

Reducing stigma and discrimination of people with mental health problems

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Why should we fight the stigma of mental illness?

- Stigmatization and discrimination, for reasons of health, gender, age, race or religion are grave menaces to the survival of any society
- Stigma of mental illness and its consequences are the chief obstacle to the improvement of mental health and mental health care
- There exist tools for effective action against stigma and its consequences

Why should we fight the stigma of mental illness?

- Stigma of mental illness does not stop at the individuals who have a mental illness. It will spread to members of their families, to mental health services (and treatments) and persist over generations.
- It leads to discrimination in all walks of life
- It reduces chances of recovery from illness and increases the cost of care for those affected and their families.

Trends

- Unless resolute action is taken stigmatization and its consequences will increase. The reasons for this include
 - The worldwide reduction of social capital
 - The changes of family structure and size
 - The disappearance of classical communities
 - The increased complexity of labour and life

Elements of a new strategy of fighting stigma

The selection of targets, the planning, the execution of programmes and their evaluation must be done jointly with those ill and their carers

Elements of a new strategy of fighting stigma

The primary target of work is not a change of attitudes but a change of behaviour

Elements of a new strategy of fighting stigma

The reduction of discrimination is more important than the elimination of stigma that produced it. It is important also that it can be measured in meaningful terms and achieved faster.

Elements of a new strategy of fighting stigma

Short lasting campaigns against stigma are not particularly useful: long term programmes incorporated into other society's efforts are needed to make a difference

Elements of a new strategy of fighting stigma

Making society tolerant to people with mental illness is an obsolete goal which should be replaced by their inclusion in society despite the fact that they might be different

Elements of a new strategy of fighting stigma

Fighting stigma and discrimination with success is possible regardless of the size of the national income or of the co-existent problems

Elements of a new strategy of fighting stigma

Programmes against stigma should adopt general principles but their activities should be tailored to fit local circumstances

Assets in fighting stigma in Europe

- Programmes in various European countries produced a wealth of evidence and experience relevant to fighting stigma
- In addition to individual country programmes several collaborative ventures against stigma have been successfully conducted. They also demonstrated the usefulness of joint work in this area.

Assets in fighting stigma in Europe

- The awareness of the pernicious effects of stigma has increased, possibly in parallel to indications of an increase of stigmatization in European countries.
- The efforts to protect human rights of citizens of Europe are in synergy with fighting stigma

Assets in fighting stigma in Europe

- The awareness of the magnitude and severity of mental health problems and the loss to societies that they may produce is increasing among decision makers
- Research has already produced valuable knowledge and is likely to be even more helpful if adequately supported

Conclusion

- Stigma and its consequences are the major obstacle to the improvement of mental health and mental health care
- There are effective methods to fight stigmatization and the discrimination that follows it

Conclusion

The reduction of stigmatization and discrimination will help people with mental illness, their families and societies in which they live.

It will also ennoble our societies and make them more civilized.

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