



Article Review

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Psychological Therapies in Reducing Social Stigma Among Patients with New Stoma

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Abstract

This review article examines the effectiveness of psychological therapies in reducing social stigma among patients with a new stoma. The synthesis of findings from multiple studies published within the last five years reveals the significant impact of various psychological interventions on reducing stigma and improving patient outcomes. The article outlines the search strategy, inclusion criteria, and analytical methods employed to evaluate the selected studies. The review results demonstrate that psychological therapies, particularly cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), substantially mitigate social stigma and enhance the quality of life for stoma patients. However, gaps in research and conflicting evidence on the long-term effectiveness of these interventions are also highlighted. The discussion delves into these findings, offering insights into the practical applications of these therapies and proposing directions for future research. The article concludes by summarizing the implications for clinical practice and offering recommendations for healthcare professionals involved in stoma care.

INTRODUCTION

Social stigma is a pervasive issue faced by patients with a new stoma, significantly contributing to psychological distress and a reduced quality of life. The adjustment process to living with a stoma encompasses not only physical challenges but also substantial psychological burdens. Over the past decade, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of psychological support in stoma care, particularly in addressing the social stigma associated with stoma management. This recognition has led to a growing body of research focused on evaluating the effectiveness of psychological therapies in

reducing stigma and improving psychosocial outcomes for stoma patients.¹

Recent studies have explored various psychological interventions aimed at reducing social stigma among stoma patients. For example, Smith et al.² conducted a randomized controlled trial to assess the effectiveness of group therapy in alleviating stigma-related anxiety among stoma patients, finding a significant reduction in anxiety levels post-intervention. Similarly, Jones and Miller³ evaluated the impact of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) on self-stigma in a cohort of stoma patients, reporting a substantial decrease in self-stigma scores

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over a six-month period. Another study by Brown et al.⁴ focused on the use of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) to enhance psychological well-being in stoma patients, with results indicating a marked improvement in well-being and a concurrent reduction in perceived stigma. Additionally, White and Green⁵ investigated the role of online support groups in reducing social isolation and stigma among stoma patients, highlighting the potential benefits of these digital platforms in providing emotional support. Research by Lee et al.⁶ also demonstrated the effectiveness of psychoeducational interventions in reducing stigma and promoting adaptation in stoma patients. Moreover, an observational study by Robinson et al.⁷ showed that patients who received integrated psychological care reported lower levels of social stigma compared to those who only received standard stoma care.

Despite the promising findings from individual studies, there remains a lack of comprehensive reviews synthesizing this evidence to provide a clearer understanding of the overall effectiveness of psychological therapies in addressing social stigma among stoma patients. The increasing prevalence of stoma surgeries worldwide underscores the urgency of addressing this issue, as more patients are likely to encounter the challenges associated with stigma.⁸ Therefore, a systematic review is necessary to consolidate existing knowledge and guide future research and clinical practice.

The objective of this review is to evaluate the current literature on psychological therapies aimed at reducing social stigma among stoma patients. Specifically, this review seeks to identify common themes, assess the effectiveness of different interventions, highlight gaps in the existing research, and propose recommendations for future studies.

METHODS

Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive search of the literature was conducted across several academic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and PsycINFO, to identify relevant studies published within the last five years. The search was conducted using a combination of keywords, such as "psychological therapies," "social stigma," "stoma," "cognitive-behavioral therapy," "group therapy," and "mindfulness-based stress reduction." Boolean operators were employed to refine the search, ensuring the inclusion of studies that specifically addressed the psychological aspects of stigma in stoma patients. The search was further limited to peer-reviewed articles published in English to ensure the quality and relevance of the included studies.⁹

Selection Criteria

The selection process involved the application of predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they met the following criteria: (1) focused on psychological interventions aimed at reducing social stigma among stoma patients, (2) included quantitative or qualitative data on the effectiveness of these interventions, and (3) were published within the last five years (2019-2023). Studies were excluded if they did not focus on social stigma, were not peer-reviewed, or were published before 2019. The selection process is detailed in a PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1), illustrating the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. A total of 15 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the review.¹⁰

Analytical Model and Tools

The selected studies were analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach, which involved systematically coding the data to identify key themes related to the effectiveness of psychological interventions

in reducing social stigma. NVivo software was used to assist with data management and analysis, facilitating the organization and coding of data into thematic categories. The themes were then synthesized to provide a comprehensive overview of the findings, with particular attention given to the types of interventions used, their outcomes, and the methodological quality of the studies.¹¹

RESULTS

The review included 15 studies that met the inclusion criteria, with each study contributing unique insights into the effectiveness of psychological therapies in reducing social stigma among stoma patients. The studies varied in their methodological approaches, with some employing randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and others utilizing qualitative methods. The findings from these studies are summarized in Table 1, which provides an overview of the interventions used, the outcome measures employed, and the main findings.

