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Challenges of Maintaining Sobriety for Adults in Recovery Returning to College

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2024

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MS, University of Phoenix, 2011

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Alcohol abuse is a prevalent problem among college students, with negative
consequences on academic performance, social interactions, and well-being. The purpose
of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and
challenges of sobriety for recovering adults returning to college. Sociocultural theory was
used to gain insights into participants' experiences including resilience, risk and
protective factors, and stress. Data were collected from semi structured interviews with
three college students who were recovering adults. The data included participants'
responses regarding intervention or mediation techniques that eased their barriers and
challenges during their academic journey. The findings revealed core themes surrounding
motivation for sobriety, recovery strategies, challenges and struggles, treatment
programs, personal journey, and future goals. Findings may be used to promote a more
inclusive and supportive educational environment by informing interventions and support
systems for recovering adults returning to college. The implications highlight the
potential for fostering positive social change through increased awareness of resilience
skills and protective factors that contribute to academic success for this population.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to the memory of my mother and father, Lucille and William Johns, who passed away in 1991 and 1995. I would like to thank God for carrying me through it all. To God be the glory. I would also like to give thanks to my daughter, Towana, and my granddaughters, Blaine and Challyn, for their ongoing support, prayers, and encouragement.

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personally thank you all so very much.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The prevalence of alcohol abuse among college students is a well-known and ongoing issue in U.S. society. However, little attention has been paid to the challenges faced by recovering adults who return to college and attempt to maintain sobriety. Research has shown that exposure to alcohol abuse negatively affects academic performance, social interactions, and overall well-being, which can be detrimental to a student's success in college (Mochrie, 2020). Addressing these challenges is crucial in supporting the academic success of recovering adults who return to college.

There have been several approaches to strategizing how these issues could be dealt with. However, a process that aims at keeping students from relapsing and encouraging them to return to school and continue with the system needs to be developed. According to Sweeney (2018), these students face many challenges that include demands of work, family, and other situational factors, which need to be dealt with to help the students succeed in their academic journey.

Background

Alcohol abuse is a prevalent problem among college students, with negative consequences on academic performance, social interactions, and well-being (Mochrie, 2020). Alcohol has been a common drug among college students, which has prompted its use by many college students, and there have been quantitative studies that have focused on individual responses about academic success and the difficulties that college students are exposed to after having to enroll back for a continuation of their studies (Toney et al., 2018). Although there has been research on the challenges faced by college students in

maintaining sobriety, little attention has been paid to the unique challenges faced by recovering adults who return to college. These challenges may include exposure to negative peer pressure, environmental factors, and personal struggles, which can hinder recovering adults' ability to maintain sobriety and succeed academically (Sweeney, 2018). Additionally, some students may have a history of alcoholism and alcohol abuse before going to college, making it difficult to abstain from alcohol completely. It was essential to understand the challenges faced by these students and develop tailored interventions to support them in their recovery journey. The current study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college by providing new insights and recommendations for effective interventions and support systems.

Problem Statement

Alcohol abuse is a significant problem among college students, with 30%–40% of college students engaging in binge drinking and heavy alcohol use (Wechsler et al, 2002). Individuals trying to maintain sobriety while returning to college may face unique challenges that can negatively impact their academic performance, social interactions, and overall well-being (Cimini et al. 2009). Although previous research explored this issue, there was a gap in the literature regarding the challenges faced by recovering adults returning to college, specifically their ability to maintain sobriety while pursuing a degree. This area had been identified as requiring further study. Situational barriers, such as personal financial constraints arising from family and community obligations, may exacerbate these challenges. Therefore, there was a need for a deeper understanding of

the challenges faced by this population. By exploring these challenges, the current study aimed to provide insights and recommendations for effective interventions and support systems to support recovering adults returning to college.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college. By exploring the experiences of recovering adults, the study provided insights and recommendations for effective interventions and support systems to promote their academic success. The study sought to contribute to the development of evidence-based practices for supporting recovering adults returning to college and maintaining their sobriety.

Research Question

The research question used to guide this study was the following: How do recovering adults returning to college experience the challenges of sobriety? I used this question to gather data and gain insights into the unique experiences and perspectives of recovering adults returning to college and their strategies to overcome the challenges of maintaining sobriety.

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural theory addresses how individuals' mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional, and historical contexts, with a focus on the roles that participation in social interactions and culturally organized activities play in influencing psychological development. Sociocultural theory was used to address the research question of how recovering adults returning to college experience challenges of sobriety (see Vygotsky,

1978). The theory also provided insights into social interactions and the cultural norms related to the college environment, which may influence students' recovery process. The concepts of resilience, risks, protective factors, and stress were also important in understanding the experiences of recovering alcoholics returning to college. The concept of resilience reflected the coping strategies that students in recovery use to overcome challenges. Risk and protective factors can help the students to recognize factors that can hinder or promote sobriety. Stress was also an important concept because it addressed the effects of stress on adult college students' experiences (see Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992). By exploring these concepts in the context of individuals who are recovering from addiction and attending college, the current study provided insights into the unique challenges and opportunities facing this population, and identified strategies and interventions that may support sustained recovery and promote positive outcomes.

Nature of the Study

A phenomenological approach was chosen as the research design in this study for exploring individuals' subjective experiences of challenges that college students face, such as stress and substance abuse (see Kenner, 2020). Phenomenology focuses on uncovering the essential structures of lived experiences, such as the challenges of maintaining sobriety among students returning to college. Phenomenology aims to understand how people make sense of their world. This approach is useful for exploring complex, subjective experiences that are difficult to measure quantitatively, such as emotions, beliefs, and attitudes (Kenner, 2020). By using a phenomenological approach, the researcher can gain a deeper understanding of how individuals experience and make

meaning of the phenomenon being studied and can provide rich and detailed descriptions of those experiences. Participants for the current study were selected from a population of recovering alcoholics who had returned or were returning to college. I used semi structured interviews to collect data from three students. The data collection included responses to interview questions about interventions such as treatment programs, relapse prevention programs, Alcohol Anonymous, and other organizational well-based programs including on-campus university support that can help ease the student's barriers and challenges during their academic progress (see Kenner, 2020). The use of personal interviews revealed narratives of students' lives and the experiences they faced after having been addicted to alcohol for a long time.

Definitions

Alcohol abuse: The excessive use of alcohol that interferes with physical and psychological health, social and work responsibilities, and overall well-being (American Psychological Association, 2017).

Alcoholism: A chronic and progressive disorder characterized by physical and psychological dependence on alcohol, tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms, and often accompanied by negative consequences in various areas of life (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

College students: According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), college students are individuals enrolled in postsecondary institutions, including universities, colleges, and vocational schools.

Interventions: Strategies and programs to help individuals overcome addiction and achieve sobriety (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2018).

On-campus university support: Resources and services colleges and universities provide to assist students in recovery (American College Health Association, 2019).

Relapse: A return to alcohol use after a period of abstinence (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2018).

Sobriety: The state of being abstinent from alcohol use (National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, 2020).

Treatment programs: Programs that provide support and resources to help individuals overcome addiction and achieve sobriety (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019).

Assumptions

There were three main assumptions associated with this study. I assumed that unique challenges are faced by individuals recovering from alcohol addiction and returning to college. I also assumed that the participants in the study would be willing and able to share their individual experiences and perspectives. Finally, I assumed that the participants selected for the study were representative of the larger population of individuals recovering from alcohol addiction and returning to college.

Scope and Delimitations

The nature of social reality related to recovering alcoholics has a wide range of causes such as mental health challenges, genetic predisposition due to addiction, peer pressure, and other resulting factors. The sample selected for the current study included

individuals who had a history of alcohol addiction and were in recovery or had achieved sobriety and were enrolled in a postsecondary educational institution. This study did not investigate other forms of addiction or mental health conditions that may impact the recovery process. The study also did not explore the causes of alcohol addiction or the impact of genetic predisposition on addiction. The study did not investigate the experiences of family members, other support systems, or college students who are currently using alcohol. The study included individuals who are recovering adults returning to college. Finally, the study did not investigate other theoretical or conceptual frameworks relevant to the topic, such as mental health, peer pressure, or other forms of addiction.

Limitations

Qualitative research is often limited by self-reported data and the fallibility of human memory (Toney et al., 2018). Participants may not remember critical occurrences fully, affecting their experiences' accuracy. Another limitation is the transferability of the findings. The current study focused on the experiences of a population of recovering adults returning to college, and the results of this study may not apply to other groups or situations. In addition, the validity of this study was based on the dependability of the participants' accounts, which may have been affected by social desirability bias or other factors. Another potential bias in this study was self-selection bias. The participants who agreed to participate in the study may not be an accurate reflection of the larger population of recovering adults returning to college. Although I attempted to secure a diverse sample of participants from different backgrounds and experiences, the intent of

this study was not to generalize to the population of interest. To address these limitations, I took reasonable measures including using member checking to ensure the accuracy of the participants' accounts. I was also transparent about the limitations in the discussion of the findings and provided suggestions for future research.

