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**The meaning of social inclusion to
people with enduring mental health
problems**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Arts
in
Nursing**

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research project has been to explore what social inclusion means to people with an enduring mental health problem. A review of the general literature on social inclusion revealed that little research has been conducted in relation to mental health, particularly in New Zealand. Even fewer studies have investigated the meanings that people with severe and enduring mental health problems place on their experiences.

A life story narrative approach was employed in order to explore the experience of social inclusion and enduring mental health problems. Data were collected by way of unstructured, individual interviews with five users of mental health services living in supported housing in a small rural New Zealand town. Thematic analysis was carried out on the narratives, identifying six major themes. The findings indicated that, for this group of service users, social inclusion means having someone to love, something to do and somewhere to live. They want relationships with family and friends, to engage in recreational or leisure activities, to be employed, to have financial security, and to have safe and comfortable housing. The major barriers to achieving these are stigma and discrimination.

New Zealand's mental health services have adopted a recovery approach to mental health. Whereas social inclusion has a broad political and social focus that places responsibility for reducing social exclusion on society, recovery focuses on individuals' personal journeys towards mental health and well-being. Despite international recognition of the value of social inclusion, New Zealand's mental health services have not yet embraced it, although policy advisory organisations such as the Mental Health Commission state its aims as desirable for services. However, the concept of recovery sits within the framework of social inclusion and is an integral part of it. Mental health nurses need to understand what social inclusion means to people who experience it, so that they are able to empower them to make a positive contribution to their community, as citizens, friends, family members, employees and neighbours.

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Table of contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Abstract | 2 |
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| Table of contents | 5 |
| Chapter one: Introduction | |
| 1.0 Overview of the chapter | 9 |
| 1.1 Background to the study | 9 |
| 1.2 Social inclusion | 10 |
| 1.3 Recovery | 12 |
| 1.4 Social inclusion and recovery | 14 |
| 1.5 Research questions and aims | 15 |
| 1.6 A reference to terminology | 16 |
| 1.7 Organisation of the thesis | 17 |
| 1.8 Summary | 18 |
| Chapter two: Historical overview | |
| 2.0 Introduction | 19 |
| 2.1 Key New Zealand documents 1994-2008 | 19 |
| 2.2 Deinstitutionalisation and community care | 24 |
| 2.3 Theoretical issues | 27 |
| 2.4 Summary | 30 |
| Chapter three: Literature review | |
| 3.0 Introduction | 31 |
| 3.1 New Zealand research | 31 |
| 3.2 International research | 33 |
| 3.3 Stigma and discrimination | 37 |
| 3.31 Structural discrimination | 38 |
| 3.32 Multiple discrimination | 39 |
| 3.33 Labelling and self-stigma | 39 |
| 3.4 Employment | 40 |

| | | |
|--|--|----|
| 3.5 | Material poverty | 43 |
| 3.6 | Relationships and social networks | 43 |
| 3.7 | Partnerships in mental health | 45 |
| 3.8 | Summary | 46 |
| Chapter four: Research design and methods | | |
| 4.0 | Introduction | 48 |
| 4.1 | Design | 48 |
| 4.11 | Qualitative exploratory method | 48 |
| 4.12 | Life-story narrative | 51 |
| 4.13 | Data collection | 52 |
| 4.14 | Summary of design and data collection considerations | 54 |
| 4.2 | The qualitative researcher | 54 |
| 4.21 | The challenges | 55 |
| 4.22 | A dual role: nurse researcher | 56 |
| 4.23 | Reflexivity | 56 |
| 4.3 | Methods | 57 |
| 4.31 | The setting | 57 |
| 4.32 | The researcher | 57 |
| 4.33 | The participants | 59 |
| 4.4 | Ethical considerations | 60 |
| 4.5 | Collecting the data | 62 |
| 4.6 | Data analysis and interpretation | 67 |
| 4.7 | Data quality/rigour | 70 |
| 4.8 | Summary | 71 |
| Chapter five: Research findings | | |
| 5.0 | Introduction | 73 |
| 5.1 | The participants | 73 |
| 5.11 | Steven | 73 |
| 5.12 | Monica | 74 |
| 5.13 | Jo | 74 |
| 5.14 | Priscilla | 75 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 5.15 Gordon | 75 |
| 5.2 General trends | 75 |
| 5.3 Themes relating to social inclusion | 76 |
| 5.31 Social upset | 76 |
| 5.32 Relationships | 78 |
| 5.33 Finances and money | 81 |
| 5.34 Keeping occupied | 84 |
| 5.35 Violence and abuse | 86 |
| 5.36 Things are better now | 87 |
| 5.4 What I expected but was not supported by the data | 90 |
| 5.5 Summary | 91 |
| Chapter six: Discussion | |
| 6.0 Introduction | 93 |
| 6.1 Themes of social inclusion | 93 |
| 6.11 Social upset | 93 |
| 6.12 Relationships | 94 |
| 6.13 Finances and money | 99 |
| 6.14 Keeping occupied | 101 |
| 6.15 Violence and abuse | 103 |
| 6.16 Things are better now | 105 |
| 6.2 Issues relating to social inclusion that did not emerge from the data | 110 |
| 6.3 Summary | 114 |
| Chapter seven: Conclusion | |
| 7.0 Introduction | 116 |
| 7.1 Limitations | 116 |
| 7.2 Summary of findings | 117 |
| 7.21 What does social inclusion mean to people with an enduring mental health problem? | 117 |
| 7.22 What facilitates social inclusion? | 118 |
| 7.23 What are the barriers to social inclusion? | 119 |
| 7.24 How do life stories reflect the social and political | |

