SEEDS OF CHANGE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF WOMEN SURVIVORS OF VICTIMIZATION AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

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WHAT IS SEEDS?

- Support
- Education
- Empowerment
- Directions

Phoenix, Arizona

Started by a survivor

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/clarissa-burt/arizona-nonprofit-helps_b_3011064.html
WHAT IS SEEDS?

- Semi-structured sober transitional housing
- For survivors of domestic and sexual violence
- Help maintain sobriety
- Opportunities for to learn life skills
- Community

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/clarissa-burt/arizona-nonprofit-helps_b_3011064.html
METHODS

PARTICIPANTS
- 27 participants indicated a willingness to be interviewed for the study
- Of these 27 interviews, 7 were selected for analysis, based on order of completion
- All participants had a history or current experience with the SEEDS program
- The mean age was 43 years (SD = 9.77) with a range of 27-54
- Race: 85.7% White, 14.3% Biracial or Multiracial
- Education: 42.9% some college, 28.6% some high school, 14.3% high school diploma, 14.3% four-year bachelors degree
- 57.1% of the women had incarceration histories while 42.9% of the women did not.
- 85.7% of the women had child abuse histories while 14.3% of the women did not.

MEASURES
- Phenomenological Interviews
- Demographics Questionnaire

PROCEDURE
- Recruitment involved asking members of the SEEDs program of their willingness to be interviewed
- Interviews were performed by a professor of social work in relation to the life history calendar questions
- After a preliminary reading, general themes were identified among the transcriptions
- A second transcript reading with coding confirmed and refined the themes that constitute our findings
INTERVENTIONS ON AN ECOLOGICAL MODEL

MCKENZIE DOW
WHAT IS AN ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF SEXUAL ASSAULT?

- Multiple Levels
- Started with Bronfenbrenner
- Different impacts each layer


- CIEMSAR
- Microsystem (Relationship/Interpersonal)
- Meso/exosystem (Community)

WHAT IS AN ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF SEXUAL ASSAULT?
SEEDs fosters recovery

- at the relationship level (microsystem)
- at the community level (meso/exosystem)
RECOVERY AT THE MICROSYSTEM (INTERPERSONAL) LEVEL

- Positive social reactions predict less mental health distress
- Social support from informal sources facilitates victim recovery
- Availability of informal sources help victims with adjusting
- Positive reactions lead to less distress and symptomology

EVIDENCE OF RECOVERY AT AN INTERPERSONAL LEVEL (QUOTES)

“It is a community, it’s a support system…”

“I’m not alone and I can pick up the phone any time of the day or night and call somebody if I really needed help.”

“…I talk to peers.”

“I thank god for people like my peers that have been there done that…”
Formal systems

Rape crisis centers and community mental health programs

60% of victims get mental health services

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doi:10.11177/1524838009334456
“I had not worked in years and years and years and they’ve just been supportive and encouraging with whatever I’ve needed to do.”

“They were really instrumental in me getting my restraining order against my brother…”

“They have a lot of opportunities…”
Interventions at the different levels lay the foundation for successful recovery.

SEEDs provide the woman with many opportunities for change and personal growth.
IMPORTANCE OF EMPOWERMENT IN RECOVERY

DANIELLE M. BLEVENS
WHAT IS EMPOWERMENT?

- Empowerment is the act of uplifting individuals to recognize their own self-worth and potential in each aspect of their lives.

- Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their own lives through fostering power within individuals by acting on issues that they define as important (Page & Czuba, 1999).
HOW DOES SEEDS USE EMPOWERMENT?

- Women are empowered through strengths-based practice by focusing on the resiliency and control of the women within their own lives in their present state in recovery.

- An incredible amount of empowerment is instilled by:
  - Increasing self-confidence
  - Establishing an internal locus of control when possible
  - Providing the women with the resources to make positive changes in their lives.
SEEDs empowers women by educating them to develop life skills that they previously did not have the opportunity to learn.
- This is done through the assignment of chores and responsibilities to give back to other household residents.
- These chores give the women the courage and experience to maintain their own household in the future with proper maintenance and structure.

