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The Role of Family Support and Encouragement in Relapse Prevention among Methamphetamine Users: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

The use of methamphetamine is a major health issue that is of great concern in the world and is characterized by high rates of relapse, as well as poor psychological, social, and behavioral consequences. Family support and encouragement is regarded as one of the important protective variables towards montage of the recovery, especially in the collectivist cultures like Pakistan, where family relationships are at the center stage of the lives of different people. This phenomenological research involved the examination of family support and encouragement in relapse prevention among male methamphetamine users. The research variables were family support, emotional encouragement, motivation, restoring trust, and psychological resilience, and relapse prevention was taken as the outcome variable. The sample was purposively sampled to identify twelve males with a history of methamphetamine use since they were firsthand in the recovery process. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to collect the data and enable the

participants to open and reveal their lived experiences. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed word-to-word, then analyzed with the help of a thematic analysis method, which resulted in 19 codes, 16 minor themes, and 4 overall themes: Emotional Support and Encouragement, Family Relationship Restoration, Motivation and Responsibility for Recovery, and Psychological Strength and Relapse Prevention. The results indicated that family involvement was beneficial in terms of coping strategies, commitment to abstinence, and susceptibility to relapse. These findings show the need to include family-oriented techniques, including counseling, psychoeducation, and structured assistance, in rehabilitation programs. To sum up, supporting families at the emotional, relational, motivational, and psychological levels help to achieve recovery, and family-focused interventions can be culturally sensitive to improve the outcomes of methamphetamine users in Pakistan in the long term.

Keywords: Methamphetamine, Relapse Prevention, Family Support & Phenomenological Study.

INTRODUCTION

Substance use disorders (SUDs) remain a significant international challenge to the general population health because of their psychological, societal as well as financial impacts. Methamphetamine is among the most toxic and addictive stimulant drugs, which have an impact on millions of people worldwide. Persistent use of methamphetamines has been linked to extreme physical health issues, neurocognitive dysfunction, emotional dysregulation, and social ineffectiveness. All these outcomes result in the emergence of employment problems, relationship problems, and the general well-being (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2023; Zorick et al., 2020). The growing rate of use of methamphetamines has become an issue of great concern among health practitioners and policymakers especially due to its elevated level of relapses and difficulty in treatment.

Relapses are said to be one of the hardest parts of substance use disorders recovery. It is commonly described as a relapse to substance use, following a time of abstinence and is commonly shaped by numerous aspects of psychological, environmental, and social elements. People who are recovering after methamphetamine dependency are often faced with a powerful craving, emotional discomfort, and vulnerability to high-risk settings which could stimulate relapse. Studies also imply that the phenomenon of relapse should not be attributed to the inability to resist but is a complex one with a combination of risk and protective factors (Hendershot et al., 2021; Sarte et al., 2020).

Social support is one of the key protective mechanisms in the recovery of addicts. Social support denotes emotional, informational, and practical help that are offered by members of the social circle of a person. Family members can have a significant role to play in the recovery process, among other sources of social support. The family members can offer emotional support, inspiration, financial support, and a conducive living condition that favors abstinence. It has been discovered that those

who have strong family support are likely to have better treatment adherence and reduced relapse rates than those who do not have positive relationships with others (Tracy and Wallace, 2021; Zeng et al. 2021).

In the collectivist cultures, family involvement is especially great since family relationships are the backbone of social life. Families in most Asian and South Asian cultures, such as Pakistan are the main source of support when one is sick and recovering. The presence of family can also contribute to the motivation and emotional strength of people with addictions as they actively engage in the treatment and recovery initiatives. Conversely, absence of family support, family discord or stigma can add to the stress of the psyche and lead to a relapsing (Ali et al., 2022).

Recent studies have highlighted that giving addiction recovery treatment as an individual process is not enough, it should be a social and relational process where family dynamics and interpersonal relationship are included. Interventions and therapy programs based on families have demonstrated satisfactory results in enhancing the success of recovery and reducing relapses in substance use disorders patients. The aim of such interventions is to reinforce the family system in terms of communication and emotional bonding, as well as supportive behaviors (McCrary and Flanagan, 2021).

Although the role of family support in recovery in addiction recovery has been recognized, it is evident that a few qualitative studies have considered the lived experiences of methaddicts with respect to how family support impacts on relapse prevention. Most of the current research is based on quantitative methods assessing the relapse rates or treatment outcomes without addressing the subjective experience and personal meaning that people assign to family support in the process of recovery. These lived experiences are important to understand since recovery is an emotional, psychological, and relational process that cannot be entirely explained using quantitative measures only (Neale et al., 2021).

