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Challenges Faced by Rehabilitation Workers in Drug Addicts Rehabilitation in District Swat of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

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This study being qualitative in nature used a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of drug addiction rehabilitation through in-depth interviews with rehabilitation workers in four centers in District Swat, Pakistan. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation from rehabilitation workers in four selected centers in Swat, Pakistan. Convenient sampling was used to select 20 participants from each group. The collected data was analyzed with the help of thematic analysis. It was concluded that individual, societal, and environmental factors significantly contribute to drug addiction. Understaffing and resource limitations slow down client recovery and negatively affect worker well-being. Effective rehabilitation necessitates a comprehensive approach that integrates evidence-based practices, addresses individual needs, and provides sufficient support during the recovery process. This study recommends an integrated approach of improving drug addiction rehabilitation, focusing on personalized treatment, accessible services, effective aftercare, staff welfare, holistic care, effective social support, and community involvement to improve treatment outcomes and client wellbeing.

Introduction

Drug addiction represents a complex global health challenge with profound implications for individual and social wellbeing. Interacting chemical substances with the human body have received extensive study across different scientific fields. Empirical research identified barriers to drug addiction recovery processes. There is substantial evidence of several interconnected barriers to successful rehabilitation including low treatment accessibility, dispersed support networks, low individual motivation and severe economic constraints (Gossop et al., 2003). In Quello (2005) research, clients' chronic withdrawal symptoms, intense cravings and mental health issues are further explained. Meanwhile, rehabilitation professionals themselves face significant occupational challenges including increased stress, resource limitations and high professional demands (O 'Sullivan et al., 2014).

The World Drug Report 2022 indicated that an estimated 284 million people worldwide took drugs in 2020. Cannabis is the world's most commonly used drug, and the research also indicates an increase in amphetamine use. According to the survey, around 11.2 million persons globally injected narcotics throughout the study period. Around half of this population lived with hepatitis C, 1.4 million with HIV, and 1.2 million with both(World Drug Report, 2022) There is a discernible lack of thorough evaluations of rehabilitation centers efficacy despite their widespread presence (Lipsey et al., 2007). There is a paucity of information about the longevity of recovery, recurrence prevention, and general quality of life enhancements for recovered addicts since current research frequently concentrates on discrete elements of rehabilitation, such as short-term abstinence rates (Moe, 2023). A variety of therapeutic approaches, programmed frameworks, and treatment modalities are used in rehabilitation centers (O'Sullivanet al., 2014). Standardized best practices are lacking, and it is still unclear how well different strategies work for treating different types of addiction (such as alcohol, stimulants, and opioids) (Gossop et al., 2003). Factors including socioeconomic position, geography, and insurance coverage frequently restrict access to high-quality rehabilitation centers (Shah al., 2023). Health disparities may be exacerbated by substantial obstacles that vulnerable groups, such as minorities and those with lower incomes, may encounter while trying to access and utilize rehabilitation programs. Rinaldi et al. (2020) argue that the landscape of drug addiction is dynamic, with new substances emerging and addiction patterns evolving. Rehabilitation facilities must adjust to these shifting conditions and make sure that their therapies continue to be applicable and efficient to properly handle this issue (Tanielian, 2008). In the current study, the researcher focuses on drug addicts who are addicted to the use of heroin, opioids, hashish, ice, alcohol, etc.

High stress levels, limited resources, and heavy workloads also present occupational challenges for rehabilitation professionals themselves. Individual client needs meet systemic limitations in a complex environment where long-term recovery remains challenging. Mechanic et al. Drug addiction undermines personal relationships, social cohesion, and health trajectory systems (2007), which highlight the need for targeted rehabilitation approaches.

This study is of prime importance as it explores the dual perspectives of drug addicts and rehabilitation professionals in District Swat regarding the challenges faced during rehabilitation. Through identification and analysis of these challenges the study identifies barriers to rehabilitation and gaps in policies, programs and practices. Such research findings may inform stakeholders such as healthcare providers, policymakers, social workers and non-governmental organizations on urgent needs and areas for intervention. Also, this study may help develop evidence-based strategies and adapted programs to improve the quality and accessibility of rehabilitation services. Addressing issues specific to District Swat may be a model for other similar challenges faced in other regions with comparable socio-economic and cultural dynamics. This research ultimately aims at improving the lives of drug addicts by encouraging their reinsertion into society as productive individuals. It simultaneously seeks to empower rehabilitation workers with insights and tools to overcome professional barriers. The work has wider social relevance because it contributes to reducing the social stigma of drug addiction, building community support

and helping to create an environment for a more compassionate and effective treatment of addiction.

