

Research Paper

Getting Rid of Substance Abuse: A Look at Experiences, Opinions, and Facilitators of Psychological Well-being After Addiction Recovery in Females

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Addiction is one of the main obstacles to achieving psychological well-being in a person. This study analyzed the experiences, opinions, and facilitators of psychological well-being in women after addiction recovery.

Methods: This study was conducted using a qualitative and grounded theory approach. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. The data were saturated through semi-structured and open-ended interviews with 14 women who had given up addiction and had follow-up visits to addiction rehabilitation centers in Districts 18 to 20 from April to September 2022 in Tehran. The collected data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2008).

Results: Analysis of the lived experiences of the women who recovered from addiction revealed five main factors including causal conditions (physical condition, mental/psychological distress, and economic condition), contextual conditions (receiving social support and environmental restrictions), facilitators (social support and influence, individual determination and effort, and religious beliefs), consequences (cognitive, psychological, and behavioral consequences), and strategies (individual and social strategies).

Conclusion: Participants pointed out that the strong facilitators to getting rid of addiction were social support, individual determination and effort, and religious beliefs. The insights from this study add to the knowledge about recovery from addiction among addicted women who are about to quit and can contribute to a better understanding of facilitating factors and treatment and rehabilitation strategies in the process of psychological therapies.

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Highlights

- Addiction is currently a main obstacle to individuals' psychological well-being.
- Previous studies have indicated that addicted women as a vulnerable group experience many problems including prostitution, low quality of life (QoL), unhealthy behaviors, malnutrition, theft, marital problems, and low quality of sleep. Women have more severe functional, medical, and psychological consequences of drug use than men.
- The women's experiences revealed that the strong facilitators to getting well-being after recovery from addiction were social support, individual determination, and religious beliefs.

Plain Language Summary

The result of the present research showed that women with individual and social strategies such as physical strengthening, self-empowerment, determination to quit drug use, medical treatment, change the environment, compensation for the past, having fun activities, and improving psychological status. In addition, strengthening family ties, revising communication with friends, using experiences, developing a new understanding of goals and relationships, rebuilding the relationships, taking the lead, building trust acquiring their psychological well-being after recovery.

Introduction

Substance abuse is currently a social reality and one of the biggest social challenges (Ali et al., 2011). Substance abuse is associated with a decrease in the quality of life, an increase in the death rate, a decrease in social and moral values, and an increase in criminal behavior (Dehghan et al., 2023). Directly and indirectly, it disrupts the order and security of any community. Addiction has left deep legal, social, biological, and financial effects both from a personal and social perspective. Furthermore, women's addiction is somewhat different from men's addiction. Compared to their male counterparts, female substance abusers are treated relatively unfairly and receive much less social support (Myers, Carney, & Wechsberg, 2016).

There are no exact statistics on female drug users in Iran. However, general data on the prevalence of drug users among Iranian citizens showed that the prevalence of drug users was 2.65% and the number of consumers was 1355000 persons. However, the population of female drug users is expanding (Noorbala et al., 2020). According to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (2018), scientists who have studied drug use have found special factors affecting drug abuse in women that are different from men. According to the report of this institute, hormonal secretions, menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and breastfeeding are among the special factors that affect drug abuse in women. Drug abuse by women has more physical effects on their heart and blood vessels

than men and brain changes in women caused by drug abuse are different from men. The report also suggests that domestic violence, divorce, childhood loss, or the death of a partner or child can trigger substance abuse or other mental disorders in women. Women themselves also state specific reasons for their addiction, including weight control, coping with fatigue, coping with pain and self-treatment, and mental health problems (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2018).

Previous studies have shown that women who use drugs will have the most physical, social, and psychological problems as a vulnerable group. These problems include prostitution, low quality of life, unhealthy behaviors, malnutrition, theft, marital problems, and low quality of sleep (Khodabakhshi Koolae & Damirchi, 2016). Since the functional, medical, and psychological consequences of drug use are often more severe among women than among men, women who seek treatment for substance use disorder report more social, occupational, and family problems (McHugh et al., 2018).

Studies have demonstrated that although drug users make many efforts to get rid of their addiction-related problems (Graham & Bitten, 2015) and despite the relatively significant periods of recovery, they often report cases of voluntarily controlling their drug use and thus face many problems (Sellman, 2010; Heitmann et al., 2017). Several obstacles may delay or lead to a failure in lasting and successful recovery, such as the inability to cope with negative emotions, cultural factors, lack of resources, and environmental issues (Paganoma, Tajima, & Guydish, 2016;

Martin et al., 2016). In other cases, the lack of social support during recovery leads to relapse, and if persons do not receive adequate financial, psychological, and emotional support from their community and family, they are more likely to relapse and start using drugs again. Social support also plays an essential role in reducing substance-related symptoms, preventing relapse in patients seeking treatment, and stopping stressors (Jia et al. 2023).

