

Review

## Scientific Evidence Supporting Narrative Therapy and Therapeutic Writing in Treating Diseases—A Literature Review about Online Support Groups

Catarina Santo <sup>1</sup>  , Inês dos Santos Silva <sup>2</sup>  and Luísa Soares <sup>1,\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, Faculdade de Artes e Humanidades, Universidade da Madeira, 9000 Funchal, Portugal

<sup>2</sup> 2256.c.Health, 1269-039 Lisboa, Portugal

\* Correspondence: lsoares@staff.uma.pt

**Received:** 15 April 2025; **Revised:** 2 June 2025; **Accepted:** 9 June 2025; **Published:** 16 June 2025

**Abstract:** Illness of any kind entails a range of physical, cognitive, and, most notably, emotional consequences, which may lead to experiences of fear, pain, and social isolation. Narrative therapy and therapeutic writing, particularly when implemented in groups of individuals sharing similar conditions and facilitated through online platforms, offer valuable opportunities for sharing experiences and providing mutual support. This study aims to present an innovative perspective on the significance of online communities for patients and social support groups, emphasizing their potential to facilitate connections among individuals facing similar circumstances and to promote a sense of belonging, emotional support, and enhanced psychological well-being. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to identify and analyze scientific evidence on the effectiveness of narrative therapy and therapeutic writing in managing different health conditions. Searches were performed in databases such as PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Web of Science. The focus was on empirical research assessing psychological or physiological outcomes of narrative-based interventions. Relevant data were extracted and qualitatively synthesized through a integrative analysis to identify key findings, theoretical trends, and research gaps. The application of narrative therapy within online social support groups yielded positive outcomes, contributing to the alleviation of symptoms and improvement in emotional well-being among individuals affected by diverse health conditions. The integration of narrative therapy and therapeutic writing into online social support settings enables individuals to articulate their emotions, fears, and uncertainties in a supportive environment. This process cultivates a sense of community and belonging, thereby fostering emotional resilience and overall psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** Narrative Therapy; Therapeutic Writing; Support Groups; Informal Caregivers; Online Communities; Reframing; WhatsApp

### 1. Introduction

Narrative Therapy (NT) is a therapeutic approach that emerged in the 1980s, through the pioneering and collaborative work of Michael White and David Epston, and has been increasingly studied [1]. This therapeutic modality focuses on the relationship between the stories individuals tell and their lived experiences, making it clear that the person is not the problem [2]. Through externalization and detachment from the problem-saturated situation, the individual is enabled to break free from problematic patterns and discover adaptive alternatives, resulting in a reduction in suffering, guilt, shame, and frustration [3–6]. The pioneers of the narrative approach, Michael White

and David Epston, proposed the existence of three dynamic phases in the therapeutic process: deconstruction, reconstruction and consolidation. Deconstruction focuses on questioning the beliefs that sustain problematic narratives and deconstructing ideas, beliefs, and cultural practices. Reconstruction involves developing alternatives and new coping strategies. Lastly, consolidation solidifies the narrative of change [1,3,7–9]. As such, narrative therapy is used to externalize problem-saturated dominant experiences and open various possibilities for reconstructing identity in ways that are meaningfully connected to one's purpose in life [9–11]. Therefore, narrative therapy facilitates self-awareness and the reauthoring of life stories through internal reflection, thereby strengthening the individual's sense of identity [3,11,12].

Therapeutic writing is of great value in healthcare as it enables processes of personal, exploratory, and expressive writing [13,14]. This type of writing is an introspective technique of discovery, where patients or clients reflect on memories, hopes, fears, anxieties, and anger, promoting deep emotional, spiritual, and psychological work [13,14]. Writing shows excellent potential as a therapeutic tool, improving adaptation to new conditions, promoting greater levels of well-being, facilitating cognitive restructuring processes, and reducing stress and unhelpful cognitive and/or behavioral patterns associated with pain [6,14].

In recent years, it has been possible to see a growing number of individuals facing health problems that cause significant distress and suffering. These individuals typically tend to self-blame and isolate themselves due to feelings of shame about their current situation, as well as the loss of the ability to make social outings independently. For these reasons, and given the rapid development of new technologies, particularly social media, it has become much easier to create social support groups where individuals with similar or identical health conditions can communicate. When people talk or write about their experiences of chronic or severe illness, whether physical, emotional or psychological, they tend to characterize themselves as different people, managing to find adaptive perspectives and organize complex emotional experiences [6,15]. Narrative therapy, when used with individuals experiencing similar health conditions, can provide an everyday basis for discourse and support, restoring meaning to life [8,16]. Currently, there is considerable evidence on the benefits of writing about life experiences within online social support groups for various health conditions. We present this evidence in the following topics.

The conditions selected—Chronic Pain, Oncology, Palliative Care, Gestational Loss and Infertility, Grief, Eating Disorders, Bipolar Disorder, Schizophrenia and Psychotic Disorders, Suicidal Ideation, and Cerebrovascular Accident (Stroke)—were chosen for their substantial emotional, psychological, and existential impact. These conditions often involve experiences of suffering, loss, and identity disruption, making them particularly relevant to the application of narrative therapy and therapeutic writing. In such contexts, narrative approaches can facilitate meaning-making, emotional regulation, and a renewed sense of self and social connection, thereby promoting psychological resilience and well-being. These criteria guided the literature search and inclusion process in the present comprehensive literature review. Our goal was to identify and analyse scientific evidence on the effectiveness of narrative therapy and therapeutic writing in managing a range of health conditions. Searches were conducted across major databases, including PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Web of Science, using combinations of keywords such as "*narrative therapy*," "*therapeutic writing*," "*expressive writing*," and "*online support groups*". The focus was on empirical research evaluating psychological or physiological outcomes of narrative-based interventions. Relevant data were extracted and qualitatively synthesised through an integrative analysis to identify key findings, theoretical patterns, and gaps within the existing literature.

## 2. Physical

### 2.1. Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is a challenging life situation that causes some constraints, such as changes in sleep and appetite, emotional variations, concentration difficulties, lack of motivation and inactivity. Therapeutic writing can be highly beneficial for these individuals, facilitating the representation and meaning of life situations through cognitive restructuring processes [7,14,17]. In the study by Necaise and Amon [17], it was possible to understand how online peer support communities influenced expressions of pain, modifying and enabling the evolution of the language used by the various members among themselves and in relation to their condition. Over time, evidence showed that individuals tuned into their linguistic feelings, i.e., the emotions conveyed through their language, to match the language format of the other members of the community with whom they interacted. As such, this finding proved to

be consistent with the social communication model of pain, which advocates that social interactions can influence the expression of pain symptoms, as well as the existence of social learning. The synchrony found in the support community reflects the way in which they come together through shared experiences, using equally intense emotional expressions of acceptance and understanding of one another [17].