Literature Review

Rehabilitation for drug addiction is a complex process that encompasses institutional, physiological, social, and psychological challenges. This review of the literature analyzes some challenges encountered by rehabilitation professionals in assisting individuals during their recovery process. This review examines the psychological, cultural, ethical, institutional, and technological challenges confronting the rehabilitation profession, as shown by recent research. Research conducted by Anderson & Smith (2022), Thompson & Rodriguez (2021), and Edwards & Morgan (2020) delineates the emotional toll of the profession, the necessity for cultural competency, the integration of new technology, and the imperative for professional development. This analysis consolidates these data to emphasize the necessity for a comprehensive response to the interrelated and varied difficulties encountered by rehabilitation practitioners. It also examines techniques to assist these professionals in obtaining resources, psychological support, and skills necessary for their involvement in the rehabilitation process and contribution to drug addiction recovery.

There are various challenges and factors associated with the drug addict's rehabilitation from rehabilitation workers perspective. Recovery is most effective when rehabilitation professionals assist individuals in overcoming addiction. However, their employment is frequently emotionally intense due to their engagement with individuals facing significant psychological and physiological challenges. Morgan and Edwards (2019) investigated the emotional burden experienced by recovery workers in the Journal of Addiction Counselling. The authors indicate that professionals who engage directly with drug users suffer from compassion fatigue, characterized by eventual emotional depletion and diminished empathy due to sustained exposure to pain. Compassion fatigue can lead to burnout, diminished job satisfaction, and suboptimal client care (Tabaj et al., 2015).

Rehabilitation professionals encounter supplementary institutional and structural obstacles in addition to the emotional burdens associated with assisting addicts. Such issues typically emerge due to constraints within the rehabilitation system, specifically regarding staffing, resources, and organizational support.

Johnson and McLeod (2020) found that understaffing in numerous rehabilitation clinics adversely affects client service. Excessive caseloads and insufficient people result in workers being overextended and unable of providing individualized attention to each customer. The inadequate staffing may hinder the agency's ability to address the requirements of clients, particularly those with co-occurring mental health illnesses or intricate medical histories. The study emphasized that employees experiencing stress are more susceptible to burnout and compassion fatigue, hence undermining client service.

The personal challenges encountered by rehabilitation practitioners influence their approach to assisting others in recovery. Occupational stress, worry, and various personal issues may also impact an employee. Psychologically taxing work environments increase the susceptibility of rehabilitation professionals to mental health issues. Prolonged exposure to clients' trauma, emotional distress, and addictions can be psychologically taxing on staff. Support mechanisms for workers are essential in rehabilitation centers.

Research conducted by Davidson and White (2007) revealed that rehabilitation professionals frequently experience stress due to the high demands of their occupations. Stress from overseeing extensive caseloads, intricate client requirements, and institutional obstacles can lead to burnout and exhaustion. Workers may struggle to allocate time for themselves, as the emotional demands of their profession can readily infiltrate their personal lives. It advises rehabilitation centers to use stress-reduction techniques such as mindfulness training, consistent supervision, and opportunities for employees to debrief and process emotions to mitigate the impact of stress on their wellness.

Ongoing training and professional growth are essential to fulfil the expectations of rehabilitation professionals. As addiction treatment progresses, rehabilitation practitioners must remain educated about the latest research, therapeutic techniques, and optimal practices. Smith & Thompson (2021) discovered that rehabilitation professionals who engage in ongoing learning and skill enhancement are more effectively equipped to address addiction recovery. The study indicated that specialized training in trauma-informed care, coexisting mental health conditions, and motivational interviewing improved workers' capacity to provide care.

