



Social support in recovery former users of psychoactive substances in Montenegro: A survey study

Socijalna podrška u periodu oporavka bivšim korisnicima psihoaktivnih supstanci u Crnoj Gori: Istraživačka studija

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Abstract

Background/Aim. Social support can be a very powerful and beneficial force in the recovery process. Research of social support as an important component in the process of resocialization of former users of psychoactive substances, so far, has been neglected in Montenegro. However, one of the conditions for quality analysis whose outcome would involve examining of deeper causal relationships is examining of social support structure of the respondents. That is why the main goal of this study was to determine precisely dimension of social support, and its factorability. A special sub-aim was to identify latent structure of emotional support as specific dimension within the social support scale. **Methods.** The survey was conducted with 107 clients treated in the Public Institution for Accommodation, Rehabilitation and Resocialization of Users of Psychoactive Substances in Podgorica (Montenegro) from May 2014 to October 2016. The Multidimensional Social Support Scale (MSPSS) was used. It consists of 12 variables that measure three components of support: Family, Friends and Significant Others. The analysis of the main components with

direct oblimin rotation was used to examine the factorability of the MSPSS. After factor analysis conducted, the reliability of the determined scale was tested by Cronbach alpha coefficient through discriminatory validity. **Results.** All three components showed statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$). The coefficient of correlation between Friends and Significant Other was 0.510, while between Significant Others and Family it scored 0.617. On the other hand, the coefficient of correlation between Significant Other and Family was 0.525. As we had assumed and as previous results in this area suggested there was a significant link between the Friends and Family components. Also, 85.1% of the respondents stated that social support is important (or extremely important) in the process of rehabilitation and resocialization. **Conclusion.** Survey emphasizes the important role of the family in the life of respondents. Social support has many benefits and it is often crucial to establishing successful recovery of former users of psychoactive substances.

Key words: substance-related disorders; therapeutics; social support; family.

Apstrakt

Uvod/Cilj. Socijalna podrška ima veoma značajnu ulogu u procesu oporavka bivših zavisnika od psihoaktivnih supstanci. Istraživanje socijalne podrške kao važne komponente u procesu resocijalizacije bivših korisnika psihoaktivnih supstanci, do sada je bilo zanemareno u Crnoj Gori. Međutim, jedan od uslova za kvalitetnu analizu, čiji ishod uključuje ispitivanje dubljih uzročnih odnosa, jeste ispitivanje strukture socijalne podrške ispitanicima. Zbog toga je glavni cilj ovog rada bio da precizno odredi dimenziju socijalne podrške i njenu faktorsku vrednost. Poseban cilj bio je identifikacija latentne strukture emocionalne podrške kao specifične dimenzije unutar skale socijalne podrške. **Metode.** Istraživanje je uključilo 107 zavisnika lečenih u Javnoj ustanovi za smeštaj, rehabilitaciju i

resocijalizaciju korisnika psihoaktivnih supstanci u Podgorici (Crna Gora) u periodu od maja 2014. do 1. oktobra 2016. godine. U istraživanju je korišćena Multidimenzionalna skala socijalne podrške (MSPSS) koja se sastoji od 12 varijabli koje mere tri komponente podrške: porodice, prijatelja i značajnih drugih. Analiza glavnih komponenti sa direktnom *oblimin* rotacijom (*direct oblimin rotation*) korišćena je za ispitivanje faktora bilnosti MSPSS. Nakon sprovedene faktorske analize, pouzdanost skale je testirana pomoću Cronbach-ovog koeficijenta alfa (*Cronbach alpha coefficient*) kroz diskriminatornu validnost. **Rezultati.** Sve tri komponente pokazale su statistički značajne razlike ($p < 0,05$). Koeficijent korelacije između komponenti Prijatelji i Značajni drugi iznosio je 0,510, dok je između Značajnih drugih i Porodice iznosio 0,617. S druge strane, koeficijent korelacije između Značajnih drugih i Porodice bio je

0,525, što ukazuje da postoji značajna veza između komponenti Prijatelja i Porodice. Takođe, 85,1% ispitanika navelo je da im je socijalna podrška važna (ili izuzetno važna) u procesu rehabilitacije i resocijalizacije. **Zaključak.** Istraživanje naglašava važnu ulogu porodice u životu ispitanika. Socijalna podrška ima

puno prednosti i često je od ključnog značaja za uspešni oporavak bivših korisnika psihoaktivnih supstanci.