Thus, the research on the lived experiences of methamphetamine users in terms of family support and encouragement can help to learn more about the process of recovery. Phenomenological research approach is especially suitable to this end since it is aimed at explaining the perceptions and interpretations of lived experiences by individuals. This study will consider the role of family support in relapse prevention and long-term recovery by analyzing the opinions of people who survived the addiction to methamphetamine.

According to Social Support Theory, positive relationships guard off the adverse impact of stress on individuals and improve psychological well-being. Family members can help their ill loved ones by providing emotional support, motivating them, and advising them on how to cope with the difficult circumstances they face to make them more resilient. During the addiction recovery process, supportive relationships can assist people to overcome cravings, prevent risky behavior, and feel motivated to stay abstinent (Tracy and Wallace, 2021).

The other critical framework is Family Systems Theory, which assumes that the family is a connected system with each member affecting other members in terms of their behaviors and well-being. This theory states that addiction does not just impact on the individual alone but also on the whole family set-up. The supportive environment, which leads to recovery and decreases the risks of relapses, can be established through healthy family functioning, effective communication, and emotional support (McCrary and Flanagan, 2021).

Relapse processes are also described using the Relapse Prevention Model, which is a cognitive-behavioral theory based on cognitive-behavioral theory. According to this model, people relapse when they are exposed to high-risk situations and they lack either a sufficient coping skill or support system. Social support could positively affect self-efficacy and assist individuals in finding effective coping skills to address their cravings and stress (Hendershot et al., 2021).

Family support is defined as emotional, psychological, and practical support which is given to an individual by the family members to make him or her handle life challenges or a health condition. Family support can also involve encouraging, overseeing, and providing emotional reassurance and involvement in treatment processes in addiction recovery (Tracy and Wallace, 2021).

Encouragement can be described as positive verbal or behavioral statements used to encourage people to continue their efforts to be in recovery and abstinence. Family encouragement may increase self-confidence, hope, and commitment to recovery in people with substance use disorders (McCrary and Flanagan, 2021). Relapse prevention can be defined as techniques and mechanisms that focus on assisting people to sustain abstinence and not to resume substance use after a certain duration of recovery. Such tactics usually feature psychological coping mechanisms, behavioral therapy, and social support (Hendershot et al., 2021).

The studies have consistently proven that social support is highly related to outcome of recovery in substance use disorder. Clients who feel that they have the support of the family are more successful in continuing with treatment programs and long-term abstinence. Family support may enhance the motivation of people to change and reinforce positive behavior patterns to aid in recovery (Tracy and Wallace, 2021). Research has also revealed that family cohesion and emotional attachment is more likely to lower the relapse rates of the people undergoing drug addiction recovery. Positive family backgrounds offer emotional stability and allow people to overcome stress and cravings that can lead to relapses (Zeng et al., 2021). On the other hand, the dysfunctional family problems, e.g., conflict, criticism, or the absence of emotional support, can add to the psychological stress levels and become the risk factors of the relapse. Adverse family relationships may decrease the self-confidence level and enhance the sense of shame or despair, which can lead to the use of substances as an attempt to cope with the situation (Ali et al., 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of substances disorders has been a well explored topic in various nations especially in relation to the prevention of relapses, and social support. Tracy and Wallace (2021) conducted a study as an investigation of the role of social and family assistance in the recovery of people with substance use disorder in the US. The researchers concluded that those who had reported an elevated level of family support showed high retention of the treatment and much lower relapse rates (Huang et al., 2025). Family support that was characterized by emotional encouragement, accountability and practical support was cited as the key influencing factors that enhance recovery and relapse prevention. The results of the study were that family-based interventions have the potential of paying significant impact on the recovery outcomes of people with substance addiction.

Likewise, Zeng et al. (2021) performed research that investigated how family intimacy, psychological resilience, and the likelihood of relapse is associated with people who are rehabilitating drug addicts. The results showed that participants who reported an increased degree of intimacy in their families were less prone to the relapse than the counterparts who reported family discord and emotional estrangement (Noor et al., 2025). It was also found that family cohesion improves the coping skills of the individuals and the confidence they have in their abstinence maintenance meaning that family relationships are helpful to prevent a relapse.

