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Abstract

Recovery from drug addiction is a life-long process. The aim of this preliminary study was looking at the experiences of family support by people in recovery from drug addiction. This study employs a qualitative format using semi-structured interviews with four recovering drug users. Several themes were identified and discussed in relation to the literature on family support of people in recovery. The results highlight the importance of family support in the recovery of drug addiction. Suggestions and recommendations are also included.

Keywords: drug, addiction, recovery, family, relapse prevention.

1. Introduction

All over the world, drug abuse has become a huge problem and is among the most pressing health issue. There is no one country or community that has been spared from this scourge. The dramatic increase in drug production and trafficking in recent years has caused a growing number of drug users worldwide. Like other countries in the world, Malaysia is no exception in facing the challenge of overcoming the problem of drug addiction. Due to its seriousness, the country has made the call to society to view drug as the 'nation's number one enemy' and has implemented a multifaceted anti-drug strategy that includes law enforcement, preventive education, treatment and rehabilitation (Scorzelli, 1992).

Drug users or drug dependents are usually perceived as loners or people cut off from primary relationships. However, studies have shown that 60% to 80% of people who are drug dependent, especially those below the age of 35 either live with their parents or are in daily contact with at least one parent; and 80% to 95% are in at least weekly contact (Bekir, McLellan, Childress, & Gariti, 1993; Cervantes, Sorensen, Wermuth, Fernandez, & Menicucci, 1988; Stanton, 1982, 1997). This applies to both genders, male and female. In the context of Malaysia, where the culture is more collectivistic, drug users usually maintain their connection with their families. This has obvious implications for treatment. Terrell (1993) and Bowser & Word (1993) stated that nuclear and extended families are untapped resources in treatment and prevention of substance addiction. According to Cervantes et al. (1988), drug addicts have, in fact, family ties. Thus, they are likely to benefit from a family systems approach to substance abuse treatment. They suggested that for professionals coping with clients' addictive behaviors it may be wise to consider family ties when planning treatment.

There can be a number of factors related to the family that may influence the addictive process and its remediation. First, the onset of drug abuse and its overdoses may be precipitated by

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family disruptions, stresses and losses (Duncan, 1978; Krueger, 1981). There may also be modeling on part of the parents of drug or substance-taking behavior (Gorsuch & Butler, 1976). Kaufman (1985) and Stanton (1982), mentioned about preserving the family's homeostasis while Craig (1993) stated about other family members that can engage in enabling behaviors that perpetuate the substance abuse of a particular family member. In many cases, an addicted woman who is a mother will see her children as the most meaningful part of her life and the strongest motivation she has to get off drugs (Eldred, Grier, & Berliner, 1974; Noorhayati Awang, 1997). Based on these factors, it can be concluded that there is need to address family issues in a comprehensive treatment program.

Families can be of support for addicts in treatment and in maintaining recovery. Various studies have shown that there have been many factors contributed towards relapse among drug addicts. These factors include psychological, self-efficacy and lack of family and community support (Moos, 2007; Fauziah and Naresh Kumar, 2009a; Fauziah and Naresh Kumar, 2009b; Allsop et al., 2000; Ellist et al., 2004; Salmon et al., 2000). Weak support among family members and the community of former addicts may result in a higher tendency to relapse (Daley, 1987; Hawkins & Fraser, 1987; Miller, 1992; Zackon, McAuliffe & Ch 'ien, 1985). Indeed family support is needed to ensure the treatment is successful and relapse can be prevented. Isolating recovering drug dependents will only frustrate the treatment process resulting them back into the realm of addiction (Daley & Marlatt, 1992; Vicary & Lerner, 1986).

Thus, the aim of this study was to explore the experiences of family support by people in the recovery from drug addiction. By developing a better understanding of these people, families, counselors, and those involved in providing services to the drug users and their families may gain information that will make the integration of the family component into their treatment and prevention models more successful. Because people in recovery's experiences can be viewed as a complex occurrence, a qualitative approach was adopted to serve as the method of this study.

2. Method

Participants

Four participants who are recovering from drug dependency were selected from one drug rehabilitation centre. All four of them are adult males, aged 35, 37, 40 and 48 respectively. All of them had also experienced relapse. They all consented to their participation in this study.

Researcher as instrument

The role of the researcher is critical in qualitative methodology because the researcher identifies the process of the phenomenon to be studied, constructs the research question for the scientific inquiry, performs primary data collection and analysis procedures and synthesizes the data into confirmable results (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument. The researcher is responsible for deciding what to explore and analyze during the data collection and analysis procedures. The researchers' educational and professional background will be a useful perspective to lend to this research.

