

THE RECOVERY OF DEPRESSIVE PATIENTS: A REVIEW ON THE ROLES OF SOCIAL WORKER

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ABSTRACT--Since the early years of the profession, social work has had a commitment to work with people who have psychiatric disabilities by offering psychosocial interventions. This review acknowledged the critical roles of social worker in the journey of recovering for depressive patients, apart from the role of other mental health professionals. Psychosocial intervention is like two sides of the same coin. A dual partnership between social worker with other mental health professionals is vital to patients' recovery. However, the role of social workers in mental health setting has been unnoticed. In most part of the countries, patients and communities did not realize the role of social worker, particularly psychiatric social worker, and tended to seek for medical treatment only. Thus, to achieve a successful recovery, more programs related to the psychiatric social worker should be implemented. The main goal of a psychiatric social worker is to stabilize and support people experiencing psychological distress or behavioural issues that are threatening their own and other's safety and well-being. As the depressive patients are expecting social worker to recognize their difficulties before working together to resolve their conditions, the curriculum of social worker should be improved. The social worker must be able to have the skills in recognizing mental illness issues while working together in a collaborative care. The patient-survivor recovery movement is closely aligned with those of the profession, and that the movement offers social workers a more promising perspective from which to practice.

Keywords--Depressive, Mental Health, Mental Illness, Recovery, Social Worker

I. INTRODUCTION

Issues on mental health problems are growing as public concerns nowadays, where depression is the most common mental illness worldwide that had affected more than 300 million people (WHO, 2018). According to

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Stuart (2016), the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that 35% to 50% from developed countries and 79% to 85% people with severe mental health problems from developing countries were not receiving any proper treatments from a mental health provider. According to the American Psychiatric Association, those who are suffering from depression will significantly suffer, and it will directly cause them to function poorly in their family, school or working environment. In certain circumstances, depression may lead an individual to commit suicide. Almost 800 000 people die due to suicide every year, where suicide is the second leading cause of death in 15 to 29 years old (WHO, 2018). Depression is hard to recognize in patients as it may be confused with another diagnosis such as delirium and grief (Lander et al., 2000). Even though there are effective treatments for depression, fewer than 10% of affected person receive such treatments (Almanzar et al., 2014). This phenomenon is caused by several reasons including lack of resources, lack of trained health care providers, and social stigma that can lead to self-stigma associated with mental disorders (WHO, 2019).

The recovery process for depressive patients focuses not only towards the symptoms, but also must focus on the person. Strong social support is very essential in preventing individuals from sinking into depression due to loneliness (Rohany et al., 2015). Hence, the recovering process calls for a commitment from the patient, the family, mental health professionals, public health teams and the community (Jacob, 2015). Since the early of 20th century, the profession of social work has committed to work with people who have psychiatric disabilities (Peterson et al., 1998). Social work focuses on the interaction and linkages between people and social systems and therefore has a dual focus-both the individuals and the society. In the mental health setting, psychiatric social worker was involved in mental health care through direct practice, state-level advocacy and policy development (Carpenter, 2002). According to the Australian Association of Social Worker, social workers are one of the five core professional groups in the mental health field. However, the role of social workers has often being disregarded. People tend to seek a psychiatrist and other mental health professionals in search for the treatment of their mental health problems. Thus, this paper aims to review the role of the social worker in helping individual with depression for recovery process, followed by the discussion on the need to have the psychiatric social worker in the mental health setting.

II. RECOVERY PROCESS OF DEPRESSIVE PATIENTS

The issues of recovery among depressive patients have been a long debate since before. Historically, people with mental illness were often not expected to recover. From the perspective of depressive patients, recovery is not merely the absence of illness. They needed strong social support to prevent the risk of depression and loneliness (Rohany et al., 2016). The most common themes of recovery from their perspectives are recovering hope, taking control of one's own life, repairing or developing new valued relationships and social roles, and developing new meaning and purpose of life (Wallcraft, 2005). Thus, recovery can be best described as an ongoing journey that can be achieved by the help of social workers, only if the patients are willing to be open about their mental health states. It is certainly not a straightforward concept (Stuart, 2016). In a systematic review done by Afifah et al. (2019), the study found that the role of social workers in treating depressive patients was started as early as doing the early

screening. Table 1 shows the summary of selected studies that highlighted the role of the social worker in the recovery of depressive patients.

