

Does Housing Context Influence Social Identity Transition and Outcomes of Therapeutic Community Treatment?

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Introduction and Aims: Evidence shows that when individuals see themselves more as a member of recovery groups (recovery identity) than as a member of substance using groups (user identity), they report positive recovery outcomes. Social identities are influenced by the social context. However, little is known about the impact of housing on this identity change process, and in turn, recovery.

Design and Methods: 307 residents from 5 Australian therapeutic communities completed questionnaires upon entry, and at 6 and 12 months, measuring social identities, housing (ARC housing subscale and descriptive items), and recovery variables (participant-rated change; frequency of primary substance use; wellbeing; and quality of life).

Results: At time 1, most participants lived with parents or in a private rental, 26% were in alternate accommodation or homeless (this had reduced to 13% at time 3), 28% said they had been at risk of eviction, 24% had been homeless, 14% had slept rough. There was substantial housing transition between times 1 and 2, and between times 2 and 3. ARC housing scores were correlated with recovery identity and numerous outcomes (mediation models will be presented).

Discussions and Conclusions: As established in prior research, housing is a key social determinant in recovery from addiction. Populations in therapeutic communities are at risk for housing instability which is an ongoing barrier to recovery. Safe and stable housing and promoting a recovery identity are therefore crucial to maintaining recovery.

Implications for Practice or Policy: - This study demonstrates to case managers and drug and alcohol services the importance of housing support for clients. It provides further evidence of the necessity for a housing first approach and the need for policy change in the way we view homelessness and addiction to move towards frameworks of connection and identity.

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