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# Consumers' perspectives of the meaning of safety in acute mental health inpatient services

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# Consumers' perspectives of the meaning of safety in acute mental health inpatient services

## **Abstract**

Background and Aim: Safety is a priority in the acute mental health inpatient setting (ACQSHC 2014). Safety is commonly represented in government policy as the reduction or elimination of risk (AIHW 2018). Defining safety as the reduction or elimination of risk means this is where funding and resources are likely to be directed. This has limitations however, as it can lead to environments and processes considered by mental health services to be safe, but are not aligned with what people with lived experience of mental illness deem to be safe (Cutler, Moxham & Stephens 2015). This PhD study explored the ways in which safety is conceptualised by people who have experienced admission to an acute mental health inpatient unit. Materials and Methods: The study used a phenomenographic research design to determine what safety means for people who have experienced admission to an acute mental health inpatient unit. Phenomenography is a qualitative research approach that allows the diverse meanings held by people about a phenomenon to be identified (Marton 1981). The meanings of the phenomenon, rather than the phenomenon itself, are the focus of this research approach. Fifteen participants were individually interviewed for the study, using semi-structured interviews.

## **Keywords**

meaning, perspectives, consumers', health, mental, services, acute, inpatient, safety

## **Disciplines**

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# CONSUMERS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE MEANING OF SAFETY IN ACUTE MENTAL HEALTH INPATIENT SERVICES

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**Background and Aim:** Safety is a priority in the acute mental health inpatient setting (ACQSHC 2014). Safety is commonly represented in government policy as the reduction or elimination of risk (AIHW 2018). Defining safety as the reduction or elimination of risk means this is where funding and resources are likely to be directed. This has limitations however, as it can lead to environments and processes considered by mental health services to be safe, but are not aligned with what people with lived experience of mental illness deem to be safe (Cutler, Moxham & Stephens 2015). This PhD study explored the ways in which safety is conceptualised by people who have experienced admission to an acute mental health inpatient unit.

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## References:

- Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care [ACSQHC] (2014) Accreditation Workbook for Mental Health Services, Sydney, ACSQHC.
- Australian Institute of Health & Welfare [AIHW] 2018, National Mental Health Performance Framework, Canberra, AIHW.
- Cutler, NA, Moxham, L & Stephens, M 2015, 'The meaning of safety in acute mental health inpatient services', *Australian Nursing and Midwifery Journal*, vol.22, no.8, p.39. ISSN: 2202-7114.

Marton F 1981, Phenomenography – describing conceptions of the world around us, *Instructional Science*, vol. 10, pp. 177-200.

**Results:** Seven categories of description were identified; each representing a qualitatively different way safety has been conceptualised by participants. In phenomenography, the structural and hierarchical links between the categories of description are also identified and the results are presented in the form of an outcome space. The outcome space for this study provides a graphical representation of the meaning of safety from the perspective of people who have experienced admission to an acute mental health inpatient unit (see Figure 1). The seven categories of description are embedded across three interdependent realms of safety: Infrastructure (the foundations for safety), Interpersonal (the dynamics of safety), and Internalised (the personal experience of safety). The realms of safety and the categories of description that were identified in this study are:

## Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the basic physical and organisational structures and facilities needed for the operation of an enterprise. Operating at the macro-level, Infrastructure represents the foundational context for safety. Two categories of description are situated in this realm:

- Being in a calm and comforting environment
- Having nurses with knowledge, skills and the right motivation

## Interpersonal

Interpersonal represents the dynamic, relational factors that operate between mental health professionals and consumers to establish and maintain safety. Four categories of description are situated in this realm:

- Nurses being present
- Being treated with dignity and respect
- Having someone on my side
- Having autonomy and choice

## Internalised

Internalised represents the deeply personal, innermost experience of safety. This realm is dependent on the prior realms of Infrastructure and Interpersonal, and comprises a single category of description:

- Having hope

**Discussion:** This study shows that, for consumers, safety means more than the reduction and elimination of risk. As a result, the way the concept of safety is defined and applied in the acute mental health inpatient unit setting needs to be revisited. These findings have implications for mental health service policy and procedures, evaluation, and professional development of staff. The findings also show that, from the consumers' perspective, mental health nurses have an important role as partners in safety in the acute mental health inpatient setting.

