

## **A New Approach to Overcoming Mental Health Stigma through Inclusive Persuasive Communication**

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### **Abstract**

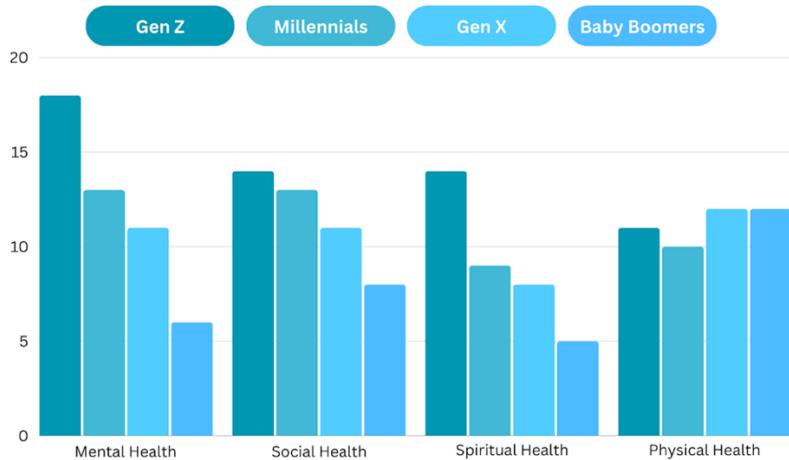
This study examines the role of inclusive persuasive communication in influencing mindsets, viewpoints, and attitudes to improve. The high prevalence of mental health disorders dominated by Generation Z is caused by an environment full of stigma and discrimination. This research uses qualitative methods by referring to Hovland's Persuasive Communication to influence, change, and regulate the attitudes and behaviours of people with stigma. Inclusive Persuasive Strategy, chosen to find out how to design effective messages that are able to evoke emotions, empathy, and motivation for positive change based on Aristotle's Rhetoric to package information according to aspects that facilitate persuasion. Communication Accommodation Theory was chosen to look at the situations and conditions of individuals with mental health disorders when making adjustments as part of their efforts to deal with unfavourable situations. The results showed that individuals with mental health disorders focus on consuming information that is clear and relevant to their needs as a means of validating their feelings, emotions and conditions. When there is relevance to the individual's needs at that time, changes in attitude and behaviours will certainly occur. In accordance with the strategy and form of an inclusive approach, patterns of behaviours and emotional changes that occur need to be channelled and validated, where channelling and validating these emotions is characterized by recognition of the diversity of experiences and feelings.

**Keywords:** *Inclusive, Meaning Construction, Psychodynamics, Sociocultural*

### **Introduction**

Mental health disorders have experienced a significant increase in various countries. This is in accordance with a statement from the World Health Organization (WHO), which reported that the prevalence of mental health disorders increased by 25% globally in the first year of the pandemic. The results of a global survey conducted by the McKinsey Health Institute in 2023 (Figure 1.) of 41,960 respondents in 26 countries around the world, showed that mental illness or mental health disorders were dominated by Generation Z (18-24), Generation Z respondents said that their mental health was poor or very poor compared to other dimensions of the health category, while other generations such as Generation X and Baby Boomers dominated the physical health problem category followed by the social health and mental health categories. This figure reflects the increasing psychological stress faced by

people, whether caused by economic uncertainty, social isolation, health-related stress or concerns about the future. This increase shows how important mental health is on a global scale, especially in countries that may not have previously taken the issue seriously.



**Figure 1.** Intergenerational Comparison of Health Problems

A similar increase in mental health disorders dominated by Generation Z has also occurred in Indonesia. The global article "Mental Health in Asia: The Numbers" notes that around 19% of adolescents in Indonesia have had suicidal thoughts, and 45% of them admitted to self-harm. Indonesia's National Adolescent Mental Health Survey shows that 1 in 3 adolescents in Indonesia experience mental health disorders. Indonesian data also shows that mental health disorders are most commonly experienced by Generation Z, although only 24.4% of individuals seek consultation and treatment from experts.

