Original Research Article

Human Rights and Mental Health: A Review of Current Awareness and Emerging Developments

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Abstract

Human rights are universal fundamental protections worth of all individuals, including those with mental health conditions. However, these rights are often observed violated in mental health care settings, where individuals may face forced treatment, isolation, and degrading conditions. Despite global advocacy efforts, to ensuring that these rights are respected, continues to be a challenge for healthcare professionals and the general public. This review examines the current awareness of human rights among mental health professionals and the public, identifies the knowledge gaps, and highlights the recent developments in policy and practice aimed at improving human rights in mental health care. A comprehensive search of academic databases identified relevant studies published between 2019 and 2024. Findings suggest a promising level of public knowledge about human rights, yet negative attitudes and stigma persist. While improvements in mental health services have been observed among healthcare professionals; resource limitations and a lack of social support remain challenging. A gap between knowledge and practice is evident, necessitating further education and training to ensure a deeper understanding of human rights complexities in mental healthcare. Overall, this review underscores the importance of continued efforts to raise awareness and advocate for the human rights of individuals with mental health conditions. By implementing educational and sensitization programs, a supportive environment can be created that empowers them to seek help without fear of discrimination.
Keywords: Human Rights, Awareness, Mentally Ill, Health Care Professional.

INTRODUCTION

Human rights encompass the fundamental liberties and entitlements inherent to every individual irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, gender, or other statuses. (OHCR) They uphold principles of dignity, equality, and respect, forming the cornerstone of international law and ethical standards. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), established in 1948, laying down universal standards for the protection of human dignity and freedom (United Nations Human Rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Among these rights, the right to health, including mental health, holds paramount importance.

Health, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), transcends mere absence of disease, emphasizing complete physical, mental, and social well-being (Huber M, *et al*., 2011). This holistic approach aligns with the UDHR, which recognizes the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being (Chendake M, *et al*., 2014). However, mental health, often overlooked, poses significant challenges globally.

The intersection of human rights and mental health is complex, with evolving legislation seeking to safeguard the rights of individuals with mental disorders (Stephen P. Marks, *et al*., 2019; Mahdanian A A., 2022). Yet, challenges persist, including coercive measures that may infringe upon human dignity and autonomy (Mahdanian A A., 2023). Instances of forced hospitalization, neglect, and discrimination underscore systemic failures in upholding the rights of those with mental illness (Mahdanian A A., 2022). Such violations perpetuate stigma, exclusion, and abuse, depriving individuals of their basic rights and dignity (Sharma N., 2021; Stephen P. Marks, *et al*., 2019).

In light of these challenges, addressing mental health within a human rights framework is imperative. It demands not only legislative reforms but also societal shifts towards inclusion, empathy, and equitable access to care. Upholding the rights of individuals with mental

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illness is not just a legal obligation but a moral imperative essential for building a fairer, more compassionate society. The aim of this review was to provide an overview about the human right awareness level of mentally ill victims among the health care provider and public that may be an underline factor for coerced treatment, neglect, and degrading conditions of the mentally ill victims.

The study examines the current state of human rights awareness in mental health care, identifying knowledge gaps and areas for improvement. It highlights challenges such as limited resources, paternalistic care models, stigma, and uneven awareness among healthcare professionals and the public. However, positive developments include deinstitutionalization, increased recognition of rights, efforts to reform coercive practices, and awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact. The study emphasizes the need for a multifaceted approach to ensure human rights are respected in mental healthcare, including increased investment, patient-centered care, public education, and targeted training.

The novelty of the study lies in its focus on the gap between awareness and practice of human rights in mental health care. It acknowledges existing knowledge but emphasizes the disconnect between theory and implementation. The study proposes targeted interventions, including training for healthcare professionals and public education campaigns, to address this gap. This focus on solutions makes the study distinctive and contributes to finding ways to improve human rights protection in mental health settings.

MATERIAL AND METHODS
The current review aimed to investigate global awareness of human rights for individuals with mental challenges among healthcare personnel and the general public.

Literature Search
A comprehensive search strategy was employed to identify relevant studies published between 2019, and 2024. Six academic databases were searched: PubMed, SCImago, DOAJ, Google Scholar, Web of Science, and ROAD.

Search Terms
The following search terms were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to optimize search results:
"human right*" OR "human dignity"
"awareness" OR "knowledge" OR "attitude*"
"mentally ill" OR "mental health service*" OR "mental illness"
"mental health personnel" OR "nurse*" OR "doctor*" OR "psychiatric unit*"

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
Studies were included if they:
- Focused on human rights awareness in mental health care
- Examined either healthcare personnel or the general public
- Were published in English-language peer-reviewed journals
- Were published between 2019 and 2024
- Studies were excluded if they:
- Solely addressed specific mental health diagnoses or treatment modalities
- Not focused on human rights awareness
- Not published in peer-reviewed journals

Selection Process
Following the initial search, duplicates were removed. Titles and abstracts were then screened by two independent reviewers to assess eligibility based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Any disagreements were resolved through consultation with a third reviewer. Full-text articles were retrieved for studies deemed potentially relevant based on the initial screening. These articles were then further assessed for eligibility by the two reviewers, ensuring adherence to the established criteria.