Women are also more frequently struggling with post-recovery challenges. In other words, some addicted women go to addiction treatment centers for recovery and treatment, but after the recovery, they resume their social life and face many personal and social problems because women and girls who have recovered from addiction are viewed as people with a past full of moral misconduct, and this attitude will have unfortunate and irreparable consequences for these people. Besides, since these women have fewer skills to face the failures and negative public view, unsurprisingly they start drug abuse again to heal the pain caused by such issues and they feel vulnerable to deal with life's problems. Accordingly, this study investigated the experiences of women recovered from addiction. Moreover, given the need to expand theoretical and practical knowledge on achieving psychological well-being in addicted women, this study explored experiences, opinions, and facilitators of psychological well-being in women after addiction recovery.

Materials and Methods

This qualitative study was conducted using a grounded theory and systematic approach (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). The analysts utilized the subjective investigation performed through grounded hypothesis and demonstrated a set of strategies based on codification forms and hypothetical testing, which are methodologically valuable to considering social issues. Grounded hypothesis, agreeing with Strauss and Corbin (2008), offers not only a set of strategies but also an improvement for considering social realities.

The participants of the study were women who recovered from addiction (at least 6 months) and had a ninth-grade education to understand and respond to the answers. The women were selected using purposive sampling from among the women who had visited addiction rehabilitation centers in Districts 18 to 20 in Tehran, Iran, from April to September 2022. The sampling process continued until the data were theoretically saturated. To this end, the interviews continued until no new information or theme was discovered with additional interviews with the participants.

The collected data by Creswell, and Poth (2016) were analyzed using the grounded theory approach. To this end, the text of the interviews was reviewed several times by the researcher to gain a general understanding of its content and underlying themes. Then, the primary codes were identified and underlined manually by reviewing the content of the interviews. The process was repeated until all primary codes were extracted. Next, the codes and themes with similar content that referred to a specific subject were placed into the same category. This process was performed recurrently until all themes were placed in the related categories. In the next step, the extracted categories were re-reviewed and labeled based on their common underlying theme. Based on the extracted themes, the theoretical framework of the study was developed using a systematic and grounded theory approach. Table 1 shows the participants' demographic characteristics and Table 2 illustrates The open, axial, and selective codes extracted in the study:

Causal factors

Causal conditions are a set of factors that directly affect recovery from addiction. Most of the participants in the study admitted that suffering from various diseases and physical problems and, as a result, psychological and economic problems were some reasons that made them decide to quit addiction. The occurrence of these types of problems has been a push and a warning for the decision to get rid of addiction. The causal conditions identified in this study were the physical condition (developing diseases and physical problems), psychological distress (mental/emotional state, feeling guilty, being humiliated, and feeling tired and helpless with drug use), and the economic situation (financial problems).

Physical conditions

Developing diseases: Since addicted people use drugs in contaminated places and even share their syringes to inject drugs, they are at risk of developing many diseases such as hepatitis C due to the use of contaminated syringes and not knowing how to inject, respiratory problems and lung bronchitis, and developing physical diseases such as thyroid, heart, respiratory, and lung problems.

Physical problems: Addicted people are always suffering from pain due to a hangover (5) and are always concerned with buying and using drugs. Some of these people don't notice their pain and even their body burns. Besides, some of the addicts may also suffer from constant fainting and do not try to check if the used drugs fit their physical conditions (1).

Table 1. The participants' demographic characteristics

Participant Code	Age	Marital Status	Education	Drug Use Duration (y)	Recovery Period
1	32	Married	Diploma	8	16 months
2	25	Divorced	Diploma	10	2 years
3	28	Divorced	Diploma	7	2 years
4	28	Divorced	Diploma	8	1 year
5	36	Married	Diploma	7	2 years
6	40	Divorced	Diploma	7	2 years
7	40	Married	Diploma	19	3 years
8	40	Married	-	7	3 years
9	36	-	-	9	2 years
10	23	Single	Diploma	4	1 year
11	37	Divorced	Diploma	14	2 years
12	44	Married	Bachelor's degree	20	6 months
13	44	Married	Diploma	14	9 months
14	39	Divorced	Diploma	10	2 years

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CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Psychological distress

Psychological-emotional state: The participants stated that some reasons for quitting substance abuse were their memories and emotional states such as their interest in their family members (1), missing their mothers and family members (2), feeling ashamed of the kindness and efforts of family members and trying to compensate their favors (1), being affected by troubles made to family members and their insistence on returning to normal life by quitting addiction (1), and having a commitment to and responsibility for family members and not allowing them to turn to drug abuse (9).

Feeling guilty: Some participants reported that they decided to stop using drugs as they felt guilty for putting their family members in trouble and creating many problems for them, thus making their family members feel humiliated (1) despite their assistance and support (1). Thus, they came with an understanding of all the troubles made to their family members for a couple of years (1) and even some family members got disappointed and tried to forget the addicted person (1).

Humiliation: One of the reasons for quitting addiction is that the addicted person is always humiliated by family members and other people (6) and is insulted, threatened, blamed, and even humiliated by the closest people and family members. They are also discredited to the extent that even the addicted person has a sense of humiliation and self-hatred. One of the participants stated, "I couldn't bear other people's blaming and humiliating look" (6). Another participant stated, "I was threatened and humiliated by my husband and sons" (7). A participant also reported "Because of my addiction, I was disgraced and discredited and I felt inferior and self-hatred" (13). The participants also reported that they suffered from public blaming and negative views (9) and the husband's mistreatment, suspicion, and abuse (10).