<div align="center">**Significance**</div>

This study may be significant because it addressed a gap in recent research by exploring the unique challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college. These challenges include stress, peer pressure, lack of support, time management, and coping with triggers (Kenner, 2020; Mochrie. 2020; Sweeney, 2018). First, college can be stressful, which can be particularly challenging for those who may be more sensitive to stress and may be more prone to relapse if they cannot manage their stress effectively (Sweeney, 2018). Additionally, college campuses can be where alcohol and drug use is prevalent, which can be a challenging environment for those in recovery to navigate. It may be difficult to resist the pressure to drink or use drugs, especially if a person's peers participate in these activities (Mochrie, 2020).

Second, finding a support system on a college campus can be challenging, especially if a person is trying to maintain sobriety. It may be helpful to seek support groups or counseling services to help with the challenges of returning to college in recovery (Kenner, 2020). Furthermore, balancing schoolwork, healing, and other responsibilities can be a challenge for anyone, especially those needing to prioritize their recovery over other commitments (Spaid-Ross, 2020).

Last, college campuses can be full of triggers for those in recovery, such as parties or social events where alcohol is present. It may be helpful to have a plan in place for coping with these triggers and seeking support when needed (Sweeney, 2018). Research supported the notion that college can be a stressful and pressure-filled environment, and this stress can be a trigger for those in recovery. Finding healthy ways to cope with stress and avoid turning to substances can also be challenging.

The current study may supply insight into the struggles and experiences of recovering college students as they work toward completing their degrees. In addition, the findings from this study may have implications for professional counselors. Social change may be addressed by providing counselors with a deeper understanding of the experiences and needs of this population (Toney et al., 2018). Additionally, the current study may help create awareness and account for the challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college, thereby promoting a more inclusive and supportive environment on college campuses (see Sweeney, 2018).

Summary

There are many challenges students experience while in sobriety and returning to college. The current study explored how recovering alcoholic adults returning to college experience these challenges and maintain sobriety. Alcohol abuse among college students is significant and can affect their education. This has been identified as an area that requires further exploration. The current study focused on strategies that could be employed to help students remain sober when returning to college for an ongoing academic program. This study may be significant because it addressed a gap in recent

research by exploring the unique challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college. Current study findings may inform the development of interventions and support systems to help these individuals achieve academic success while maintaining sobriety.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature relevant to the challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college. I examine the stress of university life and its impact on student health, the importance of resilience in college students, and the substance use by college students. I also explore stress and triggers, social pressures, lack of support, balancing academic studies, and recovery according to the findings in the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review is designed to explore, support, and justify the study of alcohol abuse among college students. This qualitative study examined the challenges of sobriety among recovering adults returning to college. Alcohol abuse is associated with an increased prevalence of adverse outcomes, including diminished academic performance, social and interpersonal difficulties, and engagement in risky behaviors (Mochrie, 2020). According to Mochrie (2020), binge drinking results from increased risks to the sobriety of recovering college students. Mochrie stated that *binge drinking* is defined as consuming more than five drinks occasionally and is common among adults between 18 and 34 years of age. Binge drinking is a harmful risk behavior often associated with severe and multiple diseases. Mochrie further stated that this behavior is associated with an increased risk of alcohol use disorder. Although binge drinking is extreme, it is also a preventable public health problem. College students experiencing sobriety have reported that 50% have indulged in these behaviors.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022), binge drinking is one of the most common, costly, and deadly patterns involving excessive alcohol use in the United States. Exploring the challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college is essential because sobriety plays a significant role in the success or failure of college students if the problem is not addressed (Mochrie, 2020). More research was needed to understand the challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college. In this literature review, I address relevant topics to understand better the challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college**.**

Literature Search Strategy

I searched for articles in the following databases: PsycINFO, APA PSYC articles Thoreau, National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the International Drug Abuse Research Abstract Database. The keywords I used included *mental health services*, *health* and *mental health treatment* and *prevention*, *barriers to mental health care*, *social disengagement*, and *adult lifelong learning*. Additional keywords included *qualitative research*, *addiction*, *undergraduate students*, *collegiate recovery programs*, *returning to college after treatment*, *feelings of exclusion*, *disclosure*, *social support*, and *identity*.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of this study consisted of sociocultural theories and related research. The focus was the influence of participation in social interactions in culturally organized activities on psychological development. This theory was a contribution to the outcome because it guided the research with the notion that the culture of the program will influence clients' perception of their most relevant success-related experiences.

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory is a comprehensive theory that involves how societal and cultural factors influence the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of an individual or group (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory is used to explain how individual mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional, and historical context. Resilience is also an important concept that was used to show the factors resulting from the interactive process between

individuals, families, schools, and communities (see Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992).

Sociocultural theory involves social interaction and plays a prominent role in psychological development. Human learning is a social process with cognitive functions formed based on interactions with those who are better skilled (Cherry, 2022). Higher order cognitive functions are influenced by parents, caregivers, peers, and the cultural environment (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, learning is based on interacting with other people, and once this has occurred, information is integrated on individual levels (Vygotsky, 1978). Cherry (2022) concurred with Vygotsky in that the surrounding culture influences a person's cognitive development. Another point of view is that an individual's mental functioning is not simply derived from social interaction; specific structures and processes, as revealed by individuals, can be traced to interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1978).

Sociocultural Theories and Related Research

According to O'Leary (2021), addiction was at one time considered caused by degeneration of morals and self-control and was considered as much a disease as diabetes and depression. Identified genetic markers make certain people predisposed to substance abuse. However, many cultural and social factors can lead to addiction issues in many people. O'Leary noted that five sociocultural factors could cultivate addiction: bonding experience, relief from stress, a sense of community, the allure of rebelling, and lifestyle appeal. Bonding experience is essential because it reflects the individual's struggle related to peers, the stress of socialization, and the need to function through social

anxiety. Today, it is commonplace for groups of friends to plan social gatherings around the presence of alcohol. The influence of alcohol, often referred to as the social lubricant, has been known to end some of these anxieties, making people feel more confident. In addition, allowing peer interaction to become more durable makes people feel less worried about rejection (O'Leary, 2021).

Sociocultural Theories Applied to the Current Study

Relief from stress is another common reason for people to overindulge. Often the pressures of everyday life, such as feeling overwhelmed, can bring about stress. Often drugs and/or alcohol is used as an outlet to temporarily escape reality, which may also cause a person to self-medicate as a means of relief. Although this is typical, it is also harmful when used as justification for frequent intoxication and is a common precursor to full-blown addiction (O'Leary, 2021). However, those who feel overwhelmed by the amount of stress experienced on a day-to-day basis have several healthy alternatives available to help manage their stress (e.g., meditation and guided breathing exercises, both physical and emotional). Meditation and mindfulness exercises have shown that behaviors believed to be immutable, such as addiction, can be positively and significantly improved. Also, counseling and stress management programs can be effective (O'Leary, 2021).

Another social factor that contributes to addiction is the tendency for drugs and alcohol abuse to promote group solidarity and feelings of community and belonging. This is a social influence that can develop in adolescents and carry forward to the college/university campus community. There has been research on the ability of positive

peer groups to aid in addiction recovery because impressionable individuals are more likely to take advice from others perceived as being like them with comparable backgrounds and interests (O'Leary, 2021).

The allure of rebelling is another issue that can cause the abuse of alcohol and other substance abuse problems. An example of this is that students often act against authority, the limitations imposed on them in their daily lives, and the norms and expectations of society. Studies have also suggested that alcohol/substance abuse can be the platform from which adolescents derive a sense of identity. Although this is more often applied to adolescents, it is the beginning of an ongoing problem that can carry over to the adult college student.

The appeal of lifestyle is also a sociocultural factor. The factors involved include the individuals who often find the lifestyle of the substance/alcohol abuser appealing and glamorous. Often these individuals will notice the way a community of alcohol abusers dress, along with the things they do for fun and the music they listen to. The individuals may also notice the attitude toward structure and responsibility the alcohol abuser presents and could find this lifestyle appealing. However, the novelty of such a lifestyle may entice onlookers who may fail to see the negative aspects.

Stress of University Life and Its Impact on Student Health

University students face challenges associated with the inflated cost of living, which leads to stress-related academic pressure. University students often face difficulties demanding higher level coursework where much concentration is needed. This can lead to feelings of insecurity and can make it difficult to focus on coursework. There are other

challenges such as social pressures and underlying responsibilities. Social pressures can be a significant source of stress for students returning to college. Making new friends and fitting into an unfamiliar environment can make students feel like their peers and professors are constantly evaluating them. This can lead to feelings of insecurity and can make it difficult for the returning student to feel accepted or supported.

Anderson et al. (2020) conducted a study examining the stress and triggers of university life and its impact on student health. The study found that university students experience increased academic pressure, financial worries, and social pressures leading to overwhelming responsibilities, which can lead to physical and mental problems. The many responsibilities that university students must manage can also add to the stress of university life. With the pressure to succeed academically, students often feel overwhelmed by the work and activities they must balance. This can lead to feeling overwhelmed and unproductive, leading to physical and mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. University students can also be subject to substance and alcohol abuse. The lack of support college students face in recovery can significantly affect their academic access and long-term recovery.

