

Poverty and Social Exclusion for Psychiatric Survivors

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Poverty and social inclusion

- ◆ In Canada, 27% of psychiatric survivors live in poverty
- ◆ Access to basic human resources → increased quality of life and community integration
- ◆ Psychiatric survivors are considered to be one of the most socially excluded and marginalized groups in our society
- ◆ Evidenced in: the housing market, when seeking employment, social relationships, access to resources, and in social policies

Purpose

- ◆ to better understand psychiatric survivors' experience of poverty and social exclusion through a social justice lens focusing in particular on the co-existence of, and the relation between, poverty and social inclusion.
- ◆ **social inclusion**

Social Justice Framework

- ◆ Nussbaum's (2011) Capabilities Approach
- ◆ Emphasis on access to resources based on actual and potential abilities...Different people/different needs
- ◆ Agency and empowerment
- ◆ At its core, the Capabilities Approach requires that we question if *human dignity* is being respected (Nussbaum, 2006)
- ◆ Echoes WHO Organization's (2001) framework of disability

Research Design

- ◆ Community University Research Alliance
- ◆ Participatory Action Research
- ◆ 4-year longitudinal design
- ◆ Mixed methods
- ◆ Ontario, Canada

Research Design: Data Collection

- ◆ N= 380 individuals (190 men and 190 women), who have had a psychiatric diagnosis and/or addiction issue for a minimum of one year
- ◆ Four subgroups were recruited: homeless, employed with housing, unemployed with housing, and those residing in group home settings
- ◆ Sample sites: homeless shelters, group living settings for psychiatric survivors, community and psychiatric survivor agencies, public housing, Employee Assistance Programs, and fee-for-service mental health services
- ◆ Advertised in multiple ways

Research Design: Data Collection

- ◆ Open and closed-ended questions regarding their perceptions of fairness and ethics
 - ◆ Ex: 'What is your experience of poverty?' and 'How does poverty relate to your experience of mental illness'
- ◆ Followed by 13 quantitative surveys, face to face
- ◆ Demographic info collected
- ◆ Honorarium

Research Ethics

- ◆ Research ethics approval was obtained
- ◆ Consent was obtained after the letter of information was reviewed, & verbally discussed.
- ◆ De-identified data- storage
- ◆ Community resources and emergency referral preparedness

Data Analysis

- ◆ Theoretically informed by Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach to social justice (Nussbaum, 2011).
- ◆ Lofland and colleagues' framework for analytical coding (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006).
- ◆ Initial emerging codes → focused into categories
- ◆ Interactive process → research team

Demographic Findings

- ◆ Participants were between the ages of 18 and 72, with mean age of 40.7 years
- ◆ Approx. 67% of participants experienced homelessness at least once
- ◆ Mean income for one month was \$1068
- ◆ Majority of participants were single never married (62%; n=264).
- ◆ Grade school was highest level of education for approx. 47% of participants
- ◆ Approx. 75% (n= 286) of participants were unemployed at the time of enrolment

Findings: Themes

- ◆ Poverty and mental health: *“You just try to survive”*
- ◆ Stigma: *“People treat you like trash”*
- ◆ Belonging: *“You feel like you don’t belong”*
- ◆ Shared concern and advocacy: *“Everyone deserves housing”*

Poverty and mental health: “You just try to survive”

- ◆ “They go hand in hand”
- ◆ “I started to live in poverty after (my) mental illness because it affected my ability to work”.
- ◆ “...you are stuck between what do I buy, groceries or meds”.
- ◆ Catastrophic impact: “Sometimes because of poverty you feel like you wanna commit suicide”; “The stress is to the point I tried to commit suicide not once, but twice. If this is what the world is I don’t want to be a part of it”.
- ◆ Survival, compromising access to basic human needs: “You just try to survive” → homelessness, prostitution, food insecurity

Stigma: “People treat you like trash

- ◆ External and internal impacts and examples
- ◆ Unequal employment and housing opportunities & decreased sense of self-worth
- ◆ Based on a multitude of factors; **mental illness & poverty**
- ◆ Recognized mistreatment/deserving and accepting of judgments
- ◆ Internalization of external stigma: “abnormal”, “worthless”, hopeless, and helpless; “I am disgusted with myself too”

Belonging: “You feel like you don’t belong”

- ◆ Feeling like an outsider, “less than, “different”
- ◆ Impacted by stigma
- ◆ “when you’re considered a freak, loser, moron, just because you’re different it makes people look down on you twice as much”
- ◆ “I’ve pushed people away and people have pushed me away because they can’t stand to see me hurt myself”
- ◆ Positive family support, organizations, engaging with people facing similar stressors

Shared concern and advocacy : *“Everyone deserves housing”:*

- ◆ Shared concern for other individuals: “Everyone deserves a living wage”; “Everyone deserves housing”
- ◆ Peer support
- ◆ Advocacy: “You can’t speak for yourself, you need an advocate to speak for you and you have to jump through hoops just to get enough money to survive”.

Discussion

- ◆ Social justice is not being met: “*What does a life worthy of human dignity require?*” the participants shared the counterpart
- ◆ *Opportunities* for a life with human dignity were perpetually denied as a result of societal and systemic discrimination and exclusion
- ◆ Shared yet individual experiences
- ◆ Individual uniqueness within poverty and stigma

Study limitations

- ◆ Limited to those who speak and understand spoken English
- ◆ Large sample for qualitative research (strength of this balances out disadvantage)
- ◆ Interview responses were handwritten by RAs, rather than being audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim

Conclusion

- ◆ If social justice is premised on the notion that human life is deserving of dignity, we question why psychiatric survivors have been deemed so ‘undeserving’ of such a life, and how such inequality can be countered
- ◆ Nussbaum’s theoretical approach a fitting lens
- ◆ More research