

Former Drug Addicts Quality of Life: A Qualitative Study

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<p>Submitted: 2024-12-07</p> <p>Published: 2025-03-03</p> <p>Keywords: Former addicts, Drugs, quality of life</p> <p>Copyright holder: © Author/s (2025)</p> <p>This article is under:</p> <p></p> <p>How to cite: Huwae, A., Rugebregt, J. M., Mage, M. Y. C., & Rondonuwu, H. C. P. (2025). Former Drug Addicts Quality of Life: A Qualitative Study. <i>Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy</i>, 7(1). https://doi.org/10.51214/002025071215000</p> <p>Published by: Kuras Institute</p> <p>E-ISSN: 2656-1050</p>	<p>ABSTRACT: Living life as a former drug addict poses significant challenges. Holistically, the impact felt will be very heavy to live. However, life goes on and as a former drug addict is required to improve bad life into a healthy and better quality. The purpose of this study is to explore the description of quality of life in former drug addicts. The method used was qualitative with a descriptive phenomenological design. The participants involved were 3 former drug addicts using purposive sampling technique. The results showed that quality of life physically, psychologically, socially, and environmentally varied in meaning by the three participants. Although, the three participants continue to learn to improve their lives, there is no denying that there are still internal judgments that are expressed about their existence as former drug addicts. Furthermore, the process of improving themselves and their lives continues to be carried out by the three participants by continuing to try positive things to realize a life that has a positive impact on themselves and the environment, in order to achieve quality of life in totality. Social support is important from family, friends, and close people to former addicts, so that they can see opportunities for self-esteem. Future studies should explore social interventions to educate communities on providing holistic support to former drug addicts to overcome the challenges of reintegration.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

The National Narcotics Agency stated that the number of drug abusers in 2017 was 3,376,115 people aged 10-59 years and in 2018 from 13 capitals provinces in Indonesia reached 2.29 million people aged 15-35 years (BNN, 2019). The widespread drug trafficking is currently not only happening in big cities but has also touched small or rural areas. The *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime* noted that in 2021, Indonesia was ranked 3rd in the world for drug users and over-dose rates (National Narcotics Agency [BNN], 2021). The BNN (2019) revealed that drugs are substances or drugs, both natural, synthetic, and semi-synthetic, that cause a decrease in consciousness, hallucinations, and stimulation. This is what causes many people involved in drug use to have a high addiction to drugs. Continued use can lead to death due to over-dose. For this reason, a recovery process is needed and leads to a journey of improving the poor quality of life (Rondonuwu & Huwae, 2023).

Quality of life is a multi-dimensional concept assessment that combines individual perceptions of health status, psycho-social status, and other aspects of life. A person who has a good quality of

life will experience positive feelings ranging from satisfaction, peace, happiness, hope, and can enjoy good things in life (World Health Organization Quality of Life [WHOQOL], 2012). In addition, a good quality of life can provide satisfaction to individuals who achieve it and provide a good quality of life in their daily activities. Achieving quality of life is related to total well-being which includes psychological, physical, and social domains (Marquez et al., 2020; Heraldstad et al., 2019). On the other hand, someone who has a low quality of life will experience a lot of stress and negative feelings in life which include sadness, hopelessness, guilt, and lack of pleasure (Vitaloni et al., 2019; Passos et al., 2020).

Being a former drug addict certainly has its own difficulties to achieve the desired expectations. There are challenges, such as the assumption of people around them about their bad past, and the lack of jobs that can accept their past (Wulandari et al., 2020; Alamsyah et al., 2021). This is what makes former drug addicts need a strong drive from within to be able to achieve the desired goals. Individuals who are stable and permanent will be better able to maintain their positive emotions towards a positive expectation and more easily build a more positive quality of life than before (Kraai et al., 2018).

Every individual wants the life they live to be more quality than their previous life, and so is what former drug addicts want. Not a few addicts who then do rehabilitation to restore their lives and improve their lives for better of life. *The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (CDC, 2016) revealed that quality of life is a broad multidimensional concept and usually includes subjective evaluation of both positive and negative aspects of life. WHOQOL (2012) describes the quality of life of individuals through four main dimensions, namely first, the physical health dimension which includes pain and discomfort, energy and fatigue, and sleep and rest where the quality of life of individuals can be seen from how good or bad physical health they have. Second, the psychological dimension can affect the quality of life by looking at how to think, as well as the feelings that arise from the individual. Third, the social relationship dimension can determine the quality of life by looking at their own personal relationships and with other people, as well as how social support is created in the individual. Fourth, the environmental dimension that will determine the quality of life it has through the conditions where it is located and lives (residence, school, office).

