Pathways to Psychiatric Care

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ABSTRACT

It is very important to understand how people seek pathways for psychiatric care especially in a developing nation like India. It is instrumental for planning and organizing psychiatric services for the community. Due to greater prevalence of mental illness in current times, majority of which are from developing nations with limited psychiatric services, studies determining the pathways of psychiatric care need to be undertaken so that mental health services could be planned according to the prevalent cultural norms and other factors more specific to the developing nations like India.

Keywords: Psychiatry, Pathways, Mental health.

INTRODUCTION

It is very important to understand how people seek pathways for psychiatric care, especially in a developing nation like India. It is instrumental for planning and organizing psychiatric services for the community. Descriptive studies regarding this issue demonstrated that people with psychiatric problems follow a variety of pathways before they reach mental health professionals. Their pathways are influenced by various factors which include (a) conventions governing referral, (b) relationships between mental health professionals and other sources of help, (c) the availability and accessibility to mental health facilities and other helping agencies. Fujisawa et al examined pathways to psychiatric care in Japan and found that the patients who consulted mental health professionals as their first care-providers took a longer time before consulting psychiatrists than patients who consulted non-mental health professionals as their first care-providers. They also found that the patients who presented with somatic symptoms as their main problem experienced longer delay from the onset of illness to psychiatric care than the patients who complained about depressive or anxiety symptoms. They concluded that the pathway to psychiatric care in Japan heavily relied on medical resources. Their study emphasized the importance of improving skills and knowledge that would facilitate the recognition of psychiatric disorders in the general healthcare system.

PATHWAYS-TO-CARE MODEL

Lincoln and McGorry reviewed the literature about pathways to psychiatric care among young persons experiencing a first episode of psychosis. They concluded that formulation of a pathways-to-care model appears to offer a useful way of understanding mental healthcare use and exploration of consumer experiences would enrich the model. Strategies to reduce treatment delay could then be developed and evaluated. Increased consumer involvement might help ensure that services are better tailored to patients’ needs. Gater et al described the referral pathways and documented the factors associated with delays in referral. The pathways in centers relatively well provided with psychiatric staff were dominated by general practitioners and to a lesser extent hospital doctors. The relatively less well resourced centers showed a variety of pathways with native healers often playing an important part. Delays were remarkably short in all centers regardless of psychiatric resources. Somatic problems were a common presentation in all centers and longer delays were found on pathways involving native healers. Anna-Karin et al found that there were important ethnic and social differences in children’s and adolescents’ pathways to mental healthcare.

FACTORS CAUSING DELAY IN PSYCHIATRIC REFERRAL

Factors causing delay in the initiation of appropriate treatment at the first instance vary from region to region depending upon the sociocultural profile, education, attitude of family/society toward mental illness, perceptions, myths, beliefs, stigma attached with psychiatric disorder, availability/accessibility of psychiatric services and referral patterns, and previous experience of receiving psychiatric help. These determinants also differ in their strength of impact deciding the pathway of care in different geographic regions of world. For example, in the developed nations, the major concern is of stigma, while in the developing nations, it is the problem...
of age old cultural myths and supernatural explanations of psychiatric disorders. There is also a significant role of care providers in deciding the pathways to psychiatric care, the first care provider being the most important for giving direction to the pathway of care to seek further help. Trivedi and Jilani emphasized the need for research to delineate pathways to psychiatric care and their determinants in the developing countries like India. Research related to help seeking behavior and attitude toward mental illnesses and services which primarily determine the pathway of care has been carried out mainly in developed nations. There is, however, deficiency of information from the developing countries.

Further studies in the arena of pathways to psychiatric care and its associated factors, such as culture, sources of referral, access to mental health professionals, indigenous systems of healthcare, attitude toward psychiatric disorders, and perceptions of patients and relatives toward psychiatry are needed. Due to greater prevalence of mental illness in current times, majority of which are from developing nations with limited psychiatric services, studies determining the pathways of psychiatric care need to be undertaken so that mental health services could be planned according to the prevalent cultural norms and other factors more specific to the developing nations like India.

REFERENCES