

The Role of Family Support in Improving Quality of Life for Individuals with Obsessive - Compulsive Disorder

Aarti Shukla¹ and Dr. Kattamanchi Subramanyam²

Research Scholar, Department of Clinical Psychology¹

Professor, Department of Clinical Psychology²

Sunrise University, Alwar, Rajasthan, India

Abstract: *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder significantly impacts the lives of individuals, affecting their emotional, psychological, and social well-being. While therapeutic interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and medication play a crucial role in managing symptoms, family support emerges as a key factor in improving the quality of life for individuals with OCD. This paper explores the importance of family involvement in the treatment process and the role of family support in enhancing various aspects of QoL for individuals with OCD. We review existing literature, examine the benefits of family support, and propose strategies to involve families in the treatment process.*

Keywords: Quality of Life, Emotional well-being, Treatment adherence, Family dynamics, Marital relationships

I. INTRODUCTION

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder is a chronic and often debilitating mental health condition characterized by intrusive thoughts and repetitive behaviors performed to alleviate the distress caused by these thoughts. This disorder affects approximately 1-2% of the global population, making it one of the most common psychiatric disorders worldwide. OCD not only impairs the daily functioning of individuals but also diminishes their quality of life, influencing their emotional well-being, social relationships, and even physical health. While medical interventions such as medication and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy have been proven effective in managing the symptoms of OCD, there is growing recognition of the crucial role that family support plays in improving the overall quality of life for individuals with this condition. Family members often serve as the primary source of care, providing emotional and practical assistance in managing the disorder. However, their involvement can go beyond caregiving; with proper education and involvement in the treatment process, family members can actively contribute to the emotional stability, social integration, and treatment adherence of the individual with OCD.

Family support is particularly important because OCD is not only a disorder that affects the individual but also has a significant impact on family dynamics. The compulsive behaviors and intrusive thoughts associated with OCD often cause distress, frustration, and strain within the family unit, especially in marital relationships. Spouses, parents, and siblings may find themselves in caregiver roles, balancing the demands of their loved one's treatment with their personal well-being. Research shows that the stress associated with caregiving can contribute to burnout and emotional exhaustion if not properly managed. Thus, a comprehensive approach that involves family members in the treatment process can create a supportive environment that benefits both the individual with OCD and their family. When families are well-informed and supported, they can help reduce the burden of the disorder by providing stability, understanding, and encouragement throughout the treatment journey.

The role of family support in improving QoL is multifaceted. On an emotional level, family members can offer comfort, validation, and reassurance, which is vital for those who often feel isolated due to the stigmatization associated with mental health disorders. On a practical level, families can assist in the management of daily routines, helping to reduce the frequency and intensity of compulsions, which in turn improves the person's ability to engage in meaningful activities. Additionally, family support enhances treatment adherence, as loved ones can encourage the individual to

follow through with therapeutic recommendations and maintain consistency with medication or therapy. Families can also play a key role in managing and mitigating the impact of the disorder on relationships, helping to foster better communication and understanding, especially within marriages and parent-child dynamics.

Despite the evident benefits of family involvement, it is not without challenges. Family members may experience stress, frustration, and a sense of helplessness as they attempt to understand the complex nature of OCD and its impact on the individual. Often, families are unprepared for the demands of caregiving, and this lack of preparation can lead to tension and conflict within the family unit. Furthermore, family members themselves may require support and guidance to cope with the stress of caregiving and to avoid enabling behaviors that may inadvertently reinforce the OCD symptoms. Research indicates that family education programs and therapeutic interventions that involve the family unit can help address these challenges and improve the overall effectiveness of treatment.

This paper explores the critical role that family support plays in enhancing the quality of life for individuals with OCD, examining the emotional, social, and practical aspects of family involvement. It delves into how family members can provide a stable foundation for treatment, improve adherence to therapeutic regimens, and help mitigate the strain that OCD places on relationships. Moreover, the paper will review strategies for involving families in treatment, including family education, therapy sessions, and support groups, and explore the barriers that can hinder effective family support, such as lack of understanding or caregiver burnout. Finally, the paper aims to highlight the benefits of fostering a collaborative approach to OCD treatment that includes the family as an integral component of the recovery process. By focusing on the importance of family support, this paper seeks to provide valuable insights into how individuals with OCD can achieve better outcomes, not only through professional treatment but also through a supportive and informed family environment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Walke et al., (2018) jointly conducted research to assess the burden of caregivers of mentally ill individuals and their coping mechanisms. A cross-sectional study was employed with a quantitative approach. A convenient sample of 320 caregivers was taken from two private tertiary care centres and one public secondary care centre in Udupaluk. This study was conducted using the Burden Assessment Schedule and Brief Cope Scale. Statistical analysis was done on categorical variables, and they were expressed as frequencies and percentages. Continuous variables were measured using mean and standard deviation. Univariate and multivariate analysis using binomial logistic regression was done. SPSS version 15 was used to analyse the data. According to BAS, severe burden accounted for 40.9% and moderate for 59.1%. The highest amount of burden was seen in the areas of physical and mental health, spouse related, and in areas of external support. The BCS showed that the most frequently used coping styles were practicing religion, active coping, and planning. In conclusion his study stated that caregivers of the mentally ill individuals do undergo a lot of burden. Hence, there is a need to develop strategies that can help them such as providing them with a support structure as well as counselling services.

