



RECOVERY INTERNATIONAL GROUP MEETING EVALUATION

CONDUCTED BY

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RI is a renowned, cognitive-behavioral, peer-to-peer self-help training system. With groups meeting weekly, it is one of the largest peer-led programs for persons struggling with emotional and mental health problems.

Of 126 individuals who enrolled in the evaluation, 79 completed each of the 4 telephone interviews conducted during their year-long study participation. This is a very good interview follow-up rate for national longitudinal studies done by telephone .

On average, participants had coped with mental health symptoms for 24 years

- 94% had seen a professional about a mental health problem
- 82% had been formally diagnosed with a mental illness
- 47% had a primary diagnosis of depression
- 25% had a diagnosis of bipolar disorder
- 15% had a diagnosis of anxiety disorder
- 53% had been hospitalized for a mental health problem
- 30% reported co-occurring physical problems
- Nearly 20% had been treated for a drug or alcohol problem at some point in their lives.

One year after they went to their first RI meeting, evaluation participants reported:

- Decreased severity of mental health symptoms
- Decreased depressive symptoms
- Decreased anxiety symptoms
- Fewer mental health and social service needs
- Less use of mental health and social services
- Increased overall mental health recovery
- Improved confidence in one's own ability to achieve mental health recovery
- Increased willingness to ask others for help and support
- Decreased mental health symptom domination (one's life is not controlled by symptoms)
- Increased feelings of hope
- Improved self-esteem
- Increased coping mastery ability
- Increased social connectedness/support

"RI Dosage effect": Greater attendance of RI groups is significantly associated with fewer and less severe total mental health symptoms, depressive symptoms, and anxiety symptoms. Greater attendance of RI groups also appears to help participants feel better about themselves, enhancing their self-esteem and coping mastery ability.

Peer to peer CBT: Numerous studies demonstrate the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral techniques in improving mental health. Most of these programs, however, are led by professionals. Our evaluation results support that peers can be similar instruments of change. RI's peer support and connections with others are vital to people struggling with mental health problems, particularly those who, like these newcomers, may have few people to turn to for help.

RI participation enhances mental health recovery. We attribute this result to several RI program components:

- **The Method and tools-** for example, "try, fail, try, fail, try, succeed"-- teaches participants that it takes many attempts to successfully change a behavior. By endorsing themselves for simply making an effort, RI participants are encouraged to keep trying, and to not give up.
- Attendees continually and consistently **practiced these skills amongst peers tackling similar challenges.**
- They had **peer group leaders who were real life examples of how to overcome** obstacles and achieve personal goals.

Across all interviews, participants reported that **nothing was unhelpful: quite the opposite, they found everything about the RI program to be helpful to them** and gave them important skills that help them better manage their daily lives.

Participants showed very good knowledge of RI methods and tools. Participants were able to quickly learn this information, and RI knowledge remained stable over time. Higher RI knowledge scores were associated with greater recovery and personal confidence.

Participants' internalization of negative public stereotypes of mental illness decreased over time. This suggests that RI participation appears to be a "stigma buster," helping to enforce a message that public negative stereotypes of mental illness do not diminish participants' self-worth.

"RI is lifesaving!"

To view the entire Study and Executive Summary
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