

## Meaning of Recovery of Drug Addicts: Focus Group Study

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**Abstract:** This study is a qualitative research conducted to explore the meaning of recovery of drug addicts in the use of focus group interview. Subjects in the study were 14 patients under medical treatment and custody in the organization N. Data have been collected from two groups where seven members belonged to each group in January, 2015 by performing focus group interview for two sessions on each group. Open coding by Strauss and Corbin was utilized for data analysis categorizing the significant areas. According to the results of the study 3 categories and 6 sub-categories were derived. Meaning of recovery of drug addicts was shown by looking at reality from the past, overcoming the extreme obstacles and preparing for the future. Therefore, this study is intended to contribute to seek for nursing approach in maintaining and managing recovery with positive interaction with family members and society through the meaning of recovery of drug addicts.

**Key word:** Drug addicts, recovery, meaning, focus group, qualitative research, analysis

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### INTRODUCTION

**Necessity of research:** Drug addiction has been causing serious social issues beyond the personal destruction including health conditions, career, family and interpersonal relationship. According to the statistical investigation of drug from Public Prosecutor's Office in Korea the number of members who controlled drug users was 9,174 in 2011, 9,255 in 2012, 9,764 in 2013 and 9,742 in 2014. Therefore, it has been decreased by 2.0% compared to the previous year. However, there has been overall increasing trend on them. Drug crime coefficient represents a value on the number of drug users exposed per a hundred thousand population. If this value was over twenty, it has been known that control was not feasible through penalty or treatment due to accelerated spreading. Korea has been representing a value higher than twenty since 1999. Therefore, Korea is not safe from drug.

Drug addiction not only harms physical and mental health of individuals but also causes family-related and social issues. In addition, it is developed into problems including economic loss and crime (Baik and Han, 2014). Korea is currently implementing nationally executed policies including the treatment in care and custody,

treatment protection and probation to eradicate drug users. Treatment in care and custody is to accept physically and mentally disabled people and drug addicts in the facility providing the security with treatment and treatment protection is to make drug users overcome physical and mental dependence on drugs and prevent re-occurrence to restore them as a healthy member in society as a part of hospitalized treatment and out-patient treatment (NLIC, 2016). Probation is to detain offenders in the correctional facilities making them lead a normal social life instead of restricting them while correcting offensive and delinquent behaviors through guidance, supervision and support from probation officers and preventing re-occurrence as a part of criminal and institutional policy (NLIC, 2016). However, in spite of nationally executed policies, the re-occurrence rate of drug users has reached to about 40% since 2005 representing how serious addiction turned out to be (Nam, 2014). Therefore, drug addiction that represents high re-occurrence rate is in dire need of treatment intervention for helping drug addicts recover as a member of society through treatment and rehabilitation procedures.

There has not been any treatment rehabilitation policy for drug users in the correctional facility. According to Park (Kang, 2012) mild drug users have been

detained with smugglers or drug suppliers and exposed to a chance for them to be a smuggler or drug supplier during the period when they were detained. Hereupon, treatment and rehabilitation program is urgently required to prevent re-occurrence of drug users.

Most of the studies in dealing with drug users have been conducted on policies for treatment of drug users, measures for promoting the rehabilitation and treatment and plans for making them restore as a member of society (Kang and Sin, 2012; Cho, 2006; KIC, 2005). In addition, there were studies in dealing with experience of recovery of drug addicts through narcotic anonymous meeting (Choi, 2011), experience of recovery of drug addicts (Yoon, 2013) and experience of recovery of drug addicts in local community (Baik and Han, 2014). However, there have not been previous studies that explored how meaningful recovery was in the perspective of drug addicts.

For the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts, understanding on drug addiction is required in advance. Therefore, it is required to identify how drug addicts have lived their lives and what it means to recover for them through their stories. In order to understand how they re-organize the experience of live and the meaning of recovery, qualitative research is required. Qualitative research method is to find the meaning and structure of life of participants with researcher together.

Especially, focus group makes it convenient to deal with reality a researcher intends to understand through interaction with others and also to acquire rich amount of data on experience that is difficult to observe such as drug addiction in a short amount of time. In addition, focus group makes it possible to identify the experience in diverse perspectives and views through interaction among group members (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997). Therefore, it is anticipated to deeply understand the recovery of drug addicts through focus group interview.