Based on existing phenomena and news, it can be concluded that Generation Z is very vulnerable to mental health disorders. Quoting from the article 'Halodoc: Myth or Fact, Gen Z Has Weaker Mentality', the mental weakness of Generation Z is not solely due to emotionality but Generation Z is a generation that is more aware and more open about mental health issues compared to other generations. In addition, Generation Z lives in a modern era with high demands and pressure. High environmental pressures can easily disrupt mental health and if the environment is not an effective support system, mental health disorders can worsen. This is reinforced by the statement of M. Adwin Luthfian N., S.Tr.Sos from the Ministry of Health: Directorate General of Health Services, who mentioned that environmental factors have a significant impact, so depression can worsen and increase if the environment is not supportive. A key characteristic of an unsupportive environment is stigma and discrimination against individuals with mental health disorders.

Stigma is often closely related to communication, so reducing and dealing with stigmatization can be done through the right communication approach (Mustaqim, 2020). To deal with stigma, communication plays an important role in shaping community attitudes and perceptions towards individuals with mental health disorders. Perceptions based on awareness and correct understanding can help reduce ignorance and stereotypes that underlie stigma. In addition, appropriate communication approaches are crucial for individuals with mental health disorders to improving their psychological well-being. An inclusive

communication approach, which emphasizes anti-discrimination and fairness, is essential to address and reduce stigma and to change societal attitudes.

Referring to previous research on the importance of understanding mental health issues and mitigating stigmatization, this study aims to assess the urgency of an inclusive approach in addressing mental health stigma in the community. This research is important because it focuses on analyzing effective communication strategies that play a major role in addressing mental health stigmatization, as well as its relationship with inclusive approaches. By doing so, it is hoped that stigmatization of mental health issues can be reduced and contribute to improving the overall well-being of society. The uniqueness and main difference of this study compared to other studies, especially those from abroad, is the relatively new context of inclusive approaches that take into account cultural, social, beliefs and norms that influence individual perceptions. It certainly provides a new dimension to communication strategies that do not only focus on mental health counseling, but also tailor messages to the local social and cultural context. This approach is more relevant in Indonesia and countries with cultural diversity, where stigma towards mental health can be very strong due to strong social norms.

One related study was conducted by Sarah Bryna Grace, Ade Gandha Kurnia Tandra, and Mary in 2020 with the title "Effective Communication in Improving Mental Health Literacy," which explored the level of mental health literacy among young people in Jabodetabek. This study revealed that education about mental health in Indonesia still lacks public attention, which tends to focus more on physical health (Grace et al., 2020). The difference between previous research and this study lies in the inclusive approach. While there have been several studies highlighting the importance of communication in reducing stigma, many have not integrated an inclusive approach that considers cultural, social and normative diversity in the context of mental health. In addition, the role of the media as communicators is certainly discussed in more depth in order to more effectively disseminate persuasive messages that reduce stigma towards mental health, as often the media exacerbates stigma.

The literature review in this study uses Persuasive Communication, Persuasive Communication Strategies with an Inclusive Approach, Rhetoric Theory, and Communication Accommodation Theory. According to G. R. Miller (2003), persuasive communication is defined as messages in various forms that aim to shape, strengthen, or change the responses, attitudes, behaviors, and choices of others as communicants (Stiff & Mongeau, 2016). The concept of persuasive communication was first popularized by Carl Hovland through his book entitled "Dynamics of Persuasion". Hovland explained that the persuasive communication process focuses on motivation and learning. In the Yale Persuasive Communication Model/The Hovland Model, Hovland outlines the stages that communicants go through to understand persuasion messages from communicators, starting from analyzing the source of communication, then proceeding to understanding the message in the process of message learning and changing audience attitudes (Perloff, 2017). Thus, it can be concluded that persuasive messages are conveyed by communicators in a subtle way to increase communicant awareness.

This persuasive communication strategy can be elaborated with an inclusive approach. Melvin L. Defleur and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach identified persuasive communication strategies: psychodynamics, sociocultural, and meaning construction (Zuhry, 2015). The relevance of these strategies to an inclusive approach focuses on increasing understanding through recognition and appreciation of diversity. In the context of this research, mental health disorders are seen as a form of diversity. Psychodynamic strategies emphasize the cognitive and emotional aspects of humans, such as motivation, experience, and empathy. Sociocultural strategies assume that human behavior is influenced by external factors, with the environment as the primary factor. It involves adjusting communication styles, using symbols and metaphors, and understanding social norms. The relationship between the sociocultural strategy and the inclusive approach is that it adapts messages to the social context and recognizes and makes room for a diversity of perspectives. Meanwhile, meaning construction strategies assume that one's knowledge can influence and shape attitudes and behaviors. This strategy includes collaboration and meaning building through two-way discussions, as well as the use of metaphors and analogies. In this study, persuasive communication strategies are applied to reduce or even eliminate stigma by changing people's attitudes and behaviors. This strategy aims to motivate change, build awareness, and provide accurate information.

