

LIVING WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA: REBUILDING A LIFE

by Priscilla Roman Fleischer, 2004

This qualitative study explored the subjective experience of living with schizophrenia. Specifically, it focuses on coping with the ongoing nature of this condition, and the consequences of being diagnosed and identified as being schizophrenic. This study was designed to explore the common features of the experience of living with schizophrenia, while at the same time offering my participants a chance to tell their own unique stories. In addition, sharing their personal narratives with me offered each participant an opportunity to talk about how he/she has come to an understanding of this experience and the meaning it has had for each of them.

Open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants, two women and five men, who have all been diagnosed with schizophrenia, and one participant has been diagnosed with Undifferentiated Schizophrenia. The participants were chosen to reflect as broad a population as possible and they varied in age, ethnicity, cultural background, education, and socio-economic status. Data from the interviews were content analyzed according to the method of constant comparative analysis as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

A primary finding is that the men and women who participated in this study, who are all struggling with the symptoms of a psychotic condition – schizophrenia – as well as from the complications of being identified as mentally ill, all actively think about and seek ways to live with their condition.

The findings are summarized in the following five categories: “Reclaiming a Sense of Self-Respect”; “Finding and Maintaining Values and Goals”; “Reconnecting with Others”; “Rejoining the World”; and “Finding Meaning in the Experience of Schizophrenia”. They describe a journey from loss and isolation to developing a renewed sense of self-esteem, and for some, reconnecting with the larger community around them. These components are interrelated and can be assumed within an overarching theme; “The struggle to reestablish a viable way of being in the world: Living with Schizophrenia”.

The extant literature on schizophrenia does not entirely answer the question of how people diagnosed with schizophrenia find the internal resources needed to rebuild their lives and give meaning and value to this experience.