Dialogical research to open up new narrative patterns among young women living with severe anxiety

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Abstract:
16,889 new cases of severe anxiety (SA) were diagnosed in Denmark in 2019. Incidence rate is highest among 16 to 24 year-old women, a population group with 64% risk of being diagnosed with SA. Experiences of stigma and shame are common among this group, affecting negatively their quality of life and opportunity to recover. The aim is 1) to gain insight into the digital narratives young women with SA share through social networking websites, and 2) to open up the possibility to develop new narrative patterns using dialogical research as a method rooted in Bakhtin (1895-1975) and further developed by Frank (2005).

Methods:
Netnography of four large Facebook groups focused on anxiety was used to gain insight into the patients’ narratives and to build guiding themes for the off-line dialogical interviews (DI). Biographical narrative patterns were analyzed in light of a narrative-constructivist approach. Participants were invited to sign an informed consent prior to the DI and received ample information about the project aims and their rights.

Results:
8 young women diagnosed with SA participated in the off-line DI. They had experienced stress, loss, betrayal or violation against them prior to the trigger of SA. All had constructed a narrative that explained why they were suffering from SA. Patient experiences were dominated by the struggle to control intrusive thoughts and to live in a threatening world. Some felt stigmatized and tried to hide their condition from colleagues, friends and family. They had different preferences regarding healthcare needs and were active in their search for alternative ways to cope with SA.

Conclusions:
Participants perceived DI as beneficial. It thus has the potential to not only explore the patient’s perspective in depth, but also serve as therapy during the process of inquiry.

Key messages:
- Dialogical research has the potential to not only explore the patient’s perspective in depth, but also serve as therapy during the process of inquiry.
- Young women suffering with severe anxiety experience shame and stigma, which worsen their condition and hinder their opportunity to recover.