The use of persuasive communication strategies with an inclusive approach is related to Aristotle's Rhetoric Theory. Rhetoric Theory introduced by Aristotle is closely related to public communication and serves as a tool to persuade, which is the essence of public communication itself (Nadhmy Dha et al., 2021). Aristotle classified the main aspects of rhetoric into three categories: ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos (Argument based on Credibility) relates to the credibility and responsibility of the communicator in delivering the message, where credibility is often supported by expertise in the field. Pathos (Psychological Emotional Argument) focuses on evoking the emotions of the communicator through the delivery of information that matches the emotional state of the individual, making it more persuasive. Logos (Logical Argument) relates to the logic and rationality of the information or message, often by including factual data to ensure delivery responsibility. In this research, Rhetoric Theory is used as the basis for arguments to package information in accordance with aspects that support the persuasion process.

In relation to inclusive strategies, Communication Accommodation Theory is used to ground how sociocultural strategies can occur. Communication Accommodation Theory, introduced by Howard Giles in 1973, explains how interaction involves adjustments in the use of words, attitudes, nonverbal behavior, and paralanguage (Trie Andini et al., 2023). Accommodation refers to the ability to modify and adjust behavior in response to others. This adjustment can be done through convergence and divergence strategies. Convergence occurs when individuals adjust their communication style to the interlocutor, while divergence is done to accentuate significant differences between individuals and interlocutors. In this study, Communication Accommodation Theory is used to analyze when and in what situations individuals with mental health disorders apply convergence and divergence strategies.

## **Method**

Qualitative research methods are used in this research because of the subjective and personal characteristics of the data. This method relies on open-ended questions in interviews to obtain data, contrast to quantitative research questions (Creswell, 2019). The results of qualitative research are uncertain, because the data obtained comes from a natural context and is not the result of manipulation (Rijal Fadli, 2021). In addition, qualitative research methods are used to explore the complex persuasive communication strategies with an inclusive approach and to understand how individuals with mental health disorders experience the adjustment of these strategies.

The research subject functions as a data source, which can be an individual, group, or object that meets certain criteria. The criteria or characteristics of key informants in this study are Generation Z (aged 20-25 years), fighters or survivors of mental health disorders including anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, and bipolar disorder, who have sought consultation and have valid diagnosis evidence from experts, and follow developments in social media related to mental health information. In this study, the subjects studied consisted of two large groups of Generation Z who experienced mental health disorders and Generation Z who were active as activists or community members who acted as communicators in persuading the public and individuals with mental health disorders. Informants who meet the criteria will be selected through the question and answer feature on Instagram to facilitate the researcher in finding informants with a broad reach. The object of research includes communication strategies and roles in overcoming stigma.

In this research, the data analysis technique starts with collecting data obtained through literature study, observation, and interviews. The initial step before starting the interviews is to study the phenomenon and issues to be researched. Then, the researcher formulates open-ended questions that align with the phenomenon or object of study. After the questions are prepared, the next step is to select informants who meet the research criteria. The researcher then explains the purpose of the study, and data collection will proceed into a deeper interaction process. During the interview, the researcher may record or take notes on key responses to be used in the interview report in the form of a script. From the script, the researcher can process the raw data and incorporate it into the results and discussion of the study.

After that, the next stage is data reduction, where the collected data is classified into categories to facilitate researchers in presenting it. Then, researchers will present relevant data, in this case in the form of narrative text and charts. Finally, after presenting the data, the researcher will draw conclusions and seek additional data for verification and reinforcement, to ensure the credibility of the existing data.

## **Result and Discussion**

### ***Stages of Achieving Persuasion in Persuasive Communication Strategy***

Stigmatization is a reality that closely related to the communication process. In general, the formation of stigma begins with how individuals with mental health disorders share messages in the form of patterns of behaviour and actions which will be accepted by

the community. Society considers that the patterns of behaviour and actions shown are different from the general patterns of behaviour and actions of the community usually. Thus, stigmatization will continue to occur due to differences in beliefs and perceptions regarding views and mindsets towards mental health issues. The lack of understanding of mental health issues is a challenge for communicator, whether activists, communities, or individuals who are aware of the importance of mental health issues to influence the viewpoints, beliefs, and actions of people with stigma. Changes in these aspects can be done using persuasive communication, it can be seen from the general understanding that persuasive communication has a function to influence communicants (Candrasari & Naning, 2019). Providing understanding to people who are not yet open to mental health issues needs to use the stages of achieving persuasion starting from source, message, and attitude change. The following is a summary table of the use of keywords based on the results of observations and research interviews with source, message, and attitude change analysis.

