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Understanding dynamics of recovery

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Abstract

The presentation is based on the evidence from addiction research by the first author. All the studies described have a common focus: understanding dynamics of recovery. The first study explored role of support group in continued abstinence. A relapse proneness scale was developed in the second study and tested on recovering as well as continuing addicts. The third study was a qualitative exploration to identify the psychological characteristics of continuing substance abusers and recovering substance abusers. Only third study is described in detail in the abstract. Thorough and in-depth information was analyzed to understand what are distinguishing features of these two categories. The purpose was to discern the factors that seem to be crucial for the maintenance of abstinence and recovery on one hand and those that contribute to continued use of addictive substances. Detailed individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 continuing addicts and 10 recovering addicts who attended Narcotics Anonymous, meetings in Lahore. Researcher also attended the meetings as an observer. Informed consent was obtained. Verbatim were transcribed and content analyzed. Coding techniques included Word Repetition, the Compare and Contrast Technique and Key Word in Context Technique (KWIC). The codes then formed clusters into themes. The themes that emerged from narratives of continuing addicts were poor self-concept,poor focus on moral values, low self efficacy, absence of faith in a spiritual power, poor insight about the problem, denial, self pity. Recovering addicts reported that there was an initial sudden 'insight' that propelled them in the direction of seeking help or treatment. The distinguishing features of recovering addicts were, insight, acceptance of their disease status, seeking support, honesty with self, optimism, spirituality, sense of moral values, positive self image, healthy interpersonal relationships and most important will power and determination. They also reported more self regulatory control. There were some common features also between continuing and recovering addicts such as hopelessness, hesitation in making long term relationships, low job satisfaction, anger, emotional distancing. However it seems that their determination and other strengths as well as seeking support was instrumental in keeping them on path of recovery. All the recovering addicts interviewed had been in recovery for more than four years and ranged between 6 years to twenty years of recovery. The findings highlighted the agents that may maintain the recovery of the recovering addicts and prevent the relapse.The paper summarizes the learning from this research and suggests directions and implications for addiction research.