

Supplementary file: semi-structured question guide applied in qualitative interviews with BD patients

Introduction to participants

This interview is a part of a study on how people with bipolar disorder (or manic depression) perceive their quality of life. In particular, I am interested in hearing about your experiences with so-called mixed states. These are states in which you may experience a mixture of manic and depressive symptoms.

I would like to begin by asking you some general questions and then, we will move on to your experiences with mixed states. I will ask you in a fairly direct manner, but if there are things you do not feel like talking about, or if you need a break or to stop, just let me know. I will record our conversation so that I won't have to take notes while we are talking. As soon as I have transcribed the interview, I will erase the recording. Everything that you say remains anonymous. No information referable to you will be passed on to your doctors or any other person. Likewise, I have not received any medical records about you. I have only been told that you have experienced mixed states.

Opening questions: background information

- 1) First, I would like to know how you refer to the disorder [*referred to as bipolar disease (BD) in the question guide but replaced throughout the interview with the respondents' own term, e.g. manic depression*]?
- 2) How long have you suffered from BD?
 - a. How old were you when you were diagnosed with BD?
 - b. How old are you today?
 - c. How long did it take from your first symptoms until you received the diagnosis?
 - d. Did you receive any other diagnosis prior to the BD diagnosis? – If so, were you treated for this?
- 3) What was your reaction to receiving the diagnosis?
 - a. Have you ever considered why you might have developed BD?
- 4) Can you describe your typical course of illness (aid: patterns in cycles of depressive, manic, mixed, and stable periods, frequency of fluctuations)?
 - a. What do you call these different episodes or states?
 - b. Has this pattern changed over time?
 - c. How often have you been admitted to hospital?
 - d. For how long periods of time have you been admitted to hospital?
 - e. How do you experience the transitions between the different phases?
 - a. Sudden or gradual transitions?
 - b. Do you register when an episode is immanent?

- 5) What are your experiences with the medical treatment?
 - a. Are you experiencing any side effects to the medication?
 - b. Are you taking your medicine as prescribed?
 - c. If not: Why not?
 - d. Have you had any influence on the choice of treatment?

- 6) Have you received other kinds of treatment, for instance psychological therapy or psycho-education?
 - a. If yes: can you describe your experiences?
 - b. Can you yourself do something to alleviate your symptoms (aid: daily routines, food, exercise, sleep rhythms, meditation, etc.)?

Main questions: Patient experiences with mixed states

Now, I would like to focus on the so-called mixed states, i.e. states where one can experience manic and depressive symptoms simultaneously. From what I understand, you have experienced such state(s). So, I would like you to try to describe what is like being in such a state. I realize it can be difficult to remember everything. But just try as best as you can.

- 7) How often would you say that you have experienced mixed states?

- 8) When was the mixed state that you remember most clearly?
 - a. How long did that state last?
 - b. Was it clear to you at the time that you were being in a mixed state?
 - c. Did you feel:
 - primarily manic with a few depressive symptoms?
 - primarily depressed with a few manic symptoms?
 - rapidly cycling between mania and depression?
 - other

If possible, would like you to focus on that particular mixed state and describe what it was like to be in that state.

- 9) What part of your life was particularly affected by being in this mixed state?
 - a. In which ways?

Some patients found it difficult to single out one particular mixed state (Q 8-10). They would describe their experiences with mixed states in the ways they preferred, picking out examples from different episodes or describing their experiences with mixed states, in general.

Semi-structured interviewing implies that the following questions were asked only if the patients did not touch upon the topics by themselves. When the patients did describe topics by themselves, they might be asked to describe in more detail or provide examples. Also, the patients would be asked to compare relevant

issues to mixed states to other disease states. The sequence of patients' descriptions and the ways in which they spontaneously relate topics are important for the qualitative analysis to maintain.

- 10) While you were being in this mixed state, how did you experience your:
- a. Work life (or studies)?
 - b. Interest in leisure activities?
 - c. Financial dispositions?
 - d. Physical well-being?
 - e. Consumption of alcohol or drugs?
 - f. Social life: Did it affect your relationship with other people (whom and how)?
 - i. Relation to your partner/spouse, including your sex life?
 - ii. Relation to your family?
 - iii. Relation to friends and acquaintances? Incl. other peoples reaction to you?
 - g. Mood (aids: depressed, elevated, anxious, despair)?
 - h. Psychological well-being (including self-harming behavior)?
 - i. Self-esteem?
 - j. Ability to think clearly (aids: concentration, cognition, memory, planning)?
 - k. Ability to manage yourself and have control over your life?
 - l. Ability to keep your home tidy?
- 11) What are your experiences with the medical treatment of your mixed state(s)?
- a. Is it effective?
 - b. How does the medication affect you?

Closing questions

- 12) Before we end this interview, I would like to ask how you feel your life in general is affected by having BD?
- 13) Would you say that certain parts of your life are more affected by having BD than others?
- 14) Which life domains do you feel are most important to your quality of life?
- 15) What are your thoughts and wishes for the future?
- 16) Do you feel that we have touched upon your most important experiences with mixed states or is there something more that you would like to tell me about this?