**Table 1.** Key Stages of Achieving Persuasion in Persuasive Strategy

Analysis	Keywords
Source	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Credibility of Communication Source</li> <li>2. Clarity of Information Relevance</li> <li>3. Audio Visual Quality</li> </ol>
Message	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Information Consistency</li> <li>2. Ambiguity and Self-Diagnose</li> <li>3. Scientific Explanation</li> </ol>
Attitude Change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Change and Adjust Information to Needs</li> <li>2. Improved Understanding by Media Exposure</li> </ol>

Source: Data Processed by Researcher, 2024

Based on the observation, before persuading the public with the information provided by the communicator, of course the information must be able to be understood and accepted first by individuals with mental health disorders themselves. This is done as a form of validation for individuals with mental health disorders so that the community is also expected to get the same understanding of the information provided. As for providing understanding, Hovland explained that persuasion must be carried out in a flowing, soft, and smooth manner, and not forceful but able to achieve the purpose of persuasion, namely fostering awareness and changing attitudes (Muslimah & Maghfirah Aesthetika, 2024). Thus, the use of communication sources in accordance with persuasion must be a source that can be accounted for and has credibility. For example, a psychologist or mental health survivor who shares their experiences openly can be an effective source. This credibility helps the audience receive information more openly, as they feel that the source understands the issue deeply. In addition to credibility, the information conveyed by the communicator must be relevant. When the information can evoke emotions that match the audience, it will certainly be more effective to persuade (Aisyah, 2022). The relevance of information to evoke emotions and empathy can be done with audio and visual support to improve the quality of the message. For example, the use of videos depicting real-life stories of individuals' journeys

in the face of mental health stigma, supplemented with scientific data and case studies, can help build empathy and provide deeper understanding. The message should also include logical arguments to ensure that the information can be received rationally.

In accordance with the research results, informants have at least one source of communication chosen so that the information they receive is linear. When the information provided is not linear or inconsistent, individuals with mental health disorders and the community as an audience or communicant will find it difficult to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information. This inconsistency will have an impact on the phenomenon of self-diagnosis, which is triggered by the perception of inconsistent information. When individuals self-diagnose, their decision making will result in irrational conclusions (Husada et al., 2024). To reduce information inconsistency, communicators need to affix logical arguments in every message delivery. Logical arguments can be delivered using research data, scientific explanations, and case studies mental health issues that can drive attitude change. To encourage attitude change, communications should be designed to connect emotions with action. For example, campaigns that encourage people to use more inclusive language, such as replacing stigmatizing terms with more supportive ones, can be accompanied by visual and audio materials to amplify their impact.

### ***Creating Effective Persuasion Message with Ethos, Pathos, and Logos***

The stages of achieving persuasion in persuasive communication strategies can be elaborated with the Concepts and Theories of Rhetoric by Aristotle. As with the concept of Ethos (Argument Based on Credibility) which relates to the results and previous discussion, namely, when an expert from his field conveys information, of course the information will be considered reliable and accountable because it is more experienced (Wati, 2017). In mental health communication, the credibility of the source of information is crucial to building trust. When a psychologist, psychiatrist, or mental health survivor who has personal experience conveys information, the audience is more likely to accept the message because they are perceived to understand the issue deeply. For example, a survivor sharing their story of how they successfully fought stigma can provide emotional validation to audiences who have also experienced similar stigma.

Similar to the concept of Pathos (Psychological Emotional Argument) which is related to the results and previous discussion, namely, a well-delivered message is a message that is able to evoke emotions that are relevant and in accordance with what the audience feels. It will be easier to persuade the audience because they will feel their emotional needs are met and be able to validate this. In the context of mental health, an emotional approach needs to be tailored to the sensitivity of the audience. Messages that evoke empathy and respond to the audience's emotional needs, such as inspirational videos or personal testimonials, help the audience feel understood and supported. For example, a campaign featuring stories of individuals' struggles with depression can evoke empathy and raise awareness of the importance of emotional support.

