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Subjective accounts of recovery from anorexia nervosa

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Abstract

Literature on recovery from anorexia nervosa indicates that research studies often exclude the experience of recovery from a subjective point of view. As a result there seems to be a lack of understanding as to what the process of recovery entails. The aim of this study is to explore the process of recovery from the participants' perspective. The focus of this study is on the narratives of young women who consider themselves recovered from anorexia nervosa with or without formal treatment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine young women who reported recovery from adolescent-onset anorexia nervosa. The resulting interview transcripts were subsequently analysed qualitatively using a narrative analytic perspective in order to explore the ways in which participants narrated their recovery experiences. Particular attention was paid to the subjective perspective of the perceived causes of anorexia nervosa, how participants narrated what it was like to be anorexic, how treatment was experienced and various aspects of the recovery process.

The narratives of recovery suggest that recovery has diverse meanings, creates different expectations and has different manifestations for different individuals. The narratives suggest that, rather than a dichotomy within recovery, there are shades of recovery through which traces of anorexia emerge. Experiences of treatment too are not clear cut with a tension existing between resistance to treatment and dissatisfaction with treatment.

By presenting these narratives, this study aims to explore the contradictions and difficulties within recovery experiences in order to extend that which is already known about recovery from anorexia nervosa.