Data collection and analysis

Data was collected from the participants at a drug rehabilitation centre until data is saturated to ensure the depthness of the data using semi-structured interview. All the interviews were audio-recorded. Data collection procedures include:

- (a) initial individual interviews
- (b) document reviews
- (d) two rounds of follow-up interviews

To ensure trustworthiness, dependability and credibility of the data, specific strategies for triangulation has been employed using reflective journaling and member checks.

Data was then analysed using content analysis of the interview transcriptions and documents. Miles and Huberman (1994) outlined three types of analytical tasks in qualitative data analysis: (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion drawing and verification. Themes, as they emerged, were identified. Once themes are identified from participants' responses, initial categories will be identified and questions will be formulated to narrow the focus of the study, confirm initial findings and probe for new or additional information.

3. Results

Four themes emerged from the data analysis as follows: (a) gaining acceptance, (b) accepting advice and guidance, (c) family's commitment, and (d) sensing hope.

(a) Gaining acceptance

Gaining family acceptance is important in order to preventing relapse. From the data collected, there were statements that show to us the acceptance given by the respondent's family. Acceptance is one of the important elements that family should do for the former addicts to change. Basically, family should accept each other whether they are problematic person or not. In part, acceptance in family will indirectly change the perception and the person will think over the problem again. The acceptance in the family will lead them to think all over again and want to change. According to Hall, Wasserman & Havasay (1991), one factor of relapsed occurs is because of the social factor be it society's acceptance or weak social support network from the surrounding.

(b) Accepting advice and guidance

Respondents stated that the family members also provided advices and guidance to lead and create awareness in them. There is several statements detected show the advices given by the family. As Fauziah & Naresh (2009) has pointed, 59% respondents agreed to say that their family members who are facing with problems would come up to them to get advice. While 60% respondents agreed to say that their family members would come up to them to get emotional and spiritual support. According Thessaloniki, 2009, a member of family (usually the mother) try to find the solution alone with many ways (doctors, lawyers, priests or psychologists, etc.) or try to press drug-addicted person. Advice is one of the elements that can lead us to the right way. Normally, the drug addicts will refuse to get the advices from the family or other people and likely to talk back and found so much reasons to protect or defend them. So, the family members should take the right or proper way to give an advice in order to make the addicts aware the meaning of the advices. The three factors that should be considered before giving an advice are 1) not letting down the person who will receive the advice; 2) the time is suitable to give advice; and 3) understand the situation of the person who will receive advice.

(c) *Family's commitment*

From the interviews, researcher had detected several statements that show the commitment given by the family. Despite the commitment given by the family, there is also respondent's commitment towards the family. This respondent has responsibilities and commitment towards the family and he is like the financial sources for the family. According to this respondent, he stated that he is the only who one is working in the family. A studies supported this finding, conducted by Brook, Whiteman & Gordon (2002), shows that problematic families showed positive relationship with drug usage. It is because the dependency more or less pressured the former addicts because they have to shoulder their family's problems and in the end, caused them to lose control and to seek easy way out by turning to addictions. Because of that, family should be responsible in playing their important role in helping former addicts to lead a life that is free of drugs.

(d) *Sensing hope*

Recovering addict always seeks and sensing hopes to fully recover from their addictions. In order to sense the hope to recover, family support plays an important roles during this phase. Respondent had stated the statements that demonstrate the support received. Various studies have shown that support from family is importance to the drug addicts. Hence, to ensure successful recovery, it is recommended that family members and significant others participate in the addicts recovery process. From researcher views, sensing the hope for support is important as acceptance. Former addicts need supports from the family and surrounding for not returning to drugs. Without support, the former addicts might have the attention to relapse because of they have lower self esteem and self confident. Support is like the device in other to maintaining recovery among the former addict and support from significant person is needed.

4. Discussion

Family has an important role in attracting their addicted family member into treatment and fostering supportive environmental change during recovery. Family involvement can also foster better engagement of addicted individuals in treatment because based on the above finding; commitment shown by family members is regarded as support by the person in recovery.