Ključne reči:

zavisnost od supstanci; lečenje; socijalna podrška; porodica.

Introduction

Dependence on psychoactive substances is considered to be physical, mental, social and spiritual illness¹. In the last 40 years, a growing trend of number of addicts has been recorded worldwide². Relapse is one of the most important topics in the recovery period³. It is therefore of utmost importance to determine which factors influence on the prevention of relapse.

Social support is determinant of addiction and due to its multidimensionality it can be defined from different perspectives and operationalized in different ways⁴. The sources of social support are numerous and quite diverse, including family, friends, partners, community and associates⁵.

Cohen and Wills⁶ mention several types of social support. Informational support is important for understanding and dealing with problems, and in literature it is also called counseling and assessment support. Self-esteem support is a person's information that he/she is accepted and respected. By communicating with people who accept and respect him/her, regardless of his or her difficulties or failures, a person develops self-esteem and this type of support is called emotional or close support. The need of each individual for belongingness is met through social companionship in leisure activities, while instrumental support is the one that provides for material support. Empirical research shows high correlations of various social support functions⁶. Family is a dominant source of sociability and social support⁷⁻¹⁰. Close relatives are more often a source of emotional and instrumental support, while friends are more important for socializing¹¹⁻¹². Instrumental support is often provided by neighbors^{13, 10}. Social relationships are assessed by frequency of social interactions¹⁴ and analyzed through three spheres. The primary sphere implies the closest family relationships; secondary relates to friends, relatives and a closer social community while tertiary relates to participation in organized activities and associations¹⁵. Böhnke¹⁶ warns of the importance of family cohesiveness, intergenerational solidarity and friendships. In their study, Spoth and Redmond¹⁷ dealt with the role of social support in the period of treatment and prevention of relapse. The authors suggest that the existence of supporting structures and networks plays a significant role during the drug treatment process in people who abuse drugs and in preventing relapse while contributing to the improvement of mental health.

Although the problem of the use of psychoactive substances is a widespread phenomenon, post-rehabilitation and resocialization social support did not find its place in scientific research in Montenegro. This problem can be also seen as a global one. Every adequately conscious society should be interested in providing social support to clients after rehabilitation and resocialization.

The aim of the research of social support as an important component in the process of resocialization of former users of psychoactive substances, so far, has been neglected in Montenegro. However, one of the conditions for quality analysis whose outcome would involve examining of deeper causal relationships is examining of social support structure of the respondents. That is why the main goal of the study was to determine precisely dimension of social support and its factorability. A special sub-aim was to identify latent structure of emotional support as specific dimension within the social support scale.

Methods

The survey covered 107 clients, former users of psychoactive substances and former residents of the Public Institution for Accommodation, Rehabilitation and Resocialization of Users of Psychoactive Substances in Podgorica, Montenegro. The sample included respondents who completed one-year rehabilitation and resocialization period. The survey was conducted by face-to-face method with the prior approval of the Institution in which the survey was conducted as well as the voluntary consent of the respondents. The total sample covers 42.8% of the total number of clients of the Institution for the survey period.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was used for this survey¹⁸. The scale consists of 12 items indicating dimensionality (factor validity) expressed through three components: Family, Friends, and Significant Others. Answers in the Likert scale were ranked from 1 to 7 (1, I strongly disagree – 7, I strongly agree). One of the goals was to validate this scale on our sample. By examining the internal compliance of the data, it was found that the results obtained by analysis coincided with the original results of the author of this scale.

