



## Exploring the Lived Experiences of Chronic Illness Patients: Understanding the Dual Role of Emotional and Psychological Aspects, Communication, and Social Support

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### ABSTRACT

Chronic illness significantly impacts individuals' emotional and psychological well-being, yet the complexities of how patients cope with these conditions remain insufficiently explored. While existing research has focused on medical and physical aspects, the role of social support and communication in managing chronic illness has not been deeply understood. Specifically, the emotional and psychological experiences of patients are often overlooked in favor of quantitative metrics. This study addresses the gap in understanding by investigating how patients emotionally respond to their chronic illness diagnosis and how communication with healthcare providers and family influences coping mechanisms. Using a phenomenological approach, this research explores the lived experiences of individuals dealing with chronic illness, highlighting the importance of communication and social support. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 participants and analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover key themes of emotional distress, coping mechanisms, and the influence of social networks. The findings indicate that while patients experience significant emotional distress, their coping strategies—especially those involving family support and healthcare communication—play a crucial role in managing stress. These results contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the emotional dimensions of chronic illness and suggest the need for integrated healthcare approaches that address both physical and emotional well-being. The study's implications call for future research on cultural differences in coping with chronic illness and the role of long-term emotional support in patient outcomes.



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### INTRODUCTION

Chronic illness remains one of the most pervasive and impactful health challenges across the globe. The experience of being diagnosed with a long-term medical condition fundamentally alters an individual's daily life, leading to significant physical, emotional, and psychological shifts. These conditions, ranging from diabetes to cardiovascular diseases, often necessitate lifelong management and adaptation. Beyond the immediate medical challenges, the social and emotional toll on patients can be profound, affecting their quality of life, mental health, and interpersonal relationships (Zhang & Li, 2022). This phenomenon is particularly significant in the context of an increasingly individualistic society, where patients may feel isolated and overwhelmed by the demands of managing a chronic illness.

The relevance of this phenomenon extends beyond the medical field, as chronic illness frequently intersects with broader societal issues such as healthcare accessibility, social support systems, and mental health awareness. In many cultures, chronic illness is seen not only as a medical condition but as a social stigma that can affect how individuals are perceived and treated by others. The social implications of living with a chronic illness are complex, as patients often navigate feelings

of anxiety, depression, and uncertainty about the future. These experiences are compounded by the lack of widespread understanding of the personal impact of chronic conditions, making it crucial to explore how individuals internally process and cope with these challenges.

The need for a deeper exploration of the lived experience of those coping with chronic illness is critical in order to truly understand the subjective dimensions of their journey. Phenomenology offers a unique lens for examining the personal meaning and emotional responses associated with chronic illness, providing insights into how patients adapt to and make sense of their condition (Asfahani, 2024). By focusing on the subjective experiences of individuals, this approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how chronic illness shapes one's life, beyond the biological or clinical aspects. Given that each patient's experience is deeply personal and affected by various social, cultural, and psychological factors, phenomenological research can uncover insights that may otherwise remain obscured in traditional clinical studies. Understanding the lived experiences of these individuals can inform better healthcare practices, policies, and social support systems.

Research into the lived experiences of individuals dealing with chronic illness has emerged as an important field within both health and social sciences. By focusing on how patients experience and make sense of their illness, phenomenological studies contribute significantly to understanding the psychological and emotional aspects that are often overlooked in traditional medical research. This area of study emphasizes the subjective, first-person perspective of patients, seeking to uncover the meanings they attribute to their experiences, including how they navigate the emotional and social challenges of managing a chronic condition. The richness of personal narratives that emerge from phenomenological research provides a more holistic view of the impact of chronic illness, not just on the body, but on the person as a whole.

However, methodological challenges persist in exploring these deep, subjective experiences. While quantitative research methods are useful for measuring the prevalence of symptoms or the effectiveness of treatments, they often fail to capture the nuances of personal experiences and the emotional complexity of living with a chronic illness (Holloway dkk., 2022). For instance, surveys or questionnaires may provide useful data on the frequency or intensity of symptoms but are limited in their ability to explore how patients feel, think, or respond to their condition on an individual level. Additionally, many existing studies rely on structured data collection methods that fail to account for the dynamic nature of patient experiences, thus limiting our understanding of the fluidity and variability inherent in living with a long-term illness.