An extended and valuable study by McCrady and Flanagan (2021) investigated the family intervention in the treatment and recovery of addiction. The paper brought to the fore that family members tend to play a role in determining treatment attendance, recovery motivation, and abstinence overall. The models of family-based therapy were revealed to be especially effective in the process of coping with relapse triggers (Arooj et al., 2025), enhancing the pattern of communication, and enhancing the emotional connection between addicted people and their family members. The researchers concluded that family support in the addiction treatment programs enhances recovery.

In the study of Hendershot et al. (2021), the relapse prevention strategies were analyzed on the population with substance use disorders through the perspective of a cognitive-behavioral framework. The researchers highlighted that relapse is common when victims are exposed to high-risk circumstances that they lack proper coping mechanisms and social support (Bukhari et al., 2024). The research also discovered that family emotional support and observation of individuals helped them to cope with cravings and stressful events. Consequently, people with excellent social and family support were observed to have better relapse prevention outcomes.

Neale et al. (2021) conducted another study that examined recovery experiences in people with substance use disorders using qualitative methods of research. The paper has highlighted that healing is more of a social and relational process than an individual process. The respondents noted that positive family ties were vital in keeping them abstinent, regaining self-esteem, and alleviating stigma

and loneliness (Adil et al., 2023). The research pointed out that lived experiences of recovery should be understood to come up with effective interventions in relapse prevention.

Qualitative research was done in rehabilitation centers in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to determine the causes of relapses among drug users. The authors relied on interviews with people receiving treatment and rehabilitation workers (Irfan & Uddin, 2025). The results have shown that peer pressure, easy access to drugs, and family support were highly correlated with the occurrence of relapse. The participants cited that in most instances, a poor family involvement in the process of recovery led to emotional distress and low motivation to abstain. The researchers highlighted the importance of family-based intervention in the rehabilitation process to ensure a decrease in the number of relapse cases in Pakistan drug users (Khan et al., 2024).

A study done in Pakistan evaluated relapse vulnerability and psychological adjustment of drug addicts. The study examined psychological variables that determine relapses and recovery. It was found that psychological adjustment and integrated self-identity were significant predictors of relapse vulnerability (Liu et al., 2023). Those with emotional stability and families that were supportive in terms of their environment showed less vulnerability to relapse than those who showed psychological distress as well as family relationship problems. The paper has denoted that family support and psychological comfort are crucial elements of relapse prevention among substance addiction patients in Pakistan (Fazaldad et al., 2023).

A study that was conducted in Punjab, Pakistan investigated psychosocial factors that relate to relapse in drug-dependent persons. The results expressed that social support, self-efficacy, and personality impacted relapse behavior. People who had higher results on social support by family members showed lower rates of relapses and improved recovery. On the other hand, vulnerability to relapse was more common in the presence of stigma, psychological stress, and unsupporting relationships. The researchers concluded that family support is a protective factor in recovery and relapse prevention of the addiction (Malik et al., 2023).

A qualitative study that investigated the experiences of family members relapsing of methamphetamine addicted persons in Peshawar showed the emotional and psychological pressures on the family members, who support addicts. The methodology employed in the study was phenomenological to examine the lived experiences of family members whose relatives had repeated relapses. The results revealed that families tend to have emotional load, social stigma and become psychologically stressed, but they remain to be encouraging and supportive in terms of recovery. The researchers highlighted that the involvement of families and emotional support is the most important part that can be used to prevent relapses in methamphetamine users (Rooh Ullah et al., 2024).

Case study research on the addiction recovery in Pakistan adopted a case-study design aimed at investigating the recovery process of a drug-addicted person in rehabilitation. The study found out that recovery depends on a number of factors

such as psychological support, family encouragement, and rehabilitation interventions. The family involvement was relevant in maintaining the motivation to recover and avoid relapses during the rehabilitation process. The research pointed out that family support systems must play a significant role in rehabilitation of addicts in Pakistan because there are few community-based recovery services (Masood Afaq et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

The research design that was used in this study was qualitative phenomenological research design to understand the lived experiences of methamphetamine users in relation to the importance of family support and encouragement in relapse prevention. The semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 male participants with a background of methamphetamine use under the condition of rehabilitation or recovery therapy. The sampling method was the purposive sampling, since the sample is chosen to allow the researcher to recruit individuals having direct experience with the phenomenon being studied. The study involved all male participants being adults as it was specifically on the experiences of male users of methamphetamine in rehabilitation centers. The interviews were conducted in a confidential setting and individually to make the participants feel comfortable so that they share their experiences. All interviews took around 30-45 minutes and were recorded on tape with the information given to the participants. Data collected were transcribed word to word and analyzed using thematic analysis to determine common patterns, meanings and themes of family support and relapse prevention. All the ethical issues were observed during the research process, which included voluntary participation, anonymity of the participants, and the ability to leave the study at any point with no repercussions.

