Addressing Psychosocial Challenges of the community Through Action: A Fieldwork Experience in Social work Education

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Abstract

Psychosocial wellbeing is a superordinate construct that includes emotional or psychological wellbeing, as well as social and collective well being. This research article explores the psychosocial challenges faced by the patients/families/caregivers belongs to the lower socioeconomic strata of the community in general and more specifically when suffered from any health issues and visit the health services. The study draws on firsthand experiences as a social work intern in the Community Medicine department. It delves into the intricacies of psychosocial issues prevalent among community members, including substance abuse, family problems, depression, and financial instability. The article emphasises the importance of targeted interventions to address the multifaceted needs of individuals in the community.

To tackle these psychosocial challenges, the research outlines community workshops, counselling services, mental health awareness campaigns, and support groups etc. The interventions aimed to empower individuals, foster resilience, and promote overall well-being within the community. After implementing these initiatives, the article analyses the observed changes in individuals, highlighting improvements in coping mechanisms, enhanced social support networks, and increased awareness of mental health issues. The study highlights the importance of holistic healthcare approaches that prioritize the psychosocial dimensions of well-being.

Keywords: Psychosocial challenges, Community medicine, Fieldwork experience, Intervention, Well-being, Social work

Introduction

Psychosocial challenges in community affect every aspect of individuals' lives, impacting their health and well-being (Ogbonna & Kagu, 2024). Well-being of an individual includes coping with the various stresses of everyday living and realization of the full potential of an individual as a productive member of the society. These challenges range from depression and anxiety to frustration and violence. The Psychosocial challenges appear in many forms, affecting people's mental and emotional well-being, physical health, social interactions, and sense of belonging in their communities (Chupradit & Vadivu, 2021). We can only start creating effective paths towards complete healing and resilience in community settings by recognizing and fully addressing the range of psychosocial difficulties (Price et al., 2023). Addressing psychosocial issues is crucial as they have a profound impact on individuals, communities, and the healthcare landscape. These challenges go beyond psychological distress and affect every aspect of life, including health outcomes, social dynamics, and society as a whole (Mia & Ali, 2024). These

challenges are a barrier to well-being, making it difficult for individuals to thrive and communities to flourish (Mishra et al., 2023). Addressing psychosocial issues directly is crucial to fostering environments that promote mental health, resilience, and social connectedness. Furthermore, addressing these issues improves not only individual quality of life but also benefits society as a whole (Topa et al., 2023). This includes reduced healthcare costs, improved productivity, and increased social cohesion. Therefore, it is essential to understand the significance of addressing psychosocial issues and to prioritize community-centered approaches that promote mental health, reduce stigma, and provide equitable access to support services (Naz et al., 2019).To explore psychosocial challenges in community, we must first identify and analyze problems (Essien et al., 2023).

During the fieldwork at Urban Health Training Centre (UHTC),Community Medicine Department , Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College (JNMC), Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), researcher observed various psychosocial challenges among patients, like Anxiety, lack of financial support, confusion, fear, lack of governmental aid etc. It has been already identified, that depression and anxiety are pervasive issues that can cause social isolation and stigma(Yousaf, 2023). These challenges can negatively impact individuals' well-being and community dynamics (Berhe et al., 2022). Our analysis aims to uncover the underlying factors contributing to these issues and explore effective intervention strategies. Identifying and analysing psychosocial problems at their roots, lays the groundwork for developing targeted solutions, can make a meaningful difference in the lives of patients and the communities they inhabit (Wright et al., 2024).

Psychosocial challenges in community require interventions to enhance health outcomes and well-being among patients. These challenges have a significant impact on individuals, communities, and the broader healthcare system (Wood & Kallestrup, 2021). Our goal is to alleviate the negative effects of depression, anxiety, social isolation and stigma in patients as well as patient's mental and emotional health by proactively addressing these challenges. Intervention strategies can also help reduce the burden of psychosocial challenges on healthcare resources, leading to cost savings and improved healthcare delivery (Saliu et al., 2022). Intervention initiatives can promote social cohesion, resilience, and community involvement. This ultimately enhances the overall quality of life for individuals and communities (Townshend et al., 2015). The rationale for intervention lies in promoting comprehensive well-being, equity, and social fairness within community (Prabhakar et al., 2024). This ensures that everyone has the opportunity to thrive and lead fulfilling lives (Raworth, 2012).