Data Extraction and Analysis
A standardized data extraction form was used to collect relevant information from the included studies, including study design, participant (healthcare personnel vs. general public), country of origin, and key findings regarding human rights awareness.

A narrative synthesis approach was employed to analyse the extracted data. This approach allowed for the exploration of the key themes and patterns across the included studies, providing a comprehensive understanding of the current state of human rights awareness in mental health care.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The current review identified both advancements and persistent challenges regarding human rights in mental health services globally. While initiatives like India's Mental Health Care Bill 2013 (Kelly, B. D. 2016); illustrate progress, significant work remains to ensure comprehensive human rights protection.

There is a critical challenge about lack of adequate resources, hindering quality care that respects human rights (Arevalo *et al.*, 2023). Increased investment in mental health services is crucial to ensure sufficient staffing, facilities, and treatment options that uphold patient dignity and autonomy.

The review also highlights the prevalence of paternalistic care models that prioritize control over

patient autonomy (Arevalo *et al*., 2023). Shifting towards a rights-based approach that empowers patients in treatment decisions making is essential. Integrating mental health and civil rights education for healthcare professionals can be instrumental in achieving this shift (Abdulla *et al*., 2022; Rekhis *et al*., 2021; Agarwal V, 2021).

Stigma towards individuals with mental illness remains a major barrier (Merhej, R., 2019; Arevalo, *et al*., 2023; Gaiha, *et al*., 2020; Souza *et al*., 2020; Thakur P & Apte S, 2019). Public education campaigns and targeted interventions specifically aimed at addressing stigma, particularly among young people, are essential for promoting social inclusion and encouraging help-seeking behaviors.

Uneven awareness of human rights among stakeholders is another concern (Abdulla *et al*., 2022). While basic rights are generally understood, knowledge about specific rights, such as participation in treatment plans, is lower (Rekhis *et al*., 2021). Targeted training programs for healthcare professionals and broader awareness campaigns for the public can bridge this knowledge gap.

Studies on healthcare workers' knowledge and implementation of patient rights yielded mixed results (Szajna, *et al*., 2021; Hassen, A., 2022; Osman, A., & AwadAlla, S., 2019; Abdallah, *et al*., 2021). Positive attitudes and knowledge were reported, but consistent implementation remains an issue (Gaiha *et al*., 2020; Souza *et al*., 2020). This underscores the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of human rights practices within healthcare settings, alongside supportive policies that empower professionals to uphold these rights effectively.

The review highlights the multifaceted nature of human rights in mental healthcare. Therefore, significant approach is needed, encompassing increased resource allocation, a shift towards rights-based care models, targeted interventions to address stigma, and ongoing efforts to raise awareness and improve implementation of human rights standards among all stakeholders (Danilakoglou. Ch, Nikolopoulou. V, *et al*., 2019).

Globally, there's a growing shift towards human rights-centered approaches in mental health care. This includes a focus on deinstitutionalization and community-based care, which aim to reduce stigma, promote recovery, and improve the quality of life for individuals with mental health conditions (Stiker H. J, 2018; WHO 2024). Additionally, there's increased advocacy for the rights of people with intellectual disabilities, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Efforts to reform mental health laws and practices are also underway, with a focus on eliminating coercive measures like involuntary hospitalization, seclusion, and restraint. The World Health Organization (WHO, Marks SP, 2019; Mahdanian AA., 2023; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; Mental health, human rights and legislation: guidance and practice) has issued guidance on improving mental health laws to address these human rights violations. The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of comprehensive mental health strategies, particularly for those with pre-existing conditions (WHO, MDPI, mental-health-in-state-government).

The findings suggest a complex interplay between positive developments and ongoing challenges. While progress has been made in mental health service delivery, the persistence of stigma, discrimination, and uneven awareness highlights the need for continued efforts to promote human rights in this field.

The increasing global focus on mental health and human rights indicate a further advancement in these areas soon. However, challenges such as resource limitations and cultural barriers may continue to hinder progress. Technological advancements could play a significant role in improving access to mental health services and promoting human rights.

To gain a deeper understanding of the evolving landscape of human rights in mental health services, longitudinal studies are needed to track changes in awareness, attitudes, and practices over time. Comparative studies across different regions and cultures can provide valuable insights into global trends and variations. Qualitative research can help to understand the experiences and perspectives of individuals with mental health conditions and healthcare providers.

CONCLUSIONS
This review underscores the ongoing challenges in ensuring the human rights of individuals with mental health conditions. While progress has been made, barriers such as limited resources, paternalistic care, stigma, and uneven awareness persist. Addressing these challenges requires increased investment, patient-centered care, public education, and targeted training. By working together, a more equitable and rights-respecting mental healthcare system can be created.

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