There have been only few studies in dealing with drug addicts conducted by focus group. Therefore, it is very meaningful to conduct a study that confirms the meaning of recovery of drug addicts. This study has been conducted to explore how drug addicts re-organize the recovery in the experience of their lives and create the meaning of recovery. The objective of this study is to identify the meaning of recovery of drug addicts in a qualitative research method. Specific research problem is "What does it mean to recover for drug addicts".

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Research design:** This study is a qualitative research conducted to identify the meaning of drug addicts in the use of focus group interview.

**Subjects in the study and ethical consideration:** This study has been conducted on 14 male adults who agreed to voluntarily participate in this research by understanding the objective of study among those who were detained under custody for treatment due to drug addiction in the organization N located in the city of G. Considering ethical issues of participants we have specifically explained the objective and methods of the study and promised to use data only for the purpose of the research and to abolish them after completing the study. In addition, we have guaranteed the non-disclosure of rights and data that were to be used in anonymous as participants had a right to withdraw from participation in the research anytime if they wanted to and acquired their signature on the agreement form. Names of participants suggested in the result of research were named from A to N for the issue of anonymity.

**Data collection:** Each focus group was comprised of seven members to collect data and focus group interview has been conducted on each group for two sessions in January 12 and 19th, 2015. We have promised for non-disclosure of data to participants asking for their agreement and recording the procedures of group interview. About two hours have been consumed for discussion that was proceeded until no new statement about the meaning of recovery was acquired from each of the participants any more. Research questions became clarified according to the principles of questions suggested in the focus group research method while configuring research inquiries and proceeding focus group interview.

### **Sample focus group questions**

**Introductory question:** Please feel free to provide your thought about drugs (narcotic).

**Transition question:** Please provide us your thought about recovery.

### **Key questions:**

- How do you feel if you 'recover'
- What does it mean to recover to you
- When do you think recovery starts
- How do you lead your life from now on

### **Ending questions:**

- I will briefly summarize our discussion. Has it been well summarized
- Do you have anything to say more

**Data analysis:** As for data analysis, recorded resources were transcribed in the language of participants while

utilizing open coding by Strauss and Cobin (1998) to find meaning parts and categorize them. I as a researcher have repeatedly read the transcribed copies focusing on the data. I have identified each topic exploring the correlation among topics, establishing main and sub-categories and classifying/recording the parts of conversation in each category based on sub-categories. While proceeding these procedures, researchers have made an effort to maintain accuracy through continuous review and discussion.

**Rigidity of research:** The evaluation of rigidity of this study was carried out based by Guba and Lincoln (1981)'s evaluative criteria composed of truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality suggested. Truth-value represented the result of analysis on the meaning of recovery among drug addicts and confirmed whether they were consistent with their experience. Applicability was to collect data in-depth until statement of participants was repeated without providing new statement. Consistency has been reviewed and evaluated in terms of procedures and results of the research by two professors in the department of mental nursing and also nurses for addiction psychiatric nurses and also a professor in the department of nurse who wrote a dissertation for doctoral degree. In addition we have consciously made an effort for subjectivity of a researcher not to influence on the results of the study for neutrality and research team has held a regular meeting for data analysis to maintain neutrality.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the results of analyzing the meaning of recovery among 14 drug addicts who participated in this study, 3 categories and 6 sub-categories were derived. Participants in this study turned out to find the meaning in their inner world and seek for the meaning of recovery in the relationship with social supporting system. The meaning of recovery among drug addicts turned out to be 'looking at reality from the past,' 'overcoming the extreme obstacles' and 'preparing for the future' (Table 1).

**Looking at reality from the past:** The first category, 'looking at reality from the past,' means to confront themselves as a drug addict through the experience and recognize social influential factors. Participants were aware of how serious addiction was and also that they needed to be disconnected from drug addicts. Drug addicts expressed to look at reality from the past through 'me seen through the life as an addict' and 'overcoming the trap of Karma'.

Table 1: Meaning of recovery of drug addicts

Categories	Theme clusters
Looking at reality from the past	Me seen through the life as an addict Overcoming the trap of karma
Overcoming the extreme obstacles	Frustration Hope and longing on precious others
Preparing for the future	Live independently Way to recover

**Me seen through the life as an addict:** Participants turned out to realize how they were weak through a life as an addict. In addition, they were afraid of drug while realizing how they were devastated due to drug and also lived for drug due to switched priority in life.

