Chapter 37

ICT and Healthcare: A Closer Look at the Role of ICTs in Providing Support for Female Victims/Survivors of Domestic Violence (DV)

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ABSTRACT

The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to support and facilitate interactions on the Web has increased in the amount of users, communities, and organizations. Computer-Mediated Communications (CMC) is among the most frequently studied and used ICT. As a communications medium, CMC has the ability to connect geographically dispersed individuals without the constraints of time or space. CMC helps foster online communities—where individuals with similar interests and/or experiences can come together. It is the ability to connect people that make these ICTs a valuable tool for social support. Thus, this chapter proposes the need to explore the use of ICT, specifically the role of CMC as a support medium for victims/survivors of Domestic Violence (DV), a topic germane to healthcare and the overall general well-being of females, their families, and societies at large.

INTRODUCTION

The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to support and facilitate interactions on the Web has increased the amount of users, communities, and organizations. Computer-Mediated Communications (CMC) is among the most frequently studied and used ICT. As a communications medium, CMC has the ability to connect geographically dispersed individuals without the constraints of time or space. Thus, individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and ethnicities are able to share information and communicate with other individuals or groups (e.g., online community) at one time over the Internet. Online communities—where individuals...
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with similar interests and/or experiences come together to interact—can benefit from CMC as a tool for seeking, gaining, and sharing knowledge and experiences. It is these communities—groups of individuals with similar interests and experiences who are connected through the use of ICTs and whose conversations are facilitated through CMC use—that make these ICTs a valuable tool for social support. Thus, the authors propose for this chapter the need to explore the use of ICTs; specifically, the role of CMC as a support medium for victims/survivors of Domestic Violence (DV). DV is a topic germane to healthcare and the overall general well being of females, their families, and society at large.

BACKGROUND ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Recent studies and research on the development and use of ICTs tend to focus on the emergent and organizational use of technologies. However, the emergent use of ICTs in personal and group settings are gaining popularity. Some will argue this is due to emerging social media’s, communication networks, and Websites. However, the use of ICTs to empower individuals through social support, help-seeking, and help providing activities are gradually taking place. ICTs offer access to timely and relevant information, which allows DV organizations to serve as advocates and respond to specific cases of abuse (Hamm, 2001). Further, online DV organizations also provide other advocates with health and support information in order to better facilitate and provide a solution to victims/survivors of DV and other related types of sensitive healthcare issues (Campbell, Sy, and Anderson, 2000; NCIPC, 2003). The amount of information available online is also used to provide online training for individuals and organizations that deal with violence against women (VAW). A specific focus in this paper is the use of ICTs for providing and facilitating support and care giving services to victims/survivors of DV. Traditionally, ICT use in healthcare and healthcare delivery, primarily focus on hospital settings such as health care givers interaction with one another and patients or pharmacies and other agencies such that issues surrounding telemedicine and informatics are a commonplace. Notwithstanding, the Center for Disease and Control (CDC) classifies domestic violence as a serious public health issue (2008). According to CDC (2008), domestic violence is a serious, yet preventable, public health problem affecting more than 32 million Americans—over 10% of the United States population (CDC, 2008; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Statistics

Some disturbing and staggering statistics are as follows:

- Each year, women experience about 4.8 million intimate partner related physical assaults and rapes (Bachman, 2000; Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000).
- Intimate partner abuse resulted in 2,340 deaths in 2007. Of these deaths, 70% were females. (Bachman, 2000; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011).
- The medical care, mental health services, and lost productivity (e.g., time away from work) cost of DV was an estimated $5.8 billion in 1995. Updated in 2003 to more than $8.3 billion dollars in cost. (CDC 2003; Max, Rice, Finkelstein, Bardwell, & Leadbetter, 2004).
- Physical violence by an intimate partner has also been associated with a number of adverse health outcomes (Breiding, Black, & Ryan, 2008). Several health conditions associated with intimate partner violence may be a direct result of the physical violence endured (for example, bruises, knife wounds, broken bones, back or pelvic pain, headaches). Studies have also demonstrated the impact of intimate partner violence on the endocrine and immune...
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