Boke et al. (2019) reported that stress is a common experience for university students. Boke et al. investigated how traditional and nontraditional students cope with the stress of being university students. According to Boke et al., the elevated stress levels of university life and limited healthy coping abilities lead to experimentation and eventual addiction to drugs and alcohol. Boke et al. surveyed 5,917 undergraduate students to understand the relationship between university stress and drug and substance

abuse. The results indicated that elevated stress levels were associated with drugs and alcohol abuse as coping mechanisms, particularly in later years of study (third year and beyond). These findings are significant because they suggest universities and colleges worldwide must incorporate healthy coping programs for their students to prevent drug and alcohol addiction and associated disadvantages.

M. A. Bell et al. (2009) reported that students recovering from alcohol face unique challenges in a university setting. However, little was known about how they negotiated recovery maintenance. At the time of this study, the focus was on exploring how recovery maintenance differs concerning the type of identity. In this study, 15 students recovering from alcohol and other drug abuse entered a university recovery program. The study was a qualitative analysis that consisted of semistructured interviews conducted multiple times during students' first academic year. The results showed that the college experience differed depending on the recovery identity type. However, the analysis also showed that specific challenges were present for all students. The results implied that further research for developing programs and practitioners who work with recovering students on a college campus was necessary.

Hingson et al. (2017) studied the slight decreases in heavy episodic drinking in recent years. The study reported that 37.4% of college-age individuals engaged in past-month heavy episodic drinking. Heavy episodic drinking was also associated with alcohol-related consequences such as intoxicated driving, fights, assaults, and medical/legal issues. These consequences contribute to the substantial public health and economic burden of college students' alcohol misuse in the United States. This research

was essential to my study because it reflected the importance of the mechanisms underlying college students' decision to consume alcohol at elevated levels despite incurring the associated personal costs. The results also suggest that college students who discount the future more steeply and with greater alcohol demand and proportionate substance-related reinforcement are at the highest risk for alcohol-related behaviors. In contrast, students who show steep discounting may not be at risk.

Jennings et al. (2018) explored the lack of support college students face in recovery from substance or alcohol abuse. The study revealed that many college students in recovery faced difficulties finding necessary resources to help them stay sober, including limited access to peer support, inadequate access to treatment facilities, and stigma associated with recovery. The study indicated that college students in recovery need more access to resources, support, and treatment to help them stay sober and achieve academic success.

Challenges Faced by Students in Recovery From Substance Abuse

Hunter-Johnson (2017) explored the educational resilience of nontraditional students and the challenges they face in achieving their academic ambitions. Nontraditional students include student body members with characteristics that differ from traditional students. For example, adult learners are considerably older than their classmates and schoolmates. According to Hunter-Johnson, nontraditional students experience various challenges due to the unique circumstances influencing their education. However, the desire for professional growth and development often supersedes some of these barriers. Financial problems are not the only difficulties

nontraditional students may have trouble resolving, even if they have an ardent desire to grow professionally. Nontraditional learners may have other constraints including domestic, work, financial, and social commitment (Hunter-Johnson, 2017). This research was essential because it addressed the retention and barrier issues of nontraditional and traditional college students.

Iarussi (2018) used the phenomenological method to study the experiences of college students in recovery. This study gave a voice to the experiences of full-time college students who identified as being in recovery, barriers to recovery among college students, and resources to support recovery. Six main themes were established: navigating the stigma of addiction, balancing recovery with multiple roles and responsibilities, the impact of recovery on academics and work, changes in relationships because of recovery, enhancing overall wellness, and use of recommendations for recovery-based recovery services and resources. These themes described the participants' experiences because these experiences "belong" to these participants. The participants in this study shared their stories so counselors and other helping professionals could better understand the experiences of college students in recovery. However, this study lacked racially and ethnically diverse participants. Additional research was needed with a more diverse student population.

Academic Success of Students Age 50–70

Imlach et al. (2017) explored factors affecting older adults' academic success. Imlach et al. noted that although researchers had found predictors of academic success in young adults, such factors were less likely to affect the academic success of the older

college student population. One reason for this situation is that the adult student populations make up a small percentage of college students, making it difficult to study them. Therefore, Imlach et al. examined psychological, cognitive, genetic, and lifetime predictors of university-level success among students age 50 to 70. Most participants were female (71%) with higher academic qualifications than high school diplomas. This research was essential because it ruled out age as a factor in academic success and suggested that other issues be studied, such as cognitive domains of episodic language, memory processing, and midlife engagements, which can also affect success.

Johnston et al. (2020) completed a study that watched the future (MTF) as a long-term study of substance use and related factors among U.S. adolescents, college students, and adult high school graduates through the age of sixty. This study is conducted annually and is supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. The MTF findings name emerging substance use problems, track substance uses trends, and inform national policy and intervention strategies. This study is essential as it is an ongoing, long-term study of significance and other related factors affecting adolescents, college students, and adult high school graduates through the age of sixty. The research found emerging substance use problems and tracked substance abuse trends. These findings also addressed national policy and intervention strategies.

Commonly, older adults returning to college after recovery from alcohol abuse face many challenges in the pursuit of academic success. Zhou et al. (2019) conducted a study to examine the success of older adults in college. The study provided various conclusions, such as Low motivation, insecurity, fear of failure, and concerns about

drinking again. The study also locked into the challenge of difficulty in keeping up with the workload by juggling work, family, and other essential commitments. These factors were determined to be key challenges the older adult student must experience. Another critical finding is that adult students may have limited social relations with peers and fail to reach the limits of their capabilities in college. However, the study concluded that providing older adults with support and resources, such as online classes and career counseling, can help them succeed in college.

Use of Substances by College Students

Ko et al. (2019) investigated relationships between resilience, social anxiety, and procrastination in a sample of college students. These studies have shown that resilience can be viewed as a stress-coping ability and reported that resilient individuals tend to show well-adjusted social behaviors and positive emotions. The relationship between resilience and anxiety has been documented in several studies (Ko et al. (2019). The importance of this research as related to my study can supply insight into the construction of resilience training programs for effective learning to enable adult college students to manage difficulties appropriately without using any mind-altering substance.

Lapina (2018) supplied an overview of the meaning of coping in adult experience. Managing adult learning-based environments is relevant because stressful experiences are sometimes inevitable. Three main types of coping strategies are distinguished to either solve the problem (problem-focused coping), avoid the problem (avoidance coping), or reduce anxiety and other negative emotions (emotion-focused coping) in learning-based contexts. The author also recommended practicing mindfulness to promote problem-

focused coping. The results are essential to my study as it addresses the effects of various coping strategies and the role of reflection in learning approaches to coping in stressful situations.

Mochrie (2020) examined differences in substance use, depression, and academic functioning among ADHD and non-ADHD college students. Substance abuse is a significant problem among college students, with alcohol/drug use associated with increased adverse outcomes, such as diminished academic performance, social-interpersonal difficulties, and engagement in risky behaviors. This report reflects that up to 50% of college students report binge drinking, directly resulting in these increased risks. This research is essential to my study as it addresses the adverse outcomes of college students with alcohol/drug use.

Importance of Resilience in College Students

Resilience can help students cope with the difficulties of university life, academic pressure, financial worries, and social pressures and provide students with the necessary resources to build resilience. As a result, universities can help students better manage these challenges and increase their success in college. Chai et al. (2017) conducted a study exploring the importance of resilience in college students. The study found that college students need to develop the strength to cope with the challenges of university life, such as academic pressure, financial worries, social pressures and maintaining recovery from alcohol abuse and or substance abuse. The study concluded that universities should provide students with resources to help them develop resilience

through counseling, peer support networks, stress management techniques and substance abuse programs.

Peer support networks can offer students a sense of community and connection, which can help reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. Stress management techniques such as mindfulness and relaxation can help students take control of their emotions and develop resilience. Substance abuse programs such as multiple prevention and intervention strategies implemented for selected at-risk students on college campuses would also help the recovering college students. By offering these resources, universities can foster a supportive environment for their students.

Osam based the study on the composition of a college population that has shifted to an older adult learning population. Osama's (2017) article found several barriers facing this student population. These situational barriers address personal financial constraints arising from family and community obligations. Also included with these referenced barriers are diagnosed depression, anxiety, and the student's fears of failure. Therefore, this research is essential as it addresses a few situational barriers associated with adult undergraduate students returning to college.

Sweeney (2018) investigated the individual experiences of adult undergraduate students to understand their feelings about how they succeeded in completing their bachelor's degree programs. Some evidence exists that those adult students returning to college are returning because of experiencing the demands of work and family, along with other situational barriers, such as a diagnosis of depression and anxiety. These students may face unique challenges in readjusting to academic life, which might lead to

the failure of the students to complete their degrees. Findings from this research supplied a greater awareness of how adult undergraduates could progress to graduation. However, the literature leaves entirely or partially unanswered how some adults complete their college degrees and graduate while others fall to obstacles that undermine their persistence.

Thompson-Ebanks (2017) examined the experiences of former students with depression and nontraditional age who dropped out of school, the reasons for their premature departure, and the barriers preventing them from returning. The author used constant comparative methods to illuminate the themes in and beyond the participants' stories. In the end, the author published a list of eight complex yet interlocking factors that these former college students deal with in their search for higher education. In addition, Thompson-Ebanks considered the students' barriers when returning to school to influence educators and policymakers to create an enabling environment for nontraditional students. This research is essential as it addresses a few complex and interlocking factors adult college students have experienced, which may cause difficulties in returning to college.