According to WHOQOL (2012), there are several factors that affect an individual' quality of life, namely physical, psychological, level of independence, social relationships, environment, and spirituality/religion/personal beliefs. These factors make a person able to see his physical ability to carry out all activities, whether he can do something, be able to socialize based on the culture/system that exists in his environment, be able to create memorable things for others, especially with different beliefs, and even be able to think optimistically in his life.

For former drug addicts, there will be many changes in their lives after releasing from the addiction. This shows the importance of quality of life in the life of everyone to be able to achieve satisfaction, peace, hope, and be able to enjoy life again. Glatzer et al. (2015) revealed that the psychological component of individuals in the quality-of-life dimension is influenced by a polarity of positive and negative emotions of individuals towards themselves which leads to positive emotions implying that individual's better quality of life. Thus, this study aims to provide an overview the quality of former drug addicts life.

METHODS

Design

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design. Qualitative research is used to obtain in-depth data by examining the conditions of natural objects (naturalistic), and the results emphasize meaning rather than generalization (Sugiyono, 2013). This phenomenological approach is a study to focus on subjective experiences related to personal views

of the events at hand (Nuryana et al., 2019). The purpose of using descriptive phenomenology is to find out in more detail meanings the quality of former drug addicts' life.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of three former drug addicts selected through purposive sampling. This method was chosen based on specific considerations, as purposive sampling involves selecting participants who meet criteria (Sugiyono, 2013). The criteria for this study were former drug addicts who had gone through a minimum rehabilitation period of 1 year and were married and had been abandoned by the nuclear family (wife) because of drug use.

Data Collection

Data were collected through interviews based on dimensions of quality life, such as physical, psychological, social, and environmental health (WHOQOL, 2012). The quality of life for ex-drug addicts needs to be explored once they are back living together in the society. It underlies how they start a new life and struggle with new conditions. Here is an example of a question on the physical dimension, which is *"After going through rehabilitation and returning to your current routine, what is your strategy for doing daily activities to keep your body fit?"* On the psychological health dimension, an example of a question is *"When feelings of guilt arise about bad experiences using drugs, how do you control them so that they do not damage your mentality in the present?"* On the social dimension, an example question is *"What steps have you taken to regain support from your closest people?"* On the environmental dimension, an example question is *"How do you respond to environmental judgments regarding negativity about being labeled a drug addict?"* The research instruments used during the interview process were stationery to take notes and recording devices and were analyzed after the interview was completed.

Data Analysis

This qualitative research data analysis technique uses interactive analysis with the Miles and Huberman model. The research data analysis process was carried out in two stages, such as pre-field analysis and data analysis while in the field using the Miles and Huberman model (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In qualitative research, data analysis is carried out both before and during the fieldwork to ensure a structured and focused study. Before entering the field, researchers analyze initial data obtained from interviews with three informants and secondary data from previous studies to determine the research focus. During fieldwork, data analysis follows the model of Miles and Huberman, which involves three key stages. First, data reduction is conducted by summarizing, selecting, and focusing on important aspects to provide a clear research overview and facilitate further data collection. Second, the presentation of data involves organizing the reduced data into narrative text, making it more accessible and comprehensible. Finally, conclusion and verification are undertaken by forming credible conclusions supported by valid and consistent evidence, resulting in a comprehensive description of the research object.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The lives of the research participants through difficult times are colored by various dark dynamics. The participants' backgrounds before getting involved in drug consumption, the process of consuming drugs, the rehabilitation process, and post-rehabilitation have brought significant life changes for the three participants. Despite going through difficult times, the three participants also created a new and healthier life through the meaning of life values which then encouraged them to improve physical health through fun daily activities—improved psychological health through regulating emotions, controlling anger, learning not to be disappointed, and losing a sense of

hopelessness. Socially, trying to rebuild relationships with the closest or surrounding people who are felt as a support system even though in a way that is not easy. Participants also see the role of the wider environment as a space to develop their potential and capacity, so that it can help them not dissolve in bad judgments or previous negative experiences. Achieving a quality life, supported by high awareness, has made the three participants always design positive strategies to live life and survive. An overview of the research results is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Quality of life of Participants