These limitations in existing research methodologies underscore the necessity of adopting a phenomenological approach for understanding the essence of patients' experiences. Without a method that prioritizes personal meaning and lived experience, much of the depth of chronic illness remains obscured. Phenomenology's focus on exploring the meanings that individuals assign to their own experiences makes it an essential tool in capturing the richness and complexity of what it truly means to live with a chronic illness. The ability to probe these lived experiences in a way that transcends statistical data allows for a deeper, more empathetic understanding, offering insights that can ultimately improve patient care and support systems.

In exploring the experiences of individuals coping with chronic illness, many studies have relied on practical, established approaches such as quantitative surveys or clinical assessments. While these methods offer valuable data regarding the prevalence of symptoms and treatment outcomes, they often fail to capture the rich, subjective experiences of patients (Zeng & Deal, 2023). Quantitative research tends to overlook the emotional and psychological dimensions of illness, offering only a superficial understanding of how patients emotionally process their condition or how they make sense of their journey through chronic illness. For instance, while statistical tools may measure levels of anxiety or stress, they do not address how these feelings manifest on a personal level or how they are influenced by social interactions and healthcare communication. Consequently, the insights derived from these studies are limited, offering a partial and often fragmented view of the illness experience.

An alternative, and more fitting solution, is to adopt a phenomenological approach, which allows for a deeper and more holistic exploration of the lived experiences of individuals facing

chronic illness. Phenomenology, with its focus on the subjective meanings and emotional responses of patients, can reveal insights that traditional methodologies fail to uncover. By embracing the personal and existential dimensions of illness, phenomenological research can provide a more nuanced understanding of how individuals navigate their health challenges, how they interpret their experiences, and how these meanings shape their coping strategies (Booth dkk., 2019). The adoption of this methodology is crucial in filling the gap left by conventional approaches, offering a richer, more empathetic perspective on the emotional and social complexities of living with a chronic condition.

In the existing literature, numerous studies have explored the experiences of individuals living with chronic illness, with a focus on how they emotionally and psychologically adapt to their diagnoses. These studies have often emphasized the physical aspects of illness, but there remains a gap in understanding the deeper, subjective meanings that individuals assign to their experience. Research by authors such as Arfaoui dkk.(2025) has highlighted the importance of social support systems and healthcare communication in managing the stress of chronic illness. However, these studies often rely on quantitative methods or offer only a superficial understanding of patient experiences. As such, the subjective and emotional dimensions of illness, particularly in how patients make sense of their condition, remain underexplored in the literature.

This study proposes a phenomenological approach to better understand the lived experiences of individuals coping with chronic illness, particularly focusing on the emotional burden of diagnosis and coping mechanisms. Phenomenology was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of how individuals experience and interpret their illness. By engaging directly with participants' subjective realities, this approach helps to uncover the personal meanings and emotions that are often overlooked by traditional research methods. This methodology addresses the gaps identified in the existing literature, providing a richer understanding of how patients adapt to and manage their condition over time. Through in-depth interviews, this study will explore the intersection of emotional responses, social support, and communication, offering a holistic view of the chronic illness experience.

The structure of this article begins with an introduction to the phenomenon of chronic illness and the importance of understanding its emotional and psychological dimensions. Following the introduction, a detailed explanation of the phenomenological methodology used will be presented, including the process of data collection and analysis (Criss dkk., 2021). The findings from the data analysis will be discussed in terms of themes that emerged from participants' experiences, followed by a synthesis of how these findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge. The article will conclude with an overview of the implications for healthcare practice and recommendations for future research, ultimately offering a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals coping with chronic illness.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Study Design**

A phenomenological approach was chosen for this study to explore the lived experiences of individuals diagnosed with chronic illness and their stress management strategies. This approach allows for a deep understanding of the subjective experiences of participants, focusing on how they perceive and make sense of their condition. The primary aim of using phenomenology is to explore the meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences in relation to chronic illness, with a particular emphasis on how they cope with the emotional burden of the diagnosis (Sugara & Fadhilah, 2024). The study adopted a descriptive phenomenological approach, which focuses on describing the essence of participants' experiences without the influence of prior theoretical assumptions. This approach was selected because it facilitates an in-depth exploration of the participants' personal and unique responses to the phenomenon, ensuring that their voices and experiences are central to the study.

