

Exploring Helper and Consumer Partnerships that Facilitate Recover From Severe Mental Illness

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The purpose of this research was to explore the helping partnerships that facilitate recovery from severe mental illness (SMI). Given that recovery from these illnesses is a relatively new concept and that the little research available suggests supportive relationships assist consumers in their recovery process, the research questions were written to understand these helping relationships:

- (a) What are the consumers' experiences of recovery from SMI?
- (b) How do consumers describe the experience of their helping partnerships that facilitate recovery?
- (c) What are the underlying themes and contexts that account for the experience of partnerships that facilitate recovery?
- (d) Where in the recovery do these partnerships form?

The co-researchers included 10 non-hospitalized adults with a self-reported diagnosis of schizophrenia (4), bipolar disorder (3) or major depression (3) from a midwestern state. Participants were purposefully chosen from a group of 69 volunteers who completed the Mental Health Recovery Measure (Young & Bullock, 2003), which was the quantitative phase of this study. In the second phase, two to three face-to-face interviews were conducted with nine of the ten participants. Phenomenological qualitative analysis with a psychological approach was accomplished using word for word transcripts of the interviews.

The intent of this study was to learn how the consumer experiences the helping partnerships that facilitate recovery to inform, families, professionals and peers about meaningful actions and strategies that promote healing. Six key themes emerged from the data and included: networks of helping partnerships, medication adherence, teaching/learning, spirituality, creative drive and time. The experiences of each co-researcher were analyzed and described and used to create a composite description for the group. From the composite description, characteristics and behaviors of helping partners were identified, as well as their impact on the co-researchers. In addition structures that facilitated the development of the helping partnerships became visible from the composite experiences.

Through interaction of the themes that emerged, the co-researchers were able to move through recovery with astounding resolve. Helping partners that exhibited a deep commitment to participants over time, using respect, care and knowledge, facilitated their progress. In conclusion, it is recommended that consumers, families, mental health professionals and the public be educated about how to facilitate recovery for the benefit of human potential of every individual with a diagnosis of severe mental illness and the financial solvency of society. Understanding networks of helping partnerships, the role of spirituality and creativity, the benefits from medication and therapy and the impact of learning on progressing through recovery can go a long way toward eliminating the mystery and fear associated with mental illness.