

Dissertation Abstracts

Congratulations and best wishes to Shannon Dunn and Judy Ripsch as they move on to new career challenges and opportunities. The dissertation topics continue to represent the diversity of interests and the commitment of clinical practice of our Ph.D. students. Dissertations are available in the faculty lounge at the School of Social Work and at the periodical desk on the 8th floor of Loyola's Lewis Library, 25 E. Pearson.

Understanding Acute Psychotic Decompensation from the Patient's Perspective

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Objective: Psychosis has been viewed as mysterious and elusive. Given conclusions of this sort, explanations for psychotic episodes have been premature, simplistic, and many times, inaccurate. The goal of this study is to explore the various contributing factors in the acute psychotic decompensation in people with severe mental illness. **Method:** This naturalistic study was designed with postpositivist assumptions and employs both quantitative and qualitative data. All data were collected from narrative formulations from 100 retrospective chart reviews of clinical interviews conducted in a natural clinical setting with patients experiencing acute psychosis. Factors were compiled from 4 perspectives: patient, mental health professional, psychiatrist, and "Axis V diagnosis." **Results:** Theme analysis revealed the most frequently reported factors influencing acute psychotic decompensation from each perspective. There is not just a singular cause of acute psychotic decompensation, but multiple influences. Psychosocial stressors, the most frequently reported being change in supportive relationships, are the origin of psychotic decompensation, and noncompliance with medication is only one of many factors that contribute to acute psychotic decompensation. People with severe mental illness report layers of stressors that contribute to psychotic episodes. People with severe mental illness live daily with internal and external layers of psychosocial stressors that keep them vulnerable. **Conclusions:** Patients are eager and capable of reporting their own subjective experience and caregivers must be equally as capable, eager, and willing to listen to and understand the experiences of patients. The experiences of patients who have been diagnosed with a severe mental illness can be understood. The viewpoint that devalues the subjective experiences of people who have been diagnosed with severe mental illness because they are psychotic is unwarranted and unsupported. Psychosis is caused by a variety of complex factors. The idea that medication noncompliance is the single cause of acute psychotic decompensation is reductionistic and overvalued. Mental health professionals of all training disciplines had difficulty folding patient quotes into final case formulations. If caregivers know more accurately what bothers an individual, he/she has a better chance of being helped. Policies should include third-party reimbursement for psychotherapy, not just medication management. Policies should stipulate more availability in supportive and therapeutic relationships in all levels of treatment programs, especially those that incorporate the understanding and treatment of dual diagnoses and traumatic experiences. Since patients are capable, eager, and willing to participate in research that allows them to share their point of view, then more research involving subgroups of severely mentally ill should be executed. More studies are needed that respect their points of view. The frequency, severity, and duration of psychotic decompensation can be decreased and even sidestepped.

Development and Maintenance of Positive Sense of Self in Successful Obese Women

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Using grounded theory method, thirteen successful, obese women were interviewed to determine how they had developed and continue to maintain their self-reported, positive sense of self. They used a Likert scale to rate how positively they perceive their sense of self, which was then correlated with Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence Scale. Their theories of how they learned to choose to experience life in a positive manner, made possible by their relationships, competencies, and self acceptance were compared to Kohut's self psychology theories of self development. Their emphasis of continued growth in relationships, competencies, service to others, and spirituality, in order to maintain their positive sense of self, was explored.