Dr Ungar (2002) directed the Resilience Research Center, designing multisite longitudinal research and evaluation projects. One of the principles of Dr Ungar's research was about resilience. According to Dr Ungar (2002), resilience is a process that measures how well a system integrates environmental shocks and initiates new behavioral regimes. This theory was incorporated into the recovery process (also described as a system's capacity to "bounce back". Which implies a return to the level of

"normal" because recovery is a complex process of rebuilding and repair. This is essential in helping college students cope with these challenges of recovery and achieve success. The results also suggest several barriers to college student success, including financial constraints, depression, anxiety, and situational barriers.

The review indicates that college administrators and educators should develop strategies to help students overcome these barriers to maximize academic success. The implications of this review for positive social change include providing recommendations for college administrators and educators on how to support college students best and increase college student success. This study suggests that college administrators and educators should develop strategies to help students overcome barriers, such as stress and substance use, to maximize their academic success. The results of this review can be used to inform college administrators and educators on best-supporting college students to maximize their academic success, which could lead to positive social change.

Barriers to Success for College Students From Foster Care

The lack of financial resources for college students from foster care can create significant barriers to success. These students may not be able to afford the necessary tuition and other fees. Inadequate academic preparation can also impede their educational progress, as this population of students may struggle to keep up with the rigorous demands of college-level courses. Often this population of students also experience other barriers such as alcohol and or drug abuse. Jones et al. (2019) conducted a study investigating the barriers to success for college students from foster care. The study found that college students from foster care often face various challenges, such as recovery

from alcohol and or substance abuse, lack of financial resources, inadequate academic preparation, and difficulty in accessing necessary support services. The study concluded that universities should provide these students with access to resources, such as scholarships, mentorship programs, and counseling services. The lack of these resources can determine the fate of these students. However, providing these students with access to these resources, universities can help alleviate the barriers to success they face.

Okpych and Courtney (2021) explored and analyzed secondary data collected from one of the most comprehensive foster youth longitudinal studies. The analytic sample was 329 individuals and derived from three states in the Midwestern area. The authors examined the student's degree completion up to 29-30 years of age. In addition, Researchers collected data from national Student Clearinghouse records and students who supplied information about their degree programs through self-report survey data. The authors noted that the students from foster care homes were less than 50 per cent of first-generation students from poor backgrounds to complete a degree program within six years. In addition, the college student body includes individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences. (Okpych & Courtney,2021). This research is essential as the author's findings suggested that life circumstances such as financial hardships and the necessity to work may also be barriers that adult college student experiences when entering college for the first time or returning to college.

Summary

This literature review focuses on the challenges faced by recovering adults returning to college and maintaining sobriety while pursuing academic success. This

review covers assorted topics including the impact of stress, substance abuse, challenges faced by students in recovery, and factors affecting the academic success of older adults. This literature review provided insight into the challenges faced by university students, particularly those in recovery from substance and/or alcohol abuse and non-traditional students. Exploring the challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college is essential, as sobriety plays a significant role in the success or failure of college students if the problem is not addressed (Mochrie,2020). The present research could fill a gap by concentrating on the challenges of sobriety and universities and colleges incorporating healthy coping programs to help prevent drug and alcohol abuse. The study's research findings might help researchers better understand the experiences and challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college.

The following chapter, chapter three, will describe how this research will be conducted. The description will include the methodological design and rationale, along with a detailed description of the instruments to be used. Data collection, analysis, and will also include trustworthiness and ethics related to this research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Through a qualitative approach, this research aimed to explore the challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college. By exploring the experiences of recovering adults, the study provided new insights and recommendations for effective interventions and support systems to promote their academic success. The study sought to contribute to the development of evidence-based practice for supporting recovering adults returning to college and maintaining their sobriety.

Research Design and Rationale

This study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the primary method for data collection and analysis (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al, 1999). IPA was well-suited for the current study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of how individuals make sense of their personal and social worlds, especially in relation to significant life experiences (see Smith et al., 1999). The choice of IPA aligned with my aim to understand the lived experiences of recovering adults as they navigate the challenges of sobriety while returning to college. As Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) explained, IPA is rooted in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. This approach recognizes that the investigator plays an active role in the research process, engaging in a double hermeneutic in which they attempt to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their experiences (Smith et al, 1999).

Role of the Researcher

In the current study, my job was to investigate the difficulties that recovering college students' experience to understand their experiences better. I used a qualitative

approach. In doing this, I interviewed recovering adults who had recently returned to college (see J. Bell & Waters, 2018). In addition, I reviewed earlier studies that addressed the difficulties that this population had experienced. I recognized that my biases and power relationships may influence the research process, and the data collected. To manage any potential biases and power relationships, I took several steps.

First, I was transparent with the participants about their role and the purpose of the study, ensuring that they had a clear understanding of what was expected of them and how the data would be used. Second, I worked to build a rapport with the participants, establishing an open and honest communication channel that encouraged them to share their experiences freely. Third, I took steps to minimize any personal biases by engaging in ongoing self-reflection and seeking input from my research team. Finally, I followed established research ethics guidelines and practices to ensure that all participants were treated fairly and with respect and that their confidentiality and privacy were protected throughout the research process. By taking these steps, I helped to ensure that the research process was conducted in a professional, nonbiased, and ethical manner.

Methodology

I adopted the IPA as the design for this study, which focused on participants' lived experiences in the world and placed a strong emphasis on data collection and analysis. This method was suitable for gaining insight into specific ideas, opinions, or experiences (Heidegger, 2018; Smith, 2011). The data were collected through in-depth semi structured interviews with all participants. I asked open-ended questions to extract information from participants, making the interview the primary data collection tool. This

method allowed for flexibility because I could pursue emerging themes throughout the interview process. Given the exploratory nature of the study, a close relationship between me and the participants was crucial. Therefore, a smaller sample of participants was selected.

Participant Selection Logic

When selecting participants for the study, I ensured that individuals matched the criterion of recovering persons attending college. To accomplish this, I had to decide what makes a person eligible to be called a recovering person and what makes someone eligible to be called a college student. I defined a recovering person as an individual currently engaged in recuperating from an addiction such as alcoholism or drug use. Similarly, I decided that attending college refers to studying in a more traditional educational environment, such as a university (see Begun, 2018). Once these definitions were established, I was able to begin the process of identifying people who fit those criteria.

Population Sample

I intended to recruit at least 6 to 10 participants for the study using the identified inclusion criteria. This sample size had been recommended by IPA methodologists as sufficient to provide a diversity of meaningful insights into the research topic while also allowing for an in-depth exploration of each participant's experience (see Smith, 2011). Furthermore, this sample size was manageable for me, enabling the collection and analysis of data within a reasonable time frame. The selection criteria assumed that these individuals may be struggling with maintaining sobriety and faced challenges accessing

resources or coping mechanisms to succeed academically. The participants were selected using a purposive snowball sampling method, which is a nonprobability sampling approach (Patton, 2014).

Procedures Involving the Participants

The procedures for participant identification, contact, and recruitment for this study involved a few steps. First, I had to find potential participants. Contacting college counseling and recovery centers was not effective because these organizations must maintain the confidentiality of their clients. Therefore, the centers were not able to directly provide me with the names and contact details of potential participants. Instead, they were able to distribute my study invitation to eligible individuals. Using online resources such as social media, forums, and online support groups was effective in finding potential participants. However, due to privacy and consent issues, I posted a general invitation to participate in my research and allowed potential participants to contact me. I also requested a letter of cooperation from the organization's college counselors and recovery center outlining the site's responsibility and my responsibility as related to the participants for my study.

Relationship Between Saturation and Sample Size

Saturation occurs when the data collected from the sample capture all of the essential information regarding the research topic (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The sample size of 10 individuals may not have been large enough to reach saturation because the study was concerned with people recovering from alcohol abuse, which may be a rare occurrence. Therefore, additional individuals may have been needed to accurately capture

the experiences and opinions of those in the study population. However, due to factors such as time and my level of involvement in the study, a sample size of three participants was incorporated into the study.

Instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument for this study was a researcher-produced semi structured interview guide. This guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore participants' experiences with maintaining sobriety while returning to college. The guide was developed based on a thorough review of relevant literature on addiction recovery and academic challenges faced by nontraditional students. To establish content validity, I invited two experts in the field of addiction recovery and higher education to review the interview guide. Their feedback was incorporated to ensure the questions adequately addressed the research objectives. An audio recorder was used to capture participants' responses accurately.

The chosen instrument was deemed sufficient to answer the research question for the following reasons:

1. The semi structured interview guide allowed for in-depth exploration of individual experiences, which was crucial for understanding the unique challenges faced by recovering adults returning to college.

2. The open-ended nature of the interview questions provided flexibility to probe deeper into specific areas of interest that emerged during the interviews.

3. Audio recording ensured accurate capture of participants' responses, allowing for detailed analysis of their narratives.

In addition to the interview data, archived data in physical and electronic formats were consulted. These included institutional reports on student support services and peer-reviewed journal articles on addiction recovery in educational settings. These sources were reputable because they were either official institutional documents or had undergone rigorous peer-review processes. They provided valuable contextual information and complemented the primary interview data by offering broader perspectives on the topic. Although other data collection instruments such as observation sheets, focus group protocols, and videotapes were considered, they were not used in this study for the following reasons:

- The sensitive nature of addiction recovery made direct observation potentially intrusive and ethically challenging.