In addition to these responsibilities, the women in the program contribute to working in coffee houses known as the Cup of Karma to help pay for the services they receive. This work provides the women with skills in:
- Finance Management
- Interacting with others who have and may not have experience with violence or substance use
- Punctuality
- Proper knowledge of sanitation and maintenance needs in preparing food and drink as well as in a safe environment in general.
Some women did not believe they could live without their abusers, as they did not have the skills to properly provide for themselves or their children, if they were mothers.

One woman, in reflecting on her experience, believed at the time that she deserved her abuse, as she was continuously using drugs and had no skills to provide anything for her children.

Learning these skills in the SEEDs program allows women to realize their true strength and that they are worthy of happy and healthy lives without violence.

Not only does this help with remaining substance-free, but also empowers the women to seek out healthy relationships.
EMPOWERMENT ON A COMMUNITY LEVEL

- The women are given an incredible amount of support and inspiration for recovery
  - They receive the empathy of everyone in the program
  - It is an opportunity to watch other women who are further along in their recovery become independent and empowered in their journeys of leaving the program.

- In addition to becoming educated on personal skills, the women create a bond with the other women in the houses that allows them to understand what a healthy relationship truly looks like
  - Women are required to attend group sessions in the house twice a week that focus on education on recognizing red flags in unhealthy relationships as well as what healthy relationships look like.
  - They are all responsible for supporting each other and reporting someone to the program for damaging their recovery by using substances.
EMPOWERMENT ON A COMMUNITY LEVEL

- Previous research states that communities containing functional leadership supported by organizational structures with the support of participation by members who have the ability to utilize resources, indicate strong social support (Laverack & Wallerstein, 2001).

- Based on the individual skill focus and the participation and success of the women of SEEDs in mobilizing their resources, the program signifies a strong supportive community.

- When someone is feeling the need to use a substance, the community setting encourages this person to instead access other resources provided to them through the program, such as a sponsor from the individual's twelve-step program.

- This type of encouragement focuses on the strength of the individual's recovery, and empowers the women to keep their control over their own life changes by having access to a support system.
In previous research, women found that it was easier to lean on other women survivors of male perpetration because they felt that only other women survivors could understand.

- Women reported that they felt supported and encouraged in their recovery based on this community. (Grefter, Bankoff, Valentine, Rood, & Pantalone, 2013)

Throughout the SEEDs program, these same community values are instilled and practiced, allowing for the empowerment of women and use of an almost feminist intervention model.
Regardless of if the women identified as feminists or not, the women were shaping feminist ideals from the model of the SEEDs program, allowing the women to be empowered to not rely on male support.

SEEDs allows women to recognize their own resilience to live and provide for themselves, without the help of a partner or the escape of reality with substances.

Coping skills are instilled in these women by taking their strengths of survival, along with other personal strengths, and using them to empower women in their recovery.

This empowerment is what allows women to recognize their incredibly high potential and resiliency to continue on and follow the program.
The empowerment model used within the SEEDs program is also indicative of a feminist model of therapy by focusing on the stress of being a woman survivor of male perpetrated violence in a patriarchal society.

Women stated that having a community of other women who could understand them was influential in their recovery.
In one interview, a woman expressed that since being victimized by a young man when she was an adolescent and then stalked for multiple years, she could not trust men because they had only hurt her and never helped.

The SEEDs program acknowledges these views in order to play into this woman’s strengths.

This woman expressed feminist views when stating that although at the time of her victimization she was afraid to disclose, as she felt as if she had been weak in letting someone violate her, she spoke of the experience now with the view that this violence was not her fault, but the fault of the young man and her parents who perpetuated the abuse.

Many other women also describe their experiences in a similar tone expressing feminist values.

Although these values may have existed before entering the SEEDs program, it is important to recognize that SEEDs uses empowerment to emphasize these strengths in values in order to prepare and allow the women to strive in their recovery.
Almost all of the women expressed a hope to help other women by sharing their stories in their transcripts. Throughout the SEEDs program, the women are encouraged to help each other and be mindful of where others are in their recovery in order to act as a support system.

- These values are then instilled in these women as they begin to recognize that they truly do deserve to be happy and live lives without violence.