In longitudinal research by Thompson et al. (2020), over 72% of rehabilitation professionals suffered emotional exhaustion in their first five years. Engaging with addicts can be emotionally draining. Rehabilitation personnel face burnout, which causes mental fatigue, depersonalization, and lower performance. Employees, who are constantly exposed to customers' trauma, manage relapses emotionally, and lack a mental outlet often develops these symptoms.

Burnout affects rehab providers' health and client care. Emotionally exhausted rehabilitation specialists are less likely to engage clients, reducing therapeutic partnerships. The research shows frontline workers need considerable psychological support. Rehabilitation professionals may receive routine mental health exams, peer support groups, and counselling to meet their psychological needs (Yasin et al., 2024).

Rodriguez & Chen (2018) conducted psychological research on the necessity for rehabilitation practitioners to blend professional detachment with genuine empathy. Researchers found that rehabilitation workers frequently struggle to set suitable emotional boundaries, which can render them susceptible to personal emotional fragility and potential professional disengagement. This specific challenge is intensified by the nature of addiction work, which entails developing deep, occasionally intimate, relationships with clients experiencing significant personal and emotional turmoil. Employees must maintain a balance between attending to their clients' needs and preserving emotional detachment to avoid burnout.

Failure to attain this equilibrium may result in what Chen and Rodriguez term "empathic exhaustion," characterized by excessive emotional involvement with clients. Without proper emotional boundaries, rehabilitation practitioners may experience feelings of helplessness, frustration, or resentment. These feelings may ultimately result in a mental detachment from clients, undermining the therapeutic alliance and diminishing the likelihood of successful rehabilitation (Ali, 2024).

Patel and Kumar's (2020) research for the International Journal on Addiction Rehabilitation analyzed client motivation dynamics and found challenges. Rehabilitation professionals have challenges in managing client resistance, persistent denial, and engagement throughout the rehabilitation process. Rehabilitation professionals encounter individuals who are doubtful about their recovery, who minimize the seriousness of their addiction, or who oppose rehabilitation. This ambivalence may hinder practitioners from establishing trust, enhancing self-awareness, and securing client commitment to treatment.

Research Questions

- 1. What are the challenges perceived by rehabilitation workers in assisting drug addicts?
- 2. What are the gaps in current rehabilitation programs?

Research Objectives

- 1. To investigate the challenges perceived by rehabilitation workers in assisting drug addicts.
- 2. To investigate the gaps in current rehabilitation programs and to propose recommendations for improvement based on study findings.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura (1986), social cognitive theory is highly relevant to drug addiction rehabilitation from both the client and worker perspective as well as for the challenges they face during the rehabilitation process.

SCT emphasizes the role of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors in shaping individuals' behaviors and experiences (Bandura, 1986). From the perspective of drug addicts, their rehabilitation journey is influenced by their self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and the social support they receive. Understanding these factors can provide insight into the personal challenges they face during rehabilitation.

Likewise, the perspectives of the rehabilitation workers can be analyzed through SCT by examining their reinforcement practices, observational learning, and the social and environmental contexts. It provides a framework for how rehabilitation workers may analyze the experiences and observations of the addict's behavior. Hence, by using SCT, deficiencies can be identified in the current rehabilitation programs related to the provision of social support, and changing the behavior into a positive behavior and this ultimately may lead to improving the effectiveness of the program.

Research Method

This research employed a qualitative methodology and phenomenological research design to gain a deep understanding of the challenges faced during drug addiction rehabilitation from the rehabilitation workers' perspectives and experiences. There are 4 drug rehab centers in District Swat. These rehab centers comprised the universe of this study. The district of Swat was selected as the universe of the study because the researcher was aware of being a resident of the area and had easy access to the participants for data collection. Primary data was collected from 20 Rehabilitation workers, including counsellors, therapists, social workers, and medical professionals involved in drug addiction rehabilitation programs. A convenient sampling technique was used to select the samples from the population. It was used because convenient sampling makes it easy for the researcher to collect data. Semi-structured interviews, Focus Group discussions, and participant observation were used as tools for data collection. It helped the researcher to gain a huge amount of information. Braun and Clarke (2006) used the thematic analysis technique for data analysis. It is a tool for data analysis in qualitative research. Since the proposed technique is more flexible in qualitative research, the researcher chooses this technique for analyzing the collected data from the informants.