Feeling tired and helpless with drug use: The participants in this study stated feeling helpless with drug abuse as an important issue that forced them to stop using drugs. By reviewing the difficult events of the past, a person hates and disgusts her past and feels dissatisfied with her life. Finally, she gets disappointed to the extent that nothing makes her happy and she always feels bad, and this stage (the feeling of being at the end of the rope) can induce the person to enter a new stage of life. One of the participants stated, "I was taking too many drugs.

Table 2. The open, axial, and selective codes extracted in the study

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Codes
Physical condition	Suffering from diseases	Developing hepatitis C due to the use of contaminated syringes and not knowing how to inject {1}, respiratory problems and lung bronchitis {1}, developing physical diseases such as thyroid, heart, respiratory, and lung problems {7}
	Physical problems	Incompatibility of the injected drug with the body {1}, constant fainting after freaking out {1}, constant burning of hands, feet, hair, and body by the picnic stove {1}, suffering a lot in prison due to hangover {5}
Psychological distress	Mental/emotional state	Strong interest in the sister {1}, compensating for the sister's kindness and favors {1}, the sister's crying and begging to return to normal life {1}, suffering a lot of stress and fear when buying substances {1}, feeling of intense longing for the mother and family members {2}
	Feeling guilty	Having pangs of conscience for bringing loss and humility to family members {1}, family members' disappointment with me {1}, being a troublemaker for my sister despite the need for my support and help {1}, losing the custody of the children due to addiction {10}
	Humiliation	Intolerance of people's blames and negative views {6}, public and family rejection {6}, being threatened and humiliated by the husband and children {7}, character assassination by others {8}, public blaming and negative views {9}, the husband's mistreatment, suspicion, and abuse {10}, violent insults from the partner {13}, discrediting and disgracing the addicted person {13}, being humiliated and disgraced {13}, self-hatred {13}
	Feeling tired and helpless with taking drugs	Feeling helpless with injections, freak-out, burns of body parts and being hospitalized {1}, not wanting to use and fear of relapse (even taking painkillers such as acetaminophen and codeine), being imprisoned and lashed for substance abuse, being displaced and homeless for having no money {1}
Economic status	Financial problems	High treatment expenses {1}, lack of support resources {8}, the need to find a job and gain independence {13}, importance of having a job to stop using drugs {13}, lack of financial security {13}

I realized that I was always in a bad physical and mental state, both with and without drug use. I had palpitations, the possibility of cardiac arrest, crying, aggressiveness, suicidal tendencies, the desire to overdose, and the desire to die" (11). Another participant stated, "I was fed up with taking drugs and my desperate conditions. I was homeless and had no place to quit drugs and I was sentenced to imprisonment and flogging by court order. Thus, I could not stand this miserable situation anymore" (1).

Economic situation

Financial problems: As a result of addiction, a person becomes unemployed, and over time, she wastes her savings and thus she may even become unable to pay for drugs. Thus, she may be forced to stop using drugs (8).

Facilitators

Some factors were identified as facilitators that helped a person stop using drugs. These factors were social support and influence (receiving support and advice), individual determination and effort (individual passion, trying to compensate for privileges lost due to addiction, and increasing awareness, knowledge, and self-control), and religious beliefs (trust in God and religious beliefs).

Social support and influence

Receiving support and advice: Receiving support and advice from other people including emotional and financial support is very important for stopping using drugs for any reason. The participants in this study reported the support and help they received from their family and relatives (1, 2) and their support and encouragement even in the worst situations (3). Family and social support motivated the drug users to try to stop taking drugs (5). Some participants reported that they were not left alone and their family members were always with them even when they went shopping (7). They also received financial support from their close family members and partners (9) and their friends provided emotional and spiritual support to them after they had stopped using drugs (9) and they believed that support from their family members helped them stop using drugs (12).

Individual determination and effort

Individual passion: If the addicted person is not interested in stopping drugs and is forced to stop drugs under the influence of external factors and stimuli, she is more likely to resume using drugs after a short time. Thus,

