



## Recovery from Substance Abuse: We are as successful as those around us

*Submitted by: Mayra Guerrero, Leonard A. Jason, Meghan Salomon-Amend, Ed Stevens, John Light, & Mike Stoolmiller*

People who abuse drugs may seek “recovery” as a path out of their misuse. We know that the social environment (including



*Photo by Keira Burton from Pexels. CCO*

people, places, and things) surrounding a person who abuses drugs has a big impact on the success of their recovery. We were interested to see if we could measure the “level of recovery” for substance abuse in a social environment. That is to say that people in recovery have more or less “social capital” to support their efforts depending on their social environment. The implication of this work is that recovery is a “team sport.”

“An individual’s probability of relapse was primarily related to the average of the “recoveries” of his or her recovery home peers, and not of his or her own personal “recovery” status. The finding that resident relapse is based primarily upon the total recovery capital available in the homes highlights the importance of the social environment for recovery.”

Recovering people may succeed or fail based upon the total recovery-related social capital available in their immediate environment. Their own individual efforts are important within the context of the overall environment of support.

### Highlights

**The social environment may be a more important influence on substance abuse recovery than previously recognized.**

**Recovery can be strongly influenced by others with whom the recovering individual has regular social contact, whether for good or for bad.**

## Methods

We investigated the idea of social capital from the perspective of both recovery home residents and the recovery home environment. The current study was set in Oxford House (OH) recovery homes - the largest network of substance abuse recovery homes in the United States - which serves 20,000 individuals nationally. We included a total of 602 participants from 42 OH recovery homes located in North Carolina, Texas, and Oregon. Participants were part of a long-term study that collected information every four months over 2 years.

## Results

- Recovery capital is comprised of resources such as wages, beliefs in one's ability to stay abstinent from substances, stress, self-esteem, quality of life, hope, sense of community, and social support at both the individual and the recovery house levels.
- An individual's probability of relapse was primarily related to the average of the "recoveries" of his or her recovery home peers, and not of his or her own personal "recovery" status.
- The social environment is very important for recovery.

## HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Community Psychology values and appreciates the shaping influence of environmental context. This study illustrates powerful environmental effects even over individual factors.

### What Does This Mean For?

**Practice:** Recovery can be strongly influenced by others with whom the recovering individual has regular social contact. Our study suggests that some settings are simply more effective than others at collectively promoting residents' recovery. Knowing this, we can target environmental resources within recovery and treatment settings to help individuals successfully recover from substance use disorders.

**Research and Evaluation:** We define a domain of recovery that represents individual and group-level elements of recovery capital. Future research that utilizes an established recovery factor like the one found in our study can more easily examine the recovery score changes in individuals and their environment over time.

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