Overview of Psychosocial Challenges & Current Approaches and Interventions for Addressing Psychosocial Issues

Silove et al., (2017) examined current concerns in the field of refugee mental health. This includes advancements in research, theoretical frameworks, intervention strategies, and policy considerations. The authors emphasized the necessity of longitudinal research to differentiate between transient distress and diagnosable mental health conditions among refugees. They suggested implementing holistic initiatives that include social and psychotherapeutic interventions, as well as accessible mental health services tailored to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. The discussion also covered obstacles related to sustainability, the use of evidence-based practices, and ensuring equitable access to mental health support in resource-constrained environments.

Spies et al., (2022) investigated the experiences of young residents and staff at a Youth Residential Rehabilitation Service. They identified three distinct phases in their journey. The study emphasised the

crucial role of staff-resident relationships in promoting recovery, ensuring safety, and fostering independence. They also recognised the valuable contributions of all involved, including participants and staff at Youth Residential Rehabilitation Services, towards the research's success. Additionally, the authors recommended involving service users more in service design and evaluation to improve their relevance and responsiveness, based on effective elements identified in existing literature on youth residential care.

Dollard et al., (2007) Dollard and colleagues conducted a review of national surveillance systems that focused on psychosocial risk factors in the workplace. They highlighted the importance of surveillance in informing policy development to promote employee well-being and create healthier work environments. The study identified key issues and topics that should be integrated into future surveillance activities. This will better align research findings with the realities of working environments.The authors recommend prioritizing specific psychosocial risk factors within surveillance systems. These factors include emotional demands placed on employees, instances of workplace bullying, and the concept of organizational justice. The study emphasised the importance of keeping surveillance systems flexible to identify and address new risk factors that may emerge over time.

Smith et al., (2017) Smith and colleagues conducted a study on the psychosocial issues faced by head and neck cancer (HNC) patients. The study highlighted the necessity for clinical interventions to address these challenges. It delved into the complex factors contributing to suicide risk among HNC patients and stressed the importance of investigating the underlying causes of suicidal ideation for future research.The authors reviewed psychosocial and behavioral factors associated with HNC. They emphasized the need for prevention, early identification, and treatment of psychosocial comorbidities in these patients. They also highlighted the impact of HNC on intimate relationships and sexual health. Clinical interventions, such as education, support groups, and couples-based counseling, were suggested as potential avenues for addressing these concerns.

Lord et al., (2005) Lord and colleagues stressed the need for randomized clinical trials to evaluate comprehensive interventions for autism spectrum disorder (ASD). They highlighted the positive results of intensive, multi-disciplinary interventions tailored to individuals with ASD. The study also addressed the lack of research on psychosocial and educational interventions specifically aimed at children with autism. The authors aim to enhance the quality of life and well-being of individuals with ASD by advocating for more rigorous study designs and a broader scope of research, improving the efficacy and accessibility of interventions.

Teo et al., (2019) concentrated on psychosocial interventions tested in randomized controlled trials from 2007 to 2016. An update was made in June 2018. This review highlights the effectiveness of different psychosocial approaches in supporting patients with advanced cancer. It emphasizes the importance of holistic care in addressing their psychosocial needs.

Whitehead & Hearn, (2015) conducted a systematic evaluation of psychosocial interventions' impact on health outcomes among Black women diagnosed with breast cancer and outlines future research priorities for this demographic, emphasizing the importance of interventions during the diagnosis and treatment phases., discussed coping mechanisms, quality of life improvements, and the benefits of cognitive-behavioral strategies for Black women, noting enhancements in mood, reduced distress, and improved coping abilities. The findings suggest that Black women benefit significantly from psychosocial interventions, particularly cognitive-behavioral strategies and culturally sensitive approaches.