Furthermore, other studies have found similar results, affirming that therapeutic writing and narrative therapy can lead to increased awareness and greater affective synchrony, which in turn facilitates greater emotional regulation and social bonding with others who are experiencing the same situation [14,17]. According to Furnes and Dysvik [14], Necaise and Amon [17] and Brown et al. [18], the process of writing enables individuals to express themselves, which helps them understand the complexity of chronic pain and develop effective coping strategies to manage it, thereby clarifying their thoughts. As such, therapeutic approaches allow an increase in new insights, beliefs that one has control over pain, and feelings of connection and emotional resilience [14,17,19]. Given this evidence, narrative therapy and therapeutic writing have been shown to lead to significant improvements in life satisfaction among individuals with chronic pain (**Table 1**) [20].

**Table 1.** The main conclusions drawn from the literature on physical conditions.

	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Aims</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Main Conclusions</b>
Chronic Pain	Furnes and Dysvik [14]	Therapeutic writing and chronic pain: experiences of therapeutic writing in a cognitive behavioural programme for people with chronic pain	Journal of Clinical Nursing	Examine patients' experiences with the use of therapeutic writing.	34 outpatients with chronic pain.	Therapeutic writing should be utilized as a tool to help patients express their individual experiences and to enhance their adaptation to this physical condition.
	Leal et al. [16]	Pain Management: A Psychological Clinical Case in Hospital Care of CBT-Brief Therapy	Orthopedics and Rheumatology Journal	Achieve changes in patients' cognitive representation and reaction to pain through CBT-Brief Therapy.	48-year-old female participant	The intervention reduced depressive and anxiety symptoms, enhanced coping strategies for managing pain and improved overall psychological well-being.
	Necaise and Amon [17]	Peer Support for Chronic Pain in Online Health Communities: Quantitative Study on the Dynamics of Social Interactions in a Chronic Pain Forum	Journal of Medical Internet Research	Investigate how participants in online support communities influenced the pain expressions of others, through the examination of the sentiment present in the language used in interaction with others.	199 Reddit users who were active in chronic pain support communities for over 10 years.	Social communication can influence the expression of pain symptoms. Being in these groups provided. Positive changes in sentiment depend on the interactions that occur.
	Brown et al. [18]	How do you write pain? A preliminary study of narrative therapy for people with chronic pain	Diversity in Health and Care	Examine the efficacy of therapeutic writing across various topics, including experiences of pain, perceived disabilities, self-efficacy, and coping skills.	10 patients	Therapeutic writing benefits coping skills with pain, and reduces unhelpful cognitions and behavioural patterns.
	Jensen et al. [19]	Changes in Beliefs, Catastrophizing, and Coping Are Associated With Improvement in Multidisciplinary Pain Treatment	Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology	Examine changes in beliefs, catastrophizing and coping skills associated with improvements in pain treatment.	241 participants	The use of this intervention was able to increase perceived control over pain and decrease maladaptive cognitions and coping responses.
	Chow [20]	Narrative Group Interventions to Reconstruct Meaning of Life Among Chronic Pain Survivors: A Wait List RCT Study	Innovation in Aging	Evaluate the effectiveness of narrative therapy in groups of individuals with chronic pain.	Eighty participants were randomly assigned to two groups.	Narrative therapy helped reduce depressive symptoms and improved life satisfaction and meaning of life.
Oncology	Høybye et al. [21]	Online interaction. Effects of storytelling in an internet breast cancer support group	Psychooncology	Explore how online support groups can break social isolation That comes from cancer.	15 women who suffered from social isolation after finding their diagnosis of breast cancer.	The women felt empowered by their exchanges of knowledge and experiences within the support group.
	Høybye et al. [22]	Effect of Internet peer-support groups on psychosocial adjustment to cancer: a randomized study	British Journal of Cancer	Investigate if online support groups affected mood disturbance and adjustment to cancer in cancer patients.	921 survivors of various cancers.	The cancer patients had an improvement in their mood disturbance and adjustment, with less anxious preoccupation, helplessness, confusion and depression.

**Table 1. Cont.**

	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Aims</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Main Conclusions</b>
Oncology	Klemm et al. [23]	Online cancer support groups: a review of the research literature	Computers, Informatics, Nursing: CIN	Make a review of the literature with 10 research studies to conclude whether internet cancer support groups helped people cope more effectively with their disease.		9 of the 10 studies concluded that online cancer support groups helped people cope more effectively with their disease. The primary focus of these groups was to seek or give information.
	Leykin et al. [24]	Internet interventions for improving psychological well-being in psycho-oncology: review and recommendations	Psychooncology	Examine the potential of Internet intervention for cancer patients.		The studies reviewed in this article supported the efficacy, accessibility and the acceptability of mental health internet intervention for cancer patients and survivors.
	Iannopollo et al. [25]	Self-Narrative in a Therapeutic Group Pathway for Cancer Patients: Discussion of the Group Narrative Psychotherapy Interventions Initiated at the Veneto Institute of Oncology: IOV IRCSS of Padua	Behavioral Sciences	To reflect on the experience of narrative therapy in a group of cancer patients participating in a therapeutic writing path to process trauma related to cancer.	Cancer patients	The participation in the online support group helped these individuals to reprocess their life events, becoming more rational and understanding of the situation, as well as feeling free from fears regarding their personal experience.
Oncology	Benson et al. [26]	Online social support groups for informal caregivers of hospice patients with cancer	European Journal of Oncology Nursing	Understand the dynamics of online social support among family and other informal caregivers in reducing their burden.	The group that was part of an ongoing cluster crossover randomized pragmatic trial from the National Cancer Institute.	The online social support group was beneficial for the caregivers, who received emotional, appraisal, and informational support.
Palliative Care	Bolton [13]	"Writing is a way of saying things I cannot say"—value to people with cancer cared for in cancer and palliative healthcare.	British Medical Journal	Investigate how therapeutic writing can support cancer patients in palliative care settings.	Cancer patients from King's College London.	Therapeutic writing can be beneficial for exploring and expressing personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
	Leal and Soares [27]	Therapeutic writing in Palliative Care: a systematic review – A death free of tubes with narrative communication skills	Journal of Poetry Therapy	Improve therapeutic encounters in palliative, which uses narrative therapy and therapeutic writing to improve the well-being and quality of life of patients.		Narrative therapy and therapeutic writing are relevant to promote well-being and quality of life of patients in palliative care.
	Gavrilovici [28]	Narrative approaches in palliative care	Journal of Palliative Care	Explain narrative therapy practices to explore responses to trauma.		Using these narratives Therapy practices help encourage individuals in palliative care to engage in the reauthoring process of their narratives.
	Laskow et al. [29]	Narrative Interventions in the Palliative Care Setting: A Scoping Review	Journal of Pain and Symptom Management 1	Review the different narrative interventions that have been performed in the palliative care setting.	34 articles	Narrative interventions enhance communication and emotional and psychological support. They should be carefully personalized to the individual needs of the patients.
Palliative Care	Roikjær et al. [30]	The use of personal narratives in hospital-based palliative care interviews: An integrative literature review	Palliative Medicine	Review the literature about the use of personal narratives and strengthen palliative care practices.	24 articles	Personal narratives can be utilized in various types of systematic palliative care interventions, but there should be some flexibility regarding the setting and the individual's needs.
	Liu et al. [31]	Clinical Experiences of Perinatal Palliative Care After a Stillbirth: A Narrative Therapy for Grief	American Journal of Hospice & Palliative Medicine	Understand how narrative therapy can support in perinatal palliative care units.	One family experienced a stillbirth.	Narrative therapy can be effective in perinatal palliative care, helping parents find meaning in the situation.
	Fonseca et al. [32]	Therapeutic letters: A qualitative study exploring their influence on the hope of parents of children receiving pediatric palliative care in Portugal	Journal of Specialists in Pediatric Nursing	Explore the impact of therapeutic letters on parents of children in palliative care.	10 parents of children in the pediatric palliative care.	The therapeutic reading of letters helped parents trust in the future and provided greater emotional support through hope.

