

# Member Retention in Consumer-Run Organizations

Dziadkowiec, Oliwier; Vu, Connie; Shagott, Todd; Reinhart, Crystal; Keele-Lien, Ashlee; Swink, Nathan; Banta, Adrienne; Hymer, Kimberly; Wituk, Scott; Meissen, Greg

*Center for Community Support and Research/Department of Psychology, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences*

**Abstract.** Consumer run-organizations (CROs) have been empowering and socially supportive settings chosen by mental health consumers as a complement or an alternative to traditional mental health services. According to previous research the benefits of actively attending and participating in CROs included increased social support, empowerment, and sense of community (2, 6 & 13). This poster will present findings from one of few longitudinal studies of mental health consumers in consumer-operate organizations in the United States. Results of this study will focus on the predictive relationship between age, hope, organizationally mediated empowerment, personal empowerment, empowerment-decision making, social participation, social network as related to member retention. Face-to faces interviews were conducted with CRO members from eight different Kansas CROs at baseline (N=172) and at a 12-month follow up (N=171). Discussion will focus on the reasons why some mental health consumers might be more likely than other mental health consumers to become long time CRO members and how should CROs use this information to ensure their longevity.

## 1. Introduction

The history of mental health consumer operated self-help groups, including consumer-run organizations (CROs), can be traced to the 1960's "ex-patient" movement [1]. This movement aimed to empower individuals with mental illness to take a more active role in their recovery from mental illness and reject the notion that mental illness is a disease that needs to be treated in the same way as physical illness [4]. CROs in Kansas operate as 501c3 non-profit peer support organizations staffed by and attended by individuals with serious and persistent mental illness. Staff and members work together to provide education, volunteering opportunities, recreational and wellness activities, advocacy, and peer support. CROs are most often attended by current or former consumers of the public mental health system mental health service system [9]. The core values in CROs are based on principles of peer support, recovery, and empowerment [4 & 10].

Consumer-run organizations, among other forms of peer-support have been designated as a promising new practice [8]. Some of the benefits of actively attending and participating in consumer-run organizations and other similar organizations include increased social support [2], increased social participation [11], increased participation in the community [13]; personal and organizational empowerment [11], increase in social networks [5], and reduction in hospitalization and psychological service utilization (12) Although there considerable amount has been done investigating the benefits of CROs [3 & 7], not much is know about the characteristics of individuals who become the long term members.

## 2. Methods

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 176 mental health consumers from 8 Kansas CROs at baseline (N=172) and at a 12-month follow up (N=171). A discriminant analysis of the baseline data was conducted in order to determine the predictors of membership at the 12-month follow up. The independent predictor variables included: age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, service utilization, reasons to come, social network size, social participation, organizationally mediated empowerment, empowerment-decision making, and hearth hope index. The outcome variable was membership status, which was a binary variable.

## 3. Results

A discriminant analysis was conducted to determine whether the thirteen predictors could predict CRO member retention 12 months from the baseline interview. The CRO members reported that that they were either still

members of their CRO (Yes group) or that they were not (No group). The overall Wilk's lambda was significant,  $\Lambda = .81$ ,  $\chi^2(13, N = 171) = 34.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .20$  indicating that overall the predictors differentiated among the two membership status groups. Because this test was significant we chose to interpret the discriminant function. The group centroids were .33 for the "Yes" group, and -.72 for the "No" group. Based on these coefficients, the number of years in the neighborhood, number of hours spent alone at home, age, and size of the social network respectively, demonstrated the strongest positive relationship with the discriminant function, and represent the "Yes" group. Personal empowerment was the most negatively correlated with discriminant function, which means that it represents the "No" group. CRO members who stayed in their CRO after 12 months ("Yes" group) lived in their neighborhood longer ( $M = 16.50$ ) than people who were no longer the members of the CRO ( $M = 8.90$ ), were older ( $M = 43.43$ ) than the people who are no longer attending the CRO ( $M = 42.00$ ), spent longer amounts at home by themselves ( $M = 1.15$ ) than people who were no longer members ( $M = .90$ ), had a larger social network ( $M = 6.26$ ), than people who are no longer attending the CRO ( $M = 4.91$ ). At the same time they were less likely to report more choice in their personal life ( $M = 16.01$ ) than people who were no longer members ( $M = 18.41$ ). Although not statistically significant at .05 level, CRO members in the "Yes" group scored higher on the three Neighborhood Sense of Community Factors.

### 3. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study are a bit surprising in relation to other CRO related literature. We found that being older, living longer in the neighborhood, bigger social network size, close relationships in the community, and longer amount of time spent home alone was more related to continued membership and variables such as organizationally mediated empowerment (OME), empowerment-decision making (EDM), and hope (HHI) were not related to continued CRO membership. This means that people who continue attending CROs are people more invested in their community with more roots and deep/meaningful relationship. These people have made their surrounding communities their home and whether it is staying at home or outside of home, they spend more time in their community and attending their CRO might be an important part of their community engagement. It's quiet interesting why personal empowerment was higher for individuals who have left their CROs before 12 months passed. Perhaps, since the non-member group was on average a bit younger and did not spend as much time at home, they did not feel like they fit in their community as much and looked elsewhere. Further analysis is needed to replicate these results on bigger samples.

### 4. Acknowledgements

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