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'What is lost?' : A Qualitative Inquiry into Narratives around Severe Mental Illness

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Learning Goal:

To appreciate the potential of 'lens of loss' in bridging the gap between the lived experiences and perceived understandings of severe mental illness.

Abstract Text:

Severe Mental Illnesses (SMI) are traditionally viewed from a lens of 'illness' highlighting clinically significant signs and symptoms, dysfunction, and disability. However, the realities of people with SMI are replete with accounts of struggles and suffering consistent with an altered sense of self, denied opportunities, broken connections, and constant alienation. Utilizing a lens of 'loss' makes visible changes in identity, relationships, current opportunities, and future aspirations in SMI (Baker, Proctor & Gibbons, 2009; Mauritz and van Meijel, 2009; O'Sullivan, Boulter, & Black, 2013; Zolnierek, 2011). Moreover, the bio-medical focus on symptom amelioration in recovery might lead to a 'loss of complexity of illness experience' (Pascal & Sagan, 2016) in turn augmenting the irrecoverable losses in SMI. Even though the mental health professionals (MHPs) are increasingly acknowledging the need to foreground subjective experiences, the gap between the lived experiences of people and the reductionist discourse of biomedicine is far from abridged. Hence, emerges a need to explore the points of connections and disagreements between the meaning-making of people living with SMI and understandings of MHPs. The current paper shall present accounts of five individuals living in a Half-way Home due to SMI and five individuals living in the community with SMI. A phenomenological analysis of their narratives will be juxtaposed with the narratives of 10 MHPs from different therapeutic setups. The implications of the findings for research and clinical engagements will be discussed. Furthermore, the paper shall articulate the possibilities offered by the "lens of loss" for people living with SMI, and those providing care and treatment.

**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**