The analysis of the main components with direct oblimin rotation¹⁹ was used to examine the factorability of the MSPSS. After factor analysis conducted, the reliability of the determined scale was tested by Cronbach alpha coefficient through discriminatory validity.

Results

Some of the key sociodemographic characteristics of respondents implied that majority of them (70.1%) completed secondary school, their average income amount was to 720 Euros (distribution of data indicates asymmetry and presence of below-average values; skewness = 1.598). The largest number of them was raised in a complete family (81.3%) (Table 1).

Table 1
Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	n (%)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Education (multiply responses)			
elementary school	21 (19.6)		
secondary school	75 (70.1)		
faculty	11 (10.3)		
Type of family (multiply responses)			
complete	87 (81.3)		
single parents	9 (8.4)		
expanded family	8 (7.5)		
other	3 (2.8)		
Marriage status of parents			
married	54 (50.5)		
a marital union	1 (0.9)		
divorced	12 (11.2)		
one parent died	36 (33.6)		
missing values	4 (3.7)		
Total family members, mean \pm SD	4.09 \pm 1.24	0.028	-0.521
Income (Euros), mean \pm SD	720.70 \pm 461.38	1.598	2.960

Table 2
Relationship with parents

Relationship with parents	Respondents (%)	
	with mother	with father
Very close	36.4	20.6
Close	40.2	30.8
Neither close nor distant	17.8	24.3
Distanced	4.7	12.1
Very distanced	0.9	10.3

Table 3
Relationship with partners

Relationship with partners	Respondents, n (%)
Very close	23 (21.5)
Close	13 (12.1)
Neither close nor distant	5 (4.7)
Distanced	5 (4.7)
Very distanced	5 (4.7)

Most of the clients stated that they had close and very close relationships with mother and father, and the smallest percentage were at a great distance with mother and father.

Table 4
Factor weight for principal component analysis (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation (Kaiser normalization) of the three-component solution

Items	Factor weights		
	Friends	Significant Other	Family
I can count on my friends when things go wrong	0.944	-0.002	-0.018
I have friends with whom I can share my happiness and sorrow	0.923	-0.017	-0.002
I can talk about my problems with my friends	0.856	-0.087	0.065
My friends really try to help me	0.764	0.160	-0.003
There is a special person who is there always when I am in need	-0.072	0.941	0.066
There is a special person who is a source of comfort to me	0.075	0.865	0.027
There is a special person in my life with whom I can share joy and sorrow	-0.017	0.761	-0.034
There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings	0.278	0.417	0.095
I can talk about my problems with my family	-0.021	0.064	0.855
My family is willing to help me make decisions	-0.003	-0.001	0.822
I have the emotional help and support I need from my family	-0.014	-0.078	0.780
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's indicator	0.092	0.119	0.727
Bartlett's sphericity test			0.845
			0.000

Approximately one third of the respondents (33.65%) described their relationship with partners as very close or close, while 9.4% of the respondents had a distant and mostly sympathetic relationship with their partners (Tables 2 and 3).

Results of the main components analysis

Analysis of the main components separated the components and determined factorability within the three components. Prior to the analysis of the main components, the adequacy of the data was determined by examining the correlation between the variables ($r > 0.3$). The value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's index was 0.845 which exceeded the threshold of 0.6 with statistically significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p = 0.000$).

The analysis of the main components revealed the presence of three components with characteristic values above 1, which accounted for 54.89%, 12.53% and 10.92% of variance. With regard to the structure of the components, these were entitled Friends, Family, and Significant Others, respectively. Looking at Table 4, one can notice the structure of the components.

For example, the Friends component explains the variables that indicate friends as an important support and encouragement in life. On the other hand, the Significant Others component includes variables that imply the existence of a “special person” in the life of respondents and his/her significant role. In the Family component the presence of variables that emphasize the important role of the family in the life of respondents was also observed.