## **Participants**

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they had direct experience with the phenomenon of interest. The inclusion criteria were adults aged 30 to 65 who had been diagnosed with a chronic illness for at least six months. These participants were expected to have sufficient experience in managing their condition and could speak to the emotional and psychological aspects of their diagnosis. Exclusion criteria included individuals with cognitive impairments or those unable to provide informed consent. A total of 12 participants were involved in the study, with an average age of 45 years. The group consisted of an equal number of male and female participants (Ferreira dkk., 2024). Demographic information such as socioeconomic status, marital status, and family structure was also collected, as these factors were deemed relevant to understanding the social support systems available to each participant.

## **Data Collection**

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which allowed for a flexible yet focused exploration of the participants' experiences. The interviews were conducted individually, either in person or via video call, depending on the participants' preferences. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The setting for in-person interviews was chosen to ensure a comfortable and private environment, conducive to open and honest dialogue. A semi-structured interview guide was used, focusing on key themes such as emotional responses to diagnosis, coping mechanisms, and the role of social support. The guide was designed to allow for the natural flow of conversation, enabling participants to share their experiences in their own words. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a commonly used method in phenomenological research. This approach involved identifying key themes that emerged from the transcriptions of the interviews. The analysis was carried out in several stages: first, the transcripts were read multiple times to gain an overall understanding of the data. Then, initial codes were assigned to significant statements or phrases that reflected participants' experiences (Sheng dkk., 2023). These codes were grouped into broader themes that captured the essence of the participants' lived experiences. The analysis followed a systematic process to ensure rigor and consistency, with constant comparison across participants' responses to identify shared meanings and differences. NVivo software was used to assist with organizing the data, although the focus remained on the thematic content rather than the tool itself.

## **Ethics**

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee. All participants were provided with detailed information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, and potential risks, and were given the opportunity to ask questions before giving their consent. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing the data and ensuring that no identifying information was included in the final reports (Abbasi dkk., 2023). All data were stored securely, and access was restricted to the research team. This study adhered to ethical standards in line with international guidelines for research involving human participants.

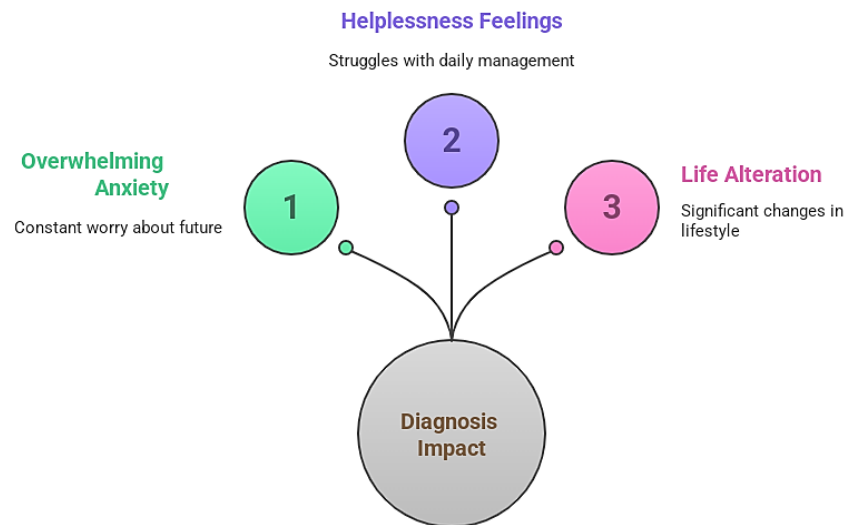
## **RESULTS**

### **The Emotional Burden of Chronic Illness Diagnosis**

The participants' experiences of coping with chronic illness revealed a profound emotional burden tied to their diagnosis. Many expressed feeling overwhelmed and uncertain about the future. One participant described the moment of receiving the diagnosis as "a life-altering moment" that left them "in shock" and unable to grasp the full implications. For instance, Patient A shared, "I remember when the doctor told me... I just froze. It felt like my whole world collapsed. I couldn't see myself living with this for long." This emotional impact was a recurring theme among the participants, who