## 2.2. Oncology

In recent decades, social support groups have become central to psychosocial interventions for cancer patients, as a means of improving quality of life by providing information about the condition, offering personal and professional support, sharing life experiences, enhancing self-esteem, and serving as a protective factor against social isolation [21–23]. The use of online support groups enables these individuals to access a space for sharing and validating personal narratives in the comfort of their own homes, 24 h a day, where they can maintain their anonymity regarding their age, gender, and social status [21–24]. Through this study [21], it was possible to understand that the process of writing about personal narratives, characteristics of the experience and naming emotions within online social support groups has excellent potential for the rehabilitation of cancer patients, as they allow them to increase their fighting spirit and transform the meaning of individual experiences through social interaction between peers (**Table 1**). Iannopollo et al. [25] also confirmed the importance of therapeutic writing as a way of sharing experiences and psycho-emotional meanings, redefining their identity and self-esteem through the cognitive reprocessing of the event within a safe, intimate and restricted social context. This process of sharing not only allows individuals to express their reality and position themselves in relation to the situation they are in, but also enables them to mirror others, compare, discuss, and accept beliefs through a new, more rational perspective [7]. Finally, these online groups can also be extremely valuable for informal caregivers who need emotional support to reduce their burden [26].

## 2.3. Palliative Care

Narrative interventions can be critical for individuals in palliative care and their families, as this approach helps construct the experiences of illness through the reframing of symptoms [27–29]. Through the externalization of thoughts, experiences, and information in online social support groups, individuals can come to understand that, like others in the same situation, they also possess sufficient skills and knowledge to solve some of their problems [27,28]. This approach helps avoid feelings of incapacity due to their terminal illness or condition, while promoting continuity of self by re-evaluating significant life events [27,28,30]. Through personal narratives, individuals in palliative care can address psychosocial and existential issues, which can lead to increased levels of forgiveness, peace, and well-being [29,30]. As found by Roikjær et al. [30], most life stories focus on personal ethics, regrets, turning points, life meaning, insight, accomplishments, lessons learned and advice to loved ones, with family being the most prominent theme. Writing about these topics promotes satisfaction and fulfillment while facilitating palliative patients' ability and opportunity to discover what they thought, felt, and remembered, and enhancing their awareness of and ability to express problems that need further attention. Therapeutic writing can facilitate profound emotional, spiritual, and psychological work [13,31]. Narrative interventions can also be beneficial for caregivers of individuals who often experience higher levels of care provider burnout [29]. This process of exchanging messages allows family members to feel understood by others who have gone through or are going through the same thing, as well as closer to the family member in palliative care. Understanding their points of view on various aspects and supporting them in their decisions and in the adaptive narratives that are created throughout the process is an essential aspect [26,28]. Narrative therapy within online support groups enables the re-signification of lived experiences, contributing to greater well-being and a better quality of life, as well as enhancing communication and understanding among family members (**Table 1**) [27,28]. Most recently, the study by Fonseca et al. [32] supports the notion that therapeutic letters written by nurses are an essential resource that can provide emotional support, especially during times of greater uncertainty, for parents of children in palliative care.

## 3. Emotional/Psychosocial Conditions

### 3.1. Gestational Loss and Infertility

When infertility is diagnosed or a baby is lost, there is a complex and unique psychological impact characterized by a sense of loss and grief, anger, anguish, guilt, frustration, sadness, shame, social isolation and low self-esteem [6,7,33]. About 47% of women feel guilt, 41% isolate themselves, and 28% feel shame, leading to anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder [6]. In this situation, emotional disclosure is particularly beneficial. It is common to seek support among peers, especially in online forums that allow them to share their common experience, receive empathetic responses, emotional, social and practical support, and guidance during the grieving

process and/or infertility treatment [33–35]. Therefore, the process of reading about the experiences of others who have gone through the same situation allows for a reduction in isolation and the validation of emotions, while providing comfort in the different ways of managing the stress felt [34]. At the same time, writing allowed women the time to process their emotional experiences and reduced symptoms of distress, while feeling rewarded by being able to help others through the narrative of one's own life and the provision of support and advice [34,35]. Online social support groups enable individuals to feel a sense of belonging to a community, where they can safely share, discuss, and reflect on similar experiences and stigmatized conditions [33,35]. This possibility of expressing emotions through writing helps reduce stress, prompts cognitive changes, and contributes to well-being (**Table 2**) [8]. Another critical aspect of the narrative approach is that it focuses on the couple's feelings of guilt and grief, strengthening the qualities that already work for the couple's relationship and uses externalizing conversations to help them escape the problem-saturated narrative [36]. Online support groups can also indirectly improve the relationship and interaction between partners by providing a greater sense of control over the situation, leading to relaxation and calm in everyday life [33,35]. It can be understood that these groups are a valuable source of information and emotional support for couples going through lengthy infertility treatment processes and pregnancy losses [33].