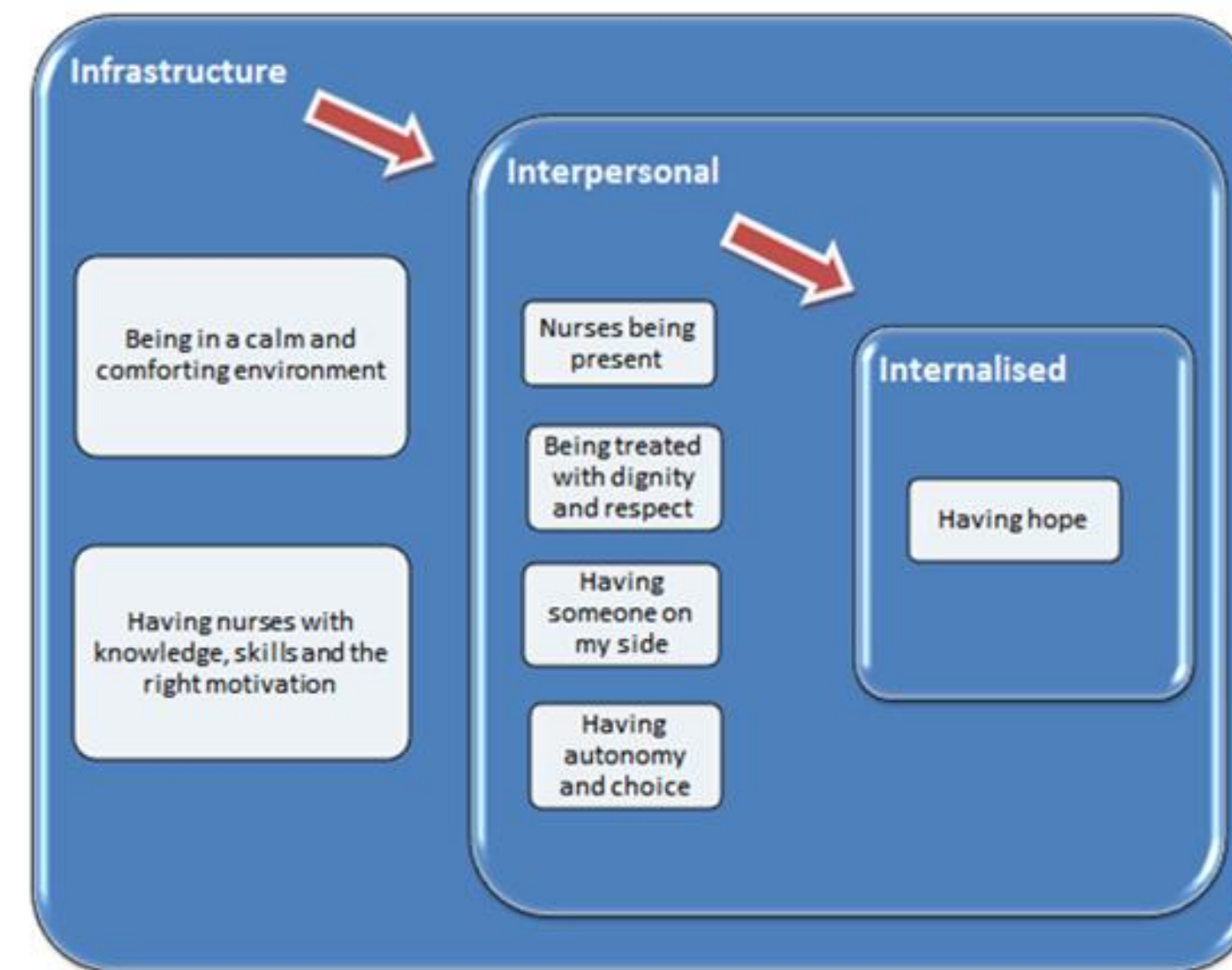


Figure 1: The outcome space representing the varied meanings of safety for people who have had admission to an acute mental health inpatient unit.

**Information about the authors:** Natalie Cutler is a lecturer in the University of Wollongong (UOW) School of Nursing, and is completing this PhD project. Professor Lorna Moxham is Professor of Mental Health Nursing and Global Challenge Lead for Living Well, Longer at UOW, and is primary supervisor of this PhD project. Dr Moira Stephens is a senior lecturer at UOW, and is co-supervisor of this PhD.