Universe & Methodology

During the fieldwork at the Urban Health Training Centre(UHTC) of the Community Medicine Department, JNMC, AMU, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, researcher worked in the healthcare setting that welcomed patients seeking medical attention. The center addresses a broad spectrum of general health concerns prevalent within the community. We noticed that tuberculosis (TB) is a significant health issue among the patient population. The centre remains committed to providing comprehensive care and support to individuals affected by TB, as well as addressing other common health ailments. They offer vaccination drives, routine health checkups, and proactive outreach programs.

Our fieldwork experience provided firsthand exposure to the multifaceted nature of community healthcare. As social work interns, we interacted with the patients and their care givers as well as conducted home visits to gain insights into patients' socio-economic backgrounds and psychosocial challenges at their natural settings. This approach of going to the patients homes is an holistic and community-centered approaches to understand and address health disparities and enhance overall well-being in their home/natural settings. Taking community together in health care gives the community (patients/caregivers/community in large) a kind of belongingness, instill confidence in the system and giving self-confidence.

As a social work traine we identified many psychosocial issues of the community in general, while going for the home visits of the assigned patients . These issues range from family problems caused by overcrowded living conditions to individuals silently struggling with depression and anxiety. Each issue paints a vivid picture of the multifaceted nature of community health. Below are the main psychosocial issues in the community that we noticed during fieldwork.

Family problems: Family problems within the community take various forms, including intergenerational conflicts and breakdowns in communication (Muñoz et al., 2015). Overcrowded living conditions were a significant issue in such underserved or slum communities, especially among large families residing in small houses. These cramped living arrangements can exacerbate tensions and conflicts among family members, leading to increased stress and discord within the household. Conflicts between siblings often cause familial strain (Barnard, 2006).Tuberculosis can easily transmit in the such families and communities. Single-family households experience better harmony and communication. Financial dependency on a single breadwinner is another common issue contributing to family problems. When one member bears the financial burden while others depend on them, it can cause tension and conflicts within the family. These financial strains often lead to increased stress and interpersonal discord, which can harm familial relationships and overall well-being(Kumari & Rajvanshi, 2023). To address these issues, a holistic approach is necessary, including counseling, mediation, and support services aimed at promoting healthy family dynamics and resolving conflicts effectively (Irving & Benjamin, 1995).

Depression and anxiety: Individuals undergoing treatment at UHTC for various conditions, especially those with chronic illnesses like tuberculosis (TB). TB patients, in particular, may feel frustrated managing a chronic illness and dealing with the stigma associated with the disease, which can significantly affect their mental well-being (Kim & Bae, 2015) and elderly individuals experiencing joint pain, helplessness, often experience high levels of stress and anxiety directly related to their health conditions. *Elderly individuals with joint pain may feel frustrated and anxious due to limited mobility and daily functioning (Chantrain et al., 2023)*

Elderly neglect: Elder neglect can cause older adults to feel lonely, abandoned, and have low self-worth from a psychological perspective. This can negatively impact their mental well-being and overall quality of life (Nyman et al., 2012).

Elder neglect is a notable/observed issue among the older population in such lower socioeconomic community. This is particularly due to the lack of support and care from their children and are without any savings. Adult children neglected their elderly parents, causing them to feel lonely, isolated, and abandoned. Their children who too barely manage the economic needs of their family and in such situation older parents are for them an extra burden. Neglecting older adults can harm their physical and mental health, worsening existing conditions and reducing their overall quality of life (Gabriel & Bowling, 2004).

Financial problems: Financial challenges are common in the community, especially among those seeking treatment at the Public Centre, who are mostly from low-income backgrounds(Fang et al., 2020). UHTC provides free treatment to many patients who cannot afford the fees charged by private doctors. This reliance on subsidized healthcare services highlights the economic constraints faced by vulnerable populations within the community. During home visits, we observed households that relied on a single breadwinner to support large family. In some cases, one individual was responsible for providing for up to 15 family members. Majority were the daily earners and getting low wages , low wages for laborers in the community add to the financial strain, making it difficult to meet basic needs, moreover Unemployment among youth worsens financial crises in similar households, creating a cycle of economic hardship (Hurd & Rohwedder, 2010).

For daily wagers, going to health cares to seek treatment for self or for their family members is a one-day financial loss, even the health services provide the treatment on subsidiary or free basis. We also encountered few who have taken loan during long treatments. (which in turn creates a vicious circle).