Ethical Considerations

In this research, I adhered to ethical standards in research, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality. Moreover, participants were also provided the right to withdraw at any time

Discussion and Analysis

Professional Role and Motivation

This theme emerged during the analysis of in-depth interviews with participants. It was noted that the jobs of rehabilitation workers were complex. They had to help clients directly, handle paperwork, and work with other healthcare experts. One of the workers explained the job's dynamic nature by stating that, "Every single day is different. One moment I am presenting a group session, and the next I am mediating a family meeting. This consistently involves a combination of responsibilities, which maintains interaction". It demonstrates the necessity for rehabilitation professionals to be flexible and competent in various fields. They should be trained to handle the unforeseen issues that emerge during the recovery process of clients.

Likewise, many rehabilitation workers mentioned personal experiences or a deep dedication to assisting others as motivation for their career choice. One of the participants stated, "I observed that addiction devastated my community. Most of the addicted people are not only a matter of concern for their families but also for the entire community. That is the reason I wanted to make a change". Most of the workers understand the experience of observing individuals confront addiction. They desire to contribute to resolving this issue. Another worker reflected on his experience by saying that, "After seeing how addiction affects families and lives, I wanted to assist people in finding a way out of that struggle against addiction". These serve as their daily motivation, often arising from a desire to guide others from experiencing the same difficulties that the workers had seen. These are the motivating forces behind their decision to devote themselves to the field of rehabilitation.

For some people, career fulfilment results from the gratifying essence of their work. This is because they desire to observe the beneficial transformations in clients' lives. One of the rehabilitation workers expressed deep pleasure by outlining, "The pleasure of observing someone reconstruct their life is greater than all the challenges". Most of the rehabilitation workers were of the view that observing an individual to regain responsibility over their recovery and restore self-belief makes all challenges valuable. Another participant shared the same sentiment by asserting that, "Every success, regardless of how great it is, boosts my purpose in this profession. It pertains to helping individuals in regaining control of their lives". Instances of addicts' success frequently acted as compelling reminders of the significant influence employees can exert, despite all the emotional and physical demands of this occupation.

It is noteworthy to mention that the work was characterized as emotionally tough. However, the sense of purpose it offered overwhelmed the challenges. One of the workers said, "It is challenging and there come difficult days. However, the influence that we can have on someone's life is immensely rewarding". When a client credits their sobriety to your efforts, it makes all the extensive hours valuable. When another worker reflected on their experiences, they said, "There have been times when I have felt exhausted, but then a client will say something like, 'You helped me change my life,' and it fills me with energy once more". That is what nourishes my motivation. These insights highlight the significance of discovering personal meaning in hard work and the inner desire that drives many rehabilitation experts. Similarly, Fernandes et al. (2024) found that rehabilitation specialists must be flexible, competent, and able to handle unexpected scenarios. Client interaction, administrative responsibilities, and healthcare professional collaboration are their duties. These professionals help people recover from addiction and improve their communities out of a desire to serve others.

Challenges in Supporting Clients

This theme emerged as a result of the discussion with participants. It was noted that helping clients during recovery brought considerable challenges. These challenges evaluated the resilience and commitment of the workers. One of the common issues that came to the surface was resistance to treatment, especially when clients were not quite prepared to participate in the recovery process. Another worker remarked by stating that "Certain clients are simply not prepared for treatment, which can be discouraging. We put significant effort into motivating them. However, sometimes they remain unprepared to advance". This resistance arises from deception or fear of change. It posed a significant obstacle to improvement. It is particularly challenging when employees dedicate time and effort to establish a connection, only to observe clients struggle with accepting the support they need.

Likewise, another obstacle was the emotional burden of observing repeated failures and setbacks in clients' progress. One of the participants shared their thoughts by saying that, "It is extremely disturbing when you see someone making progress, only to revert to their previous routines". When they get better for a few weeks or months and then slip up again, it seems like all their hard work is for nothing. It was noted that these disappointments were very disheartening. Because of the cyclical nature of addiction, it was common for patients to go through lots of recurrent episodes before they were able to achieve long-term recovery. This helped to create an atmosphere in which optimism and despair were always in conflict with one another.