**Table 2.** Main conclusions drawn from the literature on emotional/psychosocial conditions.

	Author(s)	Title	Journal	Aims	Sample	Main Conclusions
Gestational Loss and Infertility	Paiva [7]	Research Studies in Narrative Clinical Psychology – Therapeutic Writing and the Grieving Process of Mothers Who Experienced Early Pregnancy Loss: Narrative Well-Being		Analyze the narratives of mothers who faced pregnancy loss.	2 females	The narrative of the participant who participated in the intervention showed signs of increased well-being, indicating that therapeutic writing can help individuals overcome the grieving process.
	Malik and Coulson [33]	Computer-mediated infertility support groups: an exploratory study of online experiences	Patient Education and Counseling	Explore the online experiences of individuals who were part of online infertility support groups.	95 participants	The majority of participants considered that they benefited from participating in these communities.
	Bernadette et al. [34]	'I felt less alone knowing I could contribute to the forum': psychological distress and use of an online infertility peer support forum.	Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine	To assess the benefits of an online fertility-related peer support forum.	220 participants aged 23 to 54 years old	The forum reduced the loneliness felt by participants, while also allowing them to learn new ways to manage stress.
	Frederiksen et al. [35]	The effect of expressive writing intervention for infertile couples: a randomized controlled trial	Human Reproduction	Evaluate the effectiveness of expressive writing in reducing depressive and anxiety symptoms in infertile couples.	Couples undergoing IVF/ICSI treatment (295 participants)	This intervention was perceived as both meaningful and helpful in the physical and mental domains. It helped reduce depressive and anxiety-related symptoms.
	Paiva et al. [6]	Therapeutic writing and the grieving process of mothers who experienced early pregnancy loss - narrative well-being	Journal of Poetry Therapy	Explore how therapeutic writing can support mothers who have gone through early pregnancy loss.	Two participants	Therapeutic writing enabled participants to express their emotions, reconstruct their narratives, and create new meanings, thereby promoting a sense of continuity and personal growth.
Grief	Romney et al. [36]	Treatment of Couples Experiencing Pregnancy Loss: Reauthoring Loss from a Narrative Perspective	International Journal of Systematic Therapy	Explore how narrative therapy can support couples going through pregnancy loss.	Couples who had experienced pregnancy loss	Narrative therapy enabled these couples to share their loss and reframe their experiences in a way that promoted healing and resilience.
	Babar et al. [10]	Exploring the Effectiveness of Narrative Therapy Among Prolonged Grief Disorder	Journal of Asian Development Studies	Investigate the efficacy of narrative therapy in prolonged grief disorder.	2 participants	Both participants showed improvements in their symptoms, emotion regulation and positive transformation.
	Neimeyer et al. [37]	Grief Therapy and the Reconstruction of Meaning: from Principles to Practice	Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy	Illustrate techniques that can be used in narrative therapy to help participants with the challenges of their bereavement.		The process of meaningfully integrating the loss into an individual's life narrative is a way to establish a less turbulent bereavement process.

**Table 2. Cont.**

Author(s)	Title	Journal	Aims	Sample	Main Conclusions	
Grief	Nelson et al. [38]	Exploring the Impacts of an Art and Narrative Therapy Program on Participants' Grief and Bereavement Experiences	Journal of Death and Dying	Explore how narrative therapy influenced the grief experiences of the participants.	29 participants	The participants strongly felt that the therapeutic program was effective. They felt a stabilization of their feelings and learned new skills and self-care practices that helped them cope with their grief in new ways.
	Elzen [39]	Therapeutic writing through the lens of the grief memoir and dialogical self theory	Journal of Constructivist Psychology	Explore the role of therapeutic writing in situations of grief.		Therapeutic writing facilitates identity reconstruction by externalizing and reframing grief and constructing new meanings.
	Santos and Soares [40]	Narrative Therapy in Complicated Grief: A Systematic Literature Review	Journal of Chemotherapy and Cancer Research	Literature review about the contributions of narrative therapy in complicated grief situations.	21 articles	Narrative therapy and therapeutic writing help in the reintegration of loss and the processing of emotional manifestations.
Grief	Frogge [41]	Expressing your grief: healing through writing	TAPS	Explore the benefits of therapeutic writing in processing the death of a loved one.		Writing helped externalize the issues, and reading it shifted the experience, enabling them to think about it instead of just feeling it.
	Robinson and Pond [42]	Do Online Support Groups for Grief Benefit the Bereaved? Systematic Review of the Quantitative and Qualitative Literature	Computers in Human Behavior	Determine whether online support groups can reduce grief-related symptoms, as well as the positive and negative attributes of these online groups.		There are clear positive attributes of online peer support groups, including being part of an understanding community of people who have experienced similar loss, receiving emotional support, and sharing information.
	Toyama and Honda [43]	Using the Narrative Approach for Anticipatory Grief Among Family Caregivers at Home	Global Quantitative Nursing Research	Investigate how narrative therapy can assist family caregivers of terminally ill family members in managing anticipatory grief.	2 family caregivers	Through Narrative therapy, the caregivers were able to reframe their experiences, express and process their emotions, prepare for the loss and redefine their coping mechanisms.

### 3.2. Grief

The loss of a loved one triggers a wide range of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses [10]. Throughout the grieving process, feelings of helplessness, intense sadness, emotional numbing, fixation on memories of the deceased and sometimes persistent perceptions of conflict or guilt are common [10, 37, 38]. These feelings lead to a disruption in the fundamental conditions, sense of meaning, and coherence that underpin the person's life experience [39]. The best way to address such cases is through meaning-making by re-establishing a coherent self-narrative and resolving the incongruence between the reality of the loss and one's sense of meaning, so that by reconceptualizing and sharing the situation, it can be faced and felt with less anguish [37–39]. Thus, narrative therapy and, especially, therapeutic writing can be highly relevant, since the process of externalization creates distance from the grief experience in a way that the internalized loss can be viewed from the outside, helping individuals gain control over the loss (Table 2) [10, 39–41]. Writing letters and narrative retelling can transform painful memories into more positive ones, helping in the processes of saying goodbye, expressing their complete grief narrative, describing the current reality, and defining new life plans and goals for the future [10, 40]. Another possibility is the creation of online support groups for bereavement/grief, which can offer various benefits, such as a sense of community, emotional support, sharing information, rebuilding a sense of identity, engaging in a process of remembrance, and understanding the changing nature of bereavement [42]. When the bereaved person shares their personal story of profound loss, the process of writing and expressing emotions allows for new meanings, social roles, a greater sense of psychosocial support, validation, normalization of the experience and well-being [40, 42]. Therefore, the online support that these groups provide allows for the creation of an expressive, understanding and supportive environment for these people who share their losses, something that is particularly important for those

who suffer a stigmatizing loss, such as suicide [42]. Additionally, this approach can also be beneficial for caregivers in their process of anticipatory grief, as it allows family members to recognize their emotions, cope with loss, and adapt to new roles [43].

