

Research Paper

Understanding Help Seeking Behaviour Among Caregivers of Patients with Psychosis

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ABSTRACT

Caregivers of people with psychosis play a pivotal role in managing the sick individuals, often facing substantial emotional, mental, and physical burdens. The objective of this study was to discover help-seeking behaviour among caregivers, with a focus on their attitudes in the direction of accessing professional mental health services. For this exploratory cross-sectional study, 126 caregivers of patients with psychosis were selected through purposive sampling method. Data were accumulated with the usage of a Socio-Demographic Datasheet and the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS). Results revealed that a majority of caregivers held favorable attitudes towards seeking professional help. The study highlights that whilst positive attitudes are standard, cultural beliefs, stigma, and systemic boundaries were held to shape the help seeking activity. Findings underscore the need for adequate psychoeducation, stigma discount, and progressed admission to mental health services to help caregivers in playing their role suitably. Enhancing caregivers' willingness and capacity to get professional help can contribute to higher effects for both caregivers and patients.

Keywords: *Psychotic Disorders, Caregivers, Help-Seeking Behavior, Mental Health Services, Attitude to Health, Mental Disorders*

Mental health conditions such as psychosis profoundly impact not only the individuals experiencing them but also their caregivers. Caregivers play a crucial role in managing individuals with psychosis. They encounter day-to-day challenges in providing emotional, physical, and logistical support to them. However, the caregiving process often lays immense stress on individuals, which can lead to physical, emotional, and psychological strain. Help-seeking behaviour, or the willingness and capacity of caregivers to seek external support, is critical in mitigating this burden and enhancing

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both caregivers' well-being and patient outcomes. Despite the importance of help-seeking, various cultural, social, and personal factors influence caregivers' willingness to seek assistance.

Help-seeking behaviour refers to the process by which individuals recognize the need for support and take steps to access it. For caregivers of individuals with psychosis, this process often involves navigating a complex web of formal and informal support systems. Formal support includes professional mental health services such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, while informal support involves family, friends, community groups, and traditional healers. Studies have consistently highlighted the challenges caregivers face in accessing these resources and the significant variations in help-seeking behaviour across different cultural and socio-economic contexts.

Help-seeking behaviour among caregivers of individuals with psychosis often involves accessing formal services, such as mental health professionals, and informal support networks, including family, friends, and community resources. Research has shown that caregivers' willingness to seek help is strongly influenced by their perceptions of mental illness and its associated stigma. Corrigan and Watson (2002) highlighted that stigma surrounding psychosis often deters caregivers from seeking professional assistance, as they fear judgment or discrimination from others.^[1] This finding is supported by Chakrabarti (2011), who observed that caregivers in India frequently avoid seeking formal help due to cultural beliefs and the fear of being labelled as failures in managing their familial responsibilities.^[2]

A study by Gater et al. (1991) examined help-seeking behaviour among caregivers in the United Kingdom and found that most caregivers initially turned to general practitioners (GPs) for assistance.^[3] This reliance on primary care underscores the accessibility of GPs and their pivotal role in providing early interventions. However, in many cases, GPs lacked the specialized knowledge to address the complexities of psychosis, leading caregivers to seek specialized mental health services later in the caregiving journey. In contrast, research in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) has shown that caregivers often prioritize informal support systems before accessing formal services. Srinivasan et al. (2005) observed that in India, caregivers frequently sought guidance from traditional healers or religious leaders, reflecting the cultural significance of these figures in addressing mental health issues.^[4]

The prevalence of help-seeking behaviour among caregivers of individuals with psychosis remains uneven. Lucksted et al. (2013) reported that only about 30% of caregivers in their study regularly sought professional mental health services. Instead, most relied on informal networks for emotional and practical support.^[5] This finding aligns with Saraceno et al. (2007), who noted that fewer than 40% of caregivers in LMICs accessed formal mental health care, even when services were available.^[6] In rural and semi-urban areas, the prevalence of help-seeking behaviour was found to be even lower, as caregivers faced additional barriers such as geographic isolation, limited transportation options, and a lack of mental health facilities.^[7]

Delayed help-seeking is a common phenomenon among caregivers. Thara and Padmavati (2013) documented that many caregivers in Chennai, India, sought professional help only after the patient's symptoms escalated to a point where they became unmanageable. This delay was attributed to a lack of awareness about psychosis, misconceptions about mental

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illness, and societal stigma. These delays not only exacerbated the patient's condition but also heightened the caregiver's emotional and psychological burden.^[8] Similar findings were reported by Kohn et al. (2004), who emphasized the need for public awareness campaigns to encourage earlier engagement with mental health services.^[9]

