

Recovery trajectory: Sources of motivation to change from the perspectives of drug-dependent individuals

The recovery process of drug-dependent individuals is a complex one in which motivation plays a central role. Our study looked at drug-dependent individuals' recovery experiences and sources that influenced their motivation to change. Results indicate that some sources of influence, whether personal or service-related, may help increase or maintain motivation.

Brunelle, N., Bertrand, K., Landry, M., Flores-Aranda, J., Patenaude, C., & Brochu, S. (2015). Recovery from substance use: Drug-dependent people's experiences with sources that motivate them to change. *Drugs: education, prevention and policy*, 22(3), 301-307.

Background

Multiple sources, both personal and external, influence people's motivation to change their psychoactive substance use (PSU). Although they may develop motivation without professional help, specialized services may foster the process of change. Some authors emphasize the importance of looking at how clinical interventions can influence evolution of motivation. To better understand substance users' needs and adapt services that are intended for them, it is essential to take users' perceptions into account. This article seeks to examine drug-dependent individuals' experiences with sources that influence their motivation to change.

Objective and Methodology

The objective of the study is to better understand the sources of influence that can help increase or maintain drug-dependent individuals' motivation to change. To this end, a sample of 127 drug-dependent adults was interviewed. Participants were recruited in hospital emergency departments, criminal courts and Health and Social Services Centres (CSSS) in two regions: Montréal and Mauricie-Centre-du-Québec. Semi-structured interviews lasting an average of an hour and forty-five minutes enabled us to document 1) relationships between participants' substance use trajectories and service utilization; 2) experiences with detection of their PSU problems and with referral to services specializing in addiction care; 3) processes involved in going through the various services; and 4) perceptions of services received.

Most participants were men (71%) and their average age was 38 years. The majority were single, divorced, separated or widowed (72%). Cannabis (61%) and cocaine (53%) were the illegal drugs used by the greatest number of participants.

Highlights

In terms of their recovery experiences, participants reported that personal and external sources influenced their motivation to change. Those sources fall into four categories:

Quality of life

- A number of participants reported that their quality of life was affected by substance use. For them, improving or maintaining social and family networks as well as physical and psychological health was an internal source of motivation to change.
- Many participants, especially those recruited in Québec criminal court, stated feeling pressured (by a judge, lawyer, probation officer, family, employer, etc.) to go into therapy. Some participants said this pressure may have been an important lever for change.

Accumulation of services

- The majority of participants had received addiction services at some point in the past. They had not necessarily felt positive effects during their first contacts with services. A single episode with a service was often not enough to increase motivation and enable them to change their PSU habits. However, participants considered that accumulating services helped them make positive changes throughout their trajectories. Each service provided them with additional tools that helped boost their motivation, feelings of self-efficacy and hope in their capacity to change.



Role of caseworkers

- Participants emphasized the central role of caseworkers in the change process, whether at the stage of detection and referral to specialized services or during treatment. A welcoming, respectful and empathetic attitude is essential, even at the detection and referral stage, to instill motivation and help them persevere in the change process.

Collaboration among professionals

- From the participants' perspective, collaboration among professionals in various services resulted in responses that were better adapted to their needs, enhanced their motivation to change and helped them maintain treatment. Three types of collaboration were described and stand along a continuum: simple referral, accompanied referral (the most common one experienced), and collaborative follow-up involving true collaboration among caseworkers.

Conclusion

This study underscores that drug-dependent individuals' motivation to change evolves over time and can become stronger throughout their trajectories and service experiences. Results show that personal and external factors can also influence motivation. The role of caseworkers is indeed vital. The latter can support substance users' motivation to change by adopting empathetic and respectful attitudes, and by collaborating with other caseworkers from different services. However, caseworkers must show humility in relation to other sources of motivation, such as the need for users to improve their quality of life and their social and family networks.

Recovery from substance use can take several years. Accumulating services seems necessary to increase motivation and perceive positive impacts on substance use. Caseworkers have to be patient regarding the process of change and acknowledge that despite the limited effects of their interventions, they can have a very significant influence on users' motivation to change and on improving their clients' conditions.

For more information

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Keywords

- / Addiction
- / Motivation
- / Recovery
- / Qualitative research

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