

Social Media and Mental Health Care: Emerging Trends

RC Jiloha*

Professor and Chair, Psychiatry and Rehabilitation Science, Hamdard Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi, India

***Corresponding Author:** RC Jiloha, Professor and Chair, Psychiatry and Rehabilitation Science, Hamdard Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi, India.

Received: April 28, 2017; **Published:** May 11, 2017

Social Media

Social media refers to interactive web and mobile platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create and exchange information, ideas, photos or videos within virtual network. In recent times, it has emerged as a powerful medium to communicate and navigate in the social circles providing an excellent platform for news sharing, creativity display, and learning. Exchange of views and opinions on popular social media such as Face book or YouTube helps to develop a sense of belonging, hope, acceptance and validation. There have been more than two billion people across the globe having active social media accounts [1].

Severe mental illness and social media

People suffering from severe mental illness such as Schizophrenia, Schizo-affective disorder and Bipolar disorder are, increasingly turning to social media to talk about their illness, seek and learn from and support others with similar illnesses [2]. Online network offers novel approaches of supporting and engaging the high-risk group in treatment efforts [3]. Research findings demonstrate beneficial effects of social media online communication in the individuals suffering from severe mental illness [2]. Studies have been conducted on self-forming online communities of individuals who share an understanding of living with mental illness. Social interaction of individuals within these communities provides newer opportunities to promote recovery, self-esteem and mental and physical wellbeing [4].

Social stigma and severe mental illness

Individuals suffering from severe mental illness are often victims of social stigma and prejudice with a devastating effect on quality of life, self-esteem and ability to pursue meaningful life [5]. The root cause of all stigma, prejudices of all kind, is ignorance and lack of proper scientific knowledge [6]. Debilitating symptoms of anxiety, depression and low motivation combined with social stigma make the people with severe mentally illness suffer helplessly resulting into social marginalization and withdrawal. This exposes them to the risk of substance use, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, hospitalization and suicide [7]. To reach them it is necessary to overcome barriers like social isolation, reluctance to use formal health care services, traumatic life events or disruptive home environment [8].

Online network offers novel approaches of supporting and engaging the high-risk group in treatment efforts [3]. Patients with severe mental illness victims of stigma connect themselves with others who share similar health conditions and discuss their problems without revealing their identity [9]. They feel less alone, and support each other and share personal stories and strategies for coping with day to day challenges for living with mental illness [10]. Some symptoms of severe mental illness interfere with socialization in face to face interaction, social media may help to facilitate social connections by overcoming obstacles of stigma and disturbing symptoms [11]. Online support groups, forums and chat rooms serve as important venues for discussing sensitive mental health conditions [12].

Disclosing one's illness to others is an important approach to fight stigma [13] which can be easily done by sharing positive stories of recovery and facts and directly addressing myths and misinterpretation about illness experiences. Marginalized individuals benefit from empowerment, greater personal identity and pride which they feel while connecting with similar others online [14]. They feel more confident and achieve greater sense of belonging when they interact with others. Online communities serve a valuable outlet for these individuals. Further research is needed to establish whether online patient group with severe mental illness support effectively challenges stigma and helps overcome social isolation among people with severe mental illness.

Risks of online interaction

Risks of online communication should be carefully examined as it may not be fully safe to obtain advice from a person with unknown credentials. Moreover, it is not possible to confirm the reliability of what two persons with severe mental illness talk to each other in an online network and which content of interaction is trustworthy [15]. Experiences of others online may lead to unrealistic expectations and greater anxiety or confusion about one's own condition [4].

Social media provides opportunities to form meaningful relationships with others, but also poses risks. Earlier studies report the risk of development of dependency on for online relationship [16,17]. Online network may contribute to greater social withdrawal and avoidance of real life interactions [18].

Though the online interactions have a positive influence, there is possibility of coming across some forums of groups that support self-harm and other unhealthy or destructive behaviours [4]. There is possibility of exposure to hostile or derogatory comments by others as well as online harassment. However, there is limited evidence of such social risks [11].

Future Challenges

Dominant societal view is that the people suffering from severe mental illness are a group which lacks the technical proficiency and ability to engage in meaningful social relationships through contemporary technological platforms (Parr 2008) [19]. Online communication of people with severe mental illness challenges the pervasive social prejudice and discrimination by giving diverse patient groups their own voice and opportunity for self-expression. Because of the rapid proliferation of social media, patients' online interactions will increasingly become an important part of how people with severe mental illness communicate with one another.

Bibliography

1. Kemp S. Digital, social and mobile worldwide in 2015". We are Social.
2. Gowen K, *et al.* "Young adults with mental health conditions and social networking website seeking tools to build community". *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* 35.3 (2012): 245-250.
3. Naslund JA, *et al.* "Future of mental health care: peer-to-peer, support and social media". *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences* 25.2 (2016): 113-122.
4. Ziebland S and Wyke S. "Health and illness in a connected world: how might sharing experiences on internet affect people's health?" *Milbank Quarterly* 90.2 (2012): 219-249.
5. Corrigan PW. "The impact of stigma on severe mental illness". *Cognitive and Behavioural Practice* 5.2 (1998): 201-222.
6. Wig NN. "Editorial: Stigma Against Mental Illness". *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 39.3 (1997): 187-189.
7. Corrigan JW. "How stigma interferes with mental health care". *American Psychologist* 59.7 (2004): 614-625.

8. Hert M., *et al.* "Physical illness in severe mental disorders II. Barriers to care monitoring and treatment guidelines, plus recommendations at the system and individual level". *World Psychiatry* 10.2 (2011): 138-151.
9. Berger M., *et al.* "Internet use and stigmatized illness". *Social Sciences and Medicine* 61.8 (2005): 1821-1826.
10. Naslund JA., *et al.* "Naturally occurring peer support through social media: the experiences of the individuals with severe mental illness using YouTube". *Plos One* 9.10 (2014): e10171.
11. Highton-Williamson E., *et al.* "Online social networking in people with psychosis: a systematic review". *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 61.1 (2015): 92-101.
12. Kummervold PE., *et al.* "Social support in a wired world: use of online mental health forums in Norway". *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry* 56.1 (2002): 59-65.
13. Corrigan PW., *et al.* "Reducing self-stigma by coming out proud". *American Journal of Public Health* 103.5 (2013): 794-800.
14. van Uden Krann CF., *et al.* "Participation in online patient support groups endorses patients' empowerment". *Patient Education and Counseling* 74.1 (2009): 61-69.
15. Endwistle VA., *et al.* "How information about other people's experiences can help with health care decision making: a qualitative study". *Patient Education and Counseling* 85.3 (2011): e291-e298.
16. Kaplan K., *et al.* "Internet peer support for individuals with psychiatric disabilities: a randomized controlled trial". *Social Science and Medicine* 72.1 (2011): 54-62.
17. Chung JE. "Social networking in online support groups for health: how online social networking helps benefits patients". *Journal of Health Communication* 19.6 (2014): 639-659.
18. Lawlor A and Kirakowski J. "Online support group for mental health: a space for challenging self-stigma or a means of social avoidance?" *Computer in Human Behaviour* 32 (2014): 152-161.
19. Parr H. "Mental Health and Social Space: towards inclusionary Geographics?" Blackwell Publishing: Malden MA (2008).

Volume 3 Issue 5 May 2017

©All rights reserved by RC Jiloha.