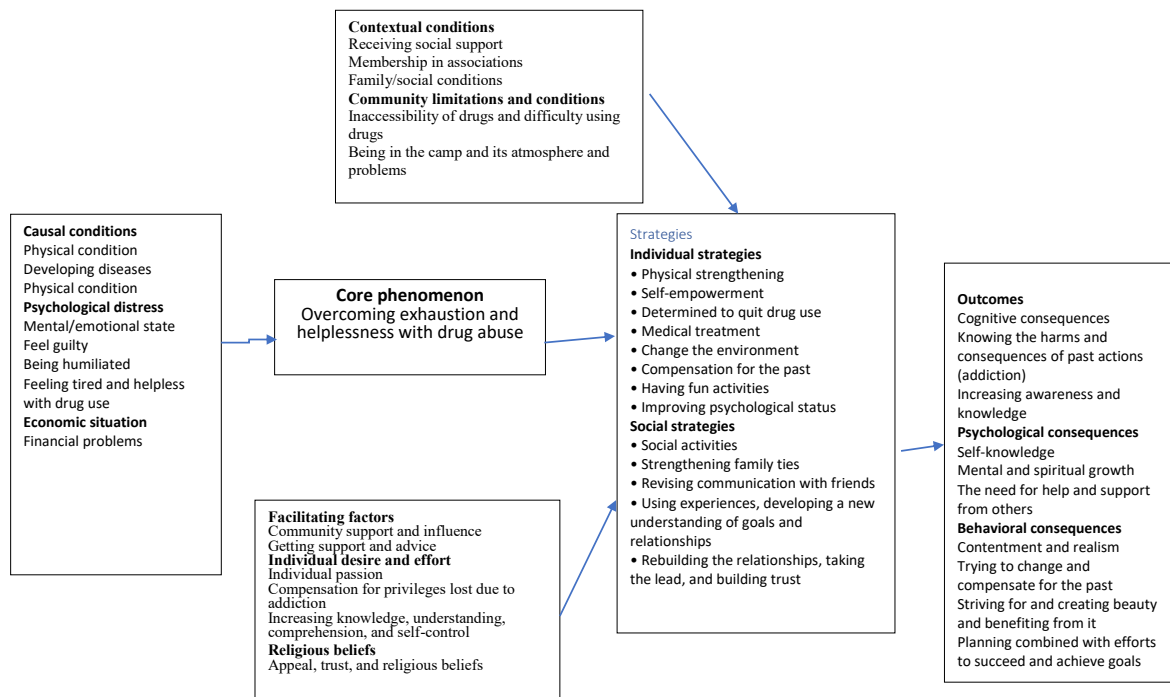


Figure 1. Paradigm model of opinions, and facilitators of psychological well-being after addiction recovery in females

stopping drug abuse permanently requires intrinsic motivation. The participants in this study reported that they decided to stop using drugs when they remembered their terrible memories and hardships and difficulties they had in the past (1). They were also worried about an unknown future awaiting them (2) and they noticed their miserable conditions after staying in the de-addiction camp for a while (3). They also remembered terrible moments in the detoxification room in the camp (4). The participants reported that they were interested in using the experiences of people who had stopped using drugs (6) and always envied the people who had left drug abuse and started their normal lives (6). They had noticed that nothing in the world was more valuable to them than their release from addiction (6). The participants also stated that they would punish themselves and burn their hands if they wanted to use drugs (13). Some participants also reported that they praised themselves each time they overcame the temptation of taking drugs (3) and tried hard to start a normal life as soon as possible (14).

Compensation for the privileges lost due to addiction: The participants reported that compensation for the loss of privileges due to addiction was another factor motivating them to get rid of addiction. An addicted person may lose many opportunities and economic, occupational, family, and social privileges, and the attractiveness of these opportunities and privileges can help

a person try to stop using drugs and compensate for the loss of several privileges (14).

Increasing awareness, knowledge, and self-control: Increasing knowledge about addiction and its complications can motivate addicted people to stop using drugs. Thus, education and training can induce some changes in these people to bring them an understanding that the things that they had done in the past were completely wrong (2). The participants also reported that they always attended the training courses in the camp that helped to raise their tolerance threshold (4). They realized that nothing in life was going to change unless they wanted to change themselves (4). The participants also suggested that they discovered most of their problems and complications were rooted in their addiction (10). People who have just recovered from addiction hate advice, judgments, and do's and don'ts. Thus, these people should only be encouraged to attend training courses (13).

Religious beliefs

Reliance on God and Religious Beliefs: Belief in a superior, divine, and supernatural power can be an effective factor contributing to recovery from addiction. This belief can sometimes lead a person to perform a series of religious duties. Sometimes it can be reflected in a person's way of looking at and believing in surrounding

events, and sometimes it can lead a person to perform a series of activities, ultimately leading to a person's recovery from addiction. The participants in this study reported some of these beliefs. For instance, they reported that they would not replace these spiritual moments with anything (even the world) (11). One of the participants reported, "I was praying to God for about forty minutes and desperately asked God to help me and God helped me and I saw all the divine miracles with my own eyes (13). I saw a divine miracle where I had no place to go and no one to help me stop using drugs, but God helped me to do it (13). Every time I confided in God, God showed me a way out (13). Now I have reached a stage where for every step I take, I am very grateful to God (13). I believe that there is always a force that supports us. When I believed in the superior force and I was on the recovery path, the whole universe joined hands and guided me (13). If I was disappointed, I would be isolated and lonely, and it would be difficult for me to keep on going the right path, and I could not see God's grace" (13). Another participant said, "I only believe in God. I always talked to God. I write a thank you letter every day and I am always thanking God" (14).

Contextual conditions

Contextual conditions have an indirect effect on a person's recovery from addiction. The contextual conditions were divided into receiving social support (membership in associations and family/social conditions) and community restrictions and conditions (inaccessibility of drugs and difficulty using drugs and being in the camp and its atmosphere and problems).

Receiving social support

Membership in associations: A person who is involved in addiction is constantly looking for an opportunity to get rid of addiction. Thus, the addicted person needs to receive advice and counseling, especially from groups and associations that have the necessary experience and knowledge in this field. The participants stated that some associations and activist groups can help addicted people recover from drug use. For instance, they joined NA¹ associations (1) and received help and advice from educated members and those who had recovered from drug use (1). The participants reported that the help and advice they received played a very important role in their recovery from addiction (5) and they could better understand themselves and recognize their problems as members of NA associations (13).

