

Relationship building between peer support worker and person in recovery in the community-based one-to-one peer support service of mental health setting

Yammi Man Yan Yuen* and **Samson TSE**

The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Peer support has been a rising prevalent mental health service in the globe. Researchers have attempted to explore the unique good qualities of peer support service that benefit those who are in the Progress of Recovery (PIRs). Empirical researchers found that the strength of the relationship between those who sought for change and the change agents positively related to the outcomes in one-to-one therapies across theoretical orientations. However, there is lack of literature on investigating the relationship building between the Peer Support Workers (PSWs) and the PIRs in the one-to-one community-based peer support service. This study aims to identify and characterise the relationship in the community-based one-to-one peer support service from the perspectives of PSWs and PIRs; and to conceptualize the components of relationship building between PSWs and PIRs in the service. The study adopted the constructivist grounded theory approach. 10 pairs of the PSWs and PIRs participated in the study. Data were collected through multiple qualitative methods, including observations of the interactions between the PSWs and PIRs in the sessions of the community-based one-to-one peer support service; and semi-structural interviews with the PSWs and PIRs separately. The preliminary findings showed that PSWs and PIRs identified their relationship as “life alliance”. Empathy was found to be one of the key components of the relationship between the PSWs and the PIRs. Unlike the empathy as explained by Carl Roger, in which the service provider was able to put themselves into the shoes of the service recipients, as if he was the service recipients, the intensity of the empathy was much greater in the relationship between PSWs and PIRs because PSWs had the lived experience of mental illness and recovery. The dimensions of the empathy in the relationship between PSWs and PIRs was found to be multiple, not only related to the mental illness, but also related to various aspects in life, like family relationship, employment, interest of life, self-esteem and etc.

Biography

Yammi Man Yan Yuen is the PhD candidate of The Department of Social Work and Social Administration, The University of Hong Kong. She possesses almost 10 years of frontline experiences in the community mental health and social services. In working with the peer support workers, she sees the strengths and resilience of this population. She strives to promote the resilience of the persons in recovery from mental illness and their careers.

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