

Therapeutic Applications of Autobiographical Writing for Chronic Illness Management and Self-Reconstruction

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Abstract: Chronic disease has a great impact on the physical, psychological, and self-perception of a person. It is likely to bring about a personality crisis and disrupt day-to-day functioning. To assist in psychological flexibility and sense-making, less clinical and more reflective methods are becoming more popular. Autobiographical writing is a therapeutic tool that can be used as a coping mechanism for long-term sickness and self-recreation, as explained in this research. To explore the potential of personal writing practices as a therapeutic intervention, the study uses a conceptual and qualitative approach to research with an interdisciplinary focus on the studies of narrative psychology, expressive writing, and health humanities. The findings suggest that autobiographical writing may help externalise the conflict within a person, organise the fragmented experience, and rewrite illness stories, which would make people emotionally clear and resilient. Through reflection, individuals will feel in control again, far more self-conscious, and develop identities not dictated by sickness. Also, the accessibility and flexibility of writing as a therapeutic method that can be applied both in a healthcare and educational setting are mentioned in the paper. It is seen in the discussion that autobiographical writing is not just a mere expression but a good process of self-exploration and transformation. This study concludes that narrative-based practices in chronic illness management can be effective in emotional well-being and in long-term coping to offer helpful information to practitioners, educators, and researchers who might be interested in embracing the holistic approach of health and identity rebuilding.

Key Words: autobiographical writing, chronic illness, narrative therapy, self-reconstruction, emotional healing, reflective practice, health humanities

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Introduction

Chronic illness is no longer a chronic disease, but a radical change in the lived life experience of the individual, typically disfiguring identity, emotional equilibrium, and normal functioning. The chronic diseases necessitate permanent accommodation as opposed to the acute ones, and this may result in the so-called biographical disruption because a person may not necessarily be in a position to uphold the integrity of the story in life (van der Kamp et al., 2022). This dissociation not only impacts physical health but also puts psychological health to the test as people find it hard to build a consistent sense of self in the context of continuing uncertainty and restriction (Valtonen, 2022).

Over the past years, the use of narrative-based interventions has been viewed as a complementary intervention on the psychosocial component of chronic illness. These strategies highlight the importance of personal narratives in enabling people to give meaning and re- sequence their lives (Rosa et al., 2023). The autobiographical writing has been a major therapeutic tool that enables the person to interpret his or her experiences of illness, refocus emotional suffering, and convert unstructured experiences into meaningful narratives (Chaudhary, 2024). In this manner, individuals would be able to make meaning out of the suffering and would be able to derive a more stable meaning of what is afflicting the individual.

Empirical and theoretical research indicates that narrative expression may greatly help to regulate emotions, improve resilience, and coping in people with ongoing conditions (Ciotti, 2023). Reflection and meaning-making in narrative interventions can enable individuals to reconstruct identities that are not limited by illness (Tran et al., 2023). Moreover, expressive writing has been associated with improvement of psychological well-being through self-awareness and release of emotions (Gerson, 2024).

The recent tendencies of health humanities and narrative medicine also highlight the importance of the integration of storytelling into the care practice since produce a better patient-centred knowledge and holistic healing (Ulin et al., 2024). Autobiographical writing provides an avenue to self-reconstruction and personal development through reframing illness experiences in the context of broader life. Thus, the analysis of its therapeutic usage will offer useful information about how people can cope with chronic disease and restore their sense of identity in a constructive and transformative manner (Nash, 2024; Lévai et al., 2024).

Key contributions:

- The study has introduced a conceptual framework to describe how autobiographical writing can facilitate emotional processing and identity reconstruction among people with chronic illnesses.
- It emphasizes the use of autobiographical writing as an available non-clinical form of therapy that can be used to supplement standard healthcare practice.
- The study combines insights of narrative studies and health humanities to understand the experiences of illness holistically.
- It determines thematic dimensions and stages that writing helps us to cope, become resilient, and become self-aware.

The paper is structured in such a way that it provides a logical flow of ideas. In Section I, the concept of chronic illness and the relevance of autobiographical writing as a therapeutic exercise are introduced. Section II contains the literature review, with a focus on the narrative practices and their importance in the mechanisms of the reconstruction of health and identity. In Section III, the analytical framework and interpretive approach that are followed in the study are described, as well as the conceptual representation that is presented in Figure 1. Section IV covers the discussion of the results and main thematic findings with the use of tables, and a further comprehensive discussion of the implications is given. Lastly, Section V will give a conclusion to the paper summarizing the insights and giving directions on the way the research should move in the future.

