

SELF CONCEPT DECLINE FROM PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALIZATION

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It is today generally recognized that mental hospitalization per se has various detrimental effects on the patient (2, 3, 5, 7). The present study shows that this can become manifest already within a month. The measure chosen for assessing effects of hospitalization was the patients' self concept, to which progressively greater interest is given by psychologists and sociologists in its dynamic relationship to the adjustment of the individual (4, 8).

METHOD

Subjects: *Ss* consisted of 24 individuals who were entering a mental hospital for the first time and 24 outpatients at the same hospital. The two groups were paired for age, sex, and diagnosis. The decision as to whether to admit a patient or carry him as an outpatient was primarily on the basis of the status of the person who referred him: if this was a physician, the patient was admitted; if it was a friend, member of the family, social worker, or public health nurse, the patient was seen at the outpatient clinic. Each group consisted of 14 males and 10 females, aged 22 to 51 years ($M = 37$ years, $SD = 9$ years). All were classified as seriously disturbed neurotics, with no evidence of psychosis.

During the period of the study, the outpatients received individual psychotherapy during their weekly clinic visits. Only a few of the outpatients continued to work at their jobs, in a marginal capacity. The majority were too disturbed to work, which was often a reason for their seeking or being referred for psychiatric help.

The inpatients received, almost from the start, a half-day occupational therapy assignment, which in some cases was changed to an industrial therapy assignment after about two weeks. Although the hospital was an old custodial institution, it had completed rather extensive building and reorganization, in line with newer conceptions of the social milieu and the therapeutic community. Group psychotherapy sessions were held for all of the inpatients at least once during the first two weeks, and after that group or individual psychotherapy was continued with many.

Materials: To measure the self concept a semantic differential scale was used consisting of 20 pairs of self-evaluation items on a 7-point scale each. Some of the pairs were: valuable - worthless, kind - cruel, good - bad, immature - mature, strong - weak, dangerous - harmless. The reliability of the items by the test-retest method one month apart on an independent sample of 37 outpatients at the hospital was .83.

Procedure: The semantic differential scale was administered individually in a quiet, isolated office, by the senior author, to inpatient *Ss* immediately after their admission interview, and to outpatients during a biweekly visit. It was subsequently re-administered twice at two-week intervals. As soon as *S* had marked each item the scale was collected and retained by the examiner. *S* was

not permitted to look over his responses to minimize memory on the two subsequent administrations. Scores were obtained by adding the ratings on the 20 pairs of items. The positive polar items were given a value of 1, the negative items a value of 7. The three administrations were compared for each group by the analysis of variance for repeated measures (6, pp. 105-111), and for linearity of regression (1, pp. 357-361).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After one month, 19 of the 24 inpatients showed a lowered self concept, compared to only 3 of the 24 outpatients. The development of the mean self-concept scores during this period is presented in Table 1. It shows an increase, indicating unfavorable development,

TABLE 1. SELF-CONCEPT SCORES OF MENTAL HOSPITAL INPATIENTS AND OUTPATIENTS UPON ADMISSION, AFTER 2, AND AFTER 4 WEEKS, HIGHER NUMBERS BEING LESS FAVORABLE

	Inpatients (N = 24)		Outpatients (N = 24)	
	M	SD	M	SD
initial scores	32.83	4.79	33.47	4.20
scores after 2 weeks	35.95	3.78	32.92	4.13
scores after 4 weeks	39.96	3.83	33.40	3.87

for the inpatients, whereas the means of the outpatients remained virtually unchanged. There were no sex differences. As one would expect, analysis of variance for the outpatients was not significant. For the inpatients the analysis indicated that the lowering in self concept was significant ($F = 8.51$, $df\ 23/46$; $p < .01$). Linearity of regression was significant at the .01 level ($F = 7.20$, $df\ 1/69$).

We found then that institutionalization had a debilitating effect on the self concept of the patients within the short period of one month. This suggests a great sensitivity of the self concept to changes in social environmental conditions. It also appears that the longer the hospitalization, the less favorable the self concept. This is comparable with previous findings on chronicity and institutionalization (3, 5) which raised the question about the advisability of hospitalization before all other possible approaches have been evaluated.

SUMMARY

The role of hospitalization on self concept was evaluated. A semantic differential scale was administered to 24 neurotic patients immediately upon entering a hospital, and 2 and 4 weeks after hospital-

ization. The same scale was also administered to 24 matched outpatients at the institution at similar intervals. No changes in self concept occurred in the outpatients, while the inpatients showed a significant decline. A test for linearity of regression was also significant. Thus hospitalization was shown to have an adverse effect on self concept within the short period of one month.

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