The experiences of affected family members and friends attending *BreakThrough: Families Understanding Addiction*

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**Introduction / Issues:** Family members affected by addiction face challenges to their health and wellbeing, in a context of stress, stigma, and isolation. *BreakThrough* offers weekly sessions helping participants understand addiction and access support networks. Informal feedback indicated participants viewed *BreakThrough* positively, but how this translated to their daily lives was not understood. We explored the experiences and outcomes of affected family members participating in *BreakThrough*.

**Method / Approach:** Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 21 family members of people experiencing addiction, recruited online at the end of *BreakThrough* sessions held July to December, 2021. The interviews were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis¹.

**Key Findings:** We interpreted participants’ experiences as three themes: *BreakThrough* as validating their experiences; participants reflecting critically on their approaches to the addiction and changing their approach (‘not fixing, stepping back’); and, *BreakThrough* as meeting an urgent need for education and knowledge, to help participants make sense of their experiences. We also summarised participants' perspectives on the online setting of the program.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Our findings highlight how *BreakThrough* validates participants’ experiences, particularly through addressing stigma. Participants perceived a change in coping style from ‘fixing’ to ‘stepping back’, following *BreakThrough*. They were able to harness the collective insights of peers and make sense of their experiences through education and support. Participants indicated a strong preference for attending *BreakThrough* online, for convenience and to address geographic barriers to in-person attendance.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** *BreakThrough* goes beyond providing practical skills and strategies; it supports participants to shift beliefs and approaches in supporting their relative. Programs such as BreakThrough provide an avenue for validation and ultimately serving to de-stigmatize addiction. This information is useful to consider in the design and implementation of similar programs.

**References:**


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