I imagine how I or those around me might be the same when I am released from the jail to society instead of looking at me for using drug. I tried to something to stay out of it. I need to persevere if I feel the pain. However, my weakness is the drug. I always say to myself that this will be the last time. However, drug might be calling me instead at some point (A).

I am frustrated for not being able to stay out of this situation but repeat the same things (B, D, N). I am anxious and insecure if I am out of meth just like we are out of rice or side dishes at home. Then, I know what I am getting myself into but I keep repeating them. This is not my life but the life of drug. I feel like I live to use drug (E).

I have never stayed at home for >3 days. However, I keep rationalizing myself. This was the reason why I stayed at home. This is not to life for my live but for drug (F).

As I am addicted, drug becomes the number one priority over the remaining time. I keep postponing what I am supposed to do but use drug first (G).

I realize that I keep using the drugs as I used it since I was so tired. Conclusion is that I have been wasting my time even if I knew it omitted. About a couple of years ago, my family had a hope and tried to help me. However, as I continued using drugs after time passed by they lost their expectation and only asked me to live well. This was what they said to me (I).

**Overcoming the trap of Karma:** Participants indicated that relationship with those who they became acquainted with because of drugs was the reason why they were trapped in vicious cycle and unable to stay out of drug. Therefore, they expressed that overcoming the trap in interpersonal relationship that they originally regarded as a part of loyalty was one way to recover. They were aware of how they needed to be disconnected with interpersonal relationship and keep a distance with them.

There is this connection among people with drugs. If I am disconnected with people, I am unable to score drugs. Therefore, there is a high chance for me to quit

drugs (D). This time, I never meet anyone except for my families when others visit. I do not want others to know that I am here. I will keep a distance with them when I am released (G).

When I am released, people wait in the front holding weeds or meth on their hands. At that time, I thought it was a part of loyalty. However, I tried to keep a distance with people I was connected from the past (K). As I kept on using drugs, I became acquainted with many people. As I became acquainted with them, I was in a deep trap. The reason why we cannot stay out of drugs easily is because of what we have around us (L).

**Overcoming the extreme obstacles:** The second category, ‘Overcoming the extreme obstacles’ is to realize how frustrated they are in with an extreme experience in their lives motivating them to recover. Family members turned out to realize how the second category was an important element for drug addicts to recover. In addition, participants indicated that they realized their realities through an indirect experience of death of their friends. Drug addicts expressed to overcome the extreme obstacles with ‘frustration’ and ‘hope and longing on previous others’.

**Frustration:** Participants turned out to realize how direct and indirect experience was an extreme of life due to drugs. What they felt in such an extreme in their lives was frustration that motivated them to recover. Frustration was represented as an ardent attitude on willing to do something at the risk of their lives.

As soon as I used drugs, I thought that everything was over. As time passed by there was nothing I got from addiction. As soon as I used them... I am frustrated to quit them at the risk of my life (B).

I wanted to live well but my life was ruined at some point. My friend died out of drugs and committing a suicide from drug does not sound strange (C). I believe that I am motivated to quit drugs with frustration (D). When I looked around they lost their teeth and hair and died due to liver cirrhosis. Now, I am losing my teeth and hair. I was motivated to change by looking at others who died in this way (E).

I am frustrated enough to quit drugs at this time since there might be no more change for me to go back to family except for this time. I kept on telling myself to quit in the past but have never been this frustrated (F).

I am willing to die if I cannot stay out of drugs. I need to find something if I stay away from drugs (Omitted). I am the king if I have many drugs. I thought that I would be able to live like a king. However, I do not want to die as a king of drugs. I do not want to succumb to a shot of drug (L).

**Hope and longing on precious others:** Participants turned out to make up their minds to change for their family by realizing how precious they were and have hope on them. Family was whom they were sorry for and also a promise to make.

There were no ones who were hurt except for family or relatives. I want to find a job that can help family. I have been making an effort for it but it was not easy (A). I want to have babies and marry. I also want to share with those in pain (B).

As my mother was left alone and became incapable of doing works, I realized that I needed to support my mother. She has been living to support me. I am sorry for my family (C).

