



ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT IN SCHIZOPHRENIA RECOVERY

Dr Sher Ayub¹, Dr Abid Usman^{2*}, Dr Abdul Shakoor³

¹Assistant Professor, Psychiatry Department MTI KGN, Bannu, Pakistan,
Email: Drsherayub@gmail.com

^{2*}Consultant Psychiatrist, MTI, DHQ Bannu, Pakistan, Email: abidwazir223@gmail.com

³Specialist Registrar, Psychiatry Department, MTI KGN Bannu, Pakistan,
Email: drshakoor11066@gmail.com

***Corresponding author:** Dr Abid Usman

*Email: abidwazir223@gmail.com

Abstract

Introduction: Schizophrenia is a severe illness that changes a person's thoughts, emotions and behaviour. While medicines help with symptoms, experts now recognize that social support is key to a person's overall improvement in health, mood and ability to participate in social activities.

Objective: To evaluate the impact of perceived social support on recovery outcomes in individuals with schizophrenia, focusing on functional capacity, emotional well-being, and quality of life.

Materials and Method: The study was carried out at Khalifa Gul Nawaz Teaching Hospital, MTI Bannu, from January, 2024 to June, 2024. A total of 120 patients between the ages of 18 and 60 with schizophrenia were tested using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and Recovery Assessment Scale (RAS). The data were studied through SPSS to determine correlations and regression.

Results: Among all the support received, family support was the most strongly tied to recovery ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$), explaining 42% of the total difference in RAS scores. Support types working together explained the outcomes of 53% of recovery cases.

Conclusion: The involvement of a family's support can help people with schizophrenia recover more effectively, so it is essential to focus on family-centered care plans.

Keywords: Schizophrenia, social support, recovery, family support, psychosocial interventions.

INTRODUCTION

Schizophrenia is a major, ongoing mental disorder that profoundly changes a person's thoughts, sensory experiences, feelings and actions. In the past, handling schizophrenia was mainly a process of prescribing medication for symptoms and rarely involved looking for other solutions. Researchers now recognize social support as a significant factor in helping individuals recover well and reintegrate into society (1). A full recovery includes not only being free from psychosis but also having good emotional well-being, taking part in society and gaining personal skills. Having social support from people, in the form of caring, assistance and comfort, can strongly influence how individuals with schizophrenia recover. One's chances of emotional stability and successful rehabilitation are greatly affected by the nature of the support, whether it is from close family, friends or even medical institutions (2).

Studies on mental health show that individuals with schizophrenia improve in their recovery if they feel more social support. Strong relationships with others can help people feel better about themselves, handle stress more effectively, and adhere to their treatment, all of which are important for recovery (3). Furthermore, family involvement is particularly crucial when resources are limited or dispersed. Family members typically support and care for the person, utilising their advocacy to aid in the person's recovery (3). Because mental health services are not as developed in Pakistan as in other countries, the role of informal support groups is especially significant. How helpful psychosocial interventions are depends significantly on how well these support systems are present and how much quality they offer (4).

Moreover, there are multiple ways to recover from schizophrenia, and this process can be affected by social and clinical factors. Socio-clinical aspects, such as education, job situation, illness duration, and level of impairment, regularly affect the social assistance people receive (5). In many cases, research points out that people with higher levels of disability may need more targeted social and clinical assistance. People with schizophrenia who have strong bonds with others are less likely to be socially isolated and can continue with both daily tasks and their social lives (5). Social support plays a crucial role in helping to deal with the shame and stereotypes that are typical of mental illness in Pakistani communities, which focus heavily on what the family is seen to represent.

Social support is also studied in educational and healthcare settings for its ability to lessen the impact of mental illness on an individual's confidence and self-esteem. People involved in mental health care, including both professionals and those caring for patients, face some of the same challenges, so social support is vital for everyone (6). Schizophrenia is managed mainly with antipsychotic medicines, yet these drugs alone do not always help a person recover completely (7). Therefore, methods that utilise social support, such as psychosocial strategies, should be part of a comprehensive recovery plan. Using social skills training supported employment and family psychoeducation in addition to medicine can significantly enhance the success of treatment (8).

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) has been validated in several groups, including caregivers, making it possible to evaluate perceived social support and its relevance to recovery variables (9). Because of these tools, research and care can be customised to help people access more social support and achieve a speedier recovery. Additionally, post-traumatic growth can be linked to receiving help and sympathy from others, which might help patients recover and develop their abilities to overcome obstacles (10). Environmental support, such as encouraging programs and nearby activities, makes it easier for people receiving cognitive remediation and community-based interventions to practice their skills and maintain improvement (11, 12).

