portugal, the Czech Republic, Norway and the Netherlands.

	Portugal	Czech Republic	Norway	The Netherlands
CHOOSE*				Clear information about the available support services: website
				Personal meeting with staff member about support services
				A supportive course that helps with choosing, identifying competencies, qualities
	Support from practitioners/ family/ peers			
GET				To do list on the school website
				Reception desk at school, specifically for questions about application
	Support from mental health professionals with applying and finding arrangements	Support from mental health professionals with applying and finding arrangements		Support from mental health professionals with applying and finding arrangements
		Information about system of student and health disability benefits		
				ImpulSE course

KEEP	Frequent personal contact with staff member/practitioner with expertise	Frequent personal contact with staff member with expertise		Frequent personal contact with staff member with expertise
				Clear information about support services
		Course in time management, study skills		A course in planning and structuring
		Learning how to manage illness/ medication in context of studying		
		Venting one's educational frustrations by transforming them into poems or by talking to someone		
		Studying something the students really enjoys		
		Smaller classes		
		Familiarity with system of student and health disability benefits		
	Flexible educational system (optional attendance)	Flexible educational system (optional attendance)	Flexible educational system (optional attendance)	
		More understanding staff		
		Some kind of professional service that coordinates/ cooperates with all stakeholders	Existing cooperative meeting between stakeholders	

		Support with disclosure		
			Physical exercise	
	Peer support group		Peer support group	
	Support from family and friends		Support from family and friends	
	Feeling of social integration			
			Supported Education program	