

What Drives Engagement? A Sociocultural Qualitative Study of SMART Recovery

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Introduction: SMART Recovery is a facilitator-led mutual-help group for addiction recovery. Further evidence is needed to understand whether sociocultural contexts could shape its delivery and how it is experienced, particularly in cultural settings that emphasise interconnection, collective responsibility, and sensitivity to social evaluation. This study explored how facilitators in Singapore adapt their practices to support member engagement and participation.

Methods: In-depth interviews with 18 participants (14 members and four facilitators) were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to generate themes reflecting culturally embedded facilitation processes.

Key Findings: Facilitation strategies were: (1) Collaborative decision-making to manage inherent hierarchical group dynamics, (2) Using member-driven topics to find commonality and discuss taboo issues, (3) Emphasising “no right or wrong” alleviates fear of social disapproval and disrupting group harmony, (4) Navigating autonomy within an interdependent group context, (5) Encouraging involvement in activities outside of SMART Recovery meetings to strengthen group cohesion, and (6) Aligning facilitation roles with local cultural expectations.

Discussions and Conclusions: These strategies reflect broader cultural emphasis on relational harmony, belonging, and the avoidance of loss of face. Facilitators' adaptability and responsiveness to group dynamics fostered group cohesion, shared identity, and collective ownership. In turn, these processes supported deeper reflection and active engagement in SMART Recovery.

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities: Findings underscore the importance of embedding recovery support within local cultural contexts. Facilitation is key to strengthening belonging, trust, and sustained engagement. Practice and policy should support flexible, community-informed adaptations. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks could extend beyond individual outcomes to include group-level processes (e.g., group cohesion, belonging), particularly in interdependent contexts.

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