

ALCOHOL

CHANGE^{UK}

Exploring social support and identity in recovery: a photovoice study

Sarah Rhynas, Lisa Schölin, Fiona Cuthill,
Brandon Walker, Aisha Holloway

Dr Sarah Rhynas
Nursing Studies
School of Health in Social Science
University of Edinburgh



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Background

- Sustained recovery is a challenge which takes energy, commitment and support.
- Recovery capital (human, physical, cultural and social) is key to understanding how people enter and sustain recovery (Cloud & Granfield, 2008)
- Connections with multiple social groups and transition into groups that don't support substance use shown to influence the recovery journey (Zywiak et al., 2002)
- Social identity theory provides insights into social aspects of recovery in relation to adapting new social identities, which appears important in recovery (Dingle et al., 2015)
- The aim of the current study was to further explore the role of social support and identity in recovery using photography

Photovoice

- A participatory action research method developed in the 1990s by Wang & Burris (1994)
- Focusing on describing experiences of the world from people's own perspective with the specific goals to;
 - "(1) to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns,
 - (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and
 - (3) to reach policy-makers" (p. 370, Wang & Burris, 1997)
- Previous work in Edinburgh has used photovoice to explore the experiences of alcohol in the environment among people in recovery (Shortt et al., 2017)

Methods

- Eight participants were recruited through a local recovery café with the help of a peer researcher
- Initial workshop describing the project and learning some photography techniques
- Photos taken over eight months
- Data collected in individual interviews and focus groups mid-way and at the end of the project
- Ethical considerations: identification and consent, health and safety
- Data analysed using thematic analysis and discussed with peer researcher

Results

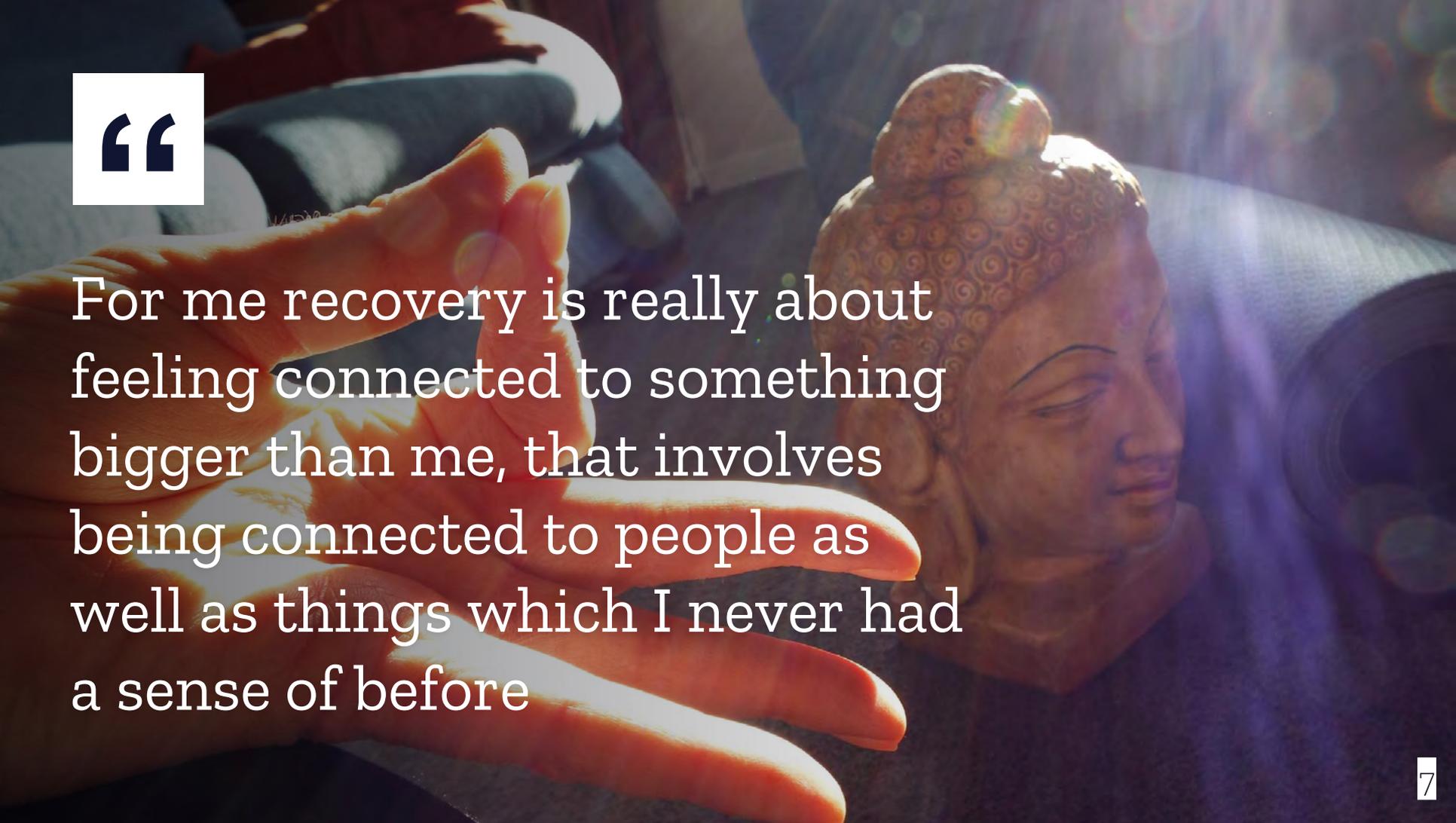
- 'Active ingredients' – abstinence, support networks, planning and organising, finding peaceful places, attending meetings, safe social spaces
- Core concepts helped participants establish their recovery identity
- Connectedness and valuing themselves was key part of developing a recovery identity, much helped by the support they were able to receive and give back within the recovery community
- Importance of visible role models, demonstrating positive lives in recovery



