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Online support: The potential of the internet as a means of supporting carers of individuals with enduring mental illness

Amy Johnson

Northumbria University
United Kingdom

Correspondence: amy.johnson@northumbria.ac.uk

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When an individual is experiencing a mental illness, this can also have a significant impact on their carers, often comprising of family members or friends. Carers can provide both invaluable physical and emotional support (a role that can last up to 24 hours a day, 7 days week) to their relative who, without which, would otherwise struggle to cope. Carers are seen to be an essential component of holistic mental health care. There is a move to encourage carer collaboration with professionals in the UK, in terms of their relative's care, one key example of this being the Triangle of Care (see Worthington & Rooney, 2016). This strives for a partnership between carer, professional and service user for the provision of treatment and support, improving carer involvement within care planning.

Lee & Schepp (2013) reported that carers are often thrust into a caring role (and as such are coping with potentially distressing symptoms experienced by their loved one) with little prior knowledge of mental illness. It is therefore not surprising that this can affect carer's mental health. While providing a caring role can have beneficial effects, there is significant focus on the negative aspects, for instance the varying degrees of anxiety in carers of someone with a personality disorder (Bailey & Greyner, 2014), the negative impact on the well-being of carers of someone with psychosis (Omwumere et al., 2016), and a reduced quality of life in carers of someone with bipolar disorder (Srivastava, Bhatia, Sharma, Rajender, & Kumar, 2010). When considering the invaluable support carers provide to those they care for, it is essential that they are supported in their role and research into this area continues.

However, despite undertaking caring roles and responsibilities, many fail to recognise or identify with the term 'carer'. This is particularly evident in young carers; with many feeling that they were simply

contributing towards the household as opposed to 'caring' and some struggling to differentiate between this and general 'helping' (Smyth, Blaxland & Cass, 2010). This may result in a failure to seek support within their role, likely having a negative impact on carer health and well-being.

Although support for carers is available (for instance, psychoeducation and family interventions), a failure to identify as a carer – along with other barriers such as funding restraints – may create blockades to receiving this support. With the continued growing prominence of the internet and the constant popularity of social media, the internet could be an invaluable tool to reaching and supporting carers.

This can be advantageous, allowing carer access to support anywhere, if there is an internet connection, and at any time. Not only can this overcome the restriction of organisational opening hours, this can be economic and provide support without the need of leaving the care recipient or finding replacement care (Stjernswärd & Hansson, 2014). Available social media networks and online forums can allow connection with other carers, reducing isolation and stigma towards seeking support (invaluable if carers are unable to travel or live in remote areas).

Over a decade ago, Blackburn, Read & Hughes (2004) investigated factors influencing online usage in carers. Of those who used the internet, over half used this once or more during the week. Factors that affected internet usage were age, sex, number of hours caring, and employment. While this was not specifically linked to mental health, it would not be difficult to apply these to those caring for someone with an enduring mental illness.

Despite this, it is important to be mindful of the possible barriers such as lack of technological skills and confidence. For instance, Read & Blackburn (2005) found that the highest reported barriers were time restraints and difficulty in use (e.g., struggling to find information or navigating websites). Other potential barriers include the digital divide: the assumption that the younger generation are more likely to use the internet and technology (generally and also for support) compared to the older generation who may not have access. With the increasing access to technology and change in times (such as the emergence of smartphones and tablets), there is an expectation that this will reduce. However, currently this can still remain a prominent issue and it is therefore important for consideration for development of future online interventions.

There remains a debate about the effectiveness of online support, especially when compared to traditional face-to-face methods. However, it is important to remember the advantages that online support can provide. As such, this should not be viewed as a replacement to face-to-face support, but as a potential to expand and to encourage more carers to access support. Currently, there is a growing focus on providing online support for carers of someone with a serious mental illness (such as schizophrenia or psychosis). Current randomised controlled trials are exploring this area and I look forward to the future results and further focus within this area.

