

Exploring the meaning of low self-esteem that is inherent
in depression, an interpretive phenomenological study

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Adelaide

Master of Nursing Science, June 2014



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Course code & title:	7007HO – Nursing Research Dissertation A – Stage II		
Assignment title:	Thesis	Assignment number:	1
Due date:	13/06/2014	Word count:	28,937
Relevant notes: (extension granted, revised submission date)	Granted one week extension. I declare that I have kept a copy of my work.		
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Declaration

This thesis titled “Exploring the meaning of low self-esteem that is inherent in depression, an interpretive phenomenological study”, contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the School of Nursing Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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Acknowledgements

There are several people that have enabled me to undertake and complete this study. Firstly this research study would not have been possible without the participation of the people who kindly and generously agreed to be interviewed, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest thanks for their contribution. Each participant willingly agreed to participate without expectation of any personal benefit or reward.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank both of my supervisor's Associate Professor Mrs Anne Wilson and Mrs Rosanne Crouch for providing supervision and advice in the development of my research proposal to conduct this research study.

I would like to also acknowledge and thank my supervisor's Dr David Foley and Ms Cheryl Green at The University of Adelaide their advice and encouragement has been much appreciated.

I also thank my wonderful family who have supported me and encouraged me.

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore the lived experience of low self esteem inherent in depression for participants who directly accessed mental health care in a rural mental health service in the South East Region of South Australia. Five participants were interviewed. Data was collected from interviews in which participants reflected on the connection of low self esteem often inherent in depression in nine domains of life and how this had impacted on the participant's day to day life. Data was collected using a phenomenological methodology, and the data was analysed using Colaizzi's 7 step method. Meaning was aggregated into themes using the structure of cognitive behavioural therapy to explore the interaction of cognition, behaviour, physiology and affect. Results illustrated a significant negative experience of low self esteem in depression with associated thoughts and behaviours. These thoughts and behaviours maintained suffering and distress in all domains of life except spirituality and to a lesser degree citizenship. Participant's experience of the mental health service was generally viewed as worthwhile.

This research confirms the value of psychological interventions by skilled health professionals. The subjective experience of low self esteem appeared to have become a part of life, not dissimilar to an addiction whereby people do not know how to live without it. The experience of low self esteem in depression for the participants was a long battle and gaining new insights through contact with mental health services may be viewed as too little too late. The research demonstrated the long term benefits of a co-ordinated approach to early interventions within the primary and secondary education system. With the estimated rates of depression on the rise there is a challenge for mental health professionals at the grass roots level to disseminate vital information to young people about the complexity of the mind. Understanding the experience of low self esteem in depression during our formative years may abort these negative experiences before they become entrenched and gain a psychological hold, which may develop into the formation of unhelpful habitual thoughts and unhelpful habitual behaviours, and loss of life through suicide.

Keywords: low self-esteem, depression, lived experience, domains of life, qualitative nursing research.