## 4. Psychological/Psychiatric Conditions

### 4.1. Eating Disorders

Currently, there is a growing number of individuals with eating disorders, mostly cases of anorexia and bulimia nervosa, who aim to achieve the levels of thinness often implemented on social networks [44]. Although the Internet, in these cases, can have very negative consequences, it is known that the creation of online support groups makes it possible to provide support and information that is vital for these people, so that they can meet virtually and share their experiences, ask questions, offer emotional support and self-help, and receive feedback by reading and posting messages. Individuals with eating disorders, especially women, tend to see these groups as especially beneficial because they allow asynchronous interaction and so they do not have to show their physical appearance or be influenced by that of the other group members [44,45]. This asynchronous communication reduces evaluation anxiety and feelings of responsibility for appearance, making it easier to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships. In turn, it offers a greater sense of belonging to the community, with the possibility of creating a space that allows for greater freedom to vent, share, and encourage others to talk about their life experiences [44,45]. In general, as shown in **Table 3**, members of these online support groups tend to receive and provide informational support based on problem-solving, advice and the creation of a positive coping environment, emotional support to increase psychological confidence in their ability to change their eating behaviors and, finally, they share their own experiences, to discuss sensitive topics without the embarrassment of others not understanding [2,45]. Another essential aspect of these groups, in particular, is the exchange of messages of encouragement and support for self-esteem, allowing members to receive and give compliments, encourage the improvement of each other's abilities and attributes and thus increase motivation for problem-solving and understanding of the self, clarification of thoughts on social problems and improvement of perspective on the future [4,44]. Finally, given that young people are increasingly suffering from eating disorders, their legal guardians also tend to feel exhausted and fearful of their children's behavior. Therefore, creating online support groups for these parents is also extremely important, as they enable them to receive advice on how to manage the situation, moderate their emotions and burden, improve their communication with their children, and increase family cohesion and adaptability [46].

**Table 3.** The main conclusions drawn from the literature on psychological/psychiatric conditions.

	Author(s)	Title	Journal	Aims	Sample	Main Conclusions
Eating Disorders	Koganei et al. [4]	Women's Psychological Experiences in a Narrative Therapy-Based Group: An Analysis of Participants' Writings and Beck Depression Inventory-Second Edition	Japanese Psychological Research	Explore women's experiences and reflections in narrative therapy groups.	7 females	The participants were able to reauthor their life narratives and scored lower in BDI-II.
	McCormack [44]	Individuals with eating disorders and the use of online support groups as a form of social support	Computers, Informatics, Nursing	Investigate the nature and types of social support in an anorexia discussion forum.	95 participants	This forum was beneficial as group members expressed thankfulness and appreciation to others for listening, caring, and providing support, information and encouragement.
Eating Disorder	Eichhorn [45]	Soliciting and Providing Social Support Over the Internet: An Investigation of Online Eating Disorder Support Groups	Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication	Analyze the type of social support provided, the strategies used to request social support, and the discussion boards related to eating disorders.		The most frequent strategy for seeking support was sharing experiences they had gone through, and the most frequent theme in the conversations was positive affect. It shows the significance of prosocial communication exchanges.

Table 3. Cont.

Author(s)	Title	Journal	Aims	Sample	Main Conclusions
Hopf et al. [46]	Internet-based chat support groups for parents in family-based treatment for adolescent eating disorders: a pilot study	European Eating Disorders Review	Investigate the feasibility and acceptability of an Internet-based chat support group for parents of children with eating disorders.	13 participants	The use of social support groups helped these participants cope better with their child's eating disorders. They felt they could speak openly and honestly, having a sense of belonging to the group.
Bipolar Disorder	Ngazimbi et al. [2]	Journal of Creativity in Mental Health	Explore the use of narrative therapy and therapeutic storytelling in individuals diagnosed with bipolar disorder.	40-year-old female participant	Narrative therapy helped the client find new meaning in the diagnosis and reconstruct her identity. Through therapeutic storytelling, it was possible to foster a sense of control over life events.
Burgin and Gibbons [11]	"More Life, Not Less": Using Narrative Therapy With Older Adults With Bipolar Disorder	Adultspan Journal	Explore the efficacy of narrative therapy in reconstructing the identities of older adults diagnosed with bipolar disorder.	Older adults with bipolar disease	The individuals were able to reframe their experiences and reconstruct their identities beyond the diagnosis. They felt empowered and regained control over their lives.
Jagfeld et al. [47]	How People with a Bipolar Disorder Diagnosis Talk About Personal Recovery in Peer Online Support Forums: Corpus Framework Analysis Using the POETIC Framework	JMIR Medical Informatics	This study aimed to understand how support groups can reveal personal stories of recovery in bipolar disorder.		The main domains discussed were: purpose and meaning in decisions and work, connectedness in romantic relationships and social support, and, lastly, empowerment through self-management and personal responsibility.
Mehl-Madrona and Mainguy [48]	Comparisons of narrative psychotherapy to conventional CBT for the psychotherapy of psychosis and bipolar disorder	European Psychiatry	Compare the effectiveness of narrative psychotherapy with conventional CBT for individuals with bipolar disorder.	18 adults diagnosed with bipolar disorder and psychotic features	The narrative therapy group significantly improved engagement between participants and reduced their number of hospitalizations, distress, and self-criticism.
Bauer et al. [49]	Cyber-support: an analysis of online self-help forums (online self-help forums in bipolar disorder)	Nordic Journal of Psychiatry	Estimate if and how online self-help forums can be used by individuals with bipolar disorders, their family members and other treating professionals.		These forums were used to discuss the symptoms of the disorder, explore potential medications, and receive emotional support while exchanging information and resources.
Bauer et al. [50]	International multi-site survey on the use of online support groups in bipolar disorder	Nordic Journal of Psychiatry	Understand how individuals with bipolar disorder use the Internet to fund coping mechanisms to deal with their condition and seek information.	1222 participants	Through online information seeking, many participants discovered ways to seek help when needed and cope more effectively with their condition.
Bipolar Disorder	Vassallo [51]	Narrative Approaches	Explore how narrative therapy can be applied in groups of people with serious mental illness.	Group of individuals with serious mental illness	The use of narrative therapy in a group promoted a supportive environment, facilitating the reconstruction of identity, shifting mindset and increasing resilience.
Schizophrenia and Psychotic Disorders	Highton-Williamson et al. [52]	International Journal of Social Psychiatry	Explore the evidence of using online social networking in people with psychosis.		Utilizing online social networking with these individuals can help mitigate their risk of isolation.
	Castelein et al. [53]	Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica	Understand the effects of a minimally guided support group for people with psychosis.	56 participants in a support group and another 50 participants in a control condition.	The participants in the support group benefited from increased social support, self-efficacy, and quality of life.