Quality of Life	P1	P2	P3
Backgrounds	<p>Initials: GA</p> <p>Gender: Male</p> <p>Age: 41 years old</p> <p>Reasons for using drugs: Influence of coworkers</p> <p>Length of use: 3 Years</p> <p>Length of rehabilitation: 2 years</p>	<p>Initials: HM</p> <p>Gender: Male</p> <p>Age: 37 years old</p> <p>Reasons for using drugs: Invited by friends.</p> <p>Length of use: 5 Years</p> <p>Length of rehabilitation: 2 years</p>	<p>Initials: AW</p> <p>Gender: Male</p> <p>Age: 40 years old</p> <p>Reasons for using drugs: Full-time office job.</p> <p>Length of use: 5 Years</p> <p>Length of rehabilitation: 2 years</p>
Physical Health	<p>P1's daily life journey has changes that are illustrated through better sleep patterns, proportional physical condition, and having energy every day in doing work as a painter. P1 is more likely to learn to maintain physical fitness through painting.</p>	<p>After going through the rehabilitation process, P2's physical condition began to drop and was hospitalized several times due to the side effects of the rehabilitation process. P2 was paralyzed for 7 months which has limited her physical activity until now. However, P2 does not make this an obstacle to living his daily life.</p>	<p>P3 has a fit physical condition. After the rehabilitation period, P3 participated in a physical activity program at a gym managed by P3. The physical activities help P3 to be more synergized to maintain the body from various diseases.</p>
Psychological Health	<p>P1's daily activities as a painter allow him to express his emotions through his paintings. The works that depict activities are expressive of the feelings shown by P1. P1 tends to feel satisfied with life as a painter. P1's emotional control also tends to be calm when facing various challenges in life. The bitterness of previous life is perceived by P1 as a positive learning that continues to be used as positive energy in carrying out activities.</p>	<p>P2 still tends to feel herself as an emotional person and often blames herself. The emotional instability that P2 forms make her feel that her life is empty and meaningless. However, P2 still thinks that behind the circumstances he is experiencing, there is a desire to be more. Currently P2 is still doing mental coaching with a psychologist, which P2 believes can help him deal with the neurotic and insecure feelings he feels. The dominant negative state that P2 has, makes him often hallucinate. P2 is more likely to close.</p>	<p>P3 feels that her current life is a golden opportunity to improve her life, especially to train herself to accept the fact that she is a former drug addict. P3, does positive activities that train her emotions with meditation and yoga to relieve feelings of self-judgment. Other than that, P3 spends more time doing her hobby of mountain climbing when she is feeling negative emotions. P3 trains her mind to always give praise and punishment to herself in balance.</p>
Social Connection	<p>The rift with the nuclear family did not make P1 despair. The relationship</p>	<p>P2 is more likely to close herself and does not want to be involved in social groups. P2's relationship</p>	<p>P3 receives more positive support from people around her. Although her marriage relationship had to end because of her</p>

	<p>with her father, mother, and older sister continues to be very good, making P1 feel valuable and still feel loved. P1 did not feel abandoned during her time as an addict until the end of rehabilitation, and even until living her current life. On the other hand, P1 also learned to be involved in the painting community. For P1, the community that she is currently building, makes her life impactful. The positive energy and healthy support he gets encourages him to continue to improve himself in life. In addition, P1 is also involved in a community of former drug addicts, where the community's social activities make P1 feel accepted and have a new family who both provide full support. P1 felt that the family he met in the community made him rarely get negative stigmas. On the contrary, the full support received makes her life more meaningful and quality.</p>	<p>with her nuclear family is also not good, causing her to be afraid to start developing herself in the neighborhood. In addition, P1 spends more time alone at home to do her hobby of online trading. P2 considers himself more likely to be closed and afraid if he is too often with other people because of his history as a former drug addict. P2's wife left him when he was undergoing a 2-year rehabilitation process, so P2 currently spends more time with his father and younger sister at home. P2 often feels that his presence burdens his father and younger sister. However, P2's father and sister are the main support system that P2 feels at this time. In addition, P2 has several friends from college who are still together today, who are positive in providing support and encouragement while undergoing the rehabilitation process until now.</p>	<p>actions, it seems that P3 does not want to make it a mental burden to prevent herself from building relationships with the surrounding environment. P3 tends to accept if there are negative labels or discrimination from others because she has used drugs. For P3, it has become a risk that she must accept and must continue to show positive changes in order to be fully accepted by the people around her. P3 still has a harmonious relationship with her father, mother and three younger siblings. On the other hand, P3 still has a poor relationship with his ex-wife. This caused P3 to be rejected when visiting his ex-wife's house when he wanted to meet his two children. Nevertheless, P3 believes that even though the relationship with his ex-wife is currently not good, he still builds communication with his two children as a form of his responsibility as a parent.</p>
<i>Environment</i>	<p>P1 has her own house and currently lives alone. The house is decorated with paintings, making P1 comfortable with the situation of the house and the neighborhood where she lives. P1's community environment is also positive and supportive.</p>	<p>P2 lives in her parents' house and is facilitate with the needs needed by P2. P2 feels a supportive home environment Despite living with personal fear of neighborhood stereotypes.</p>	<p>P3 lives alone and goes about her daily life with the struggles she does. P3 considers that the surrounding environment where she lives is also more likely to have a positive impact and does not disturb the people who live in the neighborhood.</p>

