

Pratheepkumar V., Weerawardana Y.H.

EXPLORING PATIENT AUTONOMY IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE: PERSPECTIVES ON INFORMED CONSENT AND TREATMENT INVOLVEMENT

Tutor: senior lecturer Shadova T.N.

*Department of Public Health and Healthcare
Belarusian State Medical University, Minsk*

Introduction. The intersection of mental health and autonomy is crucial in improving treatment outcomes and enhancing the patient experience. Understanding how individuals perceive their autonomy in mental health care can provide valuable insights for mental health professionals and policymakers. As the mental health landscape evolves and emphasizes patient-centered care, ensuring that patients are engaged in their treatment decisions is increasingly essential.

Aim: highlight the critical importance of informed consent, clear communication, and patient autonomy in mental health care, while identifying systemic barriers that hinder these principles.

Materials and methods. A structured 10 questionnaire was created to assess mental health status, decision-making control, perceived pressure, treatment involvement, personal values respect, informed consent, and autonomy views, statistical method (Google form, Excel), A diverse sample of 88 individuals from SriLanka (male-46, female-37, non binary -5) between age 21-50 was participated.

Results and their discussion. A significant majority of respondents (86.36%) believe that informed consent is "very important" in mental health care. This indicates a strong awareness and appreciation among patients for the necessity of being fully informed about their treatment. Many patients reported feeling pressure to agree to treatment plans without fully understanding them, with 17.05% responding affirmatively. This raises concerns about the adequacy of informed consent practices within the mental health field, suggesting a need for providers to ensure that patients are not only informed but also comfortable with the decisions being made. The results show that many patients (56.82%) feel "very confident" in their ability to ask questions about their treatment. This confidence is crucial as it allows for better communication between patients and providers, potentially leading to more personalized and effective care. While many do feel involved in treatment decisions (39.77% "always" involved), 45.45% only feel involved "sometimes." This suggests that there is room for improvement in ensuring that all patients feel actively engaged in their care.

The data indicates that while 45.45% of respondents receive clear information about their treatment options "always," a notable percentage (14.77%) say "no" regarding clarity. This discrepancy highlights the need for mental health professionals to enhance communication strategies to ensure that all patients left with a thorough understanding of their options. The survey suggests a generally positive perception of mental health professionals regarding respect for autonomy, with approximately 79.54% agreeing or strongly agreeing. However, 20.46% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, which indicates that there are still concerns about the extent to which some providers respect patient autonomy. The biggest barrier to patient autonomy identified by respondents was a "lack of information" (45.45%). Other barriers included "time constraints during appointments" (28.41%) and "provider bias" (17.05%), revealing systemic challenges that need to be addressed within mental health care settings to better support patient autonomy.

Conclusion. The survey results present vital insights into the importance of informed consent, the necessity for clear communication, and the value placed on patient autonomy in mental health care. The strong desire for involvement alongside the perceived barriers indicates a need for systemic improvements in how mental health services are delivered. Mental health professionals should prioritize informed consent practices, ensure transparent communication, and foster environments.