This time, I had my mind made up for my precious family (E). Those with family might be easy to stop using drugs than people like me. I might stop using drugs since I would be sorry for them (J). My father became bankrupt because of gambling. Therefore, I might not have anything to do after I am released, so I keep using drugs. If I had family, I would have been better (K).

**Preparing for the future:** The third category, ‘preparing for the future,’ indicated that participants turned out to seek for a meaning of recovery in a diverse and broad range from them to others and social institutions to recover from drugs. Participants were aware of how they needed to overcome drugs by themselves and making up their mind was the starting point for them to recover. In addition, they also indicated that warm glances from society and social institutional support for drug addicts and their family members were required. Drug addicts turned out to express the preparation for the future with “independent living” and “way to recover”.

**Living independently:** Participants turned out to have a will to find a way to live without relying on their family members by themselves. I am sad that I have been wasting my time. I have a goal to live independently without relying on my family members (I).

I had an older sister as the one and only family member. She lives in Malaysia and I need to live on my own (Omitted). Recovery might be relevant as I take step by step to make a whole bridge and pass the brook. I try to do it on my own without relying on others (J). It takes more than making up my mind to quit drugs. However, I cannot tell this to others. I need to control them (N).

**Way to recovery:** Participants turned out to regard resolution as a starting point for recovery and it included a modeling procedure of others who recovered from drug addiction. In addition, they indicated that they might be

able to recover and be treated not as a criminal but as an addict if they were supported with heart-warming attitude and encouragement in society.

I believe that making up one's mind or realizing how drug was a bad thing is a part of recovery process. There are people who live well off after they are released from here. About one or two people out of ten. I would like to know how they live and how they quit drugs. I would like to do the same thing (C).

People treat me as a criminal if they know I used drugs. However, I am an addict instead of a criminal. We need this attitude (Omitted). We need policies for taking care of us, changing us, helping family and putting us all together (D).

As I live a repeated life, I realize how I would have been able to quit for a year if I stayed away from drugs for a year. Then, I quit drug for two years this time. I believe that recovery is to make this time for staying away from drugs. Making up my mind for refraining and staying away from drugs is the recovery to me (L). It is like a homework. I make up my mind for homework and this is how recovery starts. There are drug fighting organization and NA meeting in Korea. However, it is still very difficult if I attend them. I hope that there are systems for helping us recover in social policies (M).

It is not important for us to stay away from drugs for 1-3 years. What is important is for others to recognize how we have been away from drugs for three years and also how "we lived our lives well enough." I believe that this is the start of recovery. When I came here, I realized how they called us as a patient. Whether we are treated as a patient or criminal. Criminal is a bad person but patient is the one who can be cured (J).

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The objective of this study is to identify the meaning of recovery of drug addicts and accurately and deeply understand their life experience. The meaning of recovery among drug addicts turned out to be derived as 'looking at reality from the past,' 'overcoming the extreme obstacles' and 'preparing for the future.'

First of all, 'looking at reality from the past' is explained that addicts look at their lives, identify the causal factors and find solutions. In other words, it can be interpreted that participants objectively look at their lives, understand themselves and pursue a desire to stay free from causal factors in the relationship with others related to drugs. This category is explained that drug addicts

confront the reality through their lives in the past and recover by disconnecting with interpersonal relationship they built in regard of drugs. According to the result of study by Baik and Han (2014) a topic of 'disconnecting the relationship with people' related with drugs was derived. Therefore, the same result was represented with this study. Hereupon, people around drug addicts are of an important existence to stop using drugs and eventually recover from them. In addition, Koski-Jannes (1998) has insisted that sincere enlightenment, cognitive-emotional changes, confirmative turning point with insight, internal conflict-solving and confrontation of reality were of a way to recover from addict.

Participants were willing to change and recover by reflecting themselves as 'drugs were calling themselves (A)' and 'they were living for the remaining lives for drugs (F).' It seems that continuous education and rehabilitation are required for internal changes, re-establishment of identity and positive interaction for expanding the perspective of viewing the reality from the past among drug addicts.