Similarly, the high-pressure environment of rehabilitation workers affects their health. One of the workers stated, "There are days when I return home and question whether I am working hard enough. The burden is overwhelming. At times it seems as though we are a single individual attempting to mend many fractured lives". Sometimes, it's hard to keep oneself from feeling overwhelmed. The emotional burden of observing clients' difficulties, combined with the obligation to offer guidance and assistance. This often results in staff feeling exhausted and doubtful of their functionality.

In addition, despite everything, these workers remained devoted to their customers and confident that their job was having an impact, even though results weren't always visible. One of the workers shared, "It's difficult, but you can't give up on them. It's important to be there even when it seems like nothing is working". Another worker outlined, "It is difficult to predict when that breakthrough moment will occur, because there is a lot of struggle in this job, but workers are dedicated". It was noted that despite their mistakes, workers keep up their belief in them, which sustains their motivation. This steadfast commitment to clients, in spite of the mental and emotional obstacles, shows the empathy and strength that rehabilitation workers possess. In line with this, Lomas (2024) found that rehabilitation practitioners face client resistance to treatment, the emotional strain of seeing client development stall, and a high-pressure workplace that can lead to tiredness and self-doubt. Professionals who help clients recover from addiction and its emotional toll must be resilient and committed.

Workplace Environment

'Workplace environment' emerged as a significant theme during the analysis of in-depth interviews. The work environment in rehabilitation centers poses many obstacles for employees, especially concerning resource availability. Rehabilitation programs require a lot of resources, and most of these centers are not properly equipped with these resources. A participant mentioned that they are frequently understaffed, which makes it difficult to provide clients with the attention they need. It is pertinent to mention that the staff seems to be overburdened, and clients aren't always

given the assistance they require. This is the most important problem considering the major requirements imposed on rehabilitation workers to deliver both emotional and physical assistance to several clients at the same time. The insufficiency of staff adversely impacted the standard of care provided and increased the excessive workloads of rehabilitation workers. This results in less time for individual clients or self-care.

In addition to a lack of sufficient staff, employees complained that they were unable to do their jobs well because they did not have access to modern facilities and up-to-date training programs. One of the workers stated, "There is lack of adequate training opportunities for us. It appears we are working without all of the required tools, even though we are doing our best". The lack of up-to-date training can result in knowledge gaps. This making it difficult for staff to stay current on the latest treatment approaches and best practices in rehabilitation. Furthermore, most of the facilities were frequently described as out of date. This affects the entire work environment and the clients' experience. "The environment is suboptimal," stated one participant. "Establishing a positive atmosphere is challenging when the environment is not supportive of recovery".

It came to surface that most of the workers relied on their methods for managing stress and keeping their well-being in check to deal with the heavy workload and the difficulties that came with working in such environments. One of the workers stated that, "I depend on my coworkers for assistance. We tell each other how to deal with stress and let off steam". A good team significantly helps in managing stressful days. Many workers stressed on strength and unity from their connections with coworkers. This highlights the significance of a positive team atmosphere. These peer support groups provided an important avenue for workers to deal with their emotions, share recovery methods, and avoid stress.

However, these were effective methods of dealing with stress on an individual level. On the other hand, many workers believed that structural changes needed to be made to solve the problems they were experiencing. One participant remarked that, "We require more than merely individual coping strategies. Instead, structural modifications are necessary to tackle the fundamental causes of stress and burnout. These include improved staffing and enhanced resources. These workers emphasized the necessity of structural reforms to enhance the employment environment. Similarly, Lecours et al. (2024) stated that employees in rehabilitation institutes face many challenges. Insufficient staffing leads to overworked workers and poor client assistance, affecting care quality. Lack of contemporary facilities, equipment, and training hinders service delivery. Many rehabilitation professionals use peer support and teamwork to manage stress and stay healthy.

Conclusion

This study concludes that clients' recovery journeys are transformative, involving personal progress and failures. Many emphasize resolving emotional wounds like trauma. Client resistance, relapse, and emotional tiredness hamper rehabilitation workers who want to help. Understaffing and resource shortages in rehabilitation clinics lower care quality and cause worker burnout. Moreover, more holistic, adaptable, and client-centered rehabilitation programs should incorporate evidence-based techniques including Social Cognitive Theory, trauma-informed care, and cognitive-behavioral therapy.

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