

# EXPERIENCES OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE USERS ATTENDING AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PRODUCTIVE OCCUPATIONS PROGRAM.

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The study explored the experiences of mental health care users (MHCUs) engaging in an occupational therapy productive occupations programme at a long-stay mental health institution. Productive occupations enable MHCUs to earn an income, to promote their health and to contribute meaningfully to society. Occupational therapists use productive occupations as part of interventions in various contexts to facilitate the above outcomes. Incorporating the experiences of MHCUs in the planning and development of occupational therapy programmes allows an evaluation of whether the service offered meets their needs. However, the MHCUs in this study were not included when the occupational therapy productive occupations programme was developed and implemented. This study therefore explored their experiences and whether the programme met their productivity needs.

**Methods:** This is a descriptive qualitative study which used semi-structured interviews to explore the participants' experiences of the occupational therapy productive occupations programme. Ten participants who gave consent were selected and interviewed. Thematic analysis guided the data analysis process.

**Results:** The findings of the study reveal that not only is the programme meaningful to the participants but it also allows them to learn various necessary skills that enable their reintegration into society. However, the programme had areas that the MHCUs felt needed to change to allow the programme to meet their needs. The identified needs are expanding the programme and allowing the programme to be responsive to their future goals with regards to the engagement in productive occupations within the community beyond hospitalisation.

**Conclusion:** The experiences of the MHCUs were not only empowering to them but also provide a platform to give valuable input towards programme adaptation.