

Moving from hopeless to hopeful: Understanding the experiences of adults in midlife living with anorexia nervosa

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Abstract

Anorexia nervosa (AN) is a complex, life-threatening mental illness with high comorbidity rates. This disorder has one of the worst prognoses of all mental illnesses, with a mortality rate of 10.5%. It affects people of varying socioeconomic statuses, cultures, sexes, genders, and ages. There is no universally effective treatment for adults living with AN. Despite the high percentage of individuals who continue to live with AN for decades, there is limited understanding of what it means to be in midlife living with a disorder that is more commonly noted to occur among adolescents and young adults. This was a qualitative study using constructivist grounded theory methodology. This research was conducted in accordance with the ethics protocol approved by the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board of the University of Toronto. Nineteen individuals in midlife (40 to 65 years of age) living with AN participated in individual, in-depth interviews. Four main findings emerged from this study. First, important differences exist between living with AN in midlife versus when one is younger. Second, based on this sample and their retrospective accounts, complex trauma is common among individuals in midlife living with AN. Third, midlife can act as a barrier to seeking treatment and/or facilitate disengaging from treatment. Fourth, shifts occur in midlife that can act as catalysts to fully engaging in recovery. Honoring the added challenges that come with midlife, as well as harnessing qualities developed in midlife will help this older age group move forward with their recovery journey, moving from feeling hopeless to feeling hopeful health facilities.



Biography:

Leslie A McCallum has completed her PhD at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work in 2019. She also holds a Master of Social Work from the University of Toronto and a

Bachelor of Commerce (honours) from Queen's University. She is a Director of Research and Program Evaluation at Cedar Centre (part-time), a mental health agency that treats individuals with childhood interpersonal trauma, and a Research Associate at the University of Toronto. Prior to entering the PhD program, she was as a Senior Executive in Communications and Marketing, working for a wide range of clients, including several mental health organizations.

Speaker Publications:

1. "The Effects of Stigma on Recovery Attitudes in People With Anorexia Nervosa in Intensive Treatment", *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease*/Volume 204(5)
2. "“You don't have anorexia, you just want to look like a celebrity”: perceived stigma in individuals with anorexia nervosa" *Journal of Mental Health*/Volume 25(1)
3. "Turbulence Processes Within Turbidity Currents", *Annual Review of Fluid Mechanics*/Volume 53(1)
4. "Prediction of pre-eclampsia in nulliparous women using routinely collected maternal characteristics: A model development and validation study", *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*/Volume 20(1)
5. "Homeownership status and risk of food insecurity: examining the role of housing debt, housing expenditure and housing asset using a cross-sectional population-based survey of Canadian households", *International Journal for Equity in Health*/Volume 19(1)

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