Countering Stigma towards Mental Illness through Facebook.

1.Dr. Humaira Mujeeb

2.Dr. Iftikharun Nisa Hassan

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of an evidence-based educational intervention, conducted via Facebook, on reducing mental illness stigma in Pakistan, with a focus on Gilgit-Baltistan. Employing a quasi-experimental pre-and post-intervention design, 124 participants aged 18–40 underwent a stigma countering intervention, with 77 completing both assessments. Data collected through an online survey platform were analysed using SPSS, employing descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Results revealed a significant reduction in stigma related to anxiety, relationship disruption, hygiene, and visibility of mental illness, alongside improved attitudes towards treatability, professional efficacy, and recovery. The findings underscore the effectiveness of social media-based educational strategies in enhancing mental health literacy and reducing stigma, highlighting the importance of context-specific interventions in Pakistan.

Introduction

Evidence-based mental health literacy campaigns conducted through social media platforms which have been successfully used in other parts of the world to counter the mental illness stigma associated needs to be validated through context-specific research in Pakistan. Considering this, the present study was conducted through Facebook to investigate the effects of stigma countering educational intervention on the level of stigma towards mental illness.

Methods

The research was quantitative in nature, and it had a quasi-experimental design (pre and post intervention). The research protocol consists of demographic data questionnaire, Level of Contact Report (LOF) (Holmes, et al., 1999 and Mental Illness Stigma Scale (MISS) (Day, Edgren & Eshlemen, 2007) . A total of 124 Facebook users between the age range of 18-40 using Facebook for at least an hour, understand English language and are natives of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan were included as the participants in the pre intervention assessment out of which only 77 complete the post intervention assessment. Pre and post intervention assessment data was gathered through online survey Murvey.com and was analyzed with the help of SPSS. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (paired sample t- test, two sample t-test (independent sample t- test) were calculated for the analysis of the data.

Results

The results showcased a statistically significant reduction in level of stigma regarding anxiety, relationship disruption, hygiene and visibility of mental illness. Furthermore, a considerable increase in the level of positive attitude towards mental illness regarding treatability, professional efficacy and recovery was observed after the intervention. The effect of educational intervention which was aimed at increasing mental health literacy by developing a better understanding of mental illness is reflected in a positive shift in the level of stigma towards mental illness which is clearly demonstrated by the difference in pre and post intervention scores.

Conclusion

The education strategy evidently increased mental health literacy and reduced mental illness stigma.

Limitations

1.The educational strategy did noy address the cognitive processes underlying stigma formation.

2. The study used a quasi-experimental design without a control group, limiting the ability to attribute outcome changes solely to the intervention, as no comparisons were made with unaffected groups.

3. Participant engagement was measured through comments, likes, and viewership on the Facebook page and group used for the intervention. However, there was no robust mechanism to verify if participants thoroughly read and understood the disseminated information.

4. The participants were aged 18-40, excluding individuals under 18 who are highly capable of learning new behaviors and forming attitudes, and who may be at a critical stage for developing stigmatizing views toward mental illness.

5. The study included only participants with a proper understanding of English, excluding many potential respondents.

6. The study had a small sample size, consisting solely of Facebook users from Gilgit-Baltistan, limiting the generalizability of its findings beyond the target population.

Recommendations

1.To address the limitations of the educational intervention, it should be combined with other stigma-reduction strategies, such as contact and protest.

2.Future studies aiming to evaluate the effectiveness of stigma-countering interventions should include a control group to enable meaningful comparisons and conclusions.

3. Iindividuals under 18 are at a crucial stage for the development of stigmatizing perceptions toward mental illness, incorporating them in future research could provide valuable insights into early intervention strategies to mitigate stigma formation.

Contact

Dr Humaira Mujeeb
Email: h.mujeeb@lancaster.ac.uk

References

1. Day, E. N., Edgren. K., & Eshlemen, A. (2007). Measuring stigma toward mental illness: Development and application of the Mental Illness Stigma Scale. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 37*(10)*,* 2191-2219.
2. Holmes, E. P., Corrigan, P. W., Williams, P., Canar, J., & Kubiak, M. A. (1999). Changing attitudes about schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia Bulletin, 25,* 447-456.