It is a vital role of a social workers to execute in improving mental health services and mental health outcomes for citizens. A positive and self-directed change of a patient can be achieved by a unique social and relationship-based skills focused on personalization and recovery from social workers. According to Lakeman (2010), the top five recovery competencies ranked by consumers that included social workers are:

1. Ability to recognize and support the personal resourcefulness of people with mental illness
2. Needs to reflect a belief that recovery is possible
3. Able to listen to what service users are saying and respect their views
4. Needs to reflect respect for the expertise and unique knowledge gained as a result of having experienced mental health problems
5. Helps the person to develop self-belief, therefore promoting their ability to help themselves

In implementing intervention for depression and other type of mental illness recovery, study by Cesare and King (2015) found that, social workers placed much higher value on counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions than did other professionals, where only 30% of psychiatrist taking the same view. Social workers in mental health setting tremendously thought social work interventions would be helpful in treating depressive patient. Their views contrasted with the views of other professionals which tended to see social work interventions as neither helpful nor harmful (Cesare & King, 2015). However, from the patients' point of view, apart from having medical treatment, their recovery is also highly depended on the roles of social workers to give them a lifestyle intervention as a treatment both for depression and schizophrenia. A research done by Clark et al. (2017) found that, a depressive patient showed improvement just after three months from interventions by collaborative cares including social workers.

III. THE ROLE OF A PSYCHIATRIC SOCIAL WORKER IN THE RECOVERY

PROCESS FOR DEPRESSIVE PATIENTS

To live in a harmonious relationship with others and able to contribute to society, a person needs a good mental health (Mohd Suhaimi & Rozita, 2018). A report by the Malaysian Mental Health Association (2018) stated that, mental health is not just about mental illness. It encompasses the well-being of life, happiness, the ability to face challenges and to have a positive attitude (Mohd Suhaimi & Rozita, 2018).

In a study done by Grant et al. (2013), it was suggested that by having a positive psychological characteristic may lower the likelihood of mental disorders such as depression. In other words, positive psychological characteristics can be a factor for depression distinct from the absence of negative characteristics. One of the characteristics of positive psychological characteristics is well-being. Again, it involves the issues of well-being.

Thus, the matters of depressive patient’s well-being are something critical to look at. However, can depressive patients achieve optimal well-being after their depression episodes?

Optimal well-being is defined as having a positive emotion and the absence of negative emotions (Burns et al., 2015). According to Rottenberg et al. (2019), people with depression may achieve optimal well-being with the help of mental health professionals. An excellent communication with the professional’s care team can enhance the recovery process and achieve the optimal of individual well-being. This statement indirectly shows the importance of having psychiatric social workers in the journey of recovery for depressive patients.

In understanding the matters of well-being, Martin Seligman, the founder of positive psychology had developed the PERMA model of well-being which he believed it could help people to reach happiness and meaningful life. This model is aligned with the report from Malaysia Mental Health Association (2018). This model can help people with mental illness in order for them to strive for well-being in life. PERMA was made up of five elements which are (P) positive emotions, (E) engagement, (R) positive relationships, (M) meaning and (A) accomplishment. Based on the PERMA model, positive emotions and positive relationships are part of the crucial aspects in order to achieve well-being. *Positive Emotions* refer to the affective component or feeling well, in combination with a positive appraisal (Seligman, 2011). The element of *Relationships* refers to the perception of both the quantity and quality of social connections. It implies the belief that one is cared for, loved and valued (Seligman, 2011). Positive relationships are an essential aspect of a more significant life. According to Butler and Kern (2016), a good social relationship is the basic necessities for healthy relationships and the key to happiness.

Table 1: Summary of the selected studies that highlighted the role of social worker in the recovery of depressive patient

	Early screening	Home-based intervention	Socio-therapeutic	Therapeutic-community	Day Hospital	Therapy in homo-family & hetero-	Work-occupational	Socio-therapeutic clubs	Cognitive-behavioral therapy	Safety counseling
Gitlin et al 2013		✓								
Decevic et al 2015			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Ruffolo & Fischer 2009									✓	
Rao et al 2011	✓									
Tewary et al 2014									✓	

