

NEW *PSPI* REPORT: Stigma as a Barrier to Mental Health Care

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Despite the availability of effective evidence-based treatment, about 40% of individuals with serious mental illness do not receive care, and many who begin an intervention fail to complete it. A new report published in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* investigates stigma as a significant barrier to care for many individuals with mental illness.

Although stigma is only one of many factors that may influence care seeking, it has profound effects for those who suffer from mental illness. In the report, Patrick W. Corrigan of the Illinois Institute of Technology and coauthors Benjamin G. Druss of Emory University and Deborah A. Perlick of Mount Sinai Hospital in New York synthesize the available scientific literature, identifying different types of stigma that can prevent individuals from accessing mental health care.

Public stigma emerges when pervasive stereotypes — that people with mental illness are dangerous or unpredictable, for example — lead to prejudice against those who suffer from mental illness. The desire to avoid public stigma causes individuals to drop out of treatment or avoid it entirely. Public stigma may also influence those closest to individuals with mental illness, including friends, family, and care providers.

Corrigan and colleagues note that stigma becomes structural when it pervades societal institutions and systems. The facts that mental health care is not covered by insurance to the same extent as other medical care and that mental health research is not funded at the same levels as medical research, are two clear indications that mental-illness stigma continues to exist at the structural level.

In the face of these realities, the report identifies approaches to addressing stigma that can help increase care seeking among those with mental illness. These approaches operate at various levels, from

promoting personal stories of recovery and enhancing support systems to instituting public policy solutions that enhance systems of care.

“This issue of *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* makes a strong start in consolidating and disseminating what we now know — that public policy, the law, and media remain our greatest resources to stimulate change and spur action,” former US First Lady Rosalynn Carter, Rebecca Palpant Shimkets, and Thomas H. Bornemann of the Carter Center Mental Health Program write in a commentary that accompanies the report. “We also need to build bridges to other fields that connect to mental health, such as public health, primary care, and education.”

The report, “The Impact of Mental Illness Stigma on Seeking and Participating in Mental Health Care,” and the accompanying commentary are available online for free to the public at www.psychologicalscience.org/r/stigma.