The life of being a former drug addict who then returns amid community life, appears to make individuals learn to place themselves appropriately. The improved quality of life shown by former drug addicts makes them learn to continue to improve themselves to be accepted by society (Lasmawan & Valentina, 2015). One of the things that former drug addicts do to get back to normal life is to improve themselves and achieve quality of life.

The results of the study prove that a healthy and continuously achieved quality of life will make individuals feel valuable and can lead to the realization of an optimal life. Quality of life is reflected through physical health (Rucker et al., 2018). When faced with a weak and limited physical state, former addicts try to do activities that foster enthusiasm and a strong drive to survive. In line

with this, Lasmawan and Valentina (2015) revealed that individuals who can improve their physical fitness can live life happily and enthusiastically.

Discussion

The good quality of life lived by former drug addicts is also described through their psychological health. Former drug addicts try to continue learning to train to develop positive emotions within themselves and not let past things ruin the process of life that is currently being lived. Aztri and Milla (2013) emphasized that individuals who learn to improve their psychological means will tend to help them reduce any negative stressors that damage their mental health. In addition, individuals who can train their emotions, understand the situation around them, and are sensitive to the problems of life, will more easily respond to any bad stimulus from the environment in positive and adaptive ways (Choopan et al., 2016; Nugroho & Huwae, 2024).

The life journey of former drug addicts to achieve quality of life is inseparable from the process of individuals establishing social relationships with family, friends, and surrounding people who are considered close and make a positive contribution to individual mental growth (Mardiyah et al., 2018). Despite being divorced by their ex-wives, the three participants did not lose hope. Parents and siblings still have strong attachments and always provide full support for the participants. In the social environment of the community, participants also received full support from friends.

Another thing that has improved the quality of life of former drug addicts is related to the physical environment in which they currently live. The environment where the participants live tends to support positive activities that are carried out every day. Many community programs are implemented so that participants can show good changes. Rantelaen and Huwae (2022) revealed that an environment that is calm and free from disturbances, will tend to have a positive impact on the survival and quality of life of individuals.

In the end, the achievement of quality former drug addicts' life is based on the evaluation process carried out by everyone to measure the journey of life that is passed every day. The spiritual journey also appears to be illustrated by the life process that former drug addicts go through. In addition, a sense of optimism that emerges as a form of self-strength and commitment to change oneself and life for the better from previous times.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is that the quality of former drug addict life physically, psychologically, socially, and environmentally is very varied interpreted by the three participants. Although, the three participants continue learn to improve their lives, there are still internal judgments that are expressed about their existence as former drug addicts. Furthermore, the process of improving themselves and their lives continues to be carried out by the three participants by continuing to try positive things to realize a life that has a positive impact on themselves and the environment, to achieve quality of life in totality. The suggestion from this study for former drug addicts is to continues learn for assess themselves positively of every effort that has been made and continues improve the quality of life by getting involved in positive social communities that support each person struggle to face every challenge of life. For the community, it is recommended to understand and be able to provide positive encouragement to ex-drug addicts so that they can show a good attitude of optimism. The community can help by accepting the existence of former drug addicts wherever they are. In addition, social support is important from family, friends, and close people to former drug addicts, so that they can see opportunities for self-esteem. For future research, it is expected to conduct social interventions that educate the community on the importance of holistic support for drug addicts to fight the dark side of their lives. In addition, designing health promotion programs for the younger generation to avoid drug use behavior.

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