Poor Health Seeking Behaviour

It was also observed that the Heath seeking behaviour was poor in such communities, mainly among women, who seeks medical treatment at the very last when the problems becomes so much aggravated. This delays are must check, particularly in the case of the TB.

Substance abuse: Substance abuse is a significant challenge to the health and well-being of teenagers and young adults in the community served by the UHTC. Peer pressure, social isolation, and exposure to stressful environments may contribute to the initiation and continuation of substance among youth. Illicit drugs, such as Equanil, pain killers and prescription medications obtained without a prescription are common substances of abuse, although younger individuals consume less alcohol compare to the relatively elder population, which is a significant concern among older adults in the community, which they justified as a coping mechanism to manage stressors associated with aging, loneliness, and social isolation.

Possible Interventions:

During our fieldwork, we collaborated and communicated continuously with our supervisors and medical social workers stationed at UHTC . We tried to recognize the complexity of the issues faced by community members and engaged in ongoing discussions to understand the root causes of the problems and identify potential solutions therefore aimed to develop actionable plans tailored to the specific needs of the community by leveraging the expertise and insights of our supervisors and medical social

workers. Our collaborative effort aimed to implement effective interventions within a specified timeframe, ensuring timely and targeted support for individuals and families experiencing various challenges.

Mittelman et.al ,(2008) addressed the difficulties associated with proving the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions and put forward suggestions for forthcoming studies. They stressed the necessity of creating dependable and accurate assessment tools to gauge the results of such interventions, particularly in the context of family caregivers. Additionally, they underscored the significance of incorporating culturally suitable measures and evaluating the cost-related outcomes of caregiving within psychosocial trials. The authors emphasized the importance of selecting assessment methods that are attuned to the specific challenges targeted by the intervention and that account for the diverse categories of caregivers involved.

Social work interventions:

Social work intervention plans are crucial tools for social workers to assist individuals, families, or groups in need. A well-planned intervention helps ensure a social worker systematically addresses a client's needs and goals. It also provides accountability by specifying objectives and deadlines and gives clients something concrete to review to track their progress. Social workers should thoroughly assess clients and their situations to create a successful intervention plan. They should then determine realistic goals and objectives and outline specific strategies, resources, and timelines. Finally, they should review and revise the plan regularly to ensure positive progress. By choosing interventions tailored to the client's unique needs and strengths, social workers can empower their clients on their journey to well-beings.

At first, we need to identify at what level the interventions are required:

- Micro,
- Mezo or
- Macro.

Then going through the respective approach:

- Teaching clients about their condition and treatment options (sensitization)
- Helping clients develop insight and make positive changes through discussion. (behavioral change approach)
- Providing immediate support in emergencies and also prepare for and respond to emergencies (crisis plans)
- Address risks like abuse, self-harm, or addiction relapse (Safety plans).
- Help in changing unhealthy behaviors and build life skills (long term plans)

It is important to provide holistic and comprehensive support during health challenges.

Comprehensive interventions should address both physical symptoms and psychological and emotional needs within the community (McCorkle et al., 2011). Providing access to mental health support services, psychotherapy, and community-based interventions can help alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety, promoting overall mental well-being and resilience(Castillo et al., 2019).

- On the basis of the above discussions and with the guidance and suggestions of the supervisor, few workshops and camps were organized to address the identified challenges and issues of the community.

Family Life Education(FLE): It was meticulously planned and conducted, which provided a safe space for families to address complex issues. Trained facilitators led discussions on effective communication, conflict resolution, and familial harmony. Participants gained practical insights into managing family dynamics, fostering understanding, and building stronger relationships through interactive activities and role-playing exercises. The workshops acted as a catalyst for positive change. They empowered families to navigate challenges and create healthier, more supportive environments in their homes.