Literature Review

The current academic literature emphasizes the increased applicability of narrative-based methods in the experience and management of chronic illnesses. The current illness discourses underline the ways that people reshape their identities through storytelling and therefore can bargain with the emotional and social impacts of chronic illnesses (Halloy et al., 2023). Narrative psychology research suggests that an autobiographical memory is a key factor in identity development, and that in chronic illness, autobiographical memory tends to shape the past and future life narrative developed by the individuals (Pedersen et al., 2024).

Studies of expressive and autobiographical writing show that it is therapeutic and assists individuals in working with complex emotions and restructuring fragmented experiences. Indicatively, narrative writing interventions have been reported to help psychological well-being by helping people give meaning to distressing life events (Dutta et al., 2022). Likewise, qualitative inquiries imply that storytelling activities

may promote resilience and enhance the bond between self and experience, especially when it comes to health-related issues (Béres et al., 2024).

Empirical studies also indicate that narrative therapy methods establish a non-judgmental system by which one can rebuild his or her own identity. Through re-framing of the illness experiences, patients can move out of passive suffering into active meaning-making and hence enhance coping strategies (Srikanthan & Ngo, 2024). An analysis of stories about chronic illness has also indicated that creative processes like poetic transcription and memoir writing can be used to tell the richness of lived experiences and capacity to express emotions (Heersmink, 2022; Porras-Segovia et al., 2024).

Also, recent research emphasizes the usefulness of short narrative interventions in clinical and psychosocial settings. These interventions assist people to arrange their experiences in a consistent narrative, which diminishes distress and boosts the perceived power of their conditions (Matta-Singh et al., 2024). Expressive writing therapy in patients with chronic illnesses has been linked to the control of emotions and the decrease in the psychological burden (Badham et al., 2023).

There is a general consensus in the literature that narrative and autobiographical writing have been effective coping strategies in attempting to reconstruct identity. Such strategies will help bridge the difference between mental and physical health and provide individuals who have to address chronic illness with an all-encompassing strategy (Fixsen, 2023). The overall findings of the analyzed studies can be summarized as follows: autobiographical writing is a transformational process that aids in emotional healing, identity construction in narratives, and the development of coping strategies, instead of a reflection process. However, more abstract models incorporating the correlation between narrative practices and the psychological consequences of different chronic diseases in the long term are still necessary.

Research Design

Research Orientation

A qualitative and interpretive research orientation will inform the research study in an attempt to examine the therapeutic application of autobiographical writing in the management and reconstruction of chronic illnesses. The methodology is based on the conceptual exploration and reflection on the approaches rather than the approach being based on empirical measurement or technical processes. It uses interdisciplinary practices of narrative studies, psychology, and health humanities to learn how people are involved with their illness experiences in writing. The chronic condition is considered a medical condition and as an experience that presupposes that it determines identity, feelings, and self-meaning. In this method, the autobiographical writing process is considered to be a reflective practice, through which individuals can re-live their own lives, re-construct their most difficult experiences, and form a more explicit meaning of their lives.

Narrative Integration and Conceptual Structuring

The theoretical framework used in this research is a result of a methodical synthesis of the repetitive themes found in the current academic discourse. The concepts of expression of emotions, narrative coherence, and disruption of identity, as well as personal meaning, are discussed and combined into one structure. The elements are not considered independent variables but are perceived as interrelated dimensions that influence one another and are all components that shape the process of self-reconstruction. The structure is designed in a way that shows a slow transition of the first experience of illness-related disturbance to the eventual development of resilience and renewed identity. Chronic illness can also bring

about a similar feeling of fragmentation, whereby people no longer identify themselves with their former identity. In reaction to this, autobiographical writing is a medium in which this fragmentation can be dealt with. When personal experiences are organized into a set of stories, individuals are capable of establishing continuity, giving a meaning, and re-establishing a sense of control over their life stories. The framework, therefore, reflects the dynamic and changing nature of this process and highlights transformation as opposed to fixed results.