Internal compliance of the scale

In order to examine the internal compliance of the scale, we examined the Cronbach alpha coefficient, which examined both for the entire score of variables that make up the synthetic variable – social support as well as for the individual synthetic variables extracted in the previous analysis. Zimet et al.¹⁸ had previously tested these properties and determined the following: the coefficient α for all 12 variables (Social support) was 0.88. The Family, Friends and Significant Others showed coefficient α of 0.85, 0.75, and 0.72, respectively. In comparison, our analysis established internal compliance of the Social Support of 0.92, while for the Family, Friends and Significant Others these coefficients amounted to 0.89, 0.934, and 0.88, respectively.

Emotional support within the MSPSS scale

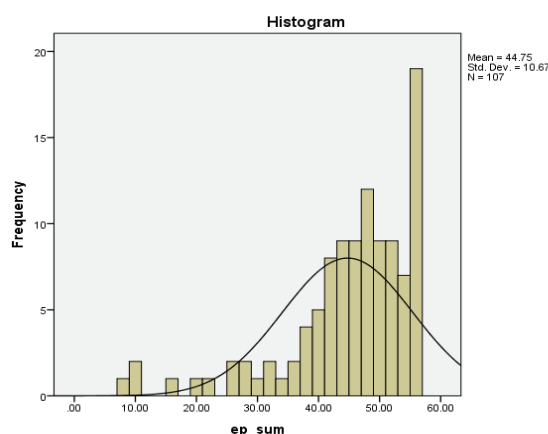
Emotional support as a sum of the two most common components, in our case the Friends and Family, is an important if not the most important part of social support. By examining the correlation coefficients among the three components of the MSPSS, the validity of this assumption was determined. All three components showed statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$). The correlation coefficient between the Friends and Significant Others was 0.510, while between the Significant Others and Family it scored 0.617. On the other hand, the correlation coefficient between the Significant Others and Family was 0.525. As we had assumed and as previous results in this area suggested there was a significant link between the Friends and Family components. Due to the lack of strong statistical evidence, these data represent a sufficient indicator of the accuracy of the assumptions stated in the paper.

In order to examine significance of emotional support, it was formatted synthetic sketch of variables identified in the previous section as a part of emotional support. As Table 5 shows, emotional support for former users of psychoactive substances had a big importance. The distribution values ranged from 8 to 56. The arithmetic mean was 44.75 and the value of the skewness had negative asymmetry.

Table 5

Descriptive statistics of Emotional Support

n	107	107
	0	0
The arithmetic mean		44.7477
Standard error		1.0315
Median		47.0000
Modus		56.00
Std. Deviation		10.67009
Variance		113.851
Skew		-1.527
Kurtosis		2.494



Data from Table 6 (after the interval variables separation and transformation into categorical ones) showed the importance of emotional support to the respondents. Very small percentage of respondents expressed that emotional support was not important, while 85.1% of them pointed out the importance of this construct.

Table 6

Emotional support

Emotional support	Respondents n (%)
It does not matter to me at all	4 (3.7)
It is a bit important to me	4 (3.7)
It is neither important nor irrelevant to me	8 (7.5)
It is important	35 (32.7)
It is extremely important	56 (52.3)

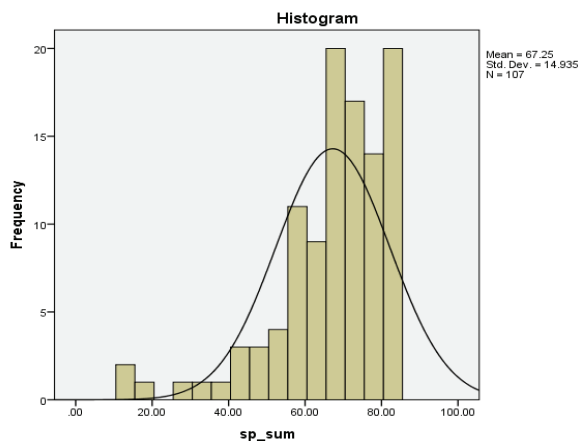
Social support to former users of psychoactive substances

In order to determine level of social support to former users of psychoactive substances, synthetic sketch of variables, which make this construct, was formed.

