Meaning in work and emerging work identities of housing support workers: A quest for a comprehensible plot

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Abstract: BACKGROUND: Work and employees are often marginalized in studies on community-based psychiatric care and support systems. This paper highlights the role of the worker at congregated supported housing for people with severe mental illness (SMI). Housing support workers (HSW) are a fairly new professional role and have developed as a result of major changes in Swedish mental health care and services. The development of new roles is not unproblematic and raises intriguing questions. OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this article is to describe housing support workers' experiences of meaning in their work, and in addition illuminate how the work identity of HSWs can be negotiated and constructed. METHODS: Four focus group interviews were conducted with a total of 25 participants. Additionally, three follow up sessions were conducted with the same participants. The material
consists of employees from four different sites. The interpretation of the material was inspired by a constructionist approach. RESULTS: The analysis generated three themes: to do a good job, everyday needs and the formal role. The work identity for HSWs is complex and not easily interpreted. CONCLUSIONS: The experience of an unclear assignment affects the description of what is meaningful and important—the work identity and significant affiliations for HSWs. In the long run, this fragmented world can have negative implications for the HSW.

**Keywords:** Housing support workers, mental health and illness, narratives, professionals, Sweden, work identity

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