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1. Narcotics Anonymous

Family/social conditions: Family background and conditions are vital factors that can affect a person's decision to stop using drugs and affect the person's mind and behavior. The participants stated that people did not trust them and they were not perceived as reliable people by family members (7). They reported that they were judged by their husbands and children from time to time (7) and they were afraid of being disgraced (6). They also suggested that a newly recovered woman should always engage in social activities and should never be alone (13).

Community restrictions and conditions

Inaccessibility of drugs and difficulty in using drugs: Access to drugs for a person who has experienced addiction can be the worst thing to start using drugs again. This is also the case for non-addicted people. Thus, access to substances should be as difficult and far-reachable as possible. The participants stated that having difficulties in accessing and using drugs is one of the factors that helped them stop using drugs (1, 7).

Living in the camp and its atmosphere and problems

The participants stated that addiction treatment centers and de-addiction camps that are managed and operated following scientific principles can contribute to recovering people from addiction. These camps and centers should be introduced to people, and addicted people should be admitted to these centers and receive the necessary training and interventions to stop using drugs (7). One of the participants stated that she was admitted to the camp after talking to her sister (6). Another participant said that she was placed in a mandatory camp to quit (8). A third participant reported that after leaving the camp, she was severely judged and criticized by the camp members. Thus, she decided to stop using drugs under any circumstances (5).

Strategies

Strategies are the reactions that are shown by a person recovering from addiction. The strategies reported by the participants in this study were divided into individual strategies (physical strengthening, self-empowerment, determination to stop drug use, medical care, changing the place of living, compensation for the past, having fun activities, and improving psychological status) and social strategies (social activities, strengthening family ties, revising communication with friends, using experiences, developing a new understanding of goals and relationships, and rebuilding the relationships, taking the lead, and building trust)

Individual strategies

The individual strategies used by the participants were as follows:

Physical strengthening: Good physical condition can create harmony between the body and mind to get rid of drug use. A person's physical condition can be improved by proper nutrition and exercise. A participant stated, "I am interested in sports, hiking, and mountain climbing both for health and finding rigor in activities" (1). Another participant said, "I am overweight and I want to reach my ideal weight by dieting and going to the gym" (4). "I try to have an ideal fit body through exercise" (14). "I started learning Taekwondo to become stronger and also to defend myself in case of necessity" (2). "I went to the gym to lose weight and keep fit" (3).

Self-empowerment: The participants pointed to some strategies such as learning, studying, and self-empowerment: "To reach my ideals, I make more efforts day by day to increase my knowledge and skills" (2). "I made the most of the training programs and the experiences of the teachers for personal growth and development" (4). "We must constantly be engaged in training and learning" (12). "I have the desire to grow and change and gain more knowledge" (12). "I love to learn and the ideal life for me means lifelong growth and knowledge" (13). "I like personal growth and increasing knowledge and skills" (12).

Determination to stop drug use: A person who is going to recover from drug use is constantly affected by the temptations of drug use, and may undergo constant seizures. The participants in this study reported that counseling, the presence of a psychiatrist and even taking sedatives can be helpful: "I had convulsions many times and hit the door and the wall, and I was severely injured physically, but I was firm on my decision to stop using drugs" (1). "I participated in training meetings to control temptations" (3). "I was under the supervision of a psychiatrist and psychologist" (12). "I attended training courses to cure my physical, mental, and mental illnesses" (12). "I was under the supervision of a psychiatrist and I took non-addictive sedating pills" (14).

Medical care: Physical and mental system reconstruction by going to the doctor and taking medicines was one of the individual strategies adopted by the participants: "I needed to take vitamins and complementary medicines" (1). "I repaired my teeth" (9, 10, 11). "I restored my skin" (11) and I took performance-enhancing drugs under the supervision of a doctor" (11). "I had several

physical and mental check-ups (12) and was under medication for several diseases such as thyroid, high heart rate, and severe stomach upset" (12).

Changing the place of living: Changing the place of living and its people and removing their memories can be a strategy for starting a new life with its elements: "After being rejected by my father, I went to my uncle's house and after telling the story of stopping drug use, they also trusted me. I lived with them for a while and they helped me to start my relationships with other relatives" (2).

Compensation for the past: People are usually concerned about compensating for the wrong things they had done in the past and if they can compensate for their mistakes, they will reach inner satisfaction. The participants stated that they used this strategy to resolve their concerns: "During the first days of recovery from addiction, I learned to compensate for my mistakes" (12, 13) and "sought to compensate for the wrong things I had done and taking advantage of opportunities" (10).

Engaging in fun and entertaining activities: One of the best ways to spend time, especially for people who have just stopped using drugs is to have fun and entertaining activities as reported by some participants in this study: "I live in the moment" (8) and "I have maximum use of the minimum amenities in life" (12, 8). "I do things such as listening to music, dancing and rhythmic movements, and riding motorcycles at night with my husband" (8). "I try to have more free time to travel" (1). "I go on small group trips for up to several days" (13).