Values for variable Social support are given in Table 7. Their range was from 13 to 84. The higher value on the scale implies presence of greater importance of social support. In average values we noticed some disagreement and values of arithmetic mean, medium, media, and mode significantly deviate and point to the asymmetry of the distribution. The sketch indicator, which measures distribution asymmetry, showed us a negative asymmetric distribution. This implies presence of above-average values.

Table 7**Descriptive statistics of Social Support**

n	Valid	107
	Missing	0
The arithmetic mean		67.2523
Standard error		1.44377
Median		70.0000
Modus		84.00
Std. deviation		14.93451
Variance		223.039
Skew		-1.574
Kurtosis		3.116



Variables were transformed into a material with 5 categories demonstrating an importance of social support to the respondents. Cumulatively, 85.1% of the respondents stated that social support was important (or extremely important) (Table 8).

Table 8**Social support**

Social support	Respondents n (%)
It does not matter to me at all	3 (2.8)
It is a bit important to me	3 (2.8)
It is neither important nor irrelevant to me	10 (9.3)
It is important	37 (34.6)
It is extremely important	54 (50.5)

Discussion

This aim of this paper was to identify the perception of social support of former users of psychoactive substances in Montenegro following their rehabilitation and resocialization. The results showed that the scale used has good internal and test-retest reliabilities and moderate construct validity¹⁸.

In 2011, a survey in Vietnam showed that parents, wives, brothers and sisters gave most of emotional support to former addicts. Respondents reported that abstinence was maintained thanks to the support of family members, and emotional support by family was emphasized for day to day functioning. Also emotional support provided by families made a significant contribution to tackling obstacles and problems they encountered and often provided strong motivation to abstain from drugs, care for their health and seek employment²⁰. Those results are very similar with results from Montenegro where the highest percentage respondents quoted the importance of this construct.

A research carried out in 2015 in China pointed to the importance of social support in recovery period and its significance in long rehabilitation period of addicts²¹. Our research showed that for more than three quarters of respondents social support is important or extremely important. Family support proved to be important for the treatment process, while good relationships with other significant

persons in life are a significant factor for mental health of clients, and are particularly important from the perspective of social functioning²². For clients who are in the program for treatment of psychoactive substances abuse, family support may be the most important aspect of social support^{18, 23}. Clients who perceive family support as good believe to have a safe environment, adequate health and social protection, financial support, possibility to use social resources^{24, 25}, which largely reflects on their quality of life.

The results of our research correlate with the results carried out by Shahzad et al.²⁶ with clients who underwent treatment for drug addiction in rehabilitation centers in Pakistan. Their research has shown that availability of social support by the family, friends and employees in the treatment facilities helps clients to better cope with the addiction and is a significant factor in preventing relapse.

In similar researches, the authors concluded that social and emotional support has a significant role after period of rehabilitation and resocialization. Therefore we can conclude that results from our survey are reliable and that cultural differences did not affect them.

Limitations of the study

The analysis pointed to interesting factorability, but more significant research should involve a larger sample. This is especially important in cases of applying multivariate statistical methods, which is one of the prerequisites for their application. This would be particularly significant for determining correlation between the components. Since all variables were a part of one scale (social support), the question is how much their mutual causality affects correlation between the components.

Benefits of the study

Taking into account the pioneering contribution of the study to understanding the current problem, especially considering the inadequate examination of the topic in Montenegro, an opening of this insufficiently explored issue sets the foundation for further research in this field.

Conclusion

Results of this study suggest that emotional support plays an important role in the perceived social support after the period of rehabilitation and resocialization of former

users of psychoactive substances. It is recommended that social support is promoted through intervention programs in dealing with clients in the process of rehabilitation and resocialization.

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