As they recognize their self-worth, the women at SEEDs can begin to see the struggles of other women coming into this program who have not reached this same point in recovery, and become empowered to create change for someone else.
EMPOWERED TO BECOME LEADERS

- As they become uplifted in their own recovery process, these women become inspired to help someone else to become empowered as well.

- Empowerment has become a backbone within the SEEDs program by helping women to reach out and work to empower others based on their own victimization and substance use experiences and success in recovery.

- The fact that most of these women chose to share their stories in hopes to help other women in the future, goes to show that the SEEDs program has truly empowered these women to not only to continue on with their own recovery process, but also become leaders within the SEEDs houses and the community as a whole.
REFERENCES


SEEDs of Change:

Sistering Sobriety, Beyond the 12–Step Model

Amy Winkler
University of New Hampshire
The word *sister*, is a verb in the construction industry, as in ‘to sister a beam.’ This means to set another plank alongside a beam and fasten the two together to create a stronger structure.
SEEDs admissions process and sobriety

- Most women are referred from institutions, but choose to attend
- Being sober and having a desire to live safe and sober are only requirements
- Subject to random urinalysis upon admission
- SEEDs agency reserves the right to ask women to leave and set terms for readmission if they relapse
What is AA?

- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Abstinence based
- Community peer-to-peer support group for mutual help maintaining sobriety
- 12-step process and spiritually based
- AA meetings are recommended but not required of SEEDs women
Who are the participants?

Earlier Demographics all the same:
- 86% of the women had child abuse histories
- 86% or 6 of 7 of the women had been in SUD treatment (mean= 2)
- the 7th woman reported having been arrested for DUI offenses
Longterm outcomes of abuse

Childhood Abuse
Physical/ Sexual

Substance Use
Coping 55-99%*

Re-Victimization
2–11 X more likely**

*Najavits, Weiss, & Shaw, 1997
**Messman-Moore, 2003
Treatment History

- Past treatment implies that the participants demonstrated want or need to become sober in the past, but were not able to succeed.
- Observing the bi-directional relationship between substance use coping and re-victimization, it is possible that sobriety may be necessary but not sufficient for recovery from victimization.
- Likewise, securing safe housing does not predict recovery from SUD.
- SUD is often a barrier to securing safe shelter housing when leaving violent relationships. **If a woman is not sober, she may not get housing.**
- This is an important question: How do AA and the SEEDs program sister one another to make recovery from victimization possible?
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Women</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous Rehab or treatment</td>
<td>6 – of - 7</td>
<td>“Yeah it keeps me sober, it keeps focused and it it’s given the tools that I didn’t have it. It’s a supplement to all the things I’ve learned from SEEDs and it’s important to me to do it.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voluntary AA participation</td>
<td>6 – of – 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sponsor Use</td>
<td>5 – of – 7 **</td>
<td>“Do you have people you would talk to? Yes… you know like sponsors, people in AA….”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>2 - of - 7</td>
<td>“Um, for me, it was a 12-step program that really changed it, but you know… I had developed an idea of faith.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEEDS as safe and sober</td>
<td>4 – of - 7</td>
<td>“…(SEEDs) provides a house for me and my kids to which is safe and sober…”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SEEDs as a Safe Place</strong></td>
<td>How SEEDs helped? “They’ve …. provided a safe environment for me to come rather than being in in unsafe situations.”</td>
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<td><strong>SEEDs as a Sober Place</strong></td>
<td>“It’s not like being in rehab or sober living. This is most definitely transitional living.”</td>
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<td><strong>No Shame</strong></td>
<td>“The one thing that I am finding right now is, there’s no shame… (crying) There’s no shame in talking to somebody. Because it was keeping everything to myself for those five year … if he wasn’t going to kill me, I was contemplating suicide, um. I was gonna take every drug we had in our house and I was going to drink every ounce of alcohol in the house… get out of yourself for just a minute. Reach out to someone and tell them what’s going on.”</td>
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<td><strong>Relapse Forgiveness</strong></td>
<td>“The SEEDS program does not shoot their wounded…we all struggle with this addiction and it sometimes does overcome us at times …they don’t shoot their wounded and I think that’s awesome because you know there’s not very many programs like that. If you screw up, you’re done.”</td>
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Emerging Picture

