ABSTRACT

HEALING FROM OPIOID ADDICTION: THE PROCESS, CORE COMPONENTS, AND MECHANISMS

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In the last several years, rates and concern about opioid addiction in the US have intensified. It is estimated that more than 130 people die every day from opioid-related drug overdoses (National Center for Health Statistics, 2017). Although there is increased attention on the lethal potential of opioid addiction, narratives about healing from opioid addiction are absent. The purpose of this study was to develop a biopsychosocial-spiritual understanding of how people heal, not only maintain abstinence, from opioid addiction. Results show four overall phases of healing (i.e., inactive healing, early active healing, middle active healing, and late active healing) four continuous core components of healing (i.e., 12-step programs, psychotherapy, spirituality, and relationships with others), and 15 mechanisms of healing ranging from substance use treatment to relationships with others to self-compassion and insight. The healing journey begins with opioid addiction itself, and continues through to the last phase of healing, wherein participants have transformed their lives and concretized a sense of personal empowerment. Throughout the early, middle, and late phases of active healing, participants spoke to the importance of 12-step programs, spirituality, psychotherapy, and their relationships with others as core components, which fueled their healing. Based on the insight participants shared about their healing journey, I developed a treatment emphasis model for providers on the structure, focus, and timing of interventions to best assist people in healing from opioid addiction.