

People living with mental health illnesses and/or drug-related issues experiences of meetings with ambulance workers.

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Introduction

People living with mental health illnesses and/or drug-related issues (PwMDs) face an increased risk of coercion and violations of autonomy within healthcare services. Simultaneously, ambulance workers (AW) encounter challenges in assessing patients' decision-making competence while ensuring appropriate care and adhering to legal frameworks. This study aims to investigate how PwMDs perceive their interactions with AWs and how these insights can be implemented in education and procedural development.

Method

Reflexive thematic analysis of 23 individual in-depth interviews with PwMDs of various genders and ages. Informed consent assessed by the researcher and qualified staff.

Results

Patients with mental disorders and/or substance use disorders (PwMDs) generally report positive experiences when interacting with AW. However, they perceived that AW were less motivated and qualified to provide healthcare when dealing with substance-related issues and/or mental health disorders compared to somatic illnesses or injuries. Informants experienced a condescending attitude, which they found stigmatizing. Nonverbal communication was perceived as more distressing than verbal communication. Furthermore, they described a lack of information and shared decision-making as burdensome. Some felt that decisions regarding treatment and admission location were predetermined. The police become involved when PwMDs refuse treatment and/or admission, and several informants believe that the behavior of ambulance workers changes in the presence of the police. They observe that AWs become stricter and more assertive when the police are involved.

Conclusion

The user perspective is a crucial element in the training of ambulance personnel, as people living with mental health illnesses and/or drug-related issues (PwMDs) are particularly vulnerable to feeling deprioritized, undertreated, and misunderstood due to widespread stigma. PwMDs express a clear desire to be treated equally to other patients and to be met with respect.