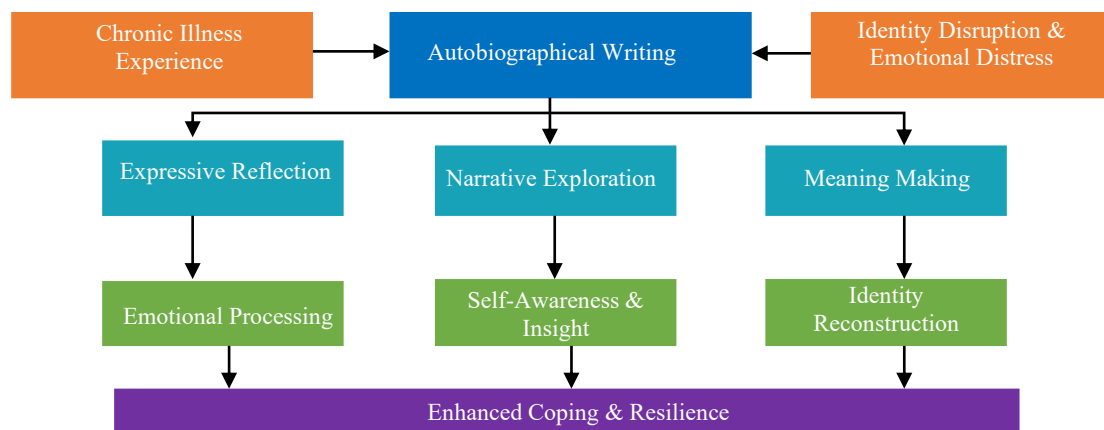


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Autobiographical Writing in Chronic Illness

The conceptual relationships used in the analysis of the study have been presented in Figure 1. It starts with the experience of chronic illness and identity disruption, which are placed as the antecedent conditions that usually result in the experience of emotional distress and a fragmented sense of self. The diagram starts with the mediation of the autobiographical writing to link these initial conditions to the transforming results. Writing assists individuals in rehearsing the exercise of expressive reflection, exploration of narratives, and the crafting of meanings. These mutually supporting processes assist people to externalize their feelings, to systematize their experience, and redefine their disease in a more systematic and significant manner. Emotional processing, self-awareness, and reconstructing identities involve such processes in their course. It is also a framework that has led to improved coping and resilience, presupposing that autobiographical writing is an avenue where individuals can redefine their sense of self in the face of the onslaught of chronic illness, in which continue to endure. Structured box elements are purposely employed in designing the diagram to focus on conceptual relationships as opposed to procedural flow.

Interpretive Synthesis of Narrative Processes

The approach used to conduct this study is the interpretive synthesis, whereby the data contained in the literature are synthesized, compared, and reorganized into a coherent conceptual story. In this case, the patterns of the narration of the experience of illness by people, as well as the impact of storytelling on the development of emotional and psychological responses, should be determined. It is also through the process that the effect of narrative practices on the formation and reconstruction of identity with time is considered. Rather than isolating a portion of the outcomes, different points of view will be pooled in the analysis and form a single image of autobiographical writing as a therapeutic means. It puts an accent on the idea that logical continuity and clarity of the idea enable a discussion to move logically and be easily understandable. This method enables one to discuss the topic matter in a subtle but not technical manner.

Holistic Relevance and Contextual Applicability

Through the approach that was chosen, the research can prove that autobiographical writing is an activity that can be utilized in practice and adapted to a variety of different therapeutic paradigms. It makes it possible to consider its application to education and therapy, in which individuals can feel free to employ writing as a form of introspection, recovery, and self-improvement. The research sets the stage for future research and practice that incorporates the application of narrative in the management of chronic illnesses and conceptual knowledge. The model offers an advanced method of health and self-representation and highlights the necessity to consider material, emotional, and identity-related components of the disease.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this article rely on the synthesis of interdisciplinary literature concepts and are presented in the form of thematic explanations, rather than in numbers. The discussion indicates that autobiographical writing is a guided reflection process through which chronically ill individuals slowly shift to an emotional crisis to narrative intelligible and identity formation. The combination of these thematic insights is used in the discussion, which clarifies the use of writing in psychological adjustment and long-term coping.

Interpretive analysis reveals that the initial phase of autobiographical writing is more of a form of expression since individuals reveal the feelings that are repressed, fears, and doubts concerning their illness. This phase is important as it enables the release of emotions and lessening of the psychological burden internally. The greater the amount of writing is done, the greater the stories begin to be organized, as it indicates the transformation of the disjointed experiences into the regular ones. This change is essential to make people realize that their disease is not a single disturbance but a bigger part of their life story.