- The personal nature of addiction experiences could have made participants uncomfortable sharing in a group setting, potentially limiting the depth of information gathered.

- Similar to direct observation, video recording was deemed too intrusive for the sensitive topic at hand.

All data collected were stored confidentially for the safety of the participants in the study. Participants were allowed to review their collected data upon request. Redactions were used to de-identify any sensitive information. The process consisted of expunging sensitive data before manually transcribing them. The initial coding was done manually to allow for deep immersion in the data. Codes were developed inductively from the data, with a focus on capturing the essence of participants' experiences. Coded

numbers and letters were used to replace the real names of the participants to minimize the risk of unintended disclosure. This analysis process allowed for a rich exploration of how recovering adults experience challenges to sobriety when returning to college. By identifying common themes and unique experiences, I developed a nuanced understanding of this phenomenon that directly addressed the research question.

My interview questions included the following:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what motivated you to pursue a return to college?

2. What specific tools, routines, and/or social support systems are you utilizing to maintain your sobriety?

3. Can you share the moment or experience when you became aware of your struggle with alcohol abuse?

4. When you started college, did you seek assistance from college campus counselors or support services?

5. Can you describe your personal journey of recovery thus far?

6. What are some effective strategies or tools you employ to support your ongoing sobriety?

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis followed the IPA guidelines as outlined by Smith et al. (1999) and further elaborated by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014). This process involved several iterative steps:

- multiple close readings of each transcript, making initial notes on content, language use, and conceptual comments (see Smith et al., 1999);

- developing emergent themes by analyzing and interpreting the initial notes, looking for patterns and connections (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014);

- searching for connections across emergent themes within each case, potentially creating superordinate themes (see Smith et al., 1999);

- moving to the next case and repeating Steps 1–3, treating each case individually to maintain IPA's idiographic commitment (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014); and

- looking for patterns across cases, identifying shared themes and unique experiences (see Smith et al., 1999).

Throughout this process, the analysis engaged in the hermeneutic circle, moving between the part and the whole, the particular and the shared, and description and interpretation (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This approach allowed for a deep engagement with the data and ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' lived experiences. IPA's theoretical foundations in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) made IPA particularly suitable for the current study. The phenomenological aspect allowed me to focus on the lived experiences of recovering adults returning to college. The hermeneutic element acknowledged the interpretative nature of the analysis, recognizing that my conceptions were necessary to make sense of the participants' personal world through a process of interpretative activity (see Smith et al., 1999). Finally, the idiographic commitment of

IPA ensured that each participant's unique experience was valued before moving to more general claims (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, as related to qualitative research, is the methodological soundness and adequacy in which researchers can make judgments of trustworthiness through the development of four major components (Stahl & King, 2020). These components consist of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

According to Stahl and King (2020), credibility represents the confidence of the qualitative researchers in the study's findings, ensuring that these findings are accurate and dependable. The current study was conducted using qualitative techniques such as interviews to provide an in-depth examination of the topic and ensure the credibility of the data obtained. This helped me ensure that the findings were representative of the sample population and that a thorough qualitative analysis of the collected data guaranteed the findings' trustworthiness and the conclusions' correctness.

Transferability

According to Stahl and King (2020), transferability in qualitative research refers to how the researcher can apply the study's findings to other contexts. The participants of the current study consisted of men and women recovering from alcohol abuse returning to college. I developed thick descriptions of the participants' experiences by collecting rich, detailed data using open-ended questions in interviews, and the gathering of audiovisual materials. I also provided direct quotes from the participants that provided

vivid details of their lived experiences and conveyed emotions and feelings. I also established a plan in which the participants could review the results to corroborate the findings. Transferability can be used to explore how individuals can transfer the skills and knowledge they have acquired in their sobriety journey to the college environment (Espinal et al., 2022).

Dependability

According to Stahl and King (2020), the extent that this study could be repeated by other researchers and that the findings would be consistent. A few strategies that can be incorporated into the researchers check of the stability of qualitative research, would consist of member checking, peer debriefing, negative case analysis and audit trails. Member checking would involve sharing the findings with participants to ensure that they accurately reflect their experiences. Peer debriefing would consist of allowing another researcher to review the research process and findings to ensure that they are accurate and unbiased. Negative case analysis is a strategy that would examine data that does not fit with the overall findings to ensure that the findings are not biased or incomplete. Audit trials are most important as they are documents used in the research process and ensure they are transparent and replicable. (Morse, et al, 2002). According to (Morse, et al,2002). Interviews with these individuals can help to identify their experiences, struggles and successes and how dependability has been a factor in their journey. Through these conversations, patterns and themes can be found that can inform more effective support and guidance for those in recovery.

Confirmability

According to Stahl and King (2020), confirmability is the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings. Which means that the findings were based on the participants' responses and not the researcher's biases. As the researcher I will ensure that the study results are valid, researchers will need to consider the context in which the research is taking place (Choi et al., 2023). This includes understanding the participants' experiences, the environment in which they are returning to college, and any potential biases that may be present. Additionally, triangulation can improve confirmability, which involves gathering data from multiple sources and perspectives. This could include interviews with college staff, administrators, and recovering adults, field observations. and document analysis. Therefore, it is also important to consider the confirmability of the research by ensuring that the data is collected consistently and unbiasedly and that the findings accurately reflect participants 'perspectives.

Ethical Procedures

The researcher kept several ethical considerations in mind while conducting research on sobriety among individuals who were either starting or returning to college after recovery. Firstly, the participants gave their informed consent and had a clear understanding of the purpose and scope of the study. They also had the option to ask questions and withdraw from the study at any time. Secondly, the confidentiality of the participants was strictly maintained to protect their anonymity. Finally, the researcher was sensitive to the participant's experiences and avoided causing undue stress or discomfort.

Summary

The proposed qualitative research study explored the challenges of sobriety in recovering adults returning to college. The study sought to contribute to the development of evidence-based practice for supporting recovering adults returning to college and maintaining their sobriety. I planned to conduct semi-structured interviews that were audio-recorded. I then planned to transcribe recordings and follow the seven-step data analysis method of Smith et al. (2012) to analyze and interpret the data from the interviews, including taking exploratory notes and creating experiential statements. I attempted to address issues of trustworthiness through being dedicated to ensuring that my research is credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. I abided by all ethical procedures enforced by the IRB to minimize harm to my participants by respecting participants' right to privacy, autonomy, and dignity. Chapter 4 begins with a brief overview of the intent of the study and provides a detailed discussion of the results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of recovering adults'
challenges of sobriety when returning to college. IPA was used as the guide to collect and
analyze data from three participants. This chapter describes the settings, demographics,
data collection methods, data analysis procedures, evidence of trustworthiness, and
results of the study.

Setting

The participants for this study were recruited through the Walden University
participant pool and social media sites (e.g., Facebook). Potential participants who were
interested in participating e-mailed me. All correspondence with the participants was
done via email until the interview date. The interviews were conducted through Zoom. I
conducted interviews in a private home office on a separate computer. This was a
separate space away from others in the home. I also suggested the participants find a
private space without distraction from others listening. At the start of each interview, I
confirmed with the participant that they were in a location where they felt comfortable
speaking privately.

Demographics

The recruitment process included Walden University's participant pool, along
with posting a flyer (see Appendix B) on social media, which consisted of Facebook and
a few specialty groups. The recruitment flyer included my university email for contact.
The final group of participants consisted of three adult students in recovery returning to
college after experiencing challenges with alcohol abuse. Their ages ranged from 32 to 55

years, Two were male, and one was female. One was a graduate student, the two were undergraduates. Years of sobriety varied among participants.

Data Collection

Before beginning recruitment or data collection, I obtained approval from Walden University's IRB. This approval was granted on December 7, 2023. Walden University's approval number for this study was 12-07-23-1007988. Once the IRB approval number was acquired, I completed the Walden University participant pool webpage form. The resulting sample was considerably smaller than the original target. Each participant was asked six questions (see Appendix A). There were also a few questions that emerged during the interviews that were based on responses from the participants. I was an attentive and active listener during the interview, and I asked follow-up questions.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of recovering adults attending college, with a particular emphasis on the challenges they face in maintaining sobriety. I used a phenomenological approach to data analysis to identify patterns and themes emerging from the data. The goal was to gain insight into the participants' experiences and understand the difficulties they encountered while pursuing their academic goals and maintaining their sobriety. I established the coding procedure involving a hand-coding process. My iterative process of coding, categorizing, and theme development allowed me to systematically analyze the rich qualitative data and identify patterns and insights that addressed my research question regarding the experiences of college students in recovery and their challenges in maintaining sobriety. The data

analysis followed the IPA guidelines outlined by Smith et al. (1999) and Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014). This involved

- multiple close reading of each transcript, making initial notes on content, language use, and conceptual comments.

- developing emergent themes by analyzing and interpreting the initial notes, looking for patterns and connections.

- searching for connections across emergent themes within each case, creating superordinate themes.

- moving to the next case and repeating Steps 1–3, treating each case individually to maintain IPA's idiographic commitment; and

- looking for patterns across cases, identifying shared themes and unique experiences.