In a study by Fauziah & Naresh (2009a), lack of open interaction between recovering addicts with their family members increases the tendency to relapse amongst the addicts. 57% of the respondents admitted that they would feel uneasy and find it difficult to express their problems with family members. Although this was also mentioned by participants in this study, they stated that by feeling the hope that their family members have for them this encourages them to try being more open especially to accept the advice and guidance given by their families. However, they admitted that if left prolonged, this situation would be able to cause stress to the recovering addicts and may lead to many difficult situations. According to Mohd Taib and Mohd Khairi, (2000), among the causes that create uneasiness amongst drug users to talk to the family are lack of communication and ineffective interaction amongst family members.

Furthermore, Lasimon Matokrem (2007) in his writing on the principles of effective treatment and recovery highlighted the importance of focusing on re-establishing recovering addicts' relationship with family, personal development, career, social activities as well as healthy lifestyle. Hence, to ensure successful recovery, it is recommended that family members and significant others participate in the addicts recovery process. This indicates that prevention of

relapse to drug use required an inclusive social support and probably has significant effects on relapse after being released from rehabilitation (Ellis et al., 2004).

A new study published in Behavior Therapy apparently confirms that offering 'understanding and encouragement' to those with drinking and drug use problems is the best approach family members can take in dealing with the situation. In addition, a study conducted by Fals-Stewart (2001) found that men recovering from substance abuse are less successful if they believe their spouse or partner is critical of them, rather than supportive.

Hence, Thomas (1992) stresses that a stable and strong family must not only care about the welfare of the family, but it also must function to guide the growth of the family members. This means that every family member should have a high and continuous commitment towards all the family members. The commitment could be observed by the family members' serious effort to spend time and energy for activities that involved the family affairs and well-being. The activities that can generate the familial spirit are such as solving family problems, taking over family member's responsibility if the situation needs it, or doing activities together like cleaning the house, having dinner, or going for picnics (Lily Mastura Harun, 2006).

5. Suggestion and Recommendation

This study has important implications to families, policy makers as well as those providing prevention, treatment and rehabilitation programs in understanding the issues of integrating the family as a support into practice.

Embedding Families in Treatment and Rehabilitation Programs

Prevention, treatment and rehabilitation programs should establish more activities with the family. By increasing the commitment and support from the family towards the recovering addicts it will indirectly lead to recover. Respondents stated that they really need support from their family in order to recover from being drug user. Implication of if family is not addressed in a rehabilitation and prevention program is that those involved will miss an opportunity to explore a system might influence their work with people in treatment and recovery and they will thus, diminish their potential to make a difference in their client's life.

Enhancing Counselor's Competency

Counselor is one of the important characters that can lead to prevent relapse. Drug users look down to counselor due to the labelling that counselor's are not competent to treat addictions. According Abd Halim (2008) counselors must have some characteristics and necessities to be a better person and its can be list as below:

1. Education necessity – they must have some training and education at least first degree until doctorate level or PhD in human services.
2. Training, qualification and experience – as a counselor they must have at least three year of experiences in addiction counseling and have knowledge in term of basic and application in addiction counseling. The professional qualification are needed and supposed to be having it.
3. Ideal personal characteristic – must have very good professional consideration, unconditional positive regard, and use confrontation in helping process rather than giving punishment and being prepared to any situation of client.
4. Role as an addiction counselor – helping, teaching, encouraging and guide in recovery process. They are also must being prepared with knowledge's.

From the characteristic listed above, it shows that addiction counselor needs to improve themselves in other be a competent addictions counselor. Sometimes, the drug user needs someone to lead them to the right way and get support to do it. So, counsellors together with families can help and support them to do the right thing and aware them about the dangerousness.

Media Campaign

Media plays important roles to burst out campaign on promoting families support towards increasing recovering addicts. As we can see nowadays, there are lots of media campaign that promoting the negative effect of drugs. Anonymous (2003) in his study on anti-drug campaign conducted by Leo Burnett and McCann-Erickson in 2002, found that the media campaign can have both positive and negative effects on the target group. The findings showed that only 25% of the respondents have a tendency to drug addiction after watching the anti-drug campaign and 75% of respondents more likely to avoid drugs. It is useful to make people aware of the consequences of taking drug, but it indirectly influences the society's view towards the drug users. Media should always promote the important of families as part of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation elements.

Conclusion

The results highlight the feasibility of utilizing the family as a source of support in the treatment and recovery of drug dependents. Family support plays an important role and is the most significant contributing factor to the positive outcome of recovery amongst recovering addicts. Thus, all treatment facilities must address the element of family support in the modality of treatment and rehabilitation.

Future research using quantitative methods would be useful in providing more information on a represented sample and an in-depth exploration of families' using appropriate inventories investigating coping issues as well as providing support to recovering drug addicts is recommended.

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