



SCHIZOPHRENIA Factsheet

May 2020

What is the evidence for stigma and attitudes to mental health?

High quality evidence indicates that professional help for schizophrenia is viewed as being important, with 83-85% of the general population recommending help should be provided by psychologists or psychiatrists. Psychotherapy is viewed as being more important than medication for schizophrenia, although recommendations for medication are increasing over time. The general public view schizophrenia as a mental illness more frequently than depression or alcohol dependence. People with both alcohol dependence and schizophrenia are considered to be more unpredictable and dangerous than people with depression, with more negative emotion felt towards them, and more social distance desired.

Targeted educational campaigns may reduce fear and exclusion and increase acceptance of people with mental disorders. High quality evidence suggests interventions aimed at reducing personal and public stigma are effective, particularly if they involve an educational component. However, moderate quality evidence found mass media interventions reduce prejudice but not discrimination. Moderate to high quality evidence found improved attitudes, prejudice, and intentions towards people with schizophrenia following contact, either face to face, virtual, or imaginary.

Moderate to low quality evidence indicates the public, patients, and their relatives predominantly view psychosocial factors as being the cause of schizophrenia, while clinicians predominantly endorse biogenetic causes. There may be a relationship between psychosocial causal views and positive attitudes towards schizophrenia, while biogenetic causal views may be associated with more negative attitudes. Portrayal of schizophrenia symptoms, rather than diagnostic labels, may endorse beliefs that psychosocial factors cause schizophrenia and that psychological treatments are most appropriate. Conversely, diagnostic labels and not portrayal of symptoms may endorse beliefs about biological causes and preferred antipsychotic treatment.

Moderate to high quality evidence indicates a medium to strong relationship between increased levels of internalised stigma in patients and reduced levels of hope, self-esteem, empowerment, self-efficacy, quality of life, social support and treatment adherence. A medium to strong relationship is apparent between increased internalised stigma and higher levels of symptom severity. There is a relationship between fewer pathways to care for patients and their sense of being different or not normal and characterising this difference negatively. Anticipating and experiencing negative reactions from self or others, employing strategies to avoid these negative reactions such as nondisclosure of symptoms, lack of awareness and understanding of mental illness, and having a negative opinion of services also reduce pathways to care.

Service-related stigma is a reason for opposing psychiatric treatment, and shame is the reason given most often for nondisclosure of symptoms. Care-givers' concern that loved ones experiencing first-episode psychosis could be labelled as 'mad' is a frequent reason for relatives not contacting psychiatric services.

For more information see the technical table

HOW YOUR SUPPORT HELPS

We are able to make significant advances due to the generosity of countless people. Your donation allows us to continue to work towards transforming lives. For information on how you can support our research, phone **1300 888 019** or make a secure donation at neura.edu.au/donate/schizophrenia.



NeuRA
Discover. Conquer. Cure.

NeuRA (Neuroscience Research Australia) is one of the largest independent medical and clinical research institutes in Australia and an international leader in neurological research.

Diseases of the brain and nervous system pose the greatest health, economic and social burden of any disease group because they are chronic, debilitating and have no known cures.

Medical research is the cornerstone of efforts to advance the health and wellbeing of families and the community. Our dedicated scientists are focussed on transforming their research into significant and practical benefits for all patients.

While we hope you find this information useful, it is always important to discuss any questions about schizophrenia or its treatment with your doctor or other health care provider.