The last concept is Logos (Logical Argument) which is related to the previous results and discussion, namely, the use of logical arguments using data and research results, as well as scientific explanations in order to convince the audience to believe the message conveyed

(Yuniarti et al., 2024). To reduce mental health stigma, logical arguments should be presented with relevant and easy-to-understand data. For example, the use of statistics on the prevalence of mental health disorders or scientific explanations on how stigma affects the well-being of individuals can give the audience a rational basis to change their views. In addition, including real case studies can make the message more convincing and relatable to the audience.

### ***Behaviour Change, Symbol Adjustment, and Meaning Construction***

Persuasive communication strategies for the stages of achieving persuasion will certainly be more effective if done with an effective approach as well. Moreover, the issue of mental health is a sensitive global issue if there are errors and ambiguities in its socialization. Inclusive approach is used as an approach that is elaborated with persuasive communication strategies. The inclusive approach is used in this study because in social life, inclusiveness refers and emphasizes aspects of acceptance and understanding of diversity and differences (Effendi, 2020). An inclusive approach to persuasive communication for mental health issues has a lot of potential to create greater understanding and acceptance, but also faces some challenges that need to be addressed. Diverse societies have widely varying perspectives on mental health. What is considered normal or acceptable in one culture or community may differ from that in another. In some cultures, the topic of mental health may still be considered taboo or associated with a very strong stigma. While inclusive approaches offer many benefits, their implementation requires adequate training for communicators, such as activists, policy makers and medical personnel. They need to understand how to deliver inclusive messages and address stigma issues with sensitivity. Thus, the inclusive approach strategies of psychodynamics, sociocultural, and meaning construction are used as solutions to these barriers and challenges.

**Table 2.** Key Stages of Inclusive Communication Strategies

<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
Psychodynamic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Psychosomatics</li> <li>2. Certain Pressures and Moment as Triggers</li> <li>3. Emotion Channeling, Validation, Motivation</li> </ol>
Sociocultural	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Change in Communication Symbols</li> <li>2. Condition Adjustment</li> <li>3. Social Response and Individual Responsibility</li> </ol>
Meaning Constructions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pressure and Courage</li> <li>2. Validation as Support to Fellow Survivor</li> <li>3. Community Education</li> </ol>

Source: Data Processed by Researcher, 2024

Psychodynamics as inclusive communication persuasion is also related to understanding behaviour, analyzing emotional responses, and understanding individual motivation. Changes in behavioural and emotional patterns in psychodynamics begin with

triggering factors, usually in the form of stress and certain traumatic moments. When these triggering factors appear, individuals with mental health disorders will experience drastic mood changes, characterized by feelings of excessive anxiety, overthinking, and sadness. This happens because, when the trigger factor appears, one part of the brain called the amygdala will activate the "fight or flight" response (Al-Joubour, et al., 2024). Where when that condition occurs, individuals with mental health disorders will try to fight and experience physical disorders such as stomach acid to increased heart rate, this phenomenon is called the psychosomatic disorder phase. When these phases occur, the individual's mental health disorder will relapse, characterized by changes in behavioural patterns and increased emotional sensitivity. Situations and conditions like this certainly make people make social judgments, where they will interpret and analyze to understand the environment they face and then compare with their views and beliefs. Providing this space needs to be done with the help and involvement of the community. When society does not recognize the diversity of mental health disorders and how individuals communicate their conditions in different ways, the impact can be very significant on the individual experiencing the disorder. Many people with mental health disorders often feel ununderstood or even misunderstood because society is more likely to generalize symptoms or trivialize the condition. This is due to a lack of understanding of how complex the spectrum of mental health disorders is and how individuals experience them. This lack of understanding means that society often gives unsupportive responses or even stigmatizes individuals with mental health disorders. This exacerbates the feelings of those who are already isolated or do not feel understood. An inclusive psychodynamic approach, which includes an understanding of the diversity of emotional experiences and psychological states, can be an effective tool to reduce this ignorance. By acknowledging that each individual may feel and communicate their condition in different ways, we can help open a space for them to speak up and be validated without fear of judgment or stigma.