RESULTS

The thematic analysis was applied to the data of twelve male respondents to find out how family support and encouragement can be used to prevent relapse among methamphetamine users. By repeatedly reading and coding transcripts of interviews, certain patterns and meanings were formed out of the lives of the participants. The analysis yielded 19 primary codes, which were further subordinated into 16 sub-themes and eventually grouped into 4 super-themes that reflect the larger aspects of recovery experience of participants.

Table 01

Table of the Codes, Subordinate Themes and Superordinate Themes of the participants.

Codes	Subordinate Themes	Superordinate Themes
Family encouragement Emotional reassurance Trust restoration Parental support	Emotional encouragement from family members Restoring trust within family relationships	Emotional Support and Encouragement Family Relationship Restoration

<p>Sibling encouragement</p> <p>Family monitoring</p> <p>Hope for recovery</p> <p>Motivation to remain abstinent.</p> <p>Family acceptance</p> <p>Emotional stability</p> <p>Sense of belonging</p> <p>Positive reinforcement</p> <p>Responsibility toward family</p> <p>Reduced feelings of isolation</p> <p>Coping with cravings</p> <p>Family communication</p> <p>Overcoming shame and guilt</p> <p>Psychological resilience</p> <p>Recovery commitment</p>	<p>Parental motivation for recovery</p> <p>Supportive sibling relationships</p> <p>Family monitoring and accountability</p> <p>Hope and optimism for future recovery.</p> <p>Strengthened motivation to maintain abstinence.</p> <p>Acceptance and forgiveness from family</p> <p>Emotional stability through family support</p> <p>Sense of belonging within the family system</p> <p>Positive reinforcement during recovery</p> <p>Increased responsibility toward family members</p> <p>Reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation</p> <p>Coping with drug cravings through family interaction</p> <p>Open communication with family members</p> <p>Building psychological resilience in recovery</p>	<p>Motivation and Responsibility for Recovery</p> <p>Psychological Strength and Relapse Prevention</p>
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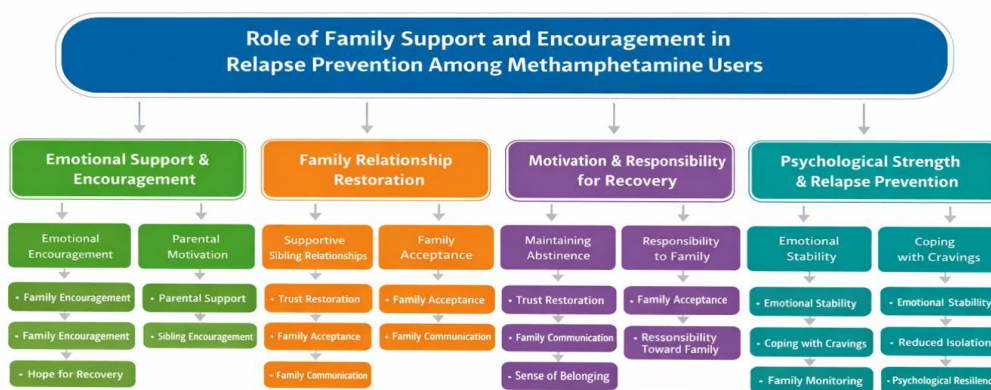


Fig 01: Cluster picture of thematic analysis

DISCUSSION

The results of this phenomenological research point to the high importance of family support and encouragement in preventing relapses in meth users. According to the themes of the stories shared by the participants, the emotional support, the re-establishment of family connections, the renewed motivation to overcome the addiction and the psychological resilience were the key elements that helped achieve long-term abstinence. It was often reported how parental attention, sibling support, and positive reinforcements made the participants stronger in their resolve to be drug-free.

Emotional Support and Encouragement is the first superordinate theme that indicates the dependence of the participants on their family members to be motivated, reassured, and hopeful in their recovery journey. Direct quotes were used to indicate that parental and sibling support enabled them to deal with cravings and renewed their will to be abstinent. This is consistent with the world literature that highlights emotional support as a protective variable to relapse in substance use disorders (Tracy and Wallace, 2021; Zeng et al., 2021). Collectivism culture of Pakistan has rendered such emotional support a major source of resilience to the recovering individuals, especially in the face of family bonds that are highly valued in the culture, as individuals tend to be collective.