**Table 3. Cont.**

Author(s)	Title	Journal	Aims	Sample	Main Conclusions	
Castelein et al. [54]	Creating a Supportive Environment: Peer Support Groups for Psychotic Disorders	Schizophrenia Bulletin	Understand the benefits of supportive social environments as well as the mental and social limitations that come from persistent social isolation.		Peer support groups can help reduce isolation and enhance personal recovery. In these groups, individuals benefit from expressing their thoughts, feelings, and other personal information to others.	
Baumel et al. [55]	Adaptation of a peer-based online emotional support program as an adjunct to treatment for people with schizophrenia-spectrum disorders	Internet Interventions	Describe an online platform that provides volunteer-based emotional support for people going through treatment for schizophrenia-spectrum disorders.	10 participants	Most participants experienced a positive gain from the opportunity to discuss their emotions and socialize about different topics with others.	
Schizophrenia and Psychotic Disorder	Haker et al. [56]	Internet forums: a self-help approach for individuals with schizophrenia?	Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica	Understand if and how online self-help forums for people with schizophrenia can be used.	Analyses of 1200 posts from 576 users of schizophrenia forums.	The use of online self-help forums seems to be a helpful way to fight the alienation and isolation of people with schizophrenia.
	Chien et al. [57]	Effectiveness of a mutual support group for families of patients with schizophrenia	Journal of Advanced Nursing	Examine the effectiveness of support groups for families of people with schizophrenia.	96 Chinese families.	There were significant improvements in the family and schizophrenia individuals' level of functioning.
Suicidal Ideation	Choudhury and Kiciman [58]	The Language of Social Support in Social Media and Its Effect on Suicidal Ideation Risk	Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media	To propose a method to examine how the language of comments can influence the risk of suicidal ideation.	A total of 79,833 posts from 44,262 users of the online forum were examined.	This study was able to interpret some specific linguistic cues that can be associated with a higher or lower likelihood of future suicide ideation.
	Sørensen et al. [59]	Online with suicidal ideation: How individuals communicate in and perceive a peer-to-peer mediated social media group	Mental Health & Prevention	Explore how the members of a private social media group perceive their communication and membership.	Four hundred forty-five posts and 2891 comments were analyzed.	The members felt that they could share their thoughts, outpour their frustrations and emotions, and, lastly, offer practical advice to others on how to navigate the psychiatric and social systems.
Suicidal Ideation	Wong et al. [60]	Who seeks help online? Comparing online and offline help-seeking preferences amongst youths with suicidal ideation	Journal of Affective Disorders	Compare the behavioral characteristics of suicidal adolescents in Hong Kong and their ways of seeking help, whether online or offline.	1214 participants, aged between 15 and 24 years old.	The online help group individuals benefited significantly from the anonymity and the social support. They were also able to avoid embarrassment, reduce suicidal ideation, distress and risk behaviors.
	Gilat et al. [61]	Offering Support to Suicidal Individuals in an Online Support Group	Archives of Suicide Research	Reveal response strategies to suicidal messages, as well as examine the relationship between those messages and the types of responses that were received inside the online support group.	121 participants	This study shows that the main strategies to reduce suicidal risk were emotion-focused strategies to establish an emotional bond between the individuals and cognitive-focused strategies to alter and broaden the narrow perspective of the suicidal individuals.

## 4.2. Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is one of the most serious mental health problems, characterized by recurrent episodes of depressive and manic moods. For this reason, research has been conducted on the most effective psychological interventions [47]. The study by Ngazimbi et al. [2] defends that narrative therapy can be effective with individuals with mood disorders, more appropriately, bipolar disorder. Those who are diagnosed with bipolar disorder often suffer from the effects of labeling. For that reason, the use of narrative therapy can help clients reauthor their personal narratives to live more meaningful lives [2, 48]. As this type of approach is also effective with groups, it is increasingly common for self-help forums to be set up on the Internet, enabling positive changes in symptoms,

better recovery through adaptive responses to the diagnosis, improved quality of life, and greater decision-making capacity [2,49]. Joining these online peer support groups provides supportive relationships, encouragement, and feelings of belonging within a community with similar characteristics, which allows for better self-management in these individuals' relationships, both online and offline [49,50,52]. Individuals diagnosed with bipolar disorder tend to be mainly interested in these groups because they allow them to enter a community where there is no stigma or behavior considered abnormal [50,51]. Since most of these individuals already possess a considerable amount of knowledge about medication side effects from professionals or other sources of information, they tend to utilize online social support groups to receive and share emotional support and empathy, thereby forming friendships [50]. They create "emotional writing groups", which resulted in a reduction of depressive, anxiety, stress and somatic symptoms, as well as fewer re-hospitalizations [48]. By sharing emotions and life situations, these individuals create connections with each other, where they are accepted and respected, and comfortable sharing more controversial or stigmatizing aspects, such as issues related to sexuality, spirituality and (hypo)mania [47,52]. Therefore, these groups provide rich experiences, focusing on the purpose and meaning individuals attribute to life, the creation of romantic and/or social support relationships, and the empowerment of these individuals in terms of self-management and personal responsibility [47,51]. The focus on strengths instead of pathology enables the transformation of problematic narratives, allowing individuals to create unique outcomes tailored to their own version of the situation (Table 3) [11].

#### 4.3. Schizophrenia and Psychotic Disorders

Schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders often lead to social isolation and a reduction in support networks due to the significant mental and social limitations they present. Bearing in mind that the creation of a supportive social environment is crucial to the successful recovery process, the use of social support groups can reduce isolation and encourage the formation and strengthening of mutual relationships, as well as the expression of thoughts, feelings, and personal concerns in a safe environment among peers [53,54]. Thus, there are already some online social support groups for individuals with schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders, but they are still rare. These groups, focused on anonymity due to the stigma and social consequences associated with these disorders, provide various benefits for these individuals with deficits in social interaction, mainly in terms of affective dullness, social isolation, lack of spontaneity and/or anhedonia [55,56]. For this reason, online platforms that allow anonymity can be critical for socializing in a safer and less critical environment compared to other environments [55]. However, although social media groups can be used to facilitate social contact, they are mainly used by individuals with schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, and their families, as a way of exchanging information about the diagnosis, their treatment and sharing experiences (Table 3) [49,52,56]. Family caregivers tend to show improvements in their adjustment to the condition, with a better understanding of various aspects, greater problem-solving skills, improved communication, and enhanced general family functioning. In short, these online social support groups enable the sharing of experiences and provide tools for fostering a more harmonious family life [57].

