

Social Work and Psychological Resilience in Coping with Chronic Illnesses

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Abstract

The study aims to explore the interaction between social work and psychological resilience in coping with chronic illness. Chronic illnesses pose significant challenges to individuals, often leading to psychological distress, anxiety, and depression, which can undermine resilience. The role of social workers is crucial in providing comprehensive support, helping patients cope with the emotional, social, and economic difficulties associated with their conditions. By drawing on psychological theories such as self-efficacy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and the biopsychosocial model, social workers can enhance patients' coping strategies and improve their quality of life. This study emphasizes the importance of integrated care approaches that address both the physical and psychological aspects of chronic illness. Through actionable recommendations, it aims to improve services and programs for individuals with chronic illnesses, ultimately enhancing psychological resilience and adaptability.

Keywords: Psychological Resilience, Social Work, Psychologist, Chronic Illnesses.

1. Introduction

Chronic diseases have become a source of suffering and a threat to the individual and society. Recent years have witnessed an exacerbation in their severity, especially those diseases that accompany the patient throughout his life, making living with them a major challenge [1].

These diseases are characterized by several main characteristics, including their long-term persistence, gradual development, continuous impact on quality of life, multiple causative factors, the impossibility of complete recovery, and the need for integrated healthcare that includes doctors, nurses, and mental health specialists [2].

Many patients suffer from anxiety and depression as a result of the daily challenges of managing their health condition and dealing with persistent symptoms. As well as the feeling of isolation and loneliness, in addition to constant pain and fatigue, can lead to a deterioration in the psychological state and increase the difficulty of controlling the disease [2,3]. Therefore, providing psychological and social support to chronic patients is essential to improve their

quality of life and enhance their ability to control the symptoms of the disease [4]. On the other hand, the medical field is considered one of the most important fields for practicing social service in the modern era, as the role of the social worker has become one of the most important roles in the treatment team, and as an integral part of integrated treatment, in order to help solve the psychological, social and economic problems associated with the disease [5].

The social worker has a major role in rehabilitating those with chronic diseases and increasing their ability to perform their social Work and Psychological Resilience by providing a set of activities that aim to bring about a positive change in the patient's behavior, and help him satisfy his psychological and social needs, and instill hope in him. The social worker can help those with chronic diseases by providing awareness, guidance and counseling services to them and their families, informing them of the reality of the disease and how to live with it, helping to solve the problems they face, improving their communication with the treatment team and family members, and encouraging positive behaviors [6].

This research aims to provide actionable recommendations to improve programs and services provided to individuals with chronic diseases, which contributes to enhancing their psychological resilience and enabling them to better adapt to their health conditions.

Problem Statement

Chronic illnesses pose significant challenges to psychological resilience in people with chronic conditions, impacting their ability to cope with long-term health problems and maintain mental health. Despite advances in medical treatments, people with chronic conditions often experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, which can undermine their psychological resilience [7]. The characteristics of chronic illnesses require ongoing adaptation and management. Research suggests that chronic illness can erode self-esteem and reduce the ability to use effective coping strategies, leading to reduced resilience. Addressing this gap is critical to developing targeted interventions that promote psychological resilience and improve overall quality of life for people with chronic illnesses [8].

2. Methodology

This study adopts a desk methodology approach to analyze the relationship between social work and psychological resilience in the face of chronic diseases. It relies on a review of the available literature from previous research to determine the role of social work in enhancing psychological resilience among patients with chronic diseases. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

The Impact of Chronic Illness on Psychological Resilience

The impact of chronic illness on psychological resilience is profound and multifaceted, significantly affecting mental health. The specific psychological symptoms experienced by patients with chronic illnesses are directly related [9]. For example, the continued progression of diseases such as multiple sclerosis and diabetes can lead to feelings of uncertainty and fear about

the future, which exacerbates psychological distress [10]. Furthermore, the side effects of many medications prescribed to manage these conditions can worsen an individual's psychological state. For example, medications that alter hormone levels can contribute to mood swings and depression, creating a complex interplay between the illness and its treatment. In addition, the constant stress about their health, the financial burden of ongoing medical expenses, and the potential loss of independence in daily activities exacerbate emotional distress [11]. This chronic stress and anxiety can severely disrupt their lives, negatively impacting psychological resilience and increasing the risk of developing more serious mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. Studies show that people with chronic conditions are more likely to experience depression than the general population, highlighting the urgent need for integrated care approaches that address both the physical and psychological aspects of chronic illness among patients with chronic pain [7]. Depression affects up to 25-30% of patients with chronic illnesses and can be a direct result of managing the disease and medication side effects [12]. Chronic anxiety is another common psychological problem among these patients, as stress about the future, fear of deteriorating health, and the financial burden of treatment contribute to increased levels of anxiety. Patients with heart conditions, for example, experience anxiety due to fears of heart attacks. Emotional stress can be overwhelming, leading to feelings of isolation and a loss of personal and social identity. This underscores the complex relationship between chronic conditions and mental health, necessitating tailored interventions to address these diverse needs [13]. In conclusion, the impact of chronic illness on psychological resilience is significant, highlighting the need for an integrated approach that considers the interplay between physical and mental health to improve patient outcomes.