Throughout this process, the analysis engaged in the hermeneutic circle, moving between the part and the whole, the particular and the shared, and description and interpretation (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The coding procedure involved a hand-coded process. The iterative process of coding, categorizing, and theme development allowed for systematic analysis of the rich qualitative data and identification of patterns and insights that addressed the research question regarding the experiences of college students in recovery and their challenges in maintaining sobriety.

The coding process was carefully documented to ensure it was systematic, transparent, and replicable. The responses to the interview questions reflected the participants' perceptions of intervention strategies, treatment programs, motivation,

organization-based programs, mental health counseling, and on-campus university support. The responses were related to the research question: How do recovering adults returning to college experience the challenges of sobriety? Transcripts were openly shared with participants. There were no corrections made to the transcriptions. After member checking, I was able to begin a full data analysis. I identified specific codes from the data, grouped them into relevant categories, and provided examples from the participants' quotes to illustrate each code. The categories helped me organize the codes into broader themes that emerged from the analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1

Data Analysis Process of Codes, Categories, Themes, and Narrative Examples

Code	Category	Theme	Example
Support system	Support systems and strategies	Motivation for sobriety and recovery	VRSP1: "I wanted to come back and pursue a career, gain as much knowledge as I could to help other alcoholics and addicts like me in different situations as a counselor or researcher."
Family/friend support			VRSP3: "Talking to friends and family that like to see me at my upper times in life when I am doing good."
Changing environment			VRSP2: "Quitting cold turkey and just changing my environment and the people I was around who drank all the time."
Wake-up call	Motivation		VRSP2: "I wanted to better myself." VRSP3: "What really helped to motivate me was when the police stopped me for a ticket, and I almost got a DUI for drinking alcohol."
Fear of consequences	Challenges and struggles	Challenges and struggles	VRSP3: "I fear relapse a little because I know, if I start drinking again, I will lose my family and my children and even my freedom."
Stigma			VRSP1: "Feeling fear that someone would find out about me."
Temptation			VRSP2: "There is always temptation, because there were times when I would stop for a long time then go to a family function and find myself tempted to take a drink."
Rehabilitation	Treatment and support	Recovery strategies	VRSP1: "I went to an impatient rehab, and an outpatient program." VRSP3: "I went to an anger management program and alcohol abuse treatment center, and I went to, not like a whole rehabilitation center but it was more like a daily day-to-day class. I would take two classes a week."
Counseling			VRSP1: "I received counseling and an awful lot of assistance from mental health folks as well, which was my choice for my recovery."
Court-mandated programs			VRSP2: "I went to a DUI program. When I got arrested, the courts sent me to one."
Personal journey	Personal growth	Personal journey	VRSP1: "I found myself over the course of the past three years not ashamed to be an alcoholic."
Progression of recovery			VRSP2: "The longest I ever stopped was about five years, and I stopped cold turkey."
Future goals	Aspirations	Future goals	VRSP1: "I wanted to come back and pursue a career, gain as much knowledge as I could to help other alcoholics and addicts like me in different situations as a counselor or researcher."

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, as related to qualitative research, is the methodological soundness and adequacy in which researchers can make judgements of trustworthiness through the development of four major components (Stahl & King, 2020). These components consist of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

According to Stahl and King (2020), credibility represents the confidence of the qualitative researchers in the study's findings. To enhance credibility, I employed member checking by sharing my interpretations of the interview data with the participants to verify accuracy of their experiences. The primary challenge for credibility came from the challenges encountered in recruiting participants for the study. The participants recruited represented a specific, hard-to-reach population: adults in recovery who have returned to college. Recruiting and scheduling interviews with this group proved to be challenging despite extensive outreach efforts. Continuing to delay data analysis and reporting in hopes of achieving a larger sample size risked compromising the timeliness and potential impact of this study.

The experiences described by the three participants displayed a high degree of commonality, allowing for a reasonably robust exploration of the research question. Although the sample size was smaller than originally envisioned, the depth and quality of the data collected, and the unique characteristics of the target population revealed some potentially useful results. The limitations of the sample size are acknowledged, and opportunities for future research with larger, more diverse samples are discussed in

Chapter 5.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to how the researcher can apply the study's findings to other contexts. The participants of the current study consisted of men and women recovering from alcohol abuse returning to college. I developed a thick description of the participants' experiences by collecting rich, detailed data using open-ended questions in interviews. I audio-recorded the interviews and coded the transcriptions to identify categories and themes related to the research question.

Dependability

Dependability, as referenced by Stahl and King (2020), is the extent to which the study can be repeated by other researchers and that the findings will be consistent. In the current study, dependability strategies included an audit trail documenting my research activities, along with the processes and decisions made during data collection and analysis. For example, I set up an audit trail and a coding strategy. I completed a transcription of the data, along with the coding process. I was clear and concise as to the boundaries of the study to ensure that the interviews never varied from the intended focus. This study included the participants' perception of their alcohol abuse and recovery.

Confirmability

Stahl and King (2020) referred to confirmability as the degree of neutrality in the study's findings. The findings in the current study were based on the participants' responses. I attempted to minimize researcher bias by staying immersed in the transcripts

and recordings as I conducted the analyses to ensure that the results were consistent with and accurately reflected the participants' perspectives.

Results

Once I began the data analysis, I found six core themes that aligned with the following research question: How do recovering adults returning to college experience the challenges of sobriety? The six themes that emerged from the interview questions were motivation for sobriety and recovery, recovery strategies, challenges and struggles, utilization of treatment programs and support systems, growth and transformation in recovery, and future aspirations as motivation for sobriety and education.

Theme 1: Motivation for Sobriety and Recovery

This theme encompassed the driving forces and reasons that prompted participants to pursue and maintain sobriety while returning to college. This theme included both internal motivations, such as personal growth and self-improvement, and external factors, such as consequences of alcohol abuse and desire for a better life. The following quotes supported this theme:

- VRSP1: "I wanted to come back and pursue a career, gain as much knowledge as I could to help other alcoholics and addicts like me in different situations as a counselor or researcher."

- VRSP2: "I wanted to better myself."

- VRSP3: "What really helped to motivate me was when the police stopped me for a ticket, and I almost got a DUI for drinking alcohol."

- VRSP3: "I think just knowing how abusive I was when I was drinking helped

  me and motivated me to stop drinking."

This theme directly addressed the research question by illuminating the

motivational factors that drove these individuals to maintain their sobriety while pursuing

higher education. Understanding these motivations provided insight into the internal

resources and external influences that supported their recovery journey in the context of

academic pursuits.

Theme 2: Recovery Strategies

This theme encompassed the various methods, techniques, and support systems

that participants employed to maintain their sobriety while navigating the challenges of

returning to college. This theme included both personal coping mechanisms and external

resources used by the participants. The following quotes supported this theme:

- VRSP1: "I utilized family and friend support, prayer, and meditation."

- VRSP2: "Quitting cold turkey and just changing my environment and the

  people I was around who drank all the time."

- VRSP3: "Talking to friends and family that like to see me at my upper times

  in life when I am doing good. I can drive right past the liquor store, and I

  don't have the urge for it anymore. It feels like a weight has been lifted off my

  shoulders."

This theme directly addressed the research question by highlighting the strategies

recovering adults employed to maintain their sobriety while facing the challenges of

college life. These strategies represented the practical, day-to-day efforts participants made to navigate the dual challenges of recovery and academic pursuits.

Theme 3: Challenges and Struggles

This theme encompassed the challenges and struggles experienced by the participants as they maintained their sobriety while navigating the challenges of returning to college. Key issues included fear of relapse, stigma, and concerns about disclosure of their recovery status. The following quotes supported this theme:

- VRSP1: "Feeling fear that someone would find out about alcohol abuse." This participant also mentioned embarrassment related to an HIV scare, noting that "these issues brought about the thought of past suicidal ideation."

- VRSP2: "There is always temptation, because there were times when I would stop for a long time and then go to a family function and find myself tempted to take a drink. I have been pretty good so far because it has been five years."

- VRSP3: "I fear relapse a little because I know if I start drinking again, I will lose my family and my children and even my freedom. I will never want to take that kind of chance again."

This theme addressed the research question by highlighting challenges and struggles recovering adults experienced while maintaining sobriety and pursuing academic goals. These challenges represented the practical, day-to-day issues participants faced in balancing recovery and academic pursuits.

Theme 4: Utilization of Treatment Programs and Support Systems

This theme encompassed the methods, techniques, and support systems that participants used to maintain their sobriety while navigating the challenges of returning to college. This theme included both formal treatment programs and informal support systems employed by the participants. The following quotes supported this theme:

- VRSP1: "I went to an inpatient rehab and an outpatient program. I also did a spouse up program. Through all this I received counseling and an awful lot of assistance from mental health folks as well, which was my choice for my recovery."

- VRSP2: "I went to a DUI program. When I got arrested the courts sent me to one. It was basically going weekly, watching movies, taking tests, and having discussions and listening to people that were damaged or hurt by drunk drivers."

- VRSP3: "I went to an anger management program and alcohol abuse treatment center, and I went to, not like a whole rehabilitation center but it was more like a daily day-to-day class. I would take two classes a week. The other center was helping me every day for like two or three times out of the month. I would go to this place, and they would do an eight-hour course. I even did like a traffic DUI class."