described feelings of helplessness, frustration, and anxiety that they struggled to manage daily. Another participant, Patient B, noted, "It's not just the disease, but how it changes your life in ways you can't prepare for. It's the constant worry, not knowing what's next." These sentiments illustrate the intense emotional toll that the diagnosis had on the participants, framing stress management as an ongoing challenge.

### Emotional Burden of Chronic Illness Diagnosis



### Coping Mechanisms and Social Support

Participants consistently reported that their coping strategies were influenced by both personal resilience and the support from family, friends, and healthcare providers. While some patients turned inward, seeking solitude to process their emotions, others found strength in family and community networks. Patient C stated, "Talking with my family, especially my mother, really helped me put things into perspective. She reassures me when I feel scared." This narrative was echoed by several others who found comfort in interpersonal communication. The role of healthcare professionals in these coping strategies also emerged as vital, as Patient D expressed, "The doctor's words are a lifeline sometimes. When they explain things clearly, I feel a little more in control, less afraid of what's coming." This theme highlights the complex interplay between personal resilience and the essential role that social support systems play in managing the emotional burden of chronic illness.

### The Role of Communication in Stress Management

The theme of communication, both with medical professionals and loved ones, surfaced as a crucial element in stress management. Many participants noted that clear and compassionate communication from healthcare providers was fundamental in reducing anxiety and empowering them to manage their illness more effectively. Patient E described their experience with their doctor, saying, "It's not just about the treatment; it's the way the doctor listens and explains things. It makes all the difference in how I feel about my illness." Similarly, several participants underscored the importance of open dialogue with family members. As Patient F explained, "Talking about it with my family has helped me process my fears. But it's also important that they listen and understand what I'm going through, not just offer solutions." These experiences underscore the importance of effective communication as a vital tool in managing both emotional and psychological stress associated with chronic illness.

### Adaptation and Acceptance of Chronic Illness

A final key theme emerging from the data was the process of adaptation and acceptance. Over time, participants shared how they adjusted their perspectives on life and illness. While some individuals struggled with denial or avoidance in the early stages, many found a sense of peace and acceptance after coming to terms with their condition. Patient G, who had been diagnosed several years ago, reflected, "It took a long time, but I've come to accept that this is my reality now. I still

have bad days, but I don't let it take over anymore. I'm learning to live with it." This shift in mindset was a significant turning point for many participants, illustrating a process of adaptation that allowed them to regain a sense of control over their lives, despite the challenges of their condition.

The results indicate that the emotional burden of chronic illness diagnosis is a pervasive experience that shapes how individuals manage their condition. Coping mechanisms, especially through social support and communication, were found to be crucial in reducing stress and fostering adaptation. Effective communication, both with healthcare providers and family members, emerged as an essential factor in helping individuals navigate the emotional challenges associated with chronic illness. Over time, many participants demonstrated a shift toward acceptance, highlighting the importance of psychological resilience in managing long-term health conditions.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Summary of Key Findings**

This study explored the lived experiences of individuals diagnosed with chronic illness, focusing on how they emotionally process and cope with the diagnosis (Hanna dkk., 2023). The key findings reveal that patients experience significant emotional distress, but their coping mechanisms—especially those involving social support and communication—play a crucial role in their emotional management. These results highlight the complexity of living with chronic illness, where personal resilience and external factors such as healthcare communication and family support significantly shape their emotional experience.

