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Mapping the Recovery Stories of Drinkers and Drug Users in Glasgow: Quality of Life and Its Predictors

Abstract

Introduction and aims: The study investigates what 'recovery' means for those who describe themselves as in alcohol or drug recovery.

Design and methods: The project used multiple methods – snowballing, recruitment through recovery groups and adverts in local press – to recruit 205 people (107 in alcohol and 98 in heroin recovery) who reported a lifetime dependence on alcohol and/or heroin; had not used their primary substance in the last year, and perceived themselves to be either recovered or in recovery. They were interviewed by researchers using a structured questionnaire and then a tape-recorded semi-structured interview.

Results: The average total time dependent for heroin users was 10.8 years and for drinkers 15.7 years, but onset and desistance were typically earlier for heroin. Longer time since last use of alcohol or

heroin was associated with significantly better quality of life at the time of interview. Greater engagement in meaningful activities was associated with better functioning, and was the strongest predictor of quality of life. The next strongest predictor was number of peers in recovery in the social network. Heroin users in abstinent recovery generally reported better functioning than those in maintained recovery.

Discussion and conclusions: Recovery experiences vary widely, but better functioning is typically reported after longer periods and is associated with supportive peer groups and more engagement in meaningful activities, and supports models promoting the development of peer networks immersed in local communities.