

Stigma surrounding the patients using mental health services

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Stigma is used as a synonym for designation of individuals or group with some characteristic differ from other population. This means that any disease by itself can carry stigma. But the greatest stigmatization is still associated with mental illness. Stigmatization means rewriting the negative characteristics of individual or group and creation of social distance and neglect.

These can include multiple groups of people:

- people with mental retardation and mental illness
- people with deformities of any kind
- unemployed
- gay people
- members of a particular race, nationality and religion

Stigma is manifested in cognitive, emotional and practical level.

- The cognitive level stigma appears in form of stereotypes. Stereotypes are rigid posts that are difficult to change based on experience. They occur due to insufficient knowledge of one disease, because of it stigma is closely linked to prejudice.
- The emotional level, stigma manifests itself as fear of mental illness
- On a practical level manifests itself when it changes to everyday practice
- The stigma affected individual gets double load, not only to deal with their disease and treatment options, but they have to fight with the features that are prescribed by the environment.

- As a result of this stigma prevents opening of centers of mental health in settlements , so this checked the processes of health care reform
- Being discriminated against has a huge impact on self-esteem and confidence. This can increase isolation from society and reinforce feelings of exclusion and social withdrawal. The Queensland Alliance for Mental Health (2010) observed that people with mental health problems are “frequently the object of ridicule or derision and are depicted within the media as being violent, impulsive and incompetent”.

In light of this, the Department of Health (2004) funded a programme called Shift which aimed to reduce the discrimination that those with mental ill health face. Many people with mental health problems say that the biggest barrier to getting back on their feet is not the symptoms of illness, but the attitudes of other people”.

- Even a brief episode of mental illness can have far-reaching effects on wellbeing, disrupting work, families, relationships and social interactions, impacting on the health and wellbeing not just of patients, but also of their families and friends. This can lead to further psychiatric problems such as anxiety and depression.
- Recipients of mental health services are also exposed to discrimination

Stigma can be a barrier to seeking early treatment. Often people will not seek professional help until their symptoms have become serious.

Others disengage from services or therapeutic interventions or stop taking medication, all of which can cause relapse and hinder recovery.

- If mental illness is treated early enough, it can reduce further ill health, and ultimately the risk of suicide. By intervening at the earliest possible opportunity, people may be able to avoid a full episode of mental ill health, and retain their jobs, relationships or social standing.

Recommendations to reduce the stigma

Components of the strategy for successful antistigma program are:

- Intervention with target group
- The possibility of meeting and contacting people who use services of mental health
- Visiting institutions for treatment
- Social activities
- Rehabilitation work
- Inclusion of patients in all process of antistigma programs
- Public campaigns for clarification and information on mental health
- Working with the media (it is desirable to seek positive figures for identification like media stars who have mental disorders and successfully overcome and live a normal life)

Conclusion

While much research has been carried out to explore the public's perception of mental illness, future research should explore the experiences of service users and their families, carers or people close to them to understand and measure the impact that stigma has on their lives. This, in turn, could help to shape interventions and policies for improved legislation to help stop the discrimination faced by those with mental illness.

Open the doors , prejudices are dark spaces filled with cobwebs behind closed doors where no touching fresh air (quote from the book of Sir P. Ustinov)

Reference:

Mentalno zdravje vo zaednicata-
doc.dr.K.Richter,dr.V.Ortakov,dr.D.Belevska