

How do we get our Daughter back? Parents' Perspectives on Recovery from Anorexia Nervosa

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Abstract

Background: Anorexia Nervosa is a severe mental illness most commonly occurring during adolescence. As a parent, caring for a child with Anorexia Nervosa can quickly consume all aspects of family life, leading to frustration, feelings of burden and increased levels of anxiety and depression. Despite the impact of the illness on parents, there is a surprising lack of literature drawing on parents perspectives of recovery, particularly during adolescence.

Objective: To gather the lived experience of parents caring for an adolescent daughter throughout recovery from Anorexia Nervosa.

Method: Eight participants, seven mothers and one father, were recruited from two specialist outpatient eating disorder services. All parents had an adolescent daughter between the ages of fourteen and eighteen in recovery from Anorexia Nervosa. The study used a qualitative design and the research lead completed semi structured interviews with each of the eight parents. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Results: Analysis of the data revealed one overarching super-ordinate theme, 'a journey to recovery' encompassing a further four super-ordinate themes. The four super-ordinate themes included "a secret exposed," "anorexia is tearing our family apart," "how do we get our daughter back?" and "accessing help." The results of the analysis are discussed in line with relevant theory and ideas for clinical practice are highlighted.

Conclusion: The current study highlighted the invasion of Anorexia Nervosa and its ability to tear the family apart. The study emphasises the adolescents need for emotional support throughout recovery but highlights the difficulties for parents due to the adolescents stage of development, their strive for independence and reluctance to accept their difficulties.

Keywords: Anorexia Nervosa (AN); Anxiety; Depression

Introduction

Anorexia Nervosa (AN) is a significant

emotions such as guilt, anger and shame [9,10], resulting in less effective communication [7]. Typically, the eating disorder can invade family life and can quickly become the central focus of the family [8,10]. In line with this, families living with a young person with an eating disorder have rated their family functioning significantly lower than control groups [11] and parents often describe an associated impact on their own mental and physical health [12-14].

Mental health difficulties in childhood can leave parents with a sense of powerlessness and uncertainty as to how to support their child; taking away a vital part of a parent's role [15-17]. When specifically discussing the need to access support for a child's eating difficulties, parents have highlighted distress that they had not recognised their child's eating difficulties

Journey: Stages of recovery, lasting impact			
A secret exposed	Anorexia is tearing our family apart!	How do we get our daughter back?	Accessing help
In the dark: not knowing and not wanting to know	Losing your daughter	Learning to do something different	Frustration
Searching for a reason	Three's a crowd	Determination	Excellent support from specialist services
Lost	Marital conflict	Supporting your daughter and staying one step ahead of anorexia	Extended support
	Family life destroyed	Guided by the young person	Dealing with other people's perceptions
	Distress		

reassurance. In the subtheme *extended support*, parents commented

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