The second category, 'overcoming the extreme obstacles,' confirmed that frustration felt in the dead end in life served as a motivation and support from environment such as family was of an important meaning for recovery. In other words, frustration in the extreme obstacles might be a turning point to recover and precious others including family members are of an important meaning for recovery including responsibility and longing that influenced on their recovery. In addition, they were aware of how necessary changes were required as they were concerned with their health conditions as other died from drugs. Koski-Jannes and Turner (1999) insisted that changing factors influencing on recovery from addiction included, first of all, tiring out of drugs in regard of diseases or deaths of others as well as concern with their health conditions, secondly, family factors related to the relationship with others or family members, third, love factors related to spouse, friends and lovers, fourth, self-dependent group or experiencing the extreme, fifth, social results in dealing with legal or financial issues and changes in divorce or residence, sixth, recognition of the God or religion and seventh, support from friends. McIntosh and Mckeganey (2000) indicated that continuous motivation was required for them to maintain the recovered conditions. Aforementioned results in the previous studies (Koski-Jannes, 1998; McIntosh and Mckeganey, 2000) were interpreted in the same context with the results of this study.

The third concept, "preparing for the future," confirmed that addicts and also social-institutional factors influenced on the recovery. Koski-Jannes and Turner

(1999) indicated that self-control was the most important element to suspend problematic behaviors and also that internal changes and correction on self-recognition influenced on recovery (Banonis, 1989; Kearney, 1996) Margaret (Kearney, 1998) insisted that stopping drugs might be of a motivation by finding goals from social structure, physical goals and also identity. It is required to support and aid them for finding social, physical and identity-related goals for synchronization and also to provide social policies for education and rehabilitation in continuous and stepwise manner. There are Korean Association Against Drug Abuse as a private group for providing drug preventing business and also Narcotic Anonymous.

Participants indicated, 'they treated us a criminal when they know we used drugs (D)' and 'whether we are treated as a criminal or patient... criminal is a bad person but patient is the one who can be cured (J).' Hereupon they insisted that changes from social perspective were required. In addition, support and encouragement by saying, 'you work hard and live well' and warm glances were confirmed to be a required element for them. Koski-Jannes and Turner (1999) indicted the love and support from friends were elements that influenced on recovery. Therefore, it is required for drug addicts to experience interaction with others and social support. It is recommended to provide various continuous and stepwise systems so that drug addicts detained in the facility can maintain cognitive-emotional changes such as resolution and perform it.

According to aforementioned results of the study, recovery was to confront reality through the past and prepare for the future to stay away from extreme obstacles among participants. They recognized how recovery was much more than quitting the drugs. In other words, recovery was a stepwise procedure as indicated, 'recovery might be relevant as I take step by step to make a whole bridge and pass the brook. I try to do it on my own without relying on others (J)'. Therefore, recovery is of a course of existence instead of final destination or goals and proceeded in unique and individual routes (Jacobson and Greenley, 2001).

At last, it was confirmed that they experienced physical, mental and social pain due to drug addiction but tried to recover from them with internal power, reliance, family and social supporting system. In the previous studies, drug addicts recognized how interacting with others everyday was of a correct route to recover (Baik and Han, 2014). Therefore, it is required to identify how drug addicts are able to maintain the recovered conditions and make an efficient approach in the nursing field by understanding the management of recovery of them.

In addition, nurses are required to not only provide the development, education and support for helping drug addicts but also participate in all the courses for subjects. Nurses are recommended to provide a fundamental service for them to find true identity in every moment when they confront themselves, experience extreme obstacles and prepare for the future.

## CONCLUSION

This study has been conducted to identify the meaning of recovery among drug addicts by using focus group. According to the results of the study, the meaning of recovery among drug addicts was to confront reality, overcome extreme obstacles and prepare for the future. Recovery among drug addicts included frustrated enlightenment of lives, confrontation of reality, family and social support as an important factor. Results of this study are meaningful in that they provided important foundation for development of rehabilitation program for making nurses stay with drug addicts and help their rehabilitation and returning to the society through the meaning of recovery.

## SUGGESTIONS

Following suggestions are made according to the results of the study. First of all this study has been conducted on drug addicts detained in the facility for custody of treatment. An expanded follow-up research is recommended in dealing with experience of recovery on drug addicts who maintain the recovered conditions at local community based on results of this study. Secondly, this study has been conducted on male drug addicts. Understanding on recovery of female drug addicts is require in the future.

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