Relationship between Psychiatric Social Workers and People with Mental Illnesses: From an interview research toward expert psychiatric social workers.

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between a psychiatric social worker (PSW) and people suffering from and with mental illness is an essential feature of social work. This paper will show details of that relationship using interview research data involving thirteen PSWs. The Perspectives of these PSWs towards people with mental illness fall into five different categories or classifications; (1) the person as a responsible subject, (2) the person as a citizen and one who lives, (3) the person in terms of his or her rights and possibilities, (4) the person who is or should be respected, and (5) the person who has troubles owing to his or her handicap. The relationship between a PSW and a person who has mental illness is not in any uniform unchanging state. This relationship is constantly changing or evolving from that of ‘community sharing a common destiny’, to that of ‘having a framework of a contract’. The relationship is founded upon its dual-directionality and mutual trust. PSWs intentionally attempt to construct any relationship they have with people suffering from with mental illness on a case-by-case basis. At times, PSWs engage in face-to-face interaction naturally, while at other times this interaction is oriented to helping the relationship based on a rigorous assessment. These three components of PSW interaction with people having a mental illness are connected and create PSWs’ practice. All concepts from the interview data are explained in detail, and the dialogue of interviewer with interviewee as well as that connection is illustrated in the paper.

Key Words: Psychiatric social worker, relationship, interview research