This theme addressed the research question by highlighting the strategies recovering adults employed to maintain their sobriety while returning to college. The use

of treatment programs and support systems represented a proactive approach for managing recovery alongside academic pursuits.

Theme 5: Personal Growth and Transformation in Recovery

This theme encompassed the individual journeys of personal growth and transformation that participants experienced as they maintained their sobriety while navigating the challenges of returning to college. This theme highlighted the internal changes, shifts in perspective, and development of coping strategies that characterized participants' recovery processes. The following quotes supported this theme:

- VRSP1: "I found myself over the course of the past three years, not ashamed to be an alcoholic. But I feel blessed to be an alcoholic because I had not gotten that kind of diagnosis for myself. I guess it wouldn't have forced me to do so much work on seeing who I am and understanding my relationships, particularly that with God my higher power."

- VRSP2: "I think the longest I ever stopped was about five years, and I stopped cold turkey. It has not been that big of a challenge. I think once you get it out of your system it's not so bad, I do not have a lot of craving for alcohol."

- VRSP3: "Right now I do woodworking, and I am in school. I can drive right past the liquor store, and I don't have the urge for it anymore. It feels like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Every day now is fulfilling for me because I know that I don't have to run to alcohol and that I don't have an urge for it."

This theme addressed the research question by illuminating how recovering adults returning to college experienced and overcame the challenges of sobriety. This theme highlighted the personal growth, strength, and determination of participants developed throughout their recovery journey, including the progression of their relationship with alcohol and the development of new coping mechanisms and perspectives.

Theme 6: Future Aspirations as Motivation for Sobriety and Education

This theme encompassed the future-oriented goals and aspirations that motivated participants to pursue and maintain sobriety while returning to college. this theme included both personal and professional ambitions, highlighting how these future goals served as driving forces tor recovery and academic pursuits. The following quotes supported this theme:

- VRSP1: "I wanted to come back and pursue a career, gain as much knowledge as I could to help other alcoholics and addicts like me in different situations as a counselor or researcher. I am not quite sure exactly where my career is going to go just yet, but I know that is going to be to help other folks in situations."

- VRSP2: "I am in my second year, so I think that makes me an undergraduate. My goal is to get my degree in psychology and to open some psychology offices for mental health treatment.

- VRSP3: "I would like to own a custom closet business and get my master's degree in business administration and own my own home."

This theme addressed the research question by illuminating how future aspirations served as powerful motivators for recovering adults to maintain sobriety while pursuing higher education. These goals provided a sense of purpose and direction, contributing to participants' commitment to recovery and academic achievement.

Summary

Chapter 4 described the research setting, participant demographics, data collection procedures, data analysis approach, strategies for establishing trustworthiness, and the findings that emerged from the study. This study was conducted with three participants who were recovering adults returning to college. The participants were recruited through the Walden University participant pool, along with social media platforms. The sample size was much smaller than anticipated. However, the decision to proceed with data analysis and reporting was justified by the depth and richness of the data collected due to the unique characteristics of the target population, along with the achievement of data saturation across the interviews. The interviews were semi structured and guided by six open-ended questions, which allowed participants to talk about their experiences and perspectives in detail.

The data analysis included a phenomenological approach, with a systematic and iterative process of manual coding and theme identification. There were six themes developed from the analysis: motivations for sobriety, recovery strategies, challenges and setbacks, treatment and program experiences, personal journey, and future goals of the participants. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, I employed member checking to enhance credibility, thick descriptions to facilitate transferability, and maintaining an

audit trail for dependability. This chapter concluded with a detailed presentation of the six themes, supported by relevant quotes and excerpts from the participant interviews.

I acknowledged that the small sample size created substantive limitations in the transferability and dependability of the results. However, the findings contribute valuable insights regarding the lived experiences of recovering adults navigating the challenges of sobriety while pursuing higher education. The rich data obtained from the interviews provided a foundation for understanding the unique perspectives and coping mechanisms of this group. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation and discussion of these results, explores the limitations of the study, offers recommendations for future research and practice, and examines the implications of the findings for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This general qualitative study explored the challenges faced by recovering adults in maintaining sobriety while pursuing their academic goals in higher education settings. Through semi structured interviews with three participants from higher education institutions, this research aimed to understand the unique perspectives and strategies employed by these individuals. These interviews were conducted to answer one research question: How do recovering adults returning to college experience the challenges of sobriety? The findings revealed that strong support systems, both within and outside the recovery community, played a crucial role in helping participants navigate sobriety during their college experiences. Participants emphasized the importance of supportive relationships, whether with family, friends, or peers, in providing emotional and practical assistance in recovery.

However, participants also faced significant challenges including the fear of relapse, concerns about stigma and disclosure of their recovery status, and the prevalence of substance use on college campuses. Despite these obstacles, participants employed various recovery strategies such as changing their environments, avoiding triggers, and using counseling and treatment programs. Additionally, the findings highlighted the diverse motivations driving participants' recovery journeys, including a desire for personal growth, better life opportunities, and a commitment to supporting others struggling with addiction. This concluding chapter provides an interpretation of the findings along with a discussion of the limitations of the study and the recommendations

for future research and practice. This chapter also includes the implications for positive

social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

Comparison to Prior Publications

A key finding from this study was the critical role of robust support systems in

maintaining sobriety during the college experience. For instance, Participant A

emphasized how weekly meetings with their campus recovery group provided a sense of

community and accountability: "Those meetings were my lifeline. Knowing I had people

who understood my struggles made all the difference." Each participant emphasized the

importance of having a network of individuals within and outside the recovery

community who could provide emotional and practical support. This finding aligns with

previous research, which highlighted the crucial role of social support in successful

recovery (Smith et al., 2019). The quality and nature of social support have been found to

significantly impact substance use, abstinence, and treatment compliance (Spohra et al.,

2019). Those who feel socially isolated may be at greater risk of exiting treatment

prematurely and relapsing (Muller et al., 2017). Social support can strengthen recovery

outcomes through various mechanisms such as social control, bonding, cohesion,

monitoring, and providing a framework for behavioral choices (Brown, 2012; Muller et

al., 2017).

Researchers have used social network analysis to gain insights into how support

networks influence recovery, consistently finding that participating in recovery-focused

social networks is associated with improved treatment completion, greater abstinence,

and an enhanced quality of life (Muller et al., 2017). The participants' experiences in the current study highlighted the interplay between internal factors (e.g., motivation, resilience) and external social factors (e.g., support networks campus environments) in shaping their recovery journeys and academic success. The social support networks cultivated by the participants played a critical role in providing emotional and practical assistance, underscoring the influence of social interaction on human development and learning, as posited by the sociocultural perspective. Furthermore, the findings resonate with the concept of vulnerability as a catalyst for human connection and personal growth, as articulated by Brown (2012). Current participants' willingness to embrace vulnerability and seek support from their social networks facilitated their recovery and academic pursuits, acting as a buffer against the stress of adjusting to university life (see Berry et al., 1987). This highlighted the potential protective role of social support in mitigating the risk of substance abuse and academic challenges faced by university students (see Anderson et al., 2020).

The current study's participants' experiences highlighted how their social support networks played a critical role in their recovery journeys and academic pursuits, aligning with the sociocultural perspective's emphasis on the influence of social interaction on human development and learning (see Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992). Recent studies have reinforced the significance of social and cultural factors in shaping substance abuse recovery and academic experiences (Krentzman, 2021). For instance, Krentzman (2021) found that peer support experiences within collegiate recovery programs fostered a sense of belonging, shared understanding, and motivation to

maintain sobriety among college students in recovery. Krentzman also highlighted the

crucial role that mutual aid groups, Alcoholics Anonymous, and other peer-based

recovery support services play in supporting individuals in their addiction recovery

journeys. These groups provide a sense of community, shared understanding, and

ongoing support, which can be valuable during challenging times such as the COVID-19

pandemic.

Scarfe et al. (2023) highlighted the unique challenges posed by the COVID-19

pandemic, including disruptions to in-person support, increased stress and isolation, and

the need to adapt to virtual or remote support options such as online support group

meetings, telehealth counseling sessions, and recovery-focused apps or digital platforms.

Although these resources were extremely helpful for some people, there were also

challenges regarding accessibility, technological barriers, and the perceived lack of

interpersonal connection when compared to in-person options. The treatment programs

and support systems described by current participants aligned with established concepts

in addiction recovery literature. The variety of programs used, from inpatient

rehabilitation to outpatient counseling and specialized courses, reflected the multifaceted

approach to recovery supported by recent research (see Kelly et al., 2020). The emphasis

on ongoing support and education, as evidenced by current participants' engagement in

regular classes and counseling sessions, aligned with the continuum of care model in

addiction treatment (see McKay, 2009). This model emphasizes the importance of

sustained, long-term support in maintaining recovery. Additionally, the court-mandated

program mentioned by VRSP2 and VRSP3 highlighted the intersection of legal

consequences and treatment opportunities in recovery journeys, a topic explored in criminal justice and addiction literature (see Chandler et al., 2009).