### **Contribution to Research Question**

The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how individuals cope with chronic illness by demonstrating the profound emotional burden of diagnosis and the role that communication, both with healthcare providers and family, plays in shaping their coping strategies. This research answers the central question posed in the introduction: How do individuals navigate the emotional challenges of chronic illness, and how does communication influence this process? The study emphasizes that coping is not solely an individual process but one deeply embedded in social contexts, such as the patient-provider relationship and family dynamics. The insights gained from participants' stories shed light on the intricate ways in which patients make sense of their illness and manage the stress it causes, providing a richer, more holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

### **Relation to Literature and Previous Theory**

These findings align with and expand upon existing research on chronic illness, particularly studies highlighting the importance of communication in managing the emotional impact of diagnosis (Civita dkk., 2023). However, while previous studies have acknowledged the role of healthcare providers in alleviating patient stress, this study provides a more nuanced understanding by illustrating the essential role of family support. The integration of personal resilience with social support, as found in this study, complements the theoretical frameworks proposed by scholars such as Chen dkk. (2022), who emphasized the importance of coping strategies that involve both individual and social resources. Additionally, the study challenges the limitations of previous quantitative studies, which often overlook the emotional dimensions of chronic illness, by offering a qualitative, phenomenological perspective that captures the lived experience in its full complexity. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge that calls for a more integrated approach to understanding chronic illness, one that includes both medical treatment and emotional, social, and psychological support.

### **Implications of Findings**

The findings of this study have significant implications for both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological and emotional dynamics of chronic illness, emphasizing that coping is a socially embedded process. The role of communication, both with healthcare providers and family members, is highlighted as a crucial

factor in how patients manage the emotional burden of their diagnosis. This finding has practical implications for healthcare providers, as it suggests the need for a more holistic approach to patient care that goes beyond medical treatment to include emotional support and clear, empathetic communication. For healthcare practitioners, integrating communication strategies that foster trust and reassurance could improve patient outcomes, not just in terms of physical health but also in terms of emotional well-being (Tarawneh dkk., 2024). On a broader scale, these findings underscore the importance of considering the emotional and social dimensions of health in the context of chronic illness, offering valuable insights for policy makers and practitioners involved in patient care.

### **Study Limitations**

While the findings provide important insights, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 12 participants, while sufficient for a qualitative phenomenological study, may limit the generalizability of the findings to larger populations. Additionally, the sample was selected through purposive sampling, which means the experiences captured may not fully represent the diversity of experiences within the chronic illness population. The study was also limited to individuals diagnosed with specific chronic conditions, and the results may differ for individuals with other types of illnesses. Furthermore, as with all qualitative research, the data collection was influenced by the perspectives and interpretations of both the participants and the researcher. These factors suggest that while the findings are valuable for understanding the lived experiences of the participants, further research with more diverse and larger samples is needed to explore the broader applicability of these insights.

### **Prospective Directions for Future Research**

The findings from this study open avenues for further research into the emotional and social aspects of chronic illness. Future studies could examine how different types of chronic conditions, such as mental health disorders or autoimmune diseases, shape patients' coping strategies and emotional experiences. Additionally, exploring how healthcare communication practices differ across cultures and healthcare systems could provide valuable insights into how contextual factors influence emotional well-being. Longitudinal studies could also help assess how coping mechanisms evolve over time, particularly as patients transition through different stages of illness. The integration of phenomenological research with other qualitative methods, such as ethnography, could also offer richer insights into how social and cultural contexts affect the management of chronic illness. These directions could enhance the understanding of chronic illness beyond the clinical realm and contribute to more effective support strategies in healthcare settings.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the emotional and psychological experiences of individuals coping with chronic illness, focusing on how communication and social support impact their coping strategies. The findings reveal that patients experience significant emotional distress, but coping mechanisms involving family support and healthcare communication play a pivotal role in managing stress. The study contributes to filling the gap in previous research by highlighting the importance of these interpersonal factors, which are often overlooked in quantitative studies. It offers a more holistic understanding of chronic illness, addressing both the emotional and social dimensions that shape how individuals adapt to their condition. Future research could expand on these findings by examining how different types of chronic illnesses influence coping strategies and how cultural differences affect these processes. Additionally, longitudinal studies could explore how coping mechanisms evolve over time and across stages of illness.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. All funding sources and affiliations have been disclosed, and the research was conducted without any commercial or financial influences that could affect the integrity of the study.

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