

Seesawing through extremes in life.

‘Like a seesaw I feel out of control’

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Introduction

Codependency: a contested construct

Research findings – Theme 3

What is the lived experience of codependency among people who have sought support from a 12-step recovery group for codependents?

Conclusions and recommendations



What is codependency?

Historical Context

American health professionals identified common behaviours; in wives of alcoholics.

Charles Whitfield document clinical cases.
Women who love too much book.

1986/7 – CoDA is created.
Cemark's work codependency Concept considered as an independent disorder.

Today codependency continues to draw research and clinical attention.

1940

1950

1960

1970

1980

1990

2000

2015

Associated with the emerging family therapy models –
Minuchin 1970,
Satir 1971.

Strong presence of quantitative research.



What is codependency?

- Literature presents different definitions:
 - Disease or addiction
 - Family problem
 - Personality disorder
 - Social interaction
- No agreement on definition or diagnosis
- Dear et al (2004):
External Focusing, Self sacrifice, Interpersonal conflict
Emotional constraint
- Widely criticised (Orford et al 2005)



Why research codependency?

'I think all addiction patterns come from codependency, I think they come from codependency. It [Codependency] is kind of the mothership of all addictions ...'

Misha (research participant)



Participants

- 8 Adults
(3 male and 5 female)
- Individuals who identified themselves as codependents
- Attendance to 12 step groups



Methodology/ Design

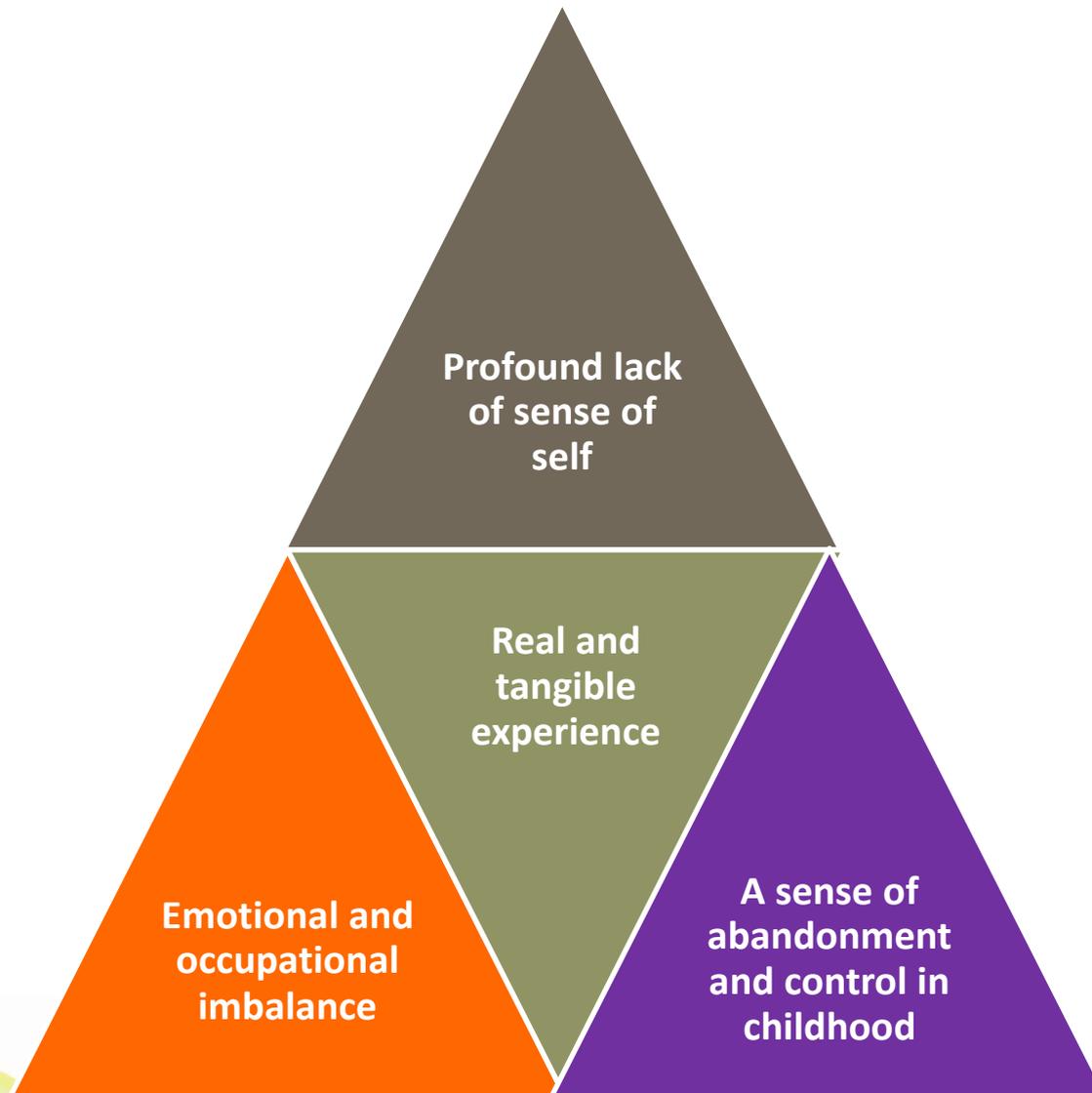
- IPA methodology
(Smith et al 2009)
- Hermeneutics,
phenomenology,
idiography
- Data collection
 - 3 semi-structured
interviews 6 months
 - Visual methods

My research demonstrated ...

- **The meaning that individuals attribute to the experience of codependency.**
- **Codependency may be involved in shaping these individuals' sense of identity.**
- **Codependency has affected these individuals and their everyday activities.**
- **The underlying experiences which have encouraged these individuals to identify with codependency.**
- **The underlying experiences which have encouraged these individuals to choose the 12-step group as form of recovery.**



Findings – Model of personhood



The undefined and fragile self.

‘I think being fragmented is real common feeling that I have, I am all over the place. I don’t have a sense of myself as being whole and good and constant.’ (Misha)



Behaving like chameleons

*'...**tailoring myself to suit the environment** that I am in, managing people's impression of me...Modifying myself in a **chameleon** like fashion to fit in, losing a sense of constancy around my values, my needs....'*



Seesawing through extremes in life.

*'Maybe [my life] is a **seesaw** ...And it's not very consistent, the two ends of it ... I feel very **out of control**, but if it is **balanced**, it would be easier'(Misha)*



Doing too much



‘...because is the **doing something else to make you feel like life is enough**. So whether it is on other people, on its on drugs or into alcohol, it’s on anything you are obsessed with ...’



Theoretical Interpretation Occupational Science

- **Occupational promoting health and well being
(Wilcock 2005a, 2005b, 2007)**
- **Doing, being and becoming
(Wilcock 1998, 1999)**
- **Harmful occupations, occupational imbalance?
(Twinley 2013, Whit et al 2013, Wasmuth et al 2014)**



Application for practice

Non- traditional client group:

- **Reflection of occupational choices – underlying meanings**
- **Risk factors associated with occupational imbalance**
- **Stress management techniques, mindfulness**
- **Balance engagement in leisure, productivity, self care**



Conclusion

- **A complex psychosocial construct with multiple meanings.**
- **Attribute meaning to their life experiences.**
- **Associated with identity, family experiences and lack of occupational and emotional regulation.**
- **There are important implications for occupational therapists clinicians working in mental health practice.**
- **An emerging role for occupational therapists?**



Thank you

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