As the internet can be used increase access to support, this can also relate to online journals such as *Psychreg Journal of Psychology (PJP)*. I am proud to present the second issue of the PJP. Although I joined the editorial board before the publication of the first issue, I am encouraged to see how far this has advanced in such a short amount of time. I am happy to inform our readership that PJP is now indexed at JGate and ResearchBib. I am also pleased to inform readers of Psychreg's first international conference (ICPCE 2018) which will be held in Quezon City, Philippines on the 3rd - 5th August 2018. Rohit Sagoo, one of the PJP editorial board members, will be supporting this as one of the session speakers.

As with the first issue, we present a wide range of topics in psychology. Avril Truttero-Clark opens this issue by exploring the relationship between emotional intelligence and mood regulation (considering the influential factors of experiential avoidance and reflective coping) in individuals experiencing a

mood disorder. Using regression analysis, relationships were found between emotional intelligence and mood regulation, in particular between experiential avoidance and mood regulation. This suggests the possible positive clinical implications of interventions with a focus on experiential avoidance for those experiencing a mood disorder.

Following this, Ashley Coveney and Mark Olver used regression analysis to identify the defence mechanisms and coping strategies that predicted eating disorder traits. The results of this quantitative-based study indicate that maladaptive defence mechanisms (as opposed to coping strategies) predicted higher levels of eating disorder traits within those with elevated anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa traits.

With regards to emotional intelligence, Gobinder Singh Gill and Shraddha Sankulkar explore emotional intelligence from an educational perspective. Comparing levels in teacher-practitioners from the UK and India, they found high levels of emotional intelligence in female teacher practitioners, as well as male and female Indian practitioners. In particular, they highlighted the importance of self-awareness within the relationship of emotional intelligence and other subdomains.

Examining the effectiveness of human behaviour map (HBM) intervention with people with depression, Joana Oliveira and colleagues found a reduction in depression. For the majority of the sample, a significant reduction of depression was shown within five and ten sessions. Additionally, the majority of the sample completely recovered from depression, suggesting the effectiveness of this intervention in the treatment of depression (especially those with severe depression).

Building on previous work, Soumen Acharya found that interpersonal factors (peer acceptance, peer rejection, number of reciprocated friends and enemies) moderated longitudinal relationships between personal factors (aggression/depression, withdrawal, aggression, and lack of physical strength) and victimisation. Additionally, victimisation was shown to predict an increase in anxiety/depression and withdrawal; however this occurred with increased peer rejection and number of reciprocated enemies, along with reduced peer acceptance. Finally, participant level of anxiety/depression predicted an increase in victimisation, occurring alongside negative interpersonal factors.

The founder of Psychreg and Editor-in-Chief of PJP, Dennis Relajo delivers the history of psychology-based blogs. Covering the numerous advantages to this medium (with a focus on the ability to promote the subject), he provides an overview of available popular blogs relating to psychology and related fields. He further discusses how blogs can serve as a transformative medium to promote the discipline of psychology and allied fields.

Davut Acka explores the historical development of measurements of personality for the recruitment of police officers. Identifying three major criticisms of this field (lack of theoretical frameworks, lack of agreed definition of personality traits and police tasks, and poor measurement tools available), he explores these and discusses potential solutions in adherence to personality theories, with the inclusion of policy recommendations and suggestions for future research.

Max Edward Guttman explores the use of intramuscular injections for antipsychotic medications. With the aim of instigating a conversation about this topic, they urge that clinicians move away from stigma and hope that this discussion will contribute towards mental healthcare consumer knowledge, raise awareness, and promote the importance of choice within treatment.

We conclude with two interviews written by Editor-in-chief Dennis Relajo, the first of which is with Dr Bruce Cohen, the editor of the *Routledge International Handbook of Critical Mental Health*. This interview centres on the latest volume which evaluates the practises, priorities and knowledge base of

the Western mental health system. Finally, this issue concludes with an interview with Dr Stella Compton Dickinson, author of *The Clinician's Guide to Forensic Music Therapy*.

We hope you enjoy this issue and would like to thank you for your continued support.

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