

“Now the narrative is changing. There is this hashtag thing. Forget all the old communication” – Transforming Health Advocacy for Harm Reduction through Digital Storytelling

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Background:

Health workers find it difficult to engage with persons with lived experiences (PWLE). Various qualitative tools help by translating knowledge and promoting health for multiple diseases and in diverse contexts; the surge of technology for this use evident in recent times. Prior research has explored the role of the digital in engaging patients undergoing chronic illnesses. Few have explored its usefulness in engaging marginalized populations. This study aims to understand the nature of storytelling by vulnerable PWLE such as persons who use drugs (PWUD). It explores the role of the digital for community engagement and advocacy of harm reduction care.

Methods:

A qualitative methodology was undertaken: 27 interviews and 4 focus group discussions were conducted with PWUD, and harm reduction staff, managers and experts in two states of India. Field notes were made; observations at a drug user network consultation workshop were used in this paper. An interpretive thematic analysis was carried out using NVivo. Ethical considerations were made.

Results:

PWLE narrate stories according to the nature of their present-day illness. Depending on the illness phase, they may be information sharers, technical representatives or advocates of health. With digital tools, PWLE establish a collective identity and shared empathy that overcomes storytelling barriers for individuals. Understanding this phenomenon can aid health providers in their attempts to engage with the vulnerable communities.

Conclusion:

The study explores how digital tools aid in improving harm reduction care by community engagement. It builds on Arthur Frank's *The Wounded Storyteller* framework to highlight features in technology that overcome barriers in community engagement and advocacy. Health educators and field-based practitioners may find results beneficial to realise innovative methods in health education and sharing of sensitive health information through technology. Policy makers may find results useful for planning policy towards the use of technology for health information.

Keywords: health education, information-sharing, digital storytelling, wounded storyteller, harm reduction

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The author certifies that she has No Conflict of Interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this study.

AI Declaration:

The author certifies that AI was not used in the preparation, drafting, or editing of any part of this submission, including data analysis, or language editing.