Psychological theories in Coping with Chronic Illnesses

Psychological theories provide a framework for patient care and improving health outcomes. Using these theories, health psychologists can create personalized interventions that address both the psychological and physical aspects of chronic illness [14].

One prominent framework in this field is cognitive behavioral theory, which posits that the way individuals think about their illness significantly influences their emotional and behavioral responses. Cognitive behavioral therapy emphasizes identifying and restructuring negative thinking patterns, helping patients develop more adaptive coping strategies [15]. In contrast, Lazarus and Folkman developed stress and coping theory, which distinguishes between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. This theory suggests that individuals assess stressors and use different coping mechanisms based on their perceived ability to manage the challenges posed by their illness. Acceptance and commitment therapy also offers insights into coping by promoting psychological flexibility and acceptance of difficult thoughts and feelings, allowing patients to engage in value-driven actions despite their health challenges [16,17].

Contribution of psychological theories to improving the Coping with Chronic Illnesses

Psychological theories offer a scientific framework for managing chronic diseases, focusing on personalized interventions that address both psychological and physical aspects. The theory of self-efficacy, developed by Albert Bandura, is particularly relevant in chronic pain management.

It emphasizes enhancing problem-solving skills and decision-making, boosting patients' self-confidence. Such programs improve health management, adherence to treatment, and the adoption of healthier lifestyles, resulting in better health outcomes [18]. The biopsychosocial model highlights the significance of psychological factors in understanding health and disease. It advocates for integrating strategies that address biological, psychological, and social dimensions, promoting a comprehensive approach to chronic disease management [19]. This model aims not only to reduce symptoms but also to enhance psychological resilience and quality of life for patients. Self-efficacy fosters a sense of control over health, allowing individuals to adhere to healthy lifestyles [20].

Additionally, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) plays a vital role in chronic disease management by addressing negative thoughts and behaviors. Research shows that CBT can significantly enhance patients' quality of life and alleviate symptoms associated with chronic illness. Incorporating psychological theories into health care has been linked to substantial improvements in patient outcomes, such as better blood sugar control and medication adherence in diabetic patients. Furthermore, understanding social factors—like poverty and relationship stress can aid health psychologists in developing strategies to help patients cope, thereby improving overall health [21]. In summary, psychological theories provide a holistic approach to managing chronic diseases, targeting physical symptoms while enhancing psychological well-being and quality of life. Integrating these factors into health care leads to significant improvements in patient outcomes and overall care.

3. Literature Review

Both social work and psychological resilience refer to the ability of individuals and patients to cope and adapt to the stresses and challenges associated with chronic diseases. Parviniannasab et al., (2018) evaluated the relationship between type 2 diabetes distress and psychological resilience, focusing on the role of diabetes management efficacy (DMSE) and social support (SS) as mediating factors. Validated questionnaires, including the Diabetes Distress Scale, Diabetes Management Efficacy Scale, Social Support Scale, and Resilience Scale, were used to collect data. The analysis results showed a significant negative association between distress and disease management efficacy ($r = -0.607$), social support ($r = -0.417$), and resilience ($r = -0.552$). The study also showed that diabetes management efficacy acts as a full mediator between distress and resilience, while social support plays a moderating role in the relationship between distress and resilience. The results suggest that enhancing diabetes management efficacy can be an effective strategy to increase resilience and reduce distress, which calls for healthcare providers to pay attention to support resources to improve patients' resilience and assess diabetes-related distress [22].

Furthermore, psychological resilience plays an important role in recovery from psychological disorders, as the results of a study found that fibromyalgia patients have low levels of psychological resilience. The results also showed a significant negative association between resilience and disease severity, anxiety, and depression scores. These findings suggest that

enhancing psychological resilience should be included in the management strategies of fibromyalgia patients [23]. A recent study of Chinese university students found that social support has a significant positive effect on psychological resilience. The results also showed that coping styles negatively affect both social support and resilience, while coping styles enhance both variables. Moreover, coping styles were found to play a mediating role in the relationship between social support and psychological resilience. This study highlights the importance of building social support networks that help young people adopt coping styles, which enhance their resilience and contribute to improving their psychological health [24]. A study was also conducted to explore the impact of resilience on mental health in adults with chronic heart disease, following 180 patients over 12 months. The results showed that higher levels of resilience were associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression over time, suggesting that resilience acts as a protective factor. The study recommended the introduction of resilience training into cardiac rehabilitation programs, noting the importance of stress management techniques and cognitive behavioral strategies. The researchers also emphasized the need for early identification of low levels of resilience to provide appropriate interventions, and suggested further research to explore the mechanisms through which resilience affects mental health [25].

4. Conclusion

Coping and managing chronic illness requires a comprehensive approach that integrates social work and psychological resilience. Chronic illnesses often present significant emotional and psychological challenges, impacting patients' ability to effectively manage their health conditions. Social workers play a vital role in providing support, guidance, and resources that address the multifaceted issues faced by individuals with chronic illnesses. By leveraging psychological theories, such as self-efficacy and cognitive behavioral therapy, healthcare providers can empower patients to improve coping strategies and improve their overall quality of life. The findings highlight the need for comprehensive treatment plans that include the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of health, promote resilience, and promote better health outcomes. Continued research and program development are essential to address the unique challenges posed by chronic illnesses and strengthen support systems that enable patients to thrive despite their health challenges.

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