#### 4.4. Suicidal Ideation

Suicide and suicidal ideation are major public health problems, with young people having the highest risk rates for such acts. Given that this can be an extremely sensitive topic to talk about in person, creating shame and embarrassment, the use of online support platforms can be an alternative way to help this population gain access to information that promotes well-being, help and advice, and means to prevent suicide [58–60]. Online support groups will make it possible to obtain social support in a way that people can deal more effectively with psychological suffering, including suicidal crises. Through anonymity and the use of written language, it is possible to reduce fears and promote the sharing of experiences, understanding that they are not alone, and thus improve their emotional well-being [61]. The process of writing a message about what they are feeling or thinking within these groups allows them to share their fears and create an emotionally favorable environment, temporarily relieving their mental pain and receiving emotional support from peers [49,61]. In addition, this process of writing within a safe space also allows them to feel heard and to reconstruct their sense of identity, giving new meaning to the experience or suicidal thoughts and impulses [42,59]. The messages sent to these groups can also be described as "primitive screams" because they are short and written in moments of anguish. They can express themselves and delve into emotions they do not know what to do with or how to control. After these expressions, they often receive a great

deal of emotional support from all the members, affirming that they were not alone in the process and encouraging them to write and express, while also sharing ways of dealing with suicidal ideation [59]. The stories shared socially within allowed the creation of a narrative that built the social identity of the various members, enabling them to undergo social learning, growth, and behavioral change, thereby protecting them from maladaptive behaviors in the face of stressful events (**Table 3**) [58].

Based on the vast amount of studies on the benefits of using online support groups to externalize the thoughts, feelings and life stories of different target populations, this study also aims to contribute to the literature review regarding the possible benefits of using narrative therapy in online social support groups for stroke survivors, since this situation also leads to a large number of physical, emotional and psychological changes and is one of significant health issues in Portugal (around 25,000 cases every year), as well as in Europe (191.9 cases per 100,000 person every year) [62,63].

## 5. Cerebral Vascular Accident/Stroke

A stroke is a condition resulting from the interruption of blood flow to the brain, causing cell death in various affected areas [64,65]. Thus, stroke is one of the leading causes of long-term deficits in motor, perceptual, emotional and/or cognitive functioning worldwide, drastically affecting the emotional well-being, social interactions and quality of life of millions of individuals every year [66–68]. After these drastic changes in the individual's functioning, destabilization and a sense of loss of identity are common post-stroke, with significant changes in lifestyle such as greater social isolation, reduced psychological well-being (helplessness, hopelessness, depression, anger, anxiety and frustration), a sense of personal failure and loss as they often become dependent on caregivers [3,64,66]. It is therefore essential to adapt to the new reality, both on the part of the individual, who ends up feeling the "stigma of stroke", and their informal caregivers, family and friends, focusing on physical rehabilitation and the emotional well-being of all those involved throughout recovery [8,64,66]. Some of the main challenges during this period are related to difficulties in managing physical symptoms, loss of personal care skills, uncertainty about the prognosis, concerns about communication difficulties, feelings of abandonment, emotional instability with difficulty expressing emotions or giving appropriate emotional responses, and fear of suffering a second stroke [65]. Therefore, to improve the quality of life of these individuals, various psychotherapeutic interventions can be used, including the use of narrative therapy to deal with the psychosocial and spiritual difficulties of survivors [3,66].

### Narrative Therapy for Stroke Survivors: Is It Possible?

The narrative therapy approach can be highly relevant in the post-stroke rehabilitation process. The psychologist will play a central role in helping survivors deconstruct their problematic stories, co-constructing them with internal values and beliefs that allow for the reconstruction of meaning and life purpose, in accordance with each individual's own identity [3]. Given the social isolation, spiritual anguish, hopelessness and helplessness, many may feel "trapped" in their "problem-saturated condition", so the presence of a psychologist focused on asking explorative narrative questions can be extremely important. In other words, by sharing stories of coping, hopes and dreams, greater flexibility can be created so that the survivor can begin their process of restoring meaning to life and a sense of self-worth, reducing the effects of the problems and life to be rebuilt within the limits of the new condition [3,8]. Another aspect to be implemented when using this approach is the use of the "train of life" metaphor in relation to stroke as a means of facilitating the creation of a new perspective in which the condition is separated and seen as an entity outside of the survivors, so that they can feel free from possible feelings of guilt [3].

There is now scientific evidence of the advantages of using narrative therapy in online support groups for stroke survivors [64,67,68], such as fostering more profound self-reflective thoughts on experiences, enabling feelings of being understood, sharing coping strategies and promoting a sense of unity through strong emotional connections (**Table 4**). It is possible to facilitate and involve survivors in the process of addressing their primary challenges, empowering them to recover their lives and improve their overall well-being. In addition, it is possible to help them reconnect with their abilities and reframe their personal narratives to reduce the focus on the stroke, rediscover a new, more positive identity, and find alternatives for a more meaningful life in the present and future [9]. However, this whole process is not a linear path. During the process of recovery and emotional adjustment, it is common for there to be more positive results and others that are more negative, such as increased anxiety. This situation can

often be related to triggering events, such as the need for a new hospitalization, a new loss of function, or the start of new treatments, so the therapist's role can be to support their process of finding a positive perspective according to their coping skills [8,69]. In other words, the psychologist can enable, by repeatedly retelling their alternative story, the development of new thoughts and feelings, thereby activating their brain's neuroplasticity and creating new neuronal connections that promote healthy and functional changes in their life. Neuroplasticity is extremely important for these survivors, as it enables neurons to change their functions, structure and chemical organization, allowing them to recover from central nervous system (CNS) injuries, which are very common after a stroke [70]. Thus, by employing the narrative approach and language externalization, it is possible to significantly enhance this ability to interpret the multiplicity of experiences lived, leading to changes in neuronal synapses that make the individual's alternative perspective "natural" to them [3,70].

