Three included studies were found amongst the included studies. All studies expressed themes such as the participants’ sense of identification, acceptance, and feelings of isolation in relation to chronic illness. For example, both Sanderson et al and Braverman et al found a common theme of loss of identity, or disrupted normality associated with individuals dealing with long-term illness. In regards to feelings of acceptance, Radcliffe et al found that “united couples” who sustained stroke experiences were able to adapt to their disabilities together to become self-sufficient; similarly, Sanderson et al found a group of participants who demonstrated a “resetting normality” typology, where normal life includes the individual’s illness. Relative to feelings of isolation, all included articles demonstrated similar themes of being distant in relationships and withdrawing from society.

Purpose

To review the literature in regards to individual’s abilities to maintain identities and relationships after the diagnosis of a chronic illness or disease.

Study

The Narrative of 12 Men with AIDS: Exploring Interviews

By: Janet Bowerman

Qualitative data from 12 men with a diagnosis of AIDS were collected for this study. The men were selected from those who had been part of a longitudinal study of 245 individuals in 5 cities. These men were interviewed about their experiences and perceptions of how their diagnosis impacted their lives. They were asked about their experiences with the disease and how it affected their relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach.

Materials and Methods

Participants

Six of the participants were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. They were interviewed about their experiences with the disease and how it affected their relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. They were selected from a larger study of 245 individuals in 5 cities. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach.

Materials

Contextual examples were used to illustrate the experiences and perceptions of the participants. The data was analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach.

Methods

Participants were contacted on a 1 year time span and their narrative was transcribed. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach.

Results

Participants were divided into 3 different groups based on their ability to express their story: those who were able to express their story clearly, those who had difficulty expressing their story, and those who were not able to express their story.

Chronic Disease on the Rise

The prevalence of chronic disease continues to rise in the U.S every year, with an estimated 171 million Americans affected in 2030.

Conclusion

Providing a platform for individuals with chronic illnesses to express their story can facilitate individuals in re-defining their identity and relationships. People suffering from chronic illness commonly withdraw from their loved ones, and isolate themselves from society because they believe others cannot relate to them, and they fear as if their identities have been lost. However, if individuals express their life challenges with others through the use of narratives, they will be able to find alternative coping strategies and find ways to accept their lifelong diagnosis. This will enable individuals to foster healthy relationships with family, friends, and healthcare providers. Further research must be conducted to evaluate the influence of chronic illness and disease on maintaining relationships and identities for a better understanding of what individuals should expect as they age.

References