Farnaz Rahmani et al. (2019) in their study which was aimed to identify coping strategies used by family caregivers of patients with schizophrenia and their determinants using a descriptive correlational study. They took participants which were 225 family caregivers of patients with schizophrenia who were referred to the psychiatric clinic at one large teaching referral hospital in Iran. They were selected through purposive sampling method. Data collection tools were demographic and clinical data form, the Zarit Burden Interview (ZBI) and the Family Coping Questionnaire (FCQ). From the results it was indicated that the score of caregiver burden was 65.14 ± 9.17 . Of 225 family caregivers, 23.11% used an avoiding coping strategy. There was a significant relationship between caregiver burden and coping strategies ($P < 0.001$). The regression model showed that adaptive coping strategies were significantly associated with some demographic characteristics including age, education level, gender, employment status, losing the job because of caregiving responsibilities, perceived income adequacy, duration of illness, duration of caregiving and caregiver burden ($P < 0.05$). Conclusively it can be said that family caregivers of patients with schizophrenia experience a high level of burden, which can put them at risk of using maladaptive coping strategies. Mental health professionals should plan programs that support both family caregivers and patients in clinical and community settings.

Basheer S, et al. (2015) reported that caregivers of mentally ill patients have diminished QOL levels. Studies measuring QOL among caregivers can help initiate early intervention among the vulnerable caregivers. This study

would help in increasing the awareness among the professional health care workers, to identify at risk caregivers. Health workers by providing better health services and better psycho-education to the caregivers can improve their QOL.

Pompeo, D. A. et al. (2016) presented to identify the coping strategies of family members of patients with mental disorders and relate them to family member socio demographic variables and to the patient's clinical variables. This was a descriptive study conducted at a psychiatric hospital in the interior of the state of São Paulo, with 40 family members of hospitalized patients over the age of 18, and who followed the patient before and during hospitalization. We used tools to characterize the subjects and the Folkman and Lazarus Inventory of Coping Strategies. It was also resulted that the coping strategies most often used by family members were social support and problem solving. Mothers and fathers used more functional strategies (self-control $p=0.037$, positive reappraisal $p=0.037$, and social support $p=0.021$). We found no significant differences between the strategies and other variables examined. In conclusion it can be stated that despite the suffering resulting from the illness of a dear one, family members make more use of functional strategies, allowing them to cope with adversities in a more well-adjusted way.

The Impact of Family Support on Emotional Well-being

Emotional support from family members provides individuals with OCD a safe and understanding environment to express their fears and frustrations. This support helps alleviate feelings of isolation and distress, which are common in individuals with OCD. Family members who show empathy and patience can reduce the emotional burden of the disorder, contributing significantly to improving the individual's overall emotional well-being. Furthermore, families that engage in open communication and validation of feelings can enhance the individual's ability to cope with intrusive thoughts and compulsive behaviors.

The Role of Family in Treatment Adherence

Adherence to therapeutic interventions such as CBT and medication is crucial for managing OCD symptoms. Family members can play an important role in encouraging consistency with treatment regimens. By supporting the individual through the therapeutic process, whether by helping to schedule appointments, encouraging participation in exposure tasks, or providing reinforcement during treatment sessions, families can increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. Furthermore, family support can reduce the likelihood of relapse, as the person with OCD is more likely to feel motivated to continue treatment when supported by loved ones.

Family Dynamics and the Impact on Marital Relationships

OCD not only affects the individual but also places a significant strain on family dynamics, especially marital relationships. Spouses may become caregivers, experiencing emotional exhaustion and frustration. The disorder can lead to conflicts over obsessive behaviors, compulsive rituals, and limited social activities. Couples therapy and family counseling can help address these issues by fostering communication, mutual understanding, and collaboration in managing the disorder. Research suggests that couples who engage in therapy together are more likely to experience improved marital satisfaction and QoL, as both partners work toward common goals in managing the disorder.

Strategies for Involving Families in OCD Treatment

Several strategies can help incorporate family support into the treatment process for OCD. These include:

- **Family Education:** Educating family members about OCD symptoms, treatment options, and coping strategies enables them to provide informed support.
- **Involvement in Therapy:** Including family members in therapy sessions, such as in family-based CBT, can enhance communication and treatment adherence.
- **Support Groups:** Family members can benefit from support groups where they can share experiences and learn from others facing similar challenges.
- **Training on Coping Mechanisms:** Providing families with tools and strategies to manage stress and support their loved one effectively can prevent caregiver burnout and improve QoL for both the individual with OCD and their family.

Barriers to Family Support

Despite the benefits, there are barriers to effective family support. These include:

- **Lack of Knowledge:** Family members may lack understanding of OCD and how to best support their loved ones.
- **Stigma:** Families may experience shame or embarrassment regarding the disorder, hindering their ability to provide open support.
- **Caregiver Burnout:** Prolonged caregiving responsibilities can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion, reducing the quality of support provided.
- **Family Conflicts:** Pre-existing family issues may exacerbate the challenges posed by OCD, making it difficult to maintain supportive relationships.

Implications for Practice

Mental health professionals should prioritize family involvement in the treatment plan for individuals with OCD. This involves not only educating families about the disorder but also providing ongoing support to them. Training family members on the symptoms, treatment modalities, and effective coping strategies can empower them to play an active role in improving the QoL of their loved ones. Healthcare providers should also consider offering family therapy as part of a holistic treatment approach.

III. CONCLUSION

Family support plays an indispensable role in improving the quality of life for individuals with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. Emotional support, practical assistance, and involvement in treatment are critical to helping individuals manage symptoms and enhance their overall well-being. By providing families with the tools and knowledge to support their loved ones, we can create a more effective and supportive treatment environment. Future research should focus on identifying the best practices for family involvement and exploring the long-term impact of family support on the course of OCD.

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