The second superordinate theme Family Relationship Restoration demonstrates that restoring the trust, acceptance and open communication within the family system was the key to the recovery of the participants. Interviewees claimed that a reconciliation with parents and siblings alleviated the feeling of guilt and shame, which enhanced a sense of belonging and social stability. This is akin to the concept of Family Systems Theory that states that one member of the family influences the overall system (McCrary and Flanagan, 2021). The process of mending relationships once there is addiction in the Pakistani families may offer a sense of emotional security and strengthen the acts of abstinence.

The third higher order theme is Motivation and Responsibility for Recovery which shows the responsibility of the participants towards their families. Numerous people reported being responsible for the family requirements and maintaining trust, which was a source of incentive not to relapse. These results are in line with the relapse prevention model that lays stress on motivation and personal accountability as the determinants of abstinence maintenance (Hendershot et al., 2021). Family honor and general well-being in Pakistani culture tend to increase this feeling of duty, so family support might be a significant means of fostering lasting recovery.

The fourth superordinate theme is Psychological Strength and Relapse Prevention, which involves the development of emotional stability, coping skills and resilience to the participants with the help of the family. The findings showed that the individuals that were supported constantly had higher reported levels of coping up with cravings, stress, and isolation. The result contributes to the evidence of social support as a protective factor that contributes to a stronger psychological resilience and prevents the relapse (Malik et al., 2023). In the Pakistani context, the

safety net that is offered by strong family ties is culturally congruent, which is why the recovering individuals will be able to navigate through the stressors without returning to substance use.

These results confirm past studies that indicated that high family support facilitates recovery motivation and decreases the risk of relapses in people with substance use disorders (Tracy and Wallace, 2021; Zeng et al., 2021). The role of the family support is even more important in the context of the Pakistani culture where family relationships are highly valued and the ties with the group members are stressed. Families can be the major providers of emotion and social support in the course of sickness and recovery. The experiences of the participants proved that restoring trust in the family relationships gave the participants a sense of belonging and responsibility, which made them unwell to use drugs. This observation is consistent with the studies that suggested that the presence of family cohesion and acceptance can enhance psychological strength and reduce the relapse rates in recovering addicts (Malik et al., 2023). Moreover, the participants stated that open communication and family monitoring assisted them in overcoming cravings and emotional distress as these factors are frequent triggers of relapse. These results can be treated as the ones that support the relapse prevention framework as it considers supportive environments and coping resources to preserve recovery (Hendershot et al., 2021). The findings, overall, indicate that family support does not just reinforce emotional stability, but also helps the individuals become more committed to recovery, which is a vital protective factor against relapses in the population of methamphetamine abusers.

Practical Implications

The results of the research have significant implications on the addiction treatment and rehabilitation interventions in Pakistan. Family members must be actively involved with the treatment planning and recovery by the rehabilitation centers and professionals with mental health. Family-based counseling, psychoeducation, and support groups may assist families to appreciate addiction as a chronic condition and provide them with the techniques to help the loved ones in the recovery process. Bringing a family environment of open communication and emotional support can be used as an encouragement in the recovery process and minimize the risk of relapse. Moreover, policymakers and healthcare providers can think about creating community-based intervention aimed at encouraging family involvement into the addiction treatment program. Recovery outcomes among the individuals with substance use disorders can be enhanced by incorporating family support systems into rehabilitation services.

Limitations and Recommendations

Even though this study offers useful information, it has several limitations. To begin, the sample size used was small and only male participants were used making it difficult to generalize the results to female users of methamphetamine or other members of other demographic groups. Second, the sample of participants was obtained in the rehabilitation settings, which might not fully reflect the experience

of people who did not receive treatment. The samples in future studies should consist of more diversified samples including female sample and other cultures and socioeconomic origins. Also, longitudinal designs can be utilized in future research to determine the effect of family support on relapse prevention in extended periods of time. The attitudes of family members themselves could also be investigated in further qualitative studies to get to know more about support and recovery dynamics within the family system.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study clearly indicates that family support and encouragement are especially important in preventing relapses in users of methamphetamine. The results reveal that emotional reinforcement, mended family bonds, greater motivation, and mental strength play a significant role in maintaining recovery. In the Pakistani cultural background, where family relationships are the key component in the life of a person, positive family factors can be strong protective measures against the relapse. Enhancing the family role in the addiction treatment programs can thus improve recovery and aid long term abstinence in those with substance use disorders.

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