

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

PARENTS BATTLING THEIR CHILD'S ANOREXIA:

What is it like For a Parent to Care for a Child with an Eating Disorder?

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Psychology

at Massey University, Albany

New Zealand

Ashley Bellingham

2012

Abstract

Anorexia nervosa is a serious and life-threatening mental health issue which needs to be given more attention. Qualitative research on parents' experience in caring for a child with an eating disorder is lacking around the world, and is almost non-existent in New Zealand. Parents of a child with an eating disorder have a huge and difficult role in caring for their child. Resources and facilities for treating eating disorders around the world are limited, and support for carers is minimal, which means the distressing experience of caring for a child with an eating disorder can become more difficult to manage. By giving parents in New Zealand an opportunity to voice their experiences, others may be educated about anorexia nervosa and the experiences of parents. A qualitative approach was employed in this project to explore the experiences of parents in caring for a child with an eating disorder. Twelve parents of nine daughters suffering from anorexia nervosa consented to participate in this research and were interviewed. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using phenomenological approaches. Descriptive, interpretative and hermeneutic phenomenological methods were drawn on to provide a detailed and in-depth explanation of what it is like for a parent to care for a child with an eating disorder. Analysis revealed that the parents experienced three stages during the struggle for the salvation of their child, which I have labeled the insidious stage, the tenacious stage and the recovery stage. Across the stages it was apparent that the battle against the eating disorder was never-ending, and full of uncertainty, contradiction and emotion. So coping was essential for the physically, emotionally and psychologically exhausted parents. The findings from this research can help raise awareness in society, assist in nationwide education around eating disorders and contribute to improving parents' experiences of caring for a child with an eating disorder. This research has established a good foundation for understanding the experiences of New Zealand parents, regarding what it is like to care for a child with an eating disorder.

Preface and Acknowledgements

The purpose of this research was to explore what it is like for a parent to care for a child with an eating disorder in New Zealand, and fill the gaps in current research. This research gave parents the opportunity to voice their very own experiences.

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Kerry Chamberlain for all his support and guidance in helping me complete this research project, using an approach which was rather unfamiliar to me initially.

I would like to express my utmost respect and gratitude to all the parents who offered to participate in my research despite the difficulties in sharing their innermost experiences.

I also want to thank my family, friends, colleagues and employer for all of their many forms of support throughout my Masters Degree. It is greatly appreciated, thank you.

Finally, thank you to Massey University for giving me the opportunity to carry out this research project and for providing some financial assistance. This research was approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC).

Table of Contents

	Page
Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Preface and Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter One: Introduction	
Background.....	1
Research up until now	4
Chapter Two: Method	
Participants	25
Procedure	25
Data Analysis.....	26
Chapter Three: Findings	
Stage One: Insidious	30
Stage Two: Tenacious	33
Stage Three: Recovery.....	48
Findings summary	54
Chapter Four: Discussion	
The value of this research within psychology	55
Concluding comment.....	62
References	63
Appendices:	
A: Information sheet.....	72
B: Interview topics.....	75