Improving the psychological status: People gradually gain experience and knowledge of themselves and others, and this knowledge helps them reduce the possibility of repeating past mistakes while preserving and strengthening their strengths and resolving their weaknesses and shortcomings. Examples of these experiences were reported by the participants: "I had a valuable sense of myself" (3). "I am trying to work on my nature of being a woman, I need to find my flaws and fix them" (6). "Concerning my moral qualities, I am improving anger control" (8). "I'm seeking to gain awareness about behaviors that underlie my and others' personalities" (10). "I try to have a strong character and have the ability and strength to say no to others and I strengthen my self-expression and decisiveness" (11). "I try to have a hopeful and forward-looking life" (13). "I work on myself and my lost self-esteem" (14).

Social strategies

Social activity: A person recovering from addiction can engage in useful social activities to use her experience to help others, to fill her free time usefully, and to fulfill her social responsibilities. Some of the social strategies adopted by the participants are detailed as follows: “I do whatever I can for others” (1). “I collaborate with a charity association” (2). “One to two days a week, I go to addiction treatment centers to help addicted people recover from addiction” (4). “I want to be an active member of the community and fulfill my social mission and I try to serve my fellow citizens more and take a step towards improving their quality of life” (6). “My ultimate goal is to help others, especially people who are struggling with addiction and to work in women’s addiction treatment centers to help women and addicts who are rejected by society and their families” (10).

Strengthening family ties: After getting rid of addiction, one of the most effective strategies reported by the participants was to rebuild family relationships. Before recovery, the family relationships of addicted people were affected by their special condition (addiction): “After recovering from addiction, I got in touch with my relatives and took the lead myself” (1). “After recovery, I have better relationships with my mother and now she doesn’t have parties without my presence and she doesn’t attend social gatherings alone” (3). “After stopping drug use, my relationships, especially my relationship with my mother improved and she overlooked my mistakes. She trusts me and considers me as her confidant” (4). “I reconstructed my relationships with my children and other family members (6). “I want to expand my relationships for my daughter’s sake so that she becomes more sociable and learns social etiquette” (9). “Now I have reached a point where my relationship with my children has improved a lot and they listen to me” (11). “After I stopped taking drugs, my family members easily forgave me and said that they are happy with my decision to recover from addiction and there is no need to repay their love” (12). “I again established a good relationship with my family member as it was before my addiction” (12). “Now I feel good with my family” (12).

Revising relationships with friends: The social character of humans requires that they engage in social activities, but such activities are different for people who have been engaged in drug use as the groups they were a member of before may have a role in their addiction. The participants in this study stated that these relationships should be revised, peer groups that can induce drug abuse should be abandoned by them, new groups

with new ideas and plans should be formed, and their lost trust should be rebuilt: “I have cut my ties with my friends who are drug users and I am only in contact with those who either have stopped using drugs or are normal people, and those who do not judge me” (14). “Now I have new friends who do not know that I am a recovered addict and I should remain anonymous because they may judge us based on their wrong presumptions” (10).

Taking advantage of experiences and developing a new understanding of goals and relationships: The experiences that addicted people have gone through have been very shocking and costly. Many people who get involved in addiction may not get the opportunity to use these experiences. However, these experiences are very effective and can be used even for healthy people: “After recovering from addiction, my vision gradually expanded and I came into contact with more and healthier people. When we stop using drugs, we live much better than normal people in the community, with a world of bitter experiences that others have no sense of” (1). “Now after recovery from addiction, I pay more attention to my relationships with others” (10). “I believe that we should understand normal people who have not experienced addiction and people who have recovered from addiction should understand others” (12). “I’m looking for a new lifestyle free from addiction and substance use” (13). “Gradually, as I got to know myself more, raise my self-confidence, and impress others with my performance and behavior, I made more new friends and established my relationships” (13).

Rebuilding relationships, taking the lead, and building trust: A person who has just recovered from addiction is not easily and quickly accepted by people. It takes effort and time to rebuild relationships and regain trust as reported by the participants in this study: “Soon after my recovery, no one wanted to communicate with me (10) because of the possibility of starting drug abuse again. After recovery, no one trusted us, so I mostly wanted to establish relationships with them. I stayed with them for a long time so that they could see me at all times to let them believe that I do not use drugs (like before addiction)” (1). “I took the initiative to start the relationship again. One month after I stopped using drugs, I went to my relatives’ house and apologized to them. It took several months until I proved to them with silence and respect that I had changed and that I was not the same person I was before. We need to be patient and take the lead to rebuild the relationship ourselves. You must be able to restore the lost trust little by little” (10). The recovered person must work to rebuild the relationship to regain this trust” (12).

Consequences

Consequences are a set of outcomes/results from previous actions including the consequences of quitting and getting rid of addiction. The consequences in this study were divided into three categories including cognitive consequences (awareness of the harm and consequences of past actions [addiction] and increasing awareness and knowledge), psychological consequences (self-knowledge, mental and spiritual growth, and the need for help and support from others), and behavioral consequences (contentment and realism, trying to make changes and compensate for the past, striving for and creating beauty and benefiting from it, and planning and making efforts to succeed and achieve goals).

Cognitive consequences

Awareness of the harm and consequences of past actions: The addicted person recognizes the harm and consequences of addiction as the main cause of her problems and troubles: “I came to believe that addiction was the cause of all my problems and troubles” (2). “I came up with the understanding that something happened in the past in which I played a significant role” (4). “I believe that every human body produces enough morphine. And there is no need to inject morphine into the body anymore” (8).