Comparison to Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural theory posits that human development and learning are shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which individuals are embedded (Vygotsky, 1978). In the current study, participants' experiences highlighted how the social support networks they cultivated played a critical role in their recovery journeys and academic pursuits, aligning with the sociocultural perspective's emphasis on the influence of social interaction and cultural contexts in facilitating learning and personal growth (see Vygotsky,1978). There were other frameworks from the literature that were consistent with the findings from the study.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory was developed by Ryan and Deci (2000). VRSP1's reflection on personal growth and spiritual connection exemplified the intrinsic motivation central to self-determination theory. This theory posits that sustainable recovery is driven by internal motivations for personal growth and fulfillment rather than external pressures. In the current study, participants' intrinsic motivation to pursue meaningful careers and personal growth aligned with self-determination theory's emphasis on autonomy, competence, and related cultural factors in sustained motivation and well-being.

Cognitive-Behavioral Approaches

Cognitive-behavioral approaches were developed by McHugh et al. (2010). VRSP3's ability to drive past liquor stores without urges demonstrated the development of coping skills and self-efficacy, key components of cognitive-behavioral therapy for addiction. This ability to resist temptation in triggering situations is crucial for long-term recovery.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory was developed by Mezirow (1991). In the current study, participants' narratives reflected elements of transformative learning in which individuals critically examine their assumptions and beliefs, leading to profound personal change. VRSP1's reframing of alcoholism as a blessing that led to self-discovery aligns with this concept.

Recovery Capital Framework

The recovery capital framework was developed by Cloud and Granfield (2008). In the current study, participants' stories illustrated the accumulation of personal, social, and community resources that supported sustained recovery, such as VRSP3's engagement in woodworking and education. The participants' educational and career aspirations represented the accumulation of human capital, a key component of recovery that supports long-term sobriety and life satisfaction.

Logotherapy and Theory

Logotherapy and theory were developed by Frankl (1959). The clear sense of purpose established by current participants, particularly VRSP1's desire to help others in

similar situations, aligns with Frankl's concept of finding meaning as a crucial factor in overcoming life's challenges.

Limitations of the Study

A primary limitation of this study was the small, heterogeneous sample size ($N = 3$) resulting from recruitment challenges. This limitation may have impacted the depth and breadth of experiences captured, potentially omitting important perspectives from underrepresented groups within the recovering student population. The study aimed to explore the experiences of college students in recovery, and the three participants represented a diverse range of educational levels, years of recovery, and substance use histories. Furthermore, the participants' experiences with substance abuse and recovery likely differed based on factors such as the substances used, the severity of the addiction, and the types of treatment or support services participants had access to. This heterogeneity within the small sample size may limit the transferability of the findings to subgroups of college students in recovery. For example, the challenges and coping strategies employed by a graduate student with a longer recovery history may differ from those employed by an undergraduate student in the early stages of their recovery journey.

Similarly, the experiences of individuals recovering from alcohol abuse disorder may be distinct from those recovering from opioid or other substance abuse disorders. Although the diversity in the sample can be seen as a strength because it captures a range of perspectives and experiences, it also introduces complexity and potential limitations in terms of identifying specific patterns or themes that may be more applicable to certain subgroups within the broader population of college students in recovery. Future research

with larger and more homogeneous samples could provide nuanced insights into the unique challenges and support needs of specific subpopulations, such as undergraduate students in early recovery or graduate students with longer term sobriety. Additionally, studies focused on specific substance use disorders could further illuminate the potential differences in experiences and coping strategies based on the type of addiction.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for future research. I recommend that researchers conduct larger scale studies with more diverse samples to enhance transferability. I also recommend conducting a longitudinal study to track students' experiences throughout their academic journey. Finally, I recommend a study of the effectiveness of specific support interventions on long-term abstinence for students in recovery.

The findings of this study have implications for the development and application of sociocultural theory in the context of substance abuse recovery and academic settings. The participants' experiences highlighted the interplay between internal factors (e.g., motivation, resilience) and external social factors (e.g., support networks, campus environments) in shaping participants' recovery journeys and academic success. This aligns with the sociocultural theory's emphasis on the dynamic interrelationships between individuals and their social and cultural contexts. Future research could explore how specific social and cultural factors within academic settings influence the recovery and academic experiences of students in recovery, contributing to the refinement and expansion of sociocultural theory in this domain.

Implications

The findings of this study have implications for higher education institutions. It is clear from the participants' perspectives that comprehensive support services tailored to the unique needs of students in recovery would make a big difference in their academic and social lives. This could include (a) establishing dedicated on-campus recovery communities, (b) offering specialized counseling services, and (c) creating sober living options in student housing. Universities should also consider integrating substance abuse and recovery education into their general curriculum. This could help destigmatize addiction and foster a more inclusive campus culture. Finally, colleges should consider ongoing training for faculty and staff in supporting students in recovery. This addition to professional development could include workshops on trauma-informed care and effective support strategies. The implications go beyond offering targeted support programs. Creating opportunities for work-study positions, internships, or employment opportunities within the institution's recovery support services could provide students in recovery with valuable experiential learning and professional development. These experiences could not only help them build relevant skills and resumes but also reinforce their commitment to sobriety and personal growth.

Furthermore, higher education institutions should consider integrating substance abuse and recovery education into their general curriculum or offering dedicated courses on these topics. By increasing awareness and understanding among the broader student population, institutions may help destigmatize addiction and mental health issues, fostering a more inclusive and supportive campus culture for those in recovery.

Collaboration with local community organizations, treatment facilities, and recovery support groups could also be instrumental in ensuring a continuum of care and support for students transitioning from treatment to college life. Such partnerships could facilitate seamless referrals, information sharing, and the development of targeted resources aligned with best practices in addiction recovery.

Moreover, higher education institutions should prioritize ongoing training and professional development for faculty, staff, and counselors to enhance their understanding of the unique challenges faced by students in recovery. This could include workshops, seminars, or certifications focused on topics such as substance abuse, mental health, trauma-informed care, and effective support strategies. By implementing these comprehensive measures, higher education institutions could not only support the academic success and well-being of students in recovery but also contribute to broader societal efforts in addressing substance abuse and promoting mental health awareness. Creating an inclusive and supportive environment for this population may have far-reaching implications for individuals, families, and communities.

Conclusion

This qualitative study provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of college students in recovery, highlighting the complex interplay between personal motivation, social support, and institutional resources in maintaining sobriety while pursuing academic goals. By illuminating these experiences, this research contributes to a growing body of knowledge that may inform more effective support strategies for this unique student population. As higher education institutions continue to grapple with

issues of student well-being and inclusivity, the findings of this study underscore the importance of creating environments that support not only academic success but also holistic personal growth and recovery. Although the findings are limited by a small sample size and qualitative nature of the study, they contribute to the existing body of knowledge and underscore the need for continued research and institutional support for this population. By promoting greater understanding and fostering inclusive environments, higher education institutions may play a pivotal role in supporting the academic and personal success of students in recovery, contributing to positive social change.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

The Interview questions for this qualitative study is based on how does recovering adults returning to college experience the challenges of sobriety? The researcher will use this question to gather data and gain insights into the unique experiences and perspectives of recovering adults returning to college and their strategies to overcome the challenges of maintaining sobriety. Below is a collection of interview questions.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what motivated you to pursue a return to college?

2. What specific tools, routines, and or social support systems are you utilizing to maintain your sobriety?

3. Can you share the moment or experience when you became aware of your struggle with alcohol abuse?

4. When you started college did you seek assistance from college campus counselors or support services?

5. Can you describe your personal journey of recovery thus far?

6. What are some effective strategies or tools you employ to support your ongoing sobriety?

Appendix B: Flyer

Interview study seeks Adults in Recovery Pursuing Higher Education for Research Study

We invite adults who have experienced addiction and are currently pursuing higher education to participate in a 30- 60- minute interview for a study exploring the experiences of maintaining sobriety within the college environment. This research is focusing on the here and now of college life.

Participation requirements:
- 18 years or older
- Completed a substance abuse treatment program.
- Currently enrolled in college
- Have a minimum of 6 months sobriety at the time of interview.

This research aims to further understanding the unique challenges and needs of adults in recovery to improve support services for this population pursuing higher education. If interested in participating, please email rosalina.johns@waldenu.edu a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during March 2024.

Appendix C: Code Book

Motivation for Sobriety and Recovery

- Desire to help others.

- Giving back to the community

- Maintaining sobriety through the 12-step program

- Hitting rock bottom as a turning point

Recovery Strategies

- Code for the tools, routines, and support systems the participant utilizes to maintain sobriety.

- Potential codes: "changing environment," "avoiding triggers," "social support," "cold turkey."

Challenges and Struggles

- Fear of relapse

- Stigma and concerns about disclosure

- Past suicidal ideation

- Trauma (HIV scare)

Treatment and Programs

- Code for any mentions of treatment programs, counseling, or support services the participant has utilized or considered.

- Potential codes: "DUI program," "court-mandated treatment," "interest in counseling"

Personal Journey

- Code for descriptions of the participant's personal journey, including the progression of their alcohol use and the recovery process.

- Potential codes: "early drinking," "habit formation," "periods of sobriety"

Future Goals

- Code for the participant's future goals, aspirations, or plans related to their education, career, or personal life.

- Potential codes: "psychology degree," "open mental health practice"