

Abstract

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Title

Theorizing an Internal Change Process of Male Workers with Depressive Disorders who Took a Long-term Leave

Purpose

This study describes and theorizes about the process of internal change in male workers with depressive disorders who returned to work after long-term leaves of absence.

Methods

A purposive sample of eleven men who had taken long-term leave (at least one month) due to depression and who had resumed work for at least six consecutive months provided data from semi-structured interviews. Their experiences of returning to work were analyzed using continuous comparative analysis based on the grounded theory method. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of St. Luke's College of Nursing (approval no. 08-075).

Results

Analysis of results revealed a core category in participants' process of internal change, namely, "reconciliation of efforts to maintain one's 'normalcy,' through a process of struggling, seeking, and restructuring." This internal change was the process of transformation of participants' views and perceptions of the concept of "normal," amidst their efforts to *be* "normal." Stages of internal change were represented by six subcategories: (1) "ongoing attempts to maintain one's identity as a 'normal' employee"; (2) "resolving to request an exemption from 'normal' employee status"; (3) "distancing oneself from the reality of no longer being a 'normal' employee," and striving to establish a 'normal as patient' identity in a new context"; (4) "attempting to return to what one views as 'normal'"; (5) "recreating that which is 'normal' in one's own eyes"; and (6) "reacquiring that which one views as 'normal' through the process of achieving equilibrium between self and others in the course of personal interaction." Additionally, "change in the degree of flexibility of one's perception of 'normal'" was found to be a modification deriving from the integration of the experience of depression into one's self-image, in the course of recreating 'normal.' Furthermore, two secondary core categories influenced the overall process: (1) "difficulty in understanding the experience of depression as something which threatens one's perception of 'normal,'" and (2) "being able to feel that the here-and-now self has value."

Conclusion

The results of this study provides the basis for a preliminary substantive theory on the process of internal change experienced by male workers returning to the workplace after long-term leaves of absence due to depression. This process of internal change was seen as the socialization process of expanding the social capacity of the self as understood within the context of Japanese society and culture. Suggestions for nursing practice, education, and research in the area of support for persons returning to the workplace after leave due to depression are discussed.