

ABSTRACT

Schizophrenia is said to be one of the most critical and severe mental illnesses affecting one percent of the population globally (Torrey, 2001). The rationale for the present study is stemmed from the lack of research conducted, specifically in South Africa on the experiences of people diagnosed with schizophrenia of their first admission to a psychiatric hospital. The main aim of this study was to explore the experience of those diagnosed with schizophrenia of their first admission to a South African psychiatric hospital ward for acute psychosis. The research method used was semi-structured individual interviews with seven participants diagnosed with schizophrenia. Questions asked revolved around the participant's first experience of being admitted to a psychiatric hospital. The participants' responses were recorded and then analysed using thematic content analysis. The main themes which emerged during data analysis were: treatment, preconceived ideas of hospitalisation, incarceration, diagnosis of schizophrenia, stigmatization, law enforcement and social interactions during initial hospitalisation. What became evident from the analysis was that each participant had a different experience of their first hospitalisation. Some had more positive experiences, while the majority of the participants had frightening, distressing, emotionally painful or traumatic experiences during their first hospitalisation. The first hospital admission was also described as having huge implications for the person with the diagnosis of schizophrenia as it made them feel isolated and stigmatised, which further hindered them from recovering and reintegrating into society. This conclusion of this study draws attention to further research projects which might illuminate areas of intervention in the first admission process to psychiatric wards in South Africa.