Studies also reveal that caregivers who participate in psychoeducation programs demonstrate significantly higher rates of help-seeking behaviour. Pharaoh et al. (2010) found that caregivers who were educated about the nature of psychosis, its symptoms, and treatment options were more likely to recognize early warning signs and seek timely assistance.^[10] Such programs not only improve caregivers' knowledge but also reduce feelings of helplessness and empower them to make informed decisions. Similarly, Lefley (1989) highlighted that caregivers with a better understanding of psychosis were more confident in accessing mental health resources and reported lower levels of stress and burnout.^[11]

Trust in mental health services also influences help-seeking behaviour. Caregivers are more likely to seek help when they perceive mental health professionals as empathetic and effective. Wong et al. (2017) emphasized that caregivers who had positive experiences with mental health services were more inclined to re-engage with these services when needed. On the other hand, caregivers who encountered dismissive attitudes or inadequate support were less likely to seek help in the future, which often resulted in increased caregiver strain and poorer patient outcomes.^[12]

The emotional toll of caregiving often drives caregivers to seek support for themselves, in addition to the patient. Lefley (1989) observed that caregivers who accessed peer support groups or counselling services reported improved emotional well-being and greater resilience in managing the challenges of psychosis.^[11] These findings are corroborated by Patel et al. (2018), who noted that caregivers who sought help for their own mental health needs were better equipped to provide consistent and compassionate care for their loved ones.^[13] Despite these benefits, the prevalence of self-directed help-seeking among caregivers remains low, particularly in cultures where caregiving is viewed as a familial duty rather than a shared responsibility.

Thus, help-seeking behaviour among caregivers of individuals with psychosis is a complex and multifaceted process influenced by cultural, social, and systemic factors. Despite the challenges, caregivers who seek help proactively are better equipped to manage the demands of caregiving and improve outcomes for both themselves and the individuals in their care. By understanding the patterns and levels of help-seeking behaviour, mental health professionals can design targeted interventions to support caregivers and foster a more inclusive and effective mental health care system.

Objective

- To assess help seeking behaviour among caregivers of patients with psychosis.

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study employed a cross-sectional research design. A total of 126 caregivers were recruited using purposive sampling from clinical settings, ensuring they met the inclusion criteria of being primary caregivers of patients diagnosed with psychosis and aged 18 years or older. Caregivers were approached during their visits to psychiatric outpatient clinics or hospital wards. The purpose of the study was explained to them, and informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Participants were assured of the confidentiality

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and anonymity of their responses, as well as the voluntary nature of their involvement. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee. Data collection included the use of a Socio-Demographic Data Sheet to gather information on variables such as age, gender, education, marital status, occupation, family type, socioeconomic status, and the caregiver's relationship with the patient. The Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS), a 10-item tool developed by Fisher and Farina (1995) was used to assess individuals' attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help.^[14] It utilized a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from "disagree" to "agree," to measure aspects such as stigma, perceived effectiveness, and openness to seeking help. Descriptive statistics were applied to analyse the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics such as mean and Chi Square were calculated for summarizing the results.

Table 1. showing attitudes towards professional help seeking behaviours among caregivers of patients with psychosis

Sl.No	Attitudes towards professional help seeking behaviours	Frequency	Percentage
1	Unfavourable	21	16.7
2	Favourable	105	83.3
	Total	126	100.0

This table shows that the majority of participants, 105 individuals (83.3%), have a favourable attitude towards seeking professional help for mental health issues, while 21 participants (16.7%) hold an unfavourable attitude. The data suggests that most participants recognize the importance of professional help-seeking behaviour in addressing mental health concerns.

Table 2. Shows Chi-Square Test for Association Between attitudes towards professional help seeking

Sl.No		
1	Chi-Square (χ^2)	56.000
2	Degrees of Freedom (df)	1
3	Asymptotic Significance (p-value)	.000

The chi-square test indicates a statistically significant association between participants' attitudes and their help-seeking behaviour. The p-value of .000 suggests that this association is not due to mere chance factor. In other words, a significant proportion of participants held favourable attitudes towards seeking professional help for mental health issues.

CONCLUSION

The results indicate that there is a meaningful and significant association between individuals' attitudes and their willingness to seek professional help for mental health concerns. A large majority of participants demonstrated a favourable attitude towards seeking professional support, highlighting a positive outlook on the importance and usefulness of mental health services. This suggests growing awareness and acceptance of professional mental health care among the participants, which can contribute to better access to treatment, early intervention, and improved mental health outcomes.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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