**Table 4.** Main conclusions drawn from the literature on stroke survivors.

Author(s)	Title	Journal	Aims	Sample	Main Conclusions
Silva [67]	The Role of Technology in Enhancing Emotional Well-being in Recovery: Integrating WhatsApp for Mutual Support Among Care Communities: A Case of Stroke Survivors	ATSK Journal of Psychology	Examine how the use of WhatsApp and an online tool, "Queijinho," can promote emotional well-being, mutual support, and community cohesion within a group of stroke survivors.	14 stroke survivors	The use of WhatsApp and "Queijinho" facilitated daily engagement and emotional sharing, promoting the strengthening of cohesion among the survivors, fostering a sense of belonging, and improving emotional communication.
Rodrigues et al. [68]	Supportive Conversations: WhatsApp as a Tool for Social Support Among Women Stroke Survivors - A Case Study	ACTA Scientific Women's Health	Understand how therapeutic writing through WhatsApp can promote social support among female stroke survivors.	Stroke survivors (predominantly females)	The use of therapeutic writing in this group helped improve emotional support, resilience and well-being, promoting a sense of belonging and renewing the meaning of life.

## 6. Findings

Across the different conditions presented in this article, the use of online social support groups consistently shows reduced isolation, validates experiences, and promotes emotional resilience. Narrative therapy and therapeutic writing can play a key role by enabling individuals to externalize their experiences through verbal language or writing, reconstruct meaning in their life events and develop more adaptive identities [3–5,20,21,25,28,34,38,42,49,56,69,70]. In some cases, the benefits extend beyond the patients to include their families and caregivers, who have gained more coping tools, improved their communication and reduced their burden [26,28,46,58]. It is also important to highlight that, while it is not a linear process, these interventions enhance psychological well-being, social bonding, and quality of life, and in some cases, such as stroke, may even support neuroplasticity and functional recovery [3,8,66,69,70].

In chronic pain, the online peer support groups influenced how participants expressed their pain, aligning their emotional language with others. The "affective synchrony" supported information processing, emotional regulation, and stronger social bonds, which is consistent with the social communication model of pain [14,16–18]; in oncology, the online groups helped cancer patients share their personal narratives, maintain anonymity and access continuous support. Writing about their experiences helped them improve their self-esteem, fighting spirit and identity redefinition [21–25]. In addition, their caregivers also benefited from a reduced emotional burden [26]. Lastly, in the palliative care groups, the narrative interventions reframed symptoms, reduced feelings of incapacity, and fostered problem-solving confidence [13,27–31]. Their families gained understanding, closeness and improved communication, leading to greater well-being and quality of life [26,28]. Regarding the emotional/psychosocial conditions, in cases of gestational loss and infertility, online forums were able to reduce isolation and help to validate emotions. The process of reading and sharing their stories fostered belonging, emotional relief and support for the couples, while improving coping and partner relationships [6,7,33–36]; the online groups focused on people going through grief, facilitated the reconstruction of self-narratives and helped the individuals to integrate the loss into a coherent life story. These groups provided validation, normalization and a safe environment, especially valuable for stigmatized losses like suicide [11,37,38,40–42]. Finally, psychological/psychiatric conditions: eating disorders support groups enabled safe and anonymous interactions, reduced anxiety about appearance and evaluation,

and provided emotional support, motivation and advice to their members [4,44,45]. The parents of teen members also gain coping strategies and improved family cohesion [46]; the bipolar disorder groups help reduce stigma and encourage self-management, acceptance and emotional support [2,11,47–49,52]. The members reported forming meaningful social bonds, experiencing empowerment, and having access to safe spaces to discuss sensitive issues [47,50,51]. Similar results were obtained in schizophrenia/psychotic disorders online support groups, where participants reported reduced isolation and strengthened relationships [53,54]. The anonymity of these groups enabled safe expression [55,56] and helped families improve their communication, problem-solving skills and family functioning [57]; lastly, the groups for suicidal ideation members benefited from the anonymity and enabled them to externalize distress, receive immediate emotional support and reconstruct identity [49,58–61]. The messages that were sent in these groups created social learning opportunities and promoted resilience against maladaptive behaviors [58].

We also found it relevant to understand the benefits of these groups for stroke survivors. We discovered that narrative therapy enables them to deconstruct problem-saturated stories, create alternative perspectives, and rebuild meaning [3,8]. Techniques such as metaphors and externalization foster self-esteem, hope, and neuroplasticity, supporting recovery and emotional adjustment despite non-linear progress [3,8,69,70].

## 7. Discussion

The present review highlights the relevance of online social support groups and the integration of narrative therapy and therapeutic writing across a wide range of health conditions. Overall, participation in these groups fosters emotional resilience, reduces social isolation, and promotes a greater sense of belonging and meaning, with narrative therapy playing a central role in coping and recovery processes [22,26,34]. It was possible to understand that therapeutic writing also enabled cognitive reprocessing, identity redefinition and improved the ability of communication between patients and caregivers [21,25,28]. These online groups provided emotional validation, the normalization of stigmatized experiences, and opportunities for individuals to reconstruct their self-narratives [7,33,34,42]. Furthermore, these groups were essential in providing a safe space where participants could share their life events, reduce stigma, and enhance self-management [4,44,49,56]. Lastly, focusing on stroke survivors is especially important, as it allows us to expand knowledge of how narrative therapy within online support groups can promote neuroplasticity, reconstruction, and reduce the emotional impact of stroke-related identity loss [3,8,65,69,70].

There are several limitations that must be taken into account, including the fact that not everyone has access to social media due to varying levels of digital literacy, socioeconomic barriers, and cultural differences. Furthermore, not all interactions within the groups are positive, as misinformation, negative feedback, or even triggering narratives can occur occasionally [21,42]. In terms of future research, the importance of narrative therapy in enhancing neuroplasticity in stroke survivors should be further explored.

## 8. Conclusions

The integration of online social support groups and narrative therapy represents a powerful and flexible intervention strategy that fosters a sense of belonging, emotional regulation, and meaning-making across diverse conditions [2,17,21,25,28,34,42]. These groups contribute to improving psychological well-being and broadening the goals of health promotion and holistic care [8,20,40,66,69,70]. Furthermore, they promote feelings of community, a safe environment, and emotional connection, while allowing the externalization of experiences and the development of new perspectives on illness, loss, or psychological distress [19,37,39,41,48,53,54]. This literature review highlights the importance of exploring digital, peer-based interventions as complementary tools to traditional healthcare, displaying their potential for accessibility and future application across diverse populations [8,20,25,34,69,70].

## Funding

This work received no external funding.

## Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

## Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

## Data Availability Statement

Not applicable.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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