Diaz-Linhart et al 2016	✓	
Slovak & Brewer 2010		✓
Rinfrette 2014		✓

In order for depressive patients to achieve optimal well-being, they needed this type of relationship, not only with community, but also with mental health professionals especially while in a difficult situation and in need of endurance. Positive relationships may speed up the recovery process from the depression episodes, because strong social support by mental health professionals and communities will act as a protector of stress and thus have a significant impact on individual mental health (Fasihi Harandi et al., 2017). The requirements to have a positive relationship also were in accordance with Ryffs' early work back then in 1989. According to him, a positive relationship is one of the aspects that constitute well-being. Staying in control in an individual's life is the priority for many people with mental illness (Jacob 2015). Thus, it should be noted that a lower level of well-being predicts future depression risk (Grant et al., 2013). A study by T. Kumaravadivel et al. (2016) suggests that, there is even a necessity to have a centre for caregiver of patients admitted to Intensive Care Unit (ICU) to receive counselling or psychotherapy as a treatment for depression because they are prone to have depression due to the psychological distress.

Social workers or specifically psychiatric social workers provide services to mental health patients. They have been trained to work in collaborative care with people using services, their families and carers to optimize involvement and collaboration solutions. Their services include therapy, social rehabilitation, crisis intervention and even outreach services. However, their status and authority within the collaborative care has sometimes been undermined. Thus, how can psychiatric social workers play an even more significant part in mental health recovery of a patient? Moreover, how can they achieve a better service user, family and community outcomes?

IV. IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION

Social worker provides individual, family, and couples therapy that related to depression and other mental health or behavioural issues to improve their patient's live. They are often the first responders towards people with mental illness, thus, they need to be competent in order to help patients to increase their quality of life. In their everyday work, social workers may encounter patients who have mental illness. Study by Cesare and King (2015) found that, 96% of the respondents (social workers) reported having professional contact with mental illness patients, while in some cases, social workers may be the first professionals that such people seek help from. However, there is a question on how far can the social workers do the first screening for mental illness problem. The capacity of social workers to detect the mental health problem has been questioned in the same study. The

result of this study found that, social workers may lack of mental health literacy (Cesare & King 2015). Jorm et al. (2012) defined mental health literacy as “knowledge of how to prevent a mental disorder; recognition of disorders when developing; knowledge of effective self-help strategies for mild-to-moderate problems; and first aid skills to help others”.

Inadequate mental health literacy among social workers may impact on the referral and collaborative care. This situation demands for an improvement in the mental health social worker setting. Psychiatric social workers are very important in helping to decreasing the number of social issues caused by depression and other type of mental illness. In Australia, Australian Association of Social Worker (AASW) recognized the need to improve the curriculum and developed attitudes, values, knowledge and skills to all social workers despite their field of practices. This is because the clients are expecting them to identify their difficulties before working together to resolve their situations (AASW, 2008). The same practices can be taken here in Malaysia. In Malaysia, anything related to mental health problems, the community will always refer to the psychiatrist and assume that the recovery is entirely depending on the medical treatment. In some community, they used religious and cultural beliefs as a coping mechanism to treat mental illness problems (Mohd Suhaimi et al. 2014). This point of view should be changed. In order to achieve a successful recovery, and to decrease social problems related to depression, more programs related to the psychiatric social worker should be implemented. As the number of mental illness problems are arising every day, and social problems caused by the illness are increasing, the profession of a psychiatric social worker need to be commenced. Alternatively, at least the curriculum for medical social workers should focus more on the psychiatric issues. The medical social worker must able to have the skills in recognizing mental illness issues and working together with other mental health professionals in helping the patients to recover before going back to the society and having a stable career that is in line with their interest (Mohd Suhaimi et al. 2016). The collaboration between the psychiatric social worker and other mental health professionals is very crucial in giving a new life and hope to the patients, as it is believed that an excellent social work can help transforms the lives of people with mental illness (Allen, 2014).

Psychosocial intervention is like two sides of the same coin. The dual partnership between social worker with other mental health professionals is vital to patient's recovery. The main goal of a social worker is to stabilize and support people experiencing psychological distress or behavioural issues that are threatening their own and other's safety and well-being. However, the community awareness of the social worker's role in a mental health setting is prone to be overlooked. The community must recognize and acknowledge the existence of psychiatric social workers and their roles in mental health recovery. By this, social work may play an even more significant part in mental health recovery of a patient and to achieve better service user, family and community outcomes.

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