

Community-Based Drug Recovery Program Social Services in Disruptive Times: Experiences of Person Who Use Drugs in Palawan, Philippines

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Abstract

The restricted movements during the COVID-19 pandemic have created challenges for people who use drugs (PWUDs) to access and complete community-based drug rehabilitation program (CBDRP) social services. This study aims to investigate the experiences of PWUDs undergoing CBDRP in Palawan, Philippines during disruptive times such as the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on the changes in the social service support mechanisms enabling PWUDs to continue in their recovery. 188 PWUDs undergoing CBDRP in the 11 municipalities of Palawan participated in focus group discussions between July to December 2022. Participants were asked about the effects of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic such as social isolation; modification in the CBDRP social services delivery and accessibility; shifting focus of the CBDRP in-charge officers; and changing family dynamics. Transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis and it revealed four themes: (1) Experiences of PWUDs on CBDRP social services support mechanisms as against as planned; (2) Challenges in completing CBDRP; (3) Leadership initiatives observed by PWUD; and (4) Role of local groups and PWUDs' family in the recovery of PWUDs during COVID 19 pandemic. The study demonstrates a need for a holistic care approach with psychosocial needs support services; enhanced family and community engagement; sustainable livelihoods programs; digital transformation and digital engagement; and capacitating the social service providers particularly those at the barangay level and local groups as vital factors for better CBDRP delivery. Further, the study exposed the necessity for data-driven and context-specific policies flexible and agile enough to enable better social services delivery, community participation, and effective implementation.

Keywords: community-based drug program, social services, person who uses drugs, COVID-19, public policy