

Mental Health Stigma



1 in 5 adults suffers from a mental health condition, and such conditions are the leading cause of disability in the U.S.

Stigma is defined as the “stereotypical or negative views attributed to a person or groups when their characteristics or behaviors are viewed as different from societal norms.”



Stigmatizing Beliefs

Stigmatizing beliefs about people with mental health issues may include:

- They're unpredictable and potentially violent.
- They're to blame for their mental health conditions.
- They're unable to do anything but the most menial of jobs.
- They're childlike and innocent. As a result, they need an authority figure such as a parent or psychiatrist to make decisions about goals and treatments.

What's the Problem?

Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death for all Americans and the second leading cause of death for those between 15 and 34. People with serious mental illnesses struggle with the symptoms and disabilities caused by these diseases, and are challenged by the stereotypes and prejudice that result from misconceptions about mental illness.



Stigma is inherently linked to power and oppression; stereotypical association between individuals and problematic ideas are created by the powerful and applied to the powerless.

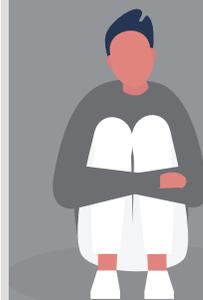
Individuals experiencing mental health conditions often face rejection, bullying and discrimination.

Individuals already facing stigma because of their group identity (e.g., poor, Black, homeless, female, LGBTQ) may face compounded stigma when suffering the added burden of a mental health condition. They have also been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Negative attitudes about individuals with mental health conditions create barriers through delays in seeking help, discontinuation of treatment, suboptimal therapeutic relationship, patient safety concerns and poorer quality mental and physical care. In 2017, only 44% of American adults with a mental condition received treatment.

Federal funding for mental health lags far behind other issues. Various studies have found that mental health professionals were similar to the general public in their desired social distance from individuals with mental health conditions. This can result in inferior care for individuals suffering from mental health conditions.

Mental Health in the U.S.



While many individuals do not recognize their symptoms, 1 in 5 adults with mental health conditions reports that they are not able to get the treatment they need.

Anxiety and depression are markedly higher today than they were in the 20th Century.

Access to quality insurance and treatment is improving, but still a significant problem. Costs often must be paid out of pocket because mental health isn't treated like other physical health conditions.

Mental health concerns can be addressed through preventative action. Early identification and intervention is critical.



Nearly half of adults with mental health conditions in the U.S. have a co-occurring substance abuse disorder.

Levels of Stigma

- STRUCTURAL**
Insurers offer lower reimbursement rates to mental health clinicians
- INTERPERSONAL**
An employer refuses to offer a job to someone with a real or perceived mental health condition
- INDIVIDUAL**
A person blames themselves for their condition, which leads them to avoid seeking treatment

These levels of stigma are interconnected. For example, legislators who hold problematic beliefs about people with mental health conditions could be less likely to advocate for increased funding for mental health. The lack of proper training for law enforcement officers can result in the arrest and incarceration of individuals experiencing mental health crises, rather than helping them access appropriate care.

6 Strategies to Reduce Stigma

- Direct services such as crisis intervention
- Advocacy efforts, including social media campaigns and letter writing to encourage policy change
- Programs that encourage contact between people suffering from mental illness and those who are not
- Public education to build awareness about mental health issues
- Training programs for those working with people who have mental health conditions
- Work with institutions such as universities to implement inclusive policies

Vulnerable Populations



LGBTQ

LGBTQ individuals are 2 or more times more likely than straight individuals to have a mental health condition. 11% of transgender individuals reported being denied care by mental health clinics due to bias or discrimination. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth.



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BLACK AMERICANS

According to the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, African Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population. Only about one-quarter of African Americans seek mental health care, compared to 40% of whites. Barriers to mental health care are driven by systemic racism and medical mistrust from events like the Tuskegee Study. The lack of Black mental health professionals is also a factor: in 2015, only 4% of working psychologists in the U.S. identified as Black/African American."



4% of working psychologists in the U.S. identified as Black/African American



TEENAGERS

Mental health conditions are common among teens and young adults. 1 in 5 live with a mental health condition. Approximately 50% of students age 14 and older with a mental illness drop out of high school. Suicide is the third-leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24. Only 30% of depressed teens are being treated for their illness.



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COVID-19 Impact on Mental Health

- The pandemic has brought about an increase in mental health conditions, substance use, and suicidal ideation, especially for younger adults, Hispanic and Black Americans, essential workers, and unpaid adult caregivers.
- While the pandemic is increasing demand for mental health services, COVID-19 itself can lead to neurological and mental complications. People with pre-existing mental, neurological or substance use disorders are also more vulnerable to infection—they may have a higher risk of severe outcomes and even death.