

The Value of Social Welfare in the Mental Health Ecosystem

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Abstract

The restructuring of mental health services from institutionalization towards more community-centered approaches to care provision and psychosocial rehabilitation has led to the re-establishment of the role of all the actors involved in the recovery process. Emphasis is now put into the idea of individuals in community: patients are defined not just alone but in relationship to others [1]. Measuring the effectiveness of this approach to mental health services calls upon an examination of the multiple interactions that comprise all members of the mental health ecosystem. A better understanding of such dynamics allows for public funding to be efficiently allocated to service-delivery mechanisms, while appropriately meeting public needs [2].

Complex Systems Theory provides a framework through which to conceptualize the interweaving of interactions among the members within the mental health community as evolving into an emergent pattern which we refer to as social capital. This allows us to consider the mental health community as an "ordered whole" [3] while assigning meanings to the role of every actor within the collective. Social capital has long been associated to community development in general [4], health and mental health in particular [5]. It has to do with "...networks, norms and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" [6]. Therefore, social capital can be thought of as emerging out of complex social interactions among individuals that conform or deviate from shared norms of behavior.

Social dilemma constructs - an abstraction for situations where individual and collective rationalities are in conflict - provides with a language to critically speculate about strategic decision making in social interaction. A set of economic games - namely the Public Good Game, the Trust Game and the Prisoner Dilemma Game - are used to elicit and quantify interactive decision-making in a parametric way. Such games involve concrete concepts of optimal play, thus providing quantitative ways to detect when individuals choices conform or deviate from shared norms of social behavior. The use of game theory paradigm is indeed becoming increasingly relevant within the mental health literature [7, 8, 9].

In strict collaboration with the Catalan Federation of Mental Health we explored the dynamics of the mental health ecosystem in a participatory way by means of citizen science and collective research strategies. We addressed concerns related to trust, reciprocity, cooperation, optimism and sense of justice of individuals with a diagnosis of mental health and of the mental health ecosystem as a whole.

We ran a collective experiment during the World Day of Mental Health in Lleida, Catalunya.
A number of key behavioral traits emerged as for the social functioning of the collective.

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