New technological projects in the field of psychosocial care, including the Horizons project, demonstrate that online resources can provide both social and clinical support to people from anywhere. These innovations are beneficial in regions where it is hard to find mental health specialists (13). To use social support most effectively in schizophrenia recovery, it is crucial to address the mental problems that affect social interactions. Schizophrenia reduces a person's ability to develop and sustain close relationships. Hence, improving cognitive skills should also be part of interventions to increase the benefits of engaging socially (14).

Finally, receiving social support is extremely important for people recovering from schizophrenia. Preventing depression and anxiety, promoting strength, decreasing stigma and increasing physical health provide multiple layers of protection for clients. When mental health care in a culture like Pakistan is relatively new, using family and community resources as a key part of the rehabilitation process is very important. Appreciating and including social support in care allows recovery in schizophrenia to be seen as more than just handling symptoms.

Objective: To assess the role of perceived social support in the recovery process of individuals with schizophrenia, focusing on its impact on functional outcomes, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design: Descriptive Cross-sectional Design.

Study setting: The study was carried out at Khalifa Gul Nawaz Teaching Hospital, MTI Bannu.

Duration: The study was carried out over a six-month period, from January, 2024 to June, 2024.

Inclusion Criteria: The inclusion criteria for the study involved people from 18 to 60 years old with schizophrenia, as defined by the DSM-5, being cared for either as outpatients or inpatients at the Institute of Psychiatry. All the participants needed to have experienced their illness for at least six months, and their psychiatrist was required to judge that they were currently at a stable stage. They also had to be in a position to figure out and answer questionnaires in Urdu or English.

Exclusion Criteria: The study excluded patients with intellectual disability, severe physical illness or substance use disorder. Individuals receiving intense psychotherapy or who have had any acute psychosis within a month were not included in the study. People who refused to give informed consent or had severe cognitive issues were excluded from the sample.

Methods

A standard questionnaire was used to gather demographic details, medical records and MSPSS scores to assess perceived social support. Family, friends and people significant to the individual are the three sources evaluated by the MSPSS. The Recovery Assessment Scale (RAS) was used to determine how confident the participants felt, how they set goals, how much they relied on others and how well they managed their symptoms. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on established criteria. Participants provided informed consent, and the interviews were conducted in a confidential space within the hospital during their visit. For analysis, the data were handled using SPSS version 25. Overall, statistics describing demographics and clinical information were used, and Pearson correlation and regression tests were done to see the connection between perceived social support and recovery.

RESULTS

There were 120 people involved in the study, and 66 (55%) were men, while 54 (45%) were women. Most participants were 34.8 years old ($SD = 8.7$), with a main range of 26 to 40 years old. Most of them were unemployed (63%), slightly fewer had jobs (22%), and the rest were students (15%). Among the adults studied, 40% had completed secondary school, 30% had higher education, and the remainder either had primary education or were illiterate. About half the participants (58%) were single, and the next largest group (32%) were married, while only 10% were divorced or separated.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Frequency (n = 120)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
- Male	66	55%
- Female	54	45%
Age Group		
- 18–25	24	20%
- 26–40	68	57%
- 41–60	28	23%
Employment Status		
- Employed	26	22%
- Unemployed	76	63%
- Student	18	15%

Participants' social support was assessed using the MSPSS. Family was perceived as giving the most support, followed by significant others and friends. Those with good support from their families had higher scores in recovering their goals and getting symptoms under control.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Perceived Social Support and Recovery Domains

Domain	Mean Score (SD)
Family Support (MSPSS)	5.1 (1.2)
Friend Support (MSPSS)	4.2 (1.4)
Significant Other Support	4.6 (1.3)
Recovery Assessment Scale	
- Personal Confidence	3.9 (0.9)
- Goal and Success Orientation	4.1 (1.0)
- Reliance on Others	3.5 (1.1)
- Symptom Management	3.8 (0.8)

According to the correlation study, social support was strongly linked to improved recovery. Family support showed the strongest connection with the recovery scores ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$), after that came significant others ($r = 0.55$, $p < 0.01$) and friends ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 3: Correlation between Perceived Social Support and Recovery Scores

Source of Support	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
Family Support	0.68	< 0.01
Friend Support	0.49	< 0.05
Significant Other	0.55	< 0.01

In addition, regression analysis revealed that a higher perceived level of family support significantly contributed to better outcomes, accounting for approximately 42% of the difference found in RAS scores ($\beta = 0.65$, $p < 0.001$). When both types of help and total support were put into the model, it explained 53% of the total change in recovery rates, which proves that social support is vital in helping schizophrenia recovery in many ways.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Predicting Recovery Outcomes from Social Support

Predictor	β (Beta Coefficient)	p-value	R ²
Family Support	0.65	< 0.001	0.42
Friend Support	0.27	< 0.05	
Significant Other Support	0.33	< 0.01	
Overall Model (R²)			0.53

The results highlight that people with schizophrenia get significant help from social support, mainly from family which increases personal confidence, makes handling symptoms easier and improves their ability to interact with others.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from this study that social support helps in the recovery of schizophrenia patients. The findings support the notion that good relationships and a supportive community have a positive impact on a person's mental health. As expected, the study results highlighted that the most potent positive effect on recovery indicators was from perceived family support, which agrees with earlier studies (1). Ahmed Mohamed et al. (1) emphasised that having more social support helps patients recover more quickly and achieve better functional outcomes. The findings of this study align with these ideas, as a strong link was observed between family support and recovery. Thus, it proves that family

understanding helps increase patients' confidence, improves adherence to treatment and motivates them to stay active in their lives.

