

Interpersonal Relationships during Drug Use and Addiction Treatment from the Perspective of Clients in a Therapeutic Community



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BACKGROUND: Interpersonal problems among drug users (DU) are frequent, are related to other problems, and improve during addiction treatment. **AIMS:** Using a retrospective methodology, to acquire a better understanding of changes in relationships which occur in the course of drug use and drug treatment, as well as their subjective appraisal by ex-drug users. **METHOD:** Semi-structured interviews with drug users in a therapeutic community (TC) were analysed by means of a descriptive-interpretive method. The coding of interview transcripts into categories was performed in two phases using the NVivo 7 qualitative software. Five interviews were coded in the pilot phase, followed by an audit by an external psychologist and progressive coding of the rest of the transcripts, with data saturation being reached in the second phase. **PARTICIPANTS:** Nine male clients and one female one, aged 18–36 years

(mean: 25.9), participated in the study, and the lengths of their stays in the TC were 2–35 months (mean: 9.9). Their approximate mean age at the time of the onset of drug use was 15.6 years (12–28). **RESULTS:** The analysis provided 21 categories which were divided into three domains based on chronological order. Changes in relationship priority during active drug use occurred on the basis of barriers (such as the need to obtain drugs and stigma), which restrained active drug users from engaging in and maintaining their social relationships. Re-prioritisation of relationships during treatment was facilitated by the experience of help, support, and the restoration of trust in relationships. **CONCLUSIONS:** This study builds on the previous work exploring the broad issue of the social consequences of drug use while also offering clients' perspectives on this topic.

KEY WORDS: INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS – DRUG USE – DRUG ADDICTION – THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY – DRUG TREATMENT CENTRE – QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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