



nami

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Facts about Stigma and Mental Illness in Diverse Communities

What is Stigma?

- An attempt to label a particular group of people as less worthy of respect than others
- A mark of shame, disgrace or disapproval that results in discrimination
- Not just a matter of using the wrong word or action – its about disrespect

What does Stigma have to do with Mental Illness?

Stigma leads to ...

- Inadequate insurance coverage for mental health services
- Fear, mistrust, and violence against people living with mental illness and their families
- Family and friends turning their backs on people with mental illness
- Prejudice and discrimination

Discrimination against people who have mental illnesses keeps them from seeking help

While 1 in 5 Americans live with a mental disorder, estimates indicate that nearly two-thirds of all people with a diagnosable mental illness do not seek treatment, especially people from diverse communities. Lack of knowledge, fear of disclosure, rejection of friends, and discrimination are a few reasons why people with mental illness don't seek help.

Discrimination against people with mental illness violates their rights and denies them opportunities

Despite Civil Rights Law such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, people with mental illnesses often experience discrimination in the workplace, education, housing, and healthcare.

Ethnic and racial communities in the US face a social and economic environment of inequality that includes greater exposure to racism, discrimination, violence and poverty

Mistrust of mental health services is an important reason for deterring people of color from seeking treatment. Their concerns are reinforced by evidence (both direct and indirect) of clinician bias and stereotyping

The cultures of racial and ethnic groups alter the types of mental health services used. Clinical environments that do not respect or are incompatible with the cultures of the people they serve may deter people from seeking help to begin with, adherence to treatment and follow-up care.

Culture counts: One's racial or ethnic background bears upon whether people even seek help in the first place, what types of help they seek, what coping styles and social supports they have, and how much stigma they attach to mental illness.

Fighting Stigma

- **Use respectful language**
Put the person before the illness – use phrases such as “a person with schizophrenia”. Never use terms like crazy, lunatic, psycho, retarded and correct people who do so.
- **Provide professional development opportunities for staff, regarding diversity, mental health issues, and fostering an inclusive work environment.**
Include mental illness in discussions about acceptance of diversity, just as you would discuss cultural diversity, religious beliefs, physical disability, and sexual orientation.
- **Become an advocate**
Create awareness by writing letters to newspapers and lawmakers. Speak out and challenge stereotypes portrayed in the media. Take it upon yourself to inform your community about the truth of mental illness.
- **Teach others about mental illness**
Spread understanding that these are illnesses like any other.

Resources:

ADS Center – www.samhsa.gov/stigma

Resource Center to Address Discrimination and Stigma (Associated with Mental Illness) – provides practical assistance to individuals, States, and public and private organizations in the design, implementation, and operation of programs and initiatives to reduce discrimination and stigma.

NAMI Multicultural Action Center - www.nami.org/multicultural

This Center works to focus attention on system reform to ensure access to culturally competent services and treatment for all Americans and to help and support families of color who are dealing with mental illness.

STAR Center – www.consumerstar.org

(Support Technical Assistance Resource Center) - funded by CMHS, this center provides support, technical assistance, and resources to help improve and increase the capacity of consumer operated programs to meet the needs of persons living with mental illnesses from diverse communities.

StigmaBusters—www.nami.org/stigma

A group of dedicated advocates across the country who seek to fight the inaccurate, hurtful representations of mental illness that can be found in TV, film, print, or other media. StigmaBusters’ goal is to break down the barriers of ignorance, prejudice, or unfair discrimination by promoting education, understanding, and respect.

Sources

Anti-Stigma: Do You Know the Facts? SAMHSA Mental Health Information Center. 2003

Challenging Stereotypes: An Action Guide. SAMHSA. 2001

Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity. A Report of the Surgeon General. 2001