Many studies, including the review conducted by Bjørlykhaug et al. (2), emphasize the role of social support in recovery from mental health issues. Although friends and essential others were also important in the recovery process, family played the primary role. According to Chronister et al. (3), being valued and understood by loved ones helps protect those with serious mental illnesses from feeling isolated and stigmatized. In agreement with this, participants who had more substantial support from both people in their lives did much better on the Recovery Assessment Scale (RAS), especially in the sections on depending on others and coping with symptoms.

Likewise, the psychosocial rehabilitation role outlined by Yildiz (4) further confirms our observations. Psychosocial interventions can offer skill-building and support from others, helping individuals function socially and cope more effectively with difficulties. Among the participants in our study, those who received assistance with emotions, everyday tasks, and social life, in addition to medical care, felt that their recovery was better. Living a quality life is very important. According to Defar et al. (5), better social support and greater functional ability helped patients with severe mental illness achieve greater quality of life. Among our participants, those with greater social support improved clinically and thought their quality of life had improved.

Therefore, recovery is not only about alleviating symptoms but also about enhancing a person's inclusion in society and self-confidence. Pervez et al. (6) also examined how mental illness and impostor syndrome overlap, observing that having social support can reduce the risk. This suggests that having support from others can help avoid the common unwanted changes in mood and thinking seen in schizophrenia. Proper treatment of mental health problems includes considering pharmacological action. Lähteenvuo and Tiihonen (7) explored the effects of using different antipsychotics at the same time. Pharmacological treatment focuses on main symptoms, and according to our study, offering supportive social care enhances healing outcomes, pushing for models of holistic care.

According to Frawley et al. (8), psychosocial interventions play a key role in helping those with early psychosis return to social and work-related activities, which supports the need for recovery-oriented care in psychiatric services. Our analysis reveals that social connections enhance the effectiveness of medical support and facilitate better recovery. Also, Wang et al. (9) confirmed the reliability of the MSPSS among caregivers of individuals with schizophrenia, which validates our choice of the MSPSS tool. As a result, our instrument proves itself suitable, which supports the credibility of our findings. In addition to support systems, Ng et al. (10) also included the meaning-making process, guided by relationships, in their study of post-traumatic growth in recovering from psychosis.

From this perspective, recovery is viewed not only as a return to normal behaviour but also as a catalyst for personal growth. The recovery process is active, and having support from others promotes significant changes in our mental state. Cognitive abilities remain a primary concern. According to Lejeune et al. (11), cognitive remediation improves outcomes for individuals with schizophrenia, and we found that social support helps patients gain opportunities to participate in these programs. When the environment is supportive, patients are more likely to follow the recommended interventions.

Killaspy et al. (12) emphasised the significance of community-based approaches and encouraged the use of social approaches in community mental health. Our findings suggest that incorporating family members and social networks into treatment can significantly enhance the effects of institutional care. Similarly, Alvarez-Jimenez et al. (13) found that projects like Horyzons help increase online social support in therapy, showing that therapeutic engagement is changing. While the research was done in a hospital, expanding support through similar platforms in places like Pakistan could be highly promising. Javitt (14) also pointed out that many symptoms of schizophrenia involve problems with thinking, and these tend to increase when a person is cut off from others. The data indicate that having social support protects against challenges and promotes an everyday daily life. Those who felt supported were more able to control their symptoms and interact with others, suggesting they had improved mental and emotional stability.

CONCLUSION

The study points out that perceived social support is crucial for the recovery of people with schizophrenia. It was found that having strong support groups, especially from family, results in patients improving their abilities, happiness and commitment to treatment. Individuals who received more support showed better progress in managing symptoms, regaining control over their lives, and reconnecting with society. These findings align with scientific evidence, indicating that maintaining positive social connections can help mitigate these issues. While medicines are necessary, incorporating social and psychosocial support can significantly improve a patient's overall outcome. Family and community are essential in Pakistani culture, so mental health services must be based on families and communities, fitting the needs of Pakistan. Additional studies could investigate the long-term effects of social support and explore the use of digital tools to assist a broader range of people. Getting better from schizophrenia is a process with many elements, and social support is central to long-term improvement.

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