

## Creating Meaning - People Living with Mental Illness in Switzerland

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**Introduction:** Mental illnesses have a large impact on individuals, their families and friends and communities. People living with mental illness often face discrimination and not the least within the health-care system. In this research project people living with mental illness in Switzerland share their stories. Out of these stories the Creating Meaning Theory was developed which sheds light on how the people concerned deal with their life situations.

**Objectives:** The aim of this research project was to explore and evaluate the personal experiences of people living with mental illness and to outline the process of adaptation within a new theory. This new understanding may help health-care providers and nurses to promote an improved quality of life and increased wellbeing.

**Methodology:** A constructivist and reflexive Grounded Theory approach was chosen for the study. Ten participants, people living with mental illness in Switzerland, were interviewed and additional data from various sources were included in the data analysis.

**Results:** Three categories form the theoretical framework of the Creating Meaning Theory, which summarises the experiences of the people interviewed for this study: Constructing explanations refers to the process of participants trying to understand what is going on in their lives. Defining self-identity points out that people living with mental illness provide themselves with an understanding of who they are. Making sense-of-life refers to the aspect, that the participants give situations meaning and take control over them. The findings support existing theories but add a new and unique understanding of people's experiences in living with mental illness.

**Conclusions:** The Creating Meaning Theory provides a new and unique understanding of the adaptation process to living with mental illness from a service user perspective. It is a non-linear, infinite and ongoing process. Their stories need to be heard, understood and transformed into action in real life, health-care and society.

**Keyword 1:** Creating Meaning

**Keyword 2:** Grounded Theory

**Keyword 3:** Mental Health and Illness

**Keyword 4:** Service User Perspective

**Keyword 5:** Adaptation to Illness

**Keyword 6:** Personal Recovery

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