Mental Health Awareness Camps: Monthly or biweekly camps provide a dedicated space for individuals to seek support and resources related to mental health. These camps offer informational sessions led by mental health professionals, raising awareness about mental health issues. Participants gain valuable insights into managing symptoms, accessing treatment options, and building resilience. Interactive workshops and discussions empowered individuals to recognize signs of depression and anxiety, reduce stigma, and access appropriate support services. These camps also facilitated peer support networks and connections within the community, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among individuals facing similar challenges. We aimed to promote early interventions, destigmatize mental illness, and improve overall well-being within the community by providing mental health resources that are accessible and inclusive.

Financial Literacy Guidance Sessions: We offer personalized financial guidance through one-on-one counseling sessions. Participants receive tailored advice on budgeting, savings, debt management, and financial planning. This empowers them to overcome financial challenges and work towards stability and security. Our sessions foster a supportive environment where individuals can openly discuss their concerns and receive practical advice tailored to their specific needs and circumstances. We empowered community members to make informed financial decisions and achieve their goals through ongoing support and education.

Prevention Workshops (Counseling and sensitization on Substance abuse): In our prevention workshops, we used different strategies to help individuals dealing with addiction. We recognized that some people found it difficult to seek help, so we provided personalized support and guidance through phone counseling sessions. Furthermore, we reached out to friends and peers of those affected, expanding our outreach to create a supportive network that promotes recovery.

In addition, we made it easier to access rehabilitation centres by providing practical assistance to those who were hesitant or unable to seek help independently. For example, we arranged transportation and coordinated logistics for one individual who faced barriers in attending a rehabilitation centre. We empowered individuals to take proactive steps towards recovery and reclaim control over their lives by removing obstacles and offering comprehensive support. Our initiatives aimed to foster a culture of support and resilience within the community, promoting positive pathways to recovery from substance abuse.

Advocacy and sensitization on Elderly Neglect : We conducted advocacy efforts to raise awareness about the importance of supporting older adults in society. The Indian constitution outlines regulations for their well-being, highlighted the valuable contributions of older adults to society and emphasized the need for their protection and care (Moberg, 1971). We did this through informational sessions and awareness campaigns. The advocacy efforts aimed to educate community members about the rights and entitlements of older adults as enshrined in the constitution. We disseminated information about relevant laws and regulations, such as the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, to

empower older adults and their families to assert their rights and access the support and resources available to them.

Interventions may include community outreach programs, caregiver support services, and advocacy efforts to raise awareness about the importance of caring for and respecting older adults within the family unit (Guruge et al., 2022). Empowering older individuals to access social support networks and resources can mitigate the negative effects of elder neglect and promote their well-being and dignity in later life. It is important to ensure that older individuals have access to social support networks and resources to help them maintain their well-being and dignity (Bagnall & Yarker, 2022).

Moreover, facilitated discussions and dialogue forums to address societal attitudes and misconceptions surrounding aging and elderly care. Our aim was to promote intergenerational understanding and solidarity within the community by fostering a culture of respect, appreciation, and inclusivity towards older adults. Therefore we aimed to create a supportive and age-friendly environment for older adults through community engagement initiatives and value and respect older adults and provide them with the care and support they deserve. Our goal was to advocate for their rights and well-being, address the issue of elderly neglect, and promote dignified and fulfilling lives for older members of our community.

Impact assessment of the Interventions

During our assessment process, we noticed that each intervention had a unique impact on the community members' lives. We carefully evaluated the outcomes and observed both tangible and qualitative changes resulting from our initiatives. Each intervention had a significant impact on the lives of those it reached. Strengthened familial bonds were nurtured through community workshops, mental illness was destigmatized through mental health awareness campaigns, and individuals were empowered to make informed financial decisions through financial literacy workshops. These insights provided valuable lessons and guiding principles for future interventions. Recognizing the strengths and areas for improvement in each approach allows us to refine our strategies and maximise their effectiveness in addressing psychosocial challenges in the community. This holistic understanding of the impact of our interventions provides a solid foundation for future endeavors, enabling us to build on our successes and further enhance the well-being of the community.

Community workshops are important for addressing complex family dynamics (Ballard et al., 2020). They provided a safe space for dialogue and learning, which facilitates deeper understanding and improved communication among family members. The sessions are interactive and include practical insights and role-playing exercises, empowering participants to proactively manage conflicts and foster stronger familial bonds. However, these workshops acted as catalysts for change. Ongoing reinforcement and follow-up sessions may be necessary to sustain long-term improvements in family dynamics.