- AA and SEEDs are two sturdy supports, sistering the women in their recovery that may have independent and overlapping functions.
SEEDs as a Functionally Integrated Environment for Recovery:
SEEDs Sister Sobriety

Prior research suggests:

- Sober homes can be a safe, supportive environment for women to disclose to sexual assault.
  - Disclosers experience higher self-esteem and social support.
- That shame and stigma of victimization endures for survivors in AA and NA*, yet SEEDs is non-shaming
- Specific aspects of empowerment critical to sobriety are present at SEEDs:
  - Self-perception of empowerment
  - Concurrent with resources knowledge in community
  - Predicts participation in community (Hunter, Jason & Keys, 2013)

*Sanders, 2011, **Hunter, Robison & Jason, 2013;
The Sistering Overlap

**AA**
- Meetings and sponsors
- Sober and spiritual
- Addiction recovery
- Shame
- Not supportive of disclosure
- Understanding of relapse, no repercussions
- 12 step work frees of anger and blame
- Sobriety empowerment

**SEEDs**
- DV Meetings
- Safe and sober
- Victimization recovery
- No shame
- Supportive of disclosure
- Forgiving of relapse, with repercussions
- DV Education empowers
- Empowerment, resources, participation
“.for me, it was a 12 step program that really changed it, I had developed an idea of faith. That you can overcome it whatever it is, you don’t have to bound by that for the rest of your life. I don’t have to be bound by victimization, I don’t have to be bound by the food problems, I don’t have to be bound by any of the addictions, I don’t have to. There’s always a way, that’s what’s really the most important”
References


Strength & Resiliency in Participants

Jen Turner
University of New Hampshire
Common Strengths

- Determination
- Identifying as a survivor
- The ability to set and achieve goals
- Hopefulness
- Optimism
- The desire to help others
Participant 013

“Even though my kids are estranged from me and they haven’t spoken to me in quite some time, um, I have managed to raise 3 incredibly independent and very smart young women”
Participant 002

“I was really lucky in the fact that he only got the skin on the breast. If he would’ve gotten any deeper on my breast I would have had to have reconstructive breast surgery because the mammary gland would have been damaged and thank god he only just got my skin.”

“...I’m not going to say that this was a good thing that happened but to be honest with you when I went to the hospital, got the rape kit done, stitched up and all that...about five years later a cold case detective found me. This guy was a serial rapist and because of the fact that I fought back and I could prove that it was an act of violence of sort, this guy is in prison today... Because of me...they caught him.”
Participant 006

“What I always thought in the back of my mind was, I knew there was going to be a better day...not with him, I just couldn’t wait for the day when he was out of my life.”

“The best part would be I know how to identify...an abuser. I know how to identify an abuser and see the signs so my daughter, if she’s experiencing them, or some other women close in my life, I see the signs and give them a heads up.”

“It took a long time to get here but you know the good part is I survived and it’s just I’m a survivor and there’s nothing that can take me down if that didn’t.”
Others

“I don’t have to be bound by victimization…”

“I’m a fighter”

“I’m a survivor”

“I really hope that this, you know, my experience, makes them hope or can open the doors for a lot of programs or people in the future.”

“I hope this helps somebody else.”
"If a person has economic difficulties, or doesn't have much of a social support network or a network of friends and people to rely on, that person is going to be less likely to be resilient."

George Bonanno
Factors

- Strong social networks
- Recalling and confronting fears
- An optimistic outlook
- The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities
- Skills in communication and problem solving
- The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses

http://www.traumasurvivorsnetwork.org/traumapedias/251
Dreams for the Future

• Living independently
• Becoming a mentor for other survivors
• Advancing their careers
• Becoming a home owner
• Rebuilding relationships
• Maintaining sobriety
• Continuing education
• Being happy & at peace
CONCLUSION

- The SEEDs program works to help these women recovery in many ways.
- Through the use of an ecological model we see many interventions.
- The SEEDs program involves empowerment to help foster the survivor’s recovery.
- AA and SEEDs have a sistering overlap that allows for successful sobriety and recovery for participants.
- By reading the transcriptions, we see an incredible amount of strength and resiliency in these survivors.