Results

- With the anchor of established recovery, people can reach for new opportunities, take new steps and consider social and personal 'risks', developing new identities
- These steps may take people away from volunteering and peer support as lives are filled with work, relationships and new challenges
- New relationships may be less clearly linked to recovery with less focus on that defining characteristic



A person's hands are shown in a meditative gesture, with fingers gently touching. In the background, a Buddha statue is visible, and the scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting a peaceful or spiritual setting.

“

For me recovery is really about feeling connected to something bigger than me, that involves being connected to people as well as things which I never had a sense of before



When I was younger I was so sad, but I never wanted to not be me. Somewhere inside me I knew there was a girl who I really liked. What's so humiliating about addiction is the powerlessness, going back to this thing that ruins your life. Now I'm free from addiction I feel like I'm actually getting to be that girl, finally



It's a year in the life. Back when I was in active addiction, because I was a polysubstance user, I couldn't give you one whole year of my life in one go



Conclusions and reflections

- Key concepts play part in accessing and sustaining recovery over time and help 'anchoring' people in a recovery identity
- Increasingly secure new identity allows people to reach for new adventure, exploring new networks and portrayals of self
- Key message that participants wanted to share was that recovery is real, aspirational and possible but is also hard work
- Methodological reflections - using photovoice for abstract topics – capturing identity, longer term projects, revisiting participants
- Sharing stories in the recovery community vs in research setting



Any questions?

Email: Sarah.Rhynas@ed.ac.uk

References

- Cloud, W. and R. Granfield, Conceptualizing Recovery Capital: Expansion of a Theoretical Construct. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 2008. 43(12-13): p. 1971-1986.
- Dingle, G.A., et al., Breaking good: breaking ties with social groups may be good for recovery from substance misuse. *Br J Soc Psychol*, 2015. 54(2): p. 236-54.
- Shortt, N.K., S.J. Rhynas, and A. Holloway, Place and recovery from alcohol dependence: A journey through photovoice. *Health & Place*, 2017. 47(September): p. 147-155.
- Wang, C. and M.A. Burris, Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, 1997. 24(3): p. 369-387. 17.
- Wang, C. and M.A. Burris, Empowerment through Photo Novella: Portraits of Participation. *Health Education Quarterly*, 1994. 21(2): p. 171-186.
- Zywiak, W.H., R. Longabaugh, and P.W. Wirtz, Decomposing the relationships between pretreatment social network characteristics and alcohol treatment outcome. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 2002. 63(1): p. 114-121.

Background photos: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-person-camera-taking-photo-1838/>; <https://www.pexels.com/photo/people-in-motion-going-through-a-doorway-2224890/>; <https://www.pexels.com/photo/curve-design-futuristic-lines-911738/>; <https://www.pexels.com/photo/gray-and-black-marble-slab-1451474/>; <https://www.pexels.com/photo/grayscale-photography-of-people-sitting-on-chair-1884585/>; <https://www.pexels.com/photo/grayscale-photo-of-human-hand-2050590/>; <https://www.pexels.com/photo/gray-folding-camera-on-white-surface-1422224/>; <https://www.pexels.com/photo/abstract-background-black-and-white-board-935871/>; <https://www.pexels.com/photo/antique-aperture-blur-camera-370659/>