Increasing awareness and knowledge: As soon as a person gets to know the harm and consequences of addiction, she will become more interested in learning new things and gaining experience: “I’m very interested in learning new things” (10). “I am constantly looking for new knowledge and experiences and increasing my awareness every day” (10). “I force myself to learn something new every day” (10).

Psychological consequences

Self-knowledge: Although there are ambivalence and contradictions in the person’s behavior shortly after stopping drug abuse, over time, the person comes up with a better self-assessment and her tolerance threshold increases. Besides, her need for care and control from others decreases over time, and the person reaches a level of self-awareness where she finds herself capable, full of energy, motivated, spirited, responsible, organized, etc. as highlighted by the participants in this study: “After stopping drug use, I try to know myself better” (1). “My evaluation of myself has improved a lot compared to the time I used drugs” (3). “Now I consider myself very capable, energetic, motivated, extroverted, high-spirited,

good-tempered, cheerful, lively, happy, and strong, and I am always in control of myself” (8). “I learned to raise my tolerance threshold” (14). “Shortly after stopping drug use, we are constantly faced with contradictions and ambivalence, developing conflicting fears and emotions. A person who has just recovered from addiction has to deal with unknown feelings whose roots are unclear; one moment you like yourself or another person and the next you hate him. You both want to get into a relationship and you can’t, and you are afraid of men and you are afraid of being in a relationship with them” (13). “I want to prove to everyone that I don’t need any kind of care and control from others and I can handle my life affairs by myself” (7). “I want to prove myself to others that I am the same person I used to be” (7). “I love my honesty and by working on myself, I came to accept all my flaws” (10).

Mental and spiritual growth: Mental and spiritual growth is another psychological consequence of getting rid of addiction. The experiences gained during the course of addiction are very influential on mental and spiritual growth as reported by the participants in this study: “I have become a person who does not lie under any circumstances because I feel guilty whenever I lie” (10). “Now I consider myself a cheerful and lively girl” (11). “I feel very valuable” (13). “I never complain or grumble” (8). “I am a reliable and trustworthy person” (13). “I believe that I have a lot of potential and I just need to be patient and plan my goals so that I can succeed” (10).

The need for help and support: Getting rid of addiction increases a person’s feeling and need for help and support from others as narrated by the participants in this study: “I need help and advice and working on these defects to correct them” (3). “Of course, I choose my goals based on my knowledge of humans” (14). “After stopping drug abuse, people consume each other instead of substances; getting rid of addiction leads to strong interest and dependence, and we stick to the other party like a parasite, so that the person himself gets tired of all this dependence” (14) and we ignore some of the behavioral differences in each other” (8).

Behavioral consequences

Contentment and realism: After stopping the addiction, there will be a change in views and expectations of the person: “I am satisfied and content with my life and I take life’s issues simply” (8). “I started my life with minimum facilities” (18).

Trying to make changes and compensate for the past: After that big change (recovery from addiction) and reaching relative peace and behavior control, the person is ready for other changes and seeks to prove herself and compensate for the wrong things she did in the past. Over time, the person reaches a level of self-satisfaction: “By changing the way I look at myself and others, I was able to increase my acceptance towards myself and my mother” (4). “I made many changes in myself” (12). “I proved to everyone I am no longer the person I used to be. If I did anything wrong, it was related to my addiction and out of my will and control, so I should not be judged like the person I used to be” (13). “I regained all that I had lost. After the camp, I became tough because you get to know the people who have the same pain and suffering and you realize that you are not alone, you even make new friends, and most importantly, you share your experiences” (14). “I try to gain complete independence for my ideal self and I want to regain my lost credibility among family members, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors” (7). “We must change our view and our way of thinking” (12).

Trying to create beauty and use it: One of the consequences of getting rid of addiction is creating beauty in collective and individual life and taking advantage of it. The participants in this study reported some of their pleasures after addiction: “Even though I am very reticent, I love myself in silence” (9). “I like myself a lot and I have a lot of fun with myself, and I believe that with happy music, dancing, singing... we can keep ourselves happy and lively” (8). “I believe that I should build my world in a better way and hand it over to future generations in a much better way” (9). “I feel valued and useful when I help others” (12). “People feel relaxed when they are with me” (12). “Since I reached inner peace, they are proud of me” (13). “I have never felt so good in my life” (11). “I never let myself be alone or distance myself from others” (13). “I am enjoying every moment of my life and I live in the present moment, now and here” (13). “My changes have also affected the people around me, and they have changed their behavior towards me” (12).

Planning and making efforts to succeed and achieve goals: One of the consequences of addiction is that one should have a goal for life, prioritize the goals, and have a plan to achieve them. Thus, with nonstop effort, it is possible to achieve the goals: “I work hard to achieve all my dreams” (1). “I try to make more dreams come true by planning and prioritizing” (1). “I am an active, curious, forward-looking and purposeful person” (1). I believe that the easiest life is for people who pursue their goals and create leisure and entertainment for themselves

in addition to setting goals and planning for their lives” (10). “I do my best to improve the quality of my life” (3). “After I started my social activities (2), my goals became very important to me and I prioritized them and I’m doing my best to achieve my goals” (10).