Mental health awareness camps have somewhat destigmatized mental illness and promoted early intervention. Monthly or biweekly sessions provided valuable insights into managing symptoms, accessing treatment options, and building resilience. The workshops and discussions were interactive, fostering a sense of community support and solidarity. This created a conducive environment for seeking help and support. However, continuous efforts are required to ensure accessibility and inclusivity, especially for marginalized groups and remote communities.

Sessions offering financial literacy guidance have provided tailored support and guidance to individuals facing financial challenges. These sessions addressed budgeting, savings, and debt management.

Participants were empowered to make informed financial decisions and work towards stability. The guidance was personalized, fostering trust and openness. This enabled individuals to address their concerns and take proactive steps towards financial well-being. However, ongoing reinforcement and access to additional resources may be necessary to address complex financial issues and sustain long-term financial stability.

Prevention workshops have been crucial in helping individuals struggling with addiction. They provide personalized support through phone counseling sessions and logistical assistance for treatment access. This support empowers individuals to seek help and embark on the path to recovery. However, it is essential to provide ongoing support and follow-up to address relapse prevention and support individuals throughout their recovery journey.

Advocacy efforts have raised awareness about the rights and entitlements of older adults, fostering a culture of respect and support within the community to address elderly neglect. These initiatives have created age-friendly environments by promoting intergenerational understanding and advocating for the well-being of older adults. However, addressing systemic issues and ensuring the continued protection and empowerment of older community members requires sustained advocacy efforts and community engagement.

Learning and future direction

Reflecting on our fieldwork experience, we have identified several key learnings from exploring psychosocial challenges in community medicine. Firstly, we have recognised the paramount importance of community-driven approaches and sustained advocacy efforts. By prioritising the voices and experiences of those most affected, particularly vulnerable populations such as older adults facing neglect, we can ensure their rights and well-being are adequately addressed.

In addition, our experience has shown that taking a comprehensive approach to interventions is crucial. By considering individual, family, and community factors, we can develop more effective strategies for addressing psychosocial issues. It is essential to collaborate with various stakeholders, including community members, local organizations, and healthcare providers, when designing and implementing successful interventions.

Our fieldwork experience has given us valuable insights into addressing psychosocial challenges in community medicine. We can create positive change and promote well-being in the communities we serve by embracing community-driven approaches, fostering collaboration, and continuing our commitment to social justice principles.

Future Work Suggestions

- Further education and skill development in social work practice, including trauma-informed care, mental health support, and culturally responsive approaches .
- Continued advocacy efforts to raise awareness about the rights and entitlements of older adults and address elderly neglect
- Promoting community-driven approaches that prioritize the voices and experiences of those most affected by psychosocial challenges
- Addressing systemic issues that contribute to psychosocial inequities, such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to healthcare
- Engaging community members in the development, execution, and assessment of interventions to

ensure their pertinence and efficacy
- Refining strategies and maximizing effectiveness by recognizing the strengths and areas for improvement in each approach
- Taking a holistic approach to address psychosocial issues, considering individual, family, and community factors
- Collaborating with community members, local organizations, and healthcare providers to create and execute successful interventions.
- We also develop the skill for the crisis interventions.

Summary

Psychosocial challenges in community have a significant impact on individuals' health and well-being, affecting their mental and emotional well-being, physical health, social interactions, and sense of belonging in their communities. Addressing these challenges requires recognizing and fully addressing the range of psychosocial difficulties, and developing effective intervention strategies. Practical assistance, such as arranging transportation and coordinating logistics, can help individuals access rehabilitation centers and take proactive steps towards recovery. Interventions in community medicine can have a positive impact on individuals' lives, strengthening familial bonds, destigmatizing mental illness, and empowering individuals to make informed decisions. Collaboration with supervisors, medical social workers, and community members is crucial in understanding the root causes of psychosocial problems and developing tailored intervention plans. Future work should focus on education and skill development in social work practice, advocacy efforts, community-driven approaches, addressing systemic issues, and refining intervention strategies.

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