Table 1: Thematic Dimensions of Autobiographical Writing in Chronic Illness Contexts

Thematic Dimension	Description	Observed Outcome
Emotional Expression	Articulation of internal feelings and distress through writing	Emotional relief and reduced anxiety
Narrative Coherence	Structuring experiences into a meaningful sequence	Improved clarity and continuity
Identity Reflection	Re-evaluating personal identity in relation to illness	Strengthened self-concept
Meaning-Making	Interpreting illness within a broader life perspective	Increased acceptance and purpose
Self-Awareness	Gaining insight into emotional and behavioral patterns	Enhanced reflective capacity

The conceptual analysis highlights the important thematic dimensions, which are summarized in Table 1. It shows how autobiographical writing can support a variety of processes that are interrelated, starting with the expression of emotion and going further to the levels of self-awareness and meaning-making. All the dimensions lead to a progressive psychological well-being improvement, which suggests that writing is a complex and dynamic therapeutic process.

With a more profound narrative process, people start practicing identity reflection as re-examine their lives with respect to chronic illness. This is an important step towards self-reconstruction because people who have been experiencing illness cannot just see themselves in only those terms anymore, but get a more complete identity. This transformation is further enhanced by the capacity to make meaning out of illness

experiences, which gives people an opportunity to view their experience as growth, adaptation, and resilience.

Table 2: Stages of Therapeutic Progression through Autobiographical Writing

Stage of Writing Process	Key Activity	Psychological Impact
Initial Expression	Free writing of emotions and experiences	Emotional release and reduced distress
Reflective Structuring	Organizing experiences into narratives	Improved understanding and clarity
Interpretive Engagement	Exploring meanings behind experiences	Development of insight and perspective
Identity Reconstruction	Reframing the self beyond illness	Strengthened identity and self-worth
Adaptive Integration	Integrating illness into life narrative	Enhanced coping and resilience

Table 2 shows the stages that autobiographical writing follows to enable therapeutic success. It exudes a developmental pathway starting with emotional expression and then to adaptive integration. The levels of each stage are more interpersonal involvement with personal experiences and eventually result in better coping mechanisms and a more consistent notion of self.

Discussion

The results suggest that autobiographical writing is a purposeful reflection process that helps people cope with the psychological burden of chronic disease. Writing helps people to stop dumping out their emotional distress and organize their experiences into expressive stories. This transition will help them overcome the feeling of disintegration and their understanding of their own situation.

The change in the line of thinking is one of the primary observations. The original stories are, in fact, likely to be dominated by the themes of loss and uncertainty, yet, with the increased involvement in the writing process, reinterpretation and sense-making take place. This could help them realize what going through as a part of the bigger picture in life, and the sense of control and emotional stability builds up.

Another aspect that emerges during the conversation is that the expression of emotions and the narrative structure and reflection of identity processes are interconnected. They all play a role in self-awareness and aid in rebuilding identity in the post-illness process. Consequently, autobiographical writing can be generated as an easy and effective method of improving coping and resilience in the case of chronic illnesses.

Conclusion and Future Work

This paper has examined how autobiographical writing can be used therapeutically as a significant method of living with chronic disease and self-reconstruction. The analysis shows that writing is both a form of expressing emotions and a form of structuring the process by which individuals make sense of their experiences in life, organize, and interpret. Through integrating the discontinuous illness accounts into coherent personal accounts, people can reclaim that sense of identification and continuity that is frequently shattered by chronic illnesses. The results show that autobiographical writing encourages emotional clarification, self-awareness, and adaptive coping because it fosters reflective processing of

personal experiences. It enables people to cease passive suffering, proactively rebuilding their identity in a manner that does not separate but incorporates the experience of illness. The importance of autobiographical writing as a method of writing- non-technical, available, and practical- is both in therapeutic and educational practice, in that it offers a holistic perspective to enhance psychological well-being and resiliency. The same principle can be transferred to the study in the future, exploring the way other individuals and cultures utilize autobiographical writing to study its increased applicability and flexibility. It is possible that the effects of various kinds of narrative expression (guided journaling, digital storytelling, or collaborative writing) on emotional and psychological results can be studied in the long term. The longitudinal studies could be utilized to understand more about the long-term effects of writing practices on the identity reconstruction process and coping mechanisms adopted to respond to chronic illnesses. Narrative-based techniques can be applied; the currently available system of helping in healthcare and education can be improved as well. Development of systematic frameworks or models would also enable the practice, as people would be guided on how to practice therapeutic writing. The research would aid in developing a more in-depth view of autobiographical writing as a long-term and wide perspective of an individual's growth and well-being tool.

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