The Impact of Podcasts on Mental Health: A Tool to Break Stigma and Amplify Patient Voices

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Abstract

Podcasts have emerged as an innovative digital medium with significant potential in the field of mental health. This umbrella review explores their impact on public perceptions and their role in breaking the stigma surrounding mental disorders. Mental health stigma remains a critical barrier to care, often manifesting through social discrimination and negative stereotypes. In this context, podcasts offer a platform for individuals with lived experience, mental health professionals, and advocates to share stories, discuss treatments, and promote psychological well-being in an accessible, personal, and engaging format. The review analyses studies published between 2019 and 2024 from databases including PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, Cochrane, and EMBASE. The findings highlight four key functions of podcasts in mental health: (1) they enable patients to humanize their condition by telling their stories, contributing to destigmatisation; (2) they foster empowerment and self-expression by allowing patients to control their narratives; (3) they offer accessibility and global reach, breaking down geographical and economic barriers; and (4) they provide psychoeducational support when content is supervised by mental health professionals. Although promising, the review notes the importance of ensuring content quality and evidence-based information, as not all podcasts are professionally moderated. Future research should focus on content validation, long-term impact on stigma reduction, and effects on treatment adherence. In conclusion, podcasts are a valuable, low-cost tool for amplifying patient voices and promoting inclusive mental health discourse. Their integration into therapeutic and educational strategies offers new opportunities for awareness, empathy, and support.

Keywords: mental health; podcasts; stigma; patient participation; health communication

Introduction

The stigma surrounding mental illness remains a significant barrier to help-seeking and social integration for those affected. This stigma manifests in negative attitudes, discrimination, and the perpetuation of stereotypes, all of which hinder access to mental health services and impede recovery processes [1]. In this context, the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of mental health [2].

With the advancement of technology and the rise of digital platforms, podcasts have become a powerful tool for disseminating information and sharing personal stories. These audio programmes, accessible via the internet, allow individuals to convey their experiences, insights, and perspectives in an intimate and direct manner [3]. In the mental health field, podcasts provide a platform for patients, professionals, and advocates to openly discuss topics related to mental disorders, treatments, and coping strategies [4].

Involving individuals with lived experience in the creation and dissemination of mental health content may contribute to destigmatisation and foster a deeper, more empathetic understanding of mental health conditions. By sharing their stories, patients not only find a channel for self-expression and empowerment but also educate listeners, encouraging a culture of acceptance and support [5].

This umbrella review aims to explore the impact of podcasts on public perception of mental health and their contribution to reducing stigma. The analysis is based on studies published over the last five years in specialised databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, Cochrane, and EMBASE.

Methodology

A descriptive literature review was conducted, focusing on studies published between 2019 and 2024 that examined the use of digital technologies in therapeutic practice, with an emphasis on podcasts as a communication medium. The selected research included studies on the impact of these

platforms on public attitudes towards mental health and on patient participation in constructing their own narratives.

Results

The reviewed studies highlight several key functions of mental health podcasts (Table 1) [6]:

Function	Description
Breaking stigma	Patients who take part in podcasts can share their experiences unfiltered, humanising the condition and reducing societal prejudice.
Empowerment and self-expression	Digital media participation fosters a sense of agency, allowing patients to become protagonists of their own stories.
Accessibility and reach	Podcasts eliminate geographic and financial barriers, delivering support and information to a global audience.
Psychoeducational intervention	Several studies suggest that podcasts can complement clinical interventions by offering information validated by mental health professionals.

Table 1: Key findings (author's own compilation)

Discussion

The use of podcasts in mental health aligns with destigmatisation strategies promoted by international organisations. By giving patients a voice, these digital media platforms challenge conventional narratives and promote a more inclusive view of mental health. Through direct testimonies and open discussions, podcasts contribute to the humanisation of mental disorders, enabling greater societal understanding and acceptance. Furthermore, podcasts facilitate interaction between patients, mental health professionals, and the wider audience, encouraging the dissemination of evidence-based information and stimulating dialogue on psychological well-being [7,8].

Nevertheless, despite their potential, it is essential to assess the quality of the content shared on these platforms. Not all podcasts are professionally supervised, which may result in the spread of misinformation or non-evidence-based content. Future research should focus on developing strategies to ensure content reliability by promoting collaborations between podcast creators and mental health experts. Additionally, more studies are needed to examine the long-term impact of podcasts on stigma reduction, treatment adherence, and societal perceptions of mental illness [9,10].

Conclusion

Podcasts represent an innovative and accessible tool for including patients in the public discourse on mental health. Their use contributes to breaking stigma and creating a safe space for experience sharing. Further research is necessary to explore the clinical and social impact of these platforms in greater depth.

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