



DET TEOLOGISKE
MENIGHETSFAKULTET



Sykehuset Innlandet HF

Meaning-making, Spirituality and Religion: Significance for Patients in Treatment for Substance Use Disorder

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Background

- Lifetime prevalence of alcohol dependence/abuse in Norway: 23% (Kringlen et al 2001)
- Addiction – large burden for the individual
- Addiction – impact on several levels in society

Background

- Spir./rel. factors **protect** against mental health problems (Koenig et al 2001, 2012)
- Weekly religious attendance increase the probability of stopping drinking heavily compared to less frequent attendance (Strawbridge et al. 2001)
- Private religious/spiritual practice over a six months period predict favourable drinking outcomes after nine months (Robinson et al. 2011)
- Overall – **few clinical studies** on meaning-making, spir./rel.'s relation to treatment of substance use disorders (especially when excluding AA-studies)

Background

- Ideal organisations and trusts represents 60 % of the substance use disorders treatment in Norway
- Several are founded on religious values
- Funded by the government and health authorities
- Funders demand a neutral attitude towards religion

Aim

- What is the significance of meaning and meaning-making, spirituality and religiousness in treatment of inpatients with substance use disorder at a religiously founded institution?

Material

- One selected institution situated in the Norwegian Inland
- 2 focus-group interviews of therapists – all available
- 1 focus-group interview of inpatients – all available

Interview guide - therapists

In focus-groups therapist discussed

- the function of meaning, meaning-making, spirituality and religiousness in treatment
- their contribution as therapists
- the significance of the institution being founded on religious values
- accomodation for spir./rel./meaning-making themes in therapy and at the institution in general?

Interview guide - patients

In focus-groups patients discussed

- where they find meaning in life
- what is important in treatment
- the religious basis of the institution
- in which way spir./rel./meaning-making can be significant in treatment
- the pastoral care at the institution

Methods

- Qualitative content analysis utilizing systematic text-condensation
 - cf. Malterud based on Giorgi's phenomenological analysis
- *Total impression* – establish an overview of data
- *Identifying/sorting meaning units* – from themes to codes
- *Condensation* – from code to meaning
- *Synthesizing* – from condensation to descriptions and concepts

Findings –therapists making a framework

- Spirituality: a wide understanding – an open focus on values linked to care and benevolence, respect for human dignity, un-prejudiced, an individual approach
- Horizontal transcendence – balance between the institutions basis and funders demands
- Fundamental attitude of openness towards the patients and their relation to their physical, mental, social as well as their spiritual dimension

«The patients arrive her with shame, guilt, feeling of guilt and regret. Here they are met with faith, hope and forgiveness»

Findings –therapists making a framework

- Artefacts, chapel, rituals (morning prayer, services)
- The chaplain as a «holy person» with a certain role and function outside the therapist team.
- Pastoral care, confession

The patients' experiences – To be met

- Patients experience to be met and seen with an open mind
- Personal human qualities like care and love among the therapists and other workers were important

«In my case it was like going from hell to heaven»

«I sent a message to a friend telling him that I had went from death to life. That was what I felt, that I had all possibilities when coming here.»

The patients' experiences - The meaning in life

- Patients searched for meaning by working with guilt and shame

“The meaning with life here and now is to try to be clean, of course. That’s why I’m here. And it is to rebuild all the bridges I’ve burned. That’s my project here. Build up again the bridges I have burned. And it looks like, more and more, that it is possible to build up again those bridges. But I have burned a lot of bridges before I came here. Meaning with life is also to learn how to live again.”

The patients' experiences - Individual treatment

- In contrast to other treatment programs the treatment at the institution is **individual**
- The patients find it positive to have choices regarding what works, which tools to use, who to talk to, themes to talk about, which activities to participate in
- It gives a possibility to be themselves

“You could say about this institution that it is rehabilitation for advanced patients. In a way you have to take the case in your own hands. At the same time you have good helpers around.”

The patients' experiences - Tools

- Patients used several tools in treatment
- Therapy with psychologists and therapists, conversation with other patients, group sessions, physical activity, hiking in the mountains, doing different handiwork creating things, going on trips etc

The patients' experiences – spir./rel. tools

- The **chaplain** is outside the treatment, but contributes to treatment through the tools he administer. He is a carrier of human compassion and something bigger, cf. spirituality, as a symbol
- The **morning-prayer** and the **service** serve as an important place for processing different themes in life helping the patients to live better lives.

“We need some peace and tranquillity, right. It has been so much negativity, action and impulses and anxiety and things like that, that to get some peace of mind is cool, right.”

The patients' experiences – spir./rel. tools

- The **chapel** and the **rituals** are experienced as vigorous giving peace of mind and security in contrast to the life as an addict.
- **Professional secrecy** and **confession** by the chaplain as a place of laying of burdens without analysis.
- Confession is also used by agnostics.

«The chaplain is the one and only person I want to talk to about the things I need to make up with, due to his professional secrecy»

Summary

- Therapist make a frame of treatment, also including spirituality
- Patients experience the different tools as useful in their own rehabilitation, including elements of spirituality, religion and meaning-making