Discussion

In addition to harming themselves, women’s addiction has destructive effects on families and children’s lives. Since women have motherhood responsibilities and raise the next generation, the presence of an addicted woman in the family can cause serious harm to the family and community (Sayar et al., 2018). Thus, given the high prevalence of drug addiction and its individual destructive effects, as well as considering domestic and social effects, most of the studies in the literature have sought to identify the causes of the tendency to addiction and its underlying factors using the quantitative research paradigm relying on psychological and sociological theories. However, few studies have addressed the experiences of people recovering from addiction. In addition, based on the global report of the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (2018) on the consequences of women’s addiction, addicted women face stigma as soon as they are released from prison and they face challenges such as discrimination in accessing health care and social services. They may experience social isolation and be exposed to social and economic losses and inequality (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2018).

Treatment can be considered a challenge for most addicts because it is characterized by failure, voluntary cessation, and continuous relapse in substance use (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Women face more challenges after recovery. Some addicted women visit addiction treatment centers for recovery and treatment, but after the recovery period, they start their social activities with many personal and social problems (Frew, 2023). Women and girls who have recovered from addiction are viewed as people with a past full of moral misconduct, and this attitude will have unfortunate and irreparable consequences for these people. Besides, since these women have fewer skills to face the failures and negative public view, unsurprisingly they start drug abuse again to heal the pain caused by such issues and they feel vulnerable to deal with life’s problems. Furthermore, the inability to face the problems after recovery from addiction eventually leads to depression, anxiety, and violence in these women. People with substance use disorder generally report fear of the future because they have to overcome many challenges to be able to experi-

ence life with a satisfactory quality in the future (Richardson, et al., 2012).

Previous studies have shown that although people with addictions make many efforts to get rid of their addiction-related problems (Graham & Bitten, 2015) and despite the relatively significant periods of recovery they experience, they often report cases where they had voluntary control of drug consumption and hence, they face many problems (Sellman, 2010; Heitmann et al., 2017). Several obstacles may delay or lead to a failure in lasting and successful recovery, such as the inability to cope with negative emotions, cultural factors, lack of resources, and environmental issues (Paganoma, Tajima, & Guydish, 2016; Martin et al., 2016). In other cases, the lack of social support during recovery leads to relapse, and if the person does not receive adequate financial, psychological, and emotional support from their community and family, they are more likely to relapse and start using drugs again (Dehghani & Khodabakhshi Koolae, 2017). Thus, women should not be left alone after recovery, because they alone cannot face the problems and challenges in the post-recover period as they need emotional, psychological, and social support (Brown et al., 2013). These women have been severely harmed and the failure to pay attention to their needs, gender-related factors, and lack of support leads to an increase in their vulnerability (Khadivi-Zand, Khodabakhshi-Koolae, Falsafinejad; 2020). This research explored the lived experiences and viewpoints of women getting rid of addiction who visited the rehabilitation centers in Tehran, which may be different from the lived experiences and perspectives of women who live in other cities or towns in Iran.

Conclusion

Using a qualitative approach, this study examined the experiences of women who recovered from addiction to develop an effective framework for the addiction recovery process in these women. Analysis of the lived experiences of the women who recovered from addiction revealed five main factors including causal conditions (physical condition, mental/psychological distress, and economic condition), contextual conditions (receiving social support and environmental restrictions), facilitators (social support and influence, individual determination and effort, and religious beliefs), consequences (cognitive, psychological, and behavioral consequences), and strategies (individual and social strategies). Moreover, the factors identified in this study were subdivided into several categories: physical condition (developing diseases and physical problems), mental/psychological

distress (mental/emotional state, feeling guilty, being humiliated, and feeling tired and helpless with drug use). The problems caused by the bad economic situation were also effective in the decision to stop taking drugs. Contextual conditions involved receiving social support and community restrictions and conditions. Social support can be provided through membership in associations and family/social conditions, and the community restrictions and conditions were related to inaccessibility of drugs and difficulties in using drugs and being in the camp facing atmosphere and problems. Intervening conditions or facilitating were divided into social support and influence (receiving support and advice), individual determination and effort (individual passion, trying to compensate for privileges lost due to addiction, and increasing awareness, knowledge, and self-control), and religious beliefs (trust in God and religious beliefs). The women who recovered from addiction also reported that they used some strategies to face their problems. These strategies were individual (physical strengthening, self-empowerment, determination to stop drug use, medical care, changing the place of living, compensation for the past, having fun activities, and improving psychological status) and social strategies (social activities, strengthening family ties, revising communication with friends, using experiences, developing a new understanding of goals and relationships, rebuilding the relationships, taking the lead, and building trust). Finally, the consequences of recovery from addiction reported by the participants were cognitive (awareness of the harm and consequences of past actions [addiction] and increasing awareness and knowledge), psychological consequences (self-knowledge, mental and spiritual growth, and the need for help and support from others), and behavioral consequences (contentment and realism, trying to make changes and compensate for the past, striving for and creating beauty and benefiting from it, and planning and making efforts to succeed and achieve goals). Accordingly, the insights from this study can be used to help people who want to stop using drugs and recover from addiction.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

All processes of the study followed the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki 2013.

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Authors' contributions

All authors equally contributed to preparing this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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