Individuals with mental health disorders may deal with the situation in different ways depending on their motivation. Motivation is the pillar that keeps individuals on their goals and is able to encourage and strengthen individuals when faced with a problem. Based on observations, self-selection as a source of motivation is included in the need to self-actualize. In accordance with what was described by informants that they focus on their own goals and ideals, Maslow also explained something similar, defining actualization as a human need to become what is expected in their desires, potential and goals to perfect themselves according to their expectations (Pedak, 2009).

Sociocultural is related to adjusting communication styles, using metaphorical symbols, and understanding social norms. In sociocultural, changes in symbols and metaphors are carried out verbally and nonverbally with the aim of expressing the conditions being experienced by individuals with mental health disorders to others around them. These changes are characterized by changes in facial expressions, intonation and tone of voice, excessive gestures that are not common. This usually includes nail biting, tremors, and selective mutism.

However, these metaphorical symbol changes are not always made by individuals with mental health disorders. This is because they are also able to make adjustments to conditions. Condition adjustments are made by individuals with mental health disorders when they are faced with formal situations and conditions, such as in a discussion room with superiors or lecturers, of course they will adjust their conditions.

Condition adjustments made by individuals with mental health disorders in line with Communication Accommodation Theory. In this theory, the adjustment of conditions and communication is divided into two aspects of the process, namely convergence and divergence, both of which are carried out by individuals with mental health disorders. Self-adjustment and communication in certain situations and conditions carried out by individuals with mental health disorders are included in the convergence aspect. This aspect of convergence is a strategy carried out by individuals by adjusting language, tone of voice, intonation, facial expressions to behaviour (Amelia et al., 2023). When the condition of mental health disorders is relapsing, then individuals are faced with a situation that requires making adjustments, individuals will try to cover up their condition. This is done to minimize unwanted things. In contrast to convergence, the divergence aspect carried out by individuals with mental health disorders aims not to adjust to situations and conditions, but to make adjustments between what is felt and how they express it. Individuals will emphasize differences (changes in communication symbols) to anyone regardless of the situation (Clief Maitimu et al., 2024).

This self-adjustment and communication is carried out when the situation and conditions are urgent, especially who the interlocutor is at that time. These changes and adjustments are certainly common and often done by individuals with mental health disorders. The stigma, negative judgment, and feelings of insecurity experienced by individuals with mental health disorders cause individuals to assess themselves that this condition is their weakness. In the end, they will make adjustments such as selective mutism where it will convince them that such conditions are their own responsibility and think that only they are able to understand and handle their conditions. Individuals with mental health disorders are shouldering all the burden alone to deal with a society that lacks understanding. However, this is the wrong condition. If individuals with mental health disorders bear all the burden alone, they will find it more difficult to recover as it will only increase the pressure on themselves

As previously described, validating the emotions and feelings of individuals with mental health disorders requires community involvement and contribution. Behind individuals with mental health disorders always mask their feelings, adjusting communication styles, and trying to take responsibility for all the pressure they receive, collaborating with the community plays an important role in balancing the situation and conditions. The collaboration desired by individuals with mental health disorders are activities that can increase courage. Collaboration to create an inclusive environment has been done before by individuals with mental health disorders. They become a place to validate emotions as a form of support to fellow survivors. This is because fellow survivors certainly understand better because they sometimes feel similar conditions and situations, they are also more free to

express and express their feelings without fear of being judged. Thus, as a society that supports an inclusive environment, open-mindedness regarding education and socialization of mental health issues needs to be accepted and emphasized as diversity present in the environment.

## Conclusion

Psychodynamics relates to the changes in behavioural patterns and emotions that arise when individuals with mental health disorders experience and perceive triggering factors. In an inclusive approach, it is important to channel and validate these patterns of behaviour and emotional changes. Channelling and validating emotions as part of an inclusive approach involves acknowledging a range of experiences and feelings. Understanding the motivations of individuals with mental health disorders is also part of this process. In the sociocultural context, changing symbols and metaphors, both verbal and nonverbal, are often used to convey the condition experienced by the individual. Individuals with mental health disorders usually adjust in formal situations, such as in discussions with superiors or lecturers, as a response to the environment they face. This adjustment is common for them. Stigma, judgment, and insecurity often make individuals feel that their condition is a personal weakness. Meaning construction focuses on how individuals form understandings through social interaction and communication. Although individuals with mental health disorders often hide their feelings, adjust their communication styles, and try to cope with pressure, collaboration with the community is essential to support their well-being.

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