CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Experiences of support in people with stress-related exhaustion

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Sara Alsen1,2, Lilas Ali1,2,3, Inger Ekman1,2, Andreas Fors1,2,4

1: Institute Of Health And Care Sciences, Sahlgrenska Academy, Sweden
2: Centre for Person-Centred Care (GPCC)
3: Psychiatric department, Sahlgrenska University Hospital
4: Research and Development Primary Health Care, Region Västra Götaland

Background: The number of people seeking care for symptoms of exhaustion and stress is a major concern in several countries. In Sweden, stress-related illness is the most common reason for sick leave. The condition is a challenging and life-changing experience, which is why a deeper understanding of support for those affected is essential for recovery. This interview study is a part of a research project investigating a person-centred eHealth intervention (phone and interactive platform) for people affected by stress-related mental illness. The aim of this study was to explore experiences of support in people with stress-related exhaustion.

Method: Twelve face-to-face interviews were conducted with patients’ affected by stress-related exhaustion. The narratives were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The collected data was analyzed using a phenomenological hermeneutical approach.

Results: Tentative findings indicate that people affected by stress-related exhaustion seem to be in a struggle as they are fighting for acknowledgement and to maintain their dignity. In this struggle, the participants experienced support when being acknowledged as persons. The participants expressed the need of being taken seriously and treated with respect and empathy by professionals and people in their surroundings. Lack of empathy in clinical encounters added more challenges for the participants in their situation.

Conclusion And Implications: When encountering patients with stress-related exhaustion, it is essential to acknowledge them as persons and establish a partnership, as emphasized in person-centred care, to provide appropriate support based on each patient’s preferences and situation. Such a partnership may avoid violating the dignity of people with stress-related exhaustion and instead improve their health and optimize their recovery.