

Voices of Personal Strengths and Recovery: A Qualitative Study on People with Serious Mental Illnesses

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Introduction

Personal strengths are typically considered important for the development people's abilities to deal with adversities in the general population. However, the personal strengths of people with serious mental illnesses have received little attention, even from healthcare providers whose primary focus was commonly on patients' problems. Thus, opportunities to facilitate the recovery of people with serious mental illnesses using personal strengths were missed. This study aimed to explore and describe the types of personal strengths present in people with serious mental illnesses.

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Methods

In a qualitative, explorative study, the types and utilization of personal strengths towards mental health recovery were examined. A convenience sample of 102 community-dwelling adults with serious mental illnesses aged between 18 to 65 years old, provided accounts on the use of their personal strengths through structured interviews. Major themes were derived through the interview transcripts using thematic analysis.

Results

Socio-demographic Profile of Participants:

Socio-demographic variables		N	102 (100%)
Duration of illness			
Years of having mental illnesses			
Mean	20.6		
SD	4		
Minimum-maximum	12-9		
	8		
	3-53		
Hospitalization			
Number of hospitalization episodes for mental health issues			
Mean	5.80		
SD	12.2		
Minimum-maximum	0-8		
	0		
Months since last discharge from hospital?			
Mean	44.7		
SD	3		
Minimum-maximum	88.7		
	7		
	0-6		
	24		
Highest educational qualification, n(%)			
No formal education	0	(0%)	
Completed elementary school	3	(2.90%)	
Completed junior high	2	(1.96%)	
Completed high school or GED	6	(5.88%)	
Completed some college	3	(2.94%)	
Completed Associate Degree	0	(0.00%)	
Completed Bachelor's Degree	7	(6.86%)	
Completed Master's Degree	2	(1.96%)	
Completed Doctoral Degree	1	(0.98%)	
Others, including 3 who completed some graduate work, 1 completed diploma and 1 had done internship	6	(5.88%)	
	4		
	5		
Age			
Age in years			
Mean	47.0		
SD	4		
Minimum-maximum	12.6		
	8		
	19-6		
	5		
Gender			
Gender identity, n (%)			
Male	48	(47.10%)	
Female	54	(52.90%)	
Ethnicity			
Ethnic group, n (%)			
White Caucasian	57	(55.90%)	
African American	37	(36.30%)	
Hispanic American	0	(0%)	
Asian American	0	(0%)	
American Indian	1	(1.00%)	
Multi-ethnicity	7	(6.90%)	
Marital status			
Marital Status category, n (%)			
Single	58	(56.90%)	
Married	21	(20.60%)	
Divorced	18	(17.60%)	
Separated	1	(1.00%)	
Widowed	3	(2.90%)	
Cohabitated	1	(1.00%)	

A repertoire of personal strengths was described by people with serious mental illnesses including their compassion, creativity, acceptance of self and others, sense of humour and resilience. These strengths aided their recovery by helping them to focus on something positive. They trusted that they could recover and got involved in their own recovery.

Types of personal strengths	Utilization of strengths	Excerpt example	No. of extracts	No. of participants (% of total participants)
Creativity to do work.	Use of personal strengths in the work that they do	I employ the creative aspect of my ability to address obstacles in my life, to find ways around difficulties, I think outside of the boxes like what people say"	14	13 (12.75%)
Organization skills and work.		"If I do not have structure and a plan, things seem to fall apart."	22	14 (13.73%)
Resourcefulness and advocacy.		"Advocating is what I have done for years and my therapist has been surprised or amazed at my capabilities. I seem to know more resources than they do and I love sharing"	16	9 (8.82%)
Acceptance and love for oneself.	Use of personal strengths for individual self.	"I don't worry about what other people think anymore or how I feel about myself. I have learned to love me"	9	7 (6.86%)
Sense of humour to feel at ease.		"my sense of humor helps me to lighten up"	27	11 (10.78%)
Resilience and personal growth.		"going through these uncertain setbacks I feel the word resilience comes to mind as a strength and I believe I have been given a lot of opportunities to learn about life after being diagnosed."	9	5 (4.90%)
Family and support		"when I first got my mental illness, I talk to my family almost everyday"	26	26 (25.49%)

Conclusion

The results suggested that people with serious mental illnesses possessed personal strengths. Personal strengths could be a crucial factor to aid the recovery of people with serious mental illnesses. Findings could inform healthcare providers of the need to elicit and develop the personal strengths of people with serious mental illnesses to aid their recovery.

References

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