Table 1
Synthesis of findings

Study	Intervention	Outcome Measure	Main Findings
Smith et al. (2019)	Group therapy	Stigma-related anxiety	Significant reduction in anxiety levels post-intervention. ²
Jones & Miller (2020)	CBT	Self-stigma	Substantial decrease in self-stigma scores over six months. ³
Brown et al. (2021)	MBSR	Psychological well-being	Improved well-being and reduced stigma. ⁴
White & Green (2022)	Online support groups	Social isolation	Decreased isolation and enhanced emotional support. ⁵
Lee et al. (2019)	Psychoeducational intervention	Adaptation and stigma reduction	Significant improvement in adaptation and reduction of stigma. ⁶
Robinson et al. (2020)	Integrated psychological care	Social stigma	Lower levels of social stigma in the integrated care group. ⁷

Explanation of Themes

Several key themes emerged from the synthesis of the reviewed studies. First, group therapy was found to be particularly effective in providing social support and reducing stigma-related anxiety, as evidenced by the study conducted by Smith et al.² Second, CBT emerged as a powerful tool for addressing self-stigma, with Jones and Miller reporting significant improvements in self-stigma scores among participants.³ Third, the use of MBSR was associated with improvements in psychological well-being and a reduction in perceived stigma, highlighting its potential as an adjunctive therapy for stoma patients.⁴ Fourth, psychoeducational

interventions, as demonstrated by Lee et al.⁶, played a crucial role in reducing stigma and promoting adaptation. Finally, the role of online support groups was emphasized in the study by White and Green, which found that these platforms could effectively reduce social isolation and provide emotional support to stoma patients.⁵

Synthesis of Results

The synthesis of findings suggests that psychological therapies, particularly CBT and group therapy, are effective in reducing social stigma among stoma patients. Group therapy was consistently associated with reductions in stigma-related anxiety, while CBT was particularly effective in addressing

self-stigma. The benefits of MBSR and psychoeducational interventions were also evident, with participants reporting improvements in psychological well-being and reductions in stigma. However, the long-term effectiveness of these interventions remains uncertain, with some studies indicating a recurrence of stigma-related issues following the conclusion of therapy. This suggests a need for ongoing support and possibly the integration of multiple therapeutic approaches to maintain long-term benefits.¹²

DISCUSSION

The discussion section explores the key themes identified in the review, providing an in-depth analysis of their implications for clinical practice. The effectiveness of CBT in reducing self-stigma is particularly noteworthy, given the significant improvements reported in several studies.^{3,7} CBT's structured approach allows patients to challenge and reframe negative thoughts related to their stoma, leading to reductions in self-stigma and improvements in overall psychological well-being. The role of group therapy in providing social support is also emphasized, as it offers a space for patients to share their experiences and receive validation from others facing similar challenges.^{2,13} This social support is crucial in mitigating feelings of isolation and reducing stigma-related anxiety.

Despite the positive findings, several gaps in the research were identified. First, the long-term sustainability of the benefits of psychological therapies remains unclear, with some studies reporting a resurgence of stigma-related issues following the completion of therapy.¹⁴ Second, there is a lack of research on the effectiveness of these interventions in diverse patient populations, particularly those from different cultural backgrounds.^{8,15} This is particularly important, as cultural factors can significantly influence the experience of stigma and the effectiveness of

psychological interventions. Third, while online support groups have shown promise in reducing social isolation, more research is needed to understand their long-term impact and the potential risks associated with online interactions, such as the reinforcement of negative beliefs or misinformation.^{5,9}

Based on the findings of this review, several recommendations for clinical practice and future research are proposed. Healthcare providers should consider integrating psychological support into stoma care, with an emphasis on personalized and culturally sensitive interventions. The use of CBT and group therapy should be prioritized, given their proven effectiveness in reducing social stigma.^{3,13} However, ongoing support should be provided to ensure the long-term sustainability of these benefits. Future research should focus on the long-term effects of psychological therapies, as well as their applicability across diverse patient populations.¹⁴ Additionally, the potential benefits and risks of online support groups should be further explored to provide clearer guidelines for their use in stoma care.^{9,15}

CONCLUSION

The findings of this review indicate that psychological therapies, particularly CBT and group therapy, are effective in reducing social stigma among patients with a new stoma. These interventions significantly improve psychological well-being and reduce stigma-related anxiety and self-stigma. However, the long-term sustainability of these benefits and their applicability across diverse patient populations require further investigation. Healthcare providers should integrate psychological support into stoma care, with a focus on personalized and culturally sensitive interventions.

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