

The Importance of Socializing for People with Mental Illness

Kristine Graves, ILEND Self-Advocacy Trainee

Purpose

Many people with mental illness struggle to be connected to services and others in their community. The goal of this research is to explore information on the importance of people with chronic and persistent mental health issues having social supports.

Method

- A literature review was conducted using Google Scholar and Google Search.
- Key search words included: support, mental illness, peer support, socialization and society.

What is Social Support?

Social support has been described as “support accessible to an individual through social ties to other individuals, groups, and the larger community.”¹

Summary of Key Findings

- Peer workers can provide important supports. Patients have noted that peer workers have better understood the challenges patients face, enabling different relationships to develop with peer workers compared with non-peer staff (Coatsworth-Puspoky 2006).²
- This will only be realized where appropriate training, supervision and support is made available to peer workers, and where the role is valued strategically through the organization. There need to be shared expectations about the role of the peer worker, whether working within or alongside the multidisciplinary team. Overformalising the role is likely to undermine the specific ‘peer’ qualities that it brings.²
- Strong social support has been shown to be an important factor in decreasing functional impairment in patients with depression and in increasing the likelihood of recovery.¹
- In contrast to low social support, high levels appear to buffer or protect against the full impact of mental and physical illness. The relationship between good social support and superior mental and physical health has been observed in diverse populations.¹
- Protective factors that mitigate the effects of social isolation identified were diverse, but three key factors emerged (family connectedness, self-esteem, and pro-social behaviors such as sharing or helping others).³

Recommendations

- Support and socialization are important and should be a focus of treatment.
- People with mental health issues may need help to connect with others and other resources they may need to stay healthy.
- Peer workers are invaluable but need training and support themselves to be able to help others.
- Information about ways to connect should be readily accessible for people to get connected to the needed resources.



References

1. Ozbay F, Johnson DC, Dimoulas E, Morgan CA, Charney D, Southwick S. Social support and resilience to stress: from neurobiology to clinical practice. *Psychiatry (Edgmont)*. 2007 May;4(5):35-40. PMID: 20806028; PMCID: PMC2921311.
2. Gillard, S., & Holley, J. (2014). Peer workers in mental health services: Literature overview. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 20(4), 286-292. doi:10.1192/apt.bp.113.011940
3. Angela J. Preston, & Lynn Rew (2022) Connectedness, Self-Esteem, and Prosocial Behaviors Protect Adolescent Mental Health Following Social Isolation: A Systematic Review, *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 43:1, 32-41, DOI: [10.1080/01612840.2021.1948642](https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840.2021.1948642)