

**Combating Stigma Against People with Mental Illness**  
**Aliya Kassam & Graham Thornicroft**

**Three Core Problems:**

What is stigma? It can best be understood as an all-encompassing term that takes into account three closely associated elements, which are ignorance, prejudice and discrimination. These elements are the result of problems or knowledge, attitude and behaviour towards people with mental illness. Specifically, problems of knowledge lead to ignorance, problems of negative attitudes lead to prejudice and problems of behaviour lead to discrimination against people with mental illness. It is therefore important to develop long lasting educational programmes that help combat the ignorance of mental illness, alongside measures to improve prejudice and discrimination.

**The Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London, England:**

It is our aim to help combat stigma and discrimination against people with mental illness. Within the Health Services Research Department at the Institute of Psychiatry (IoP), the Community Psychiatry Section is dedicated to on going projects that assess stigma and discrimination against service users as well as the development and implementation of effective, public health programmes that help tackle stigma in discrimination against people with mental illness in target groups such as school children, police and health care professionals.

- **Current Projects:**

***Anti-Stigma Training & Evaluation Collaboration (ASTEC)***

An exciting project that is underway currently, targets medical students and trainee psychiatrists in South East London. This initiative is called the Anti-Stigma Training and Evaluation Collaboration, more commonly known as ASTEC. This is a collaboration between the IoP and Rethink, a mental health charity ([www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)). Medical students comprise a large group of tomorrow's clinicians who can share similar stigmatising attitudes of society towards people with mental illness. Trainee psychiatrists are tomorrow's psychiatrists that are also shown to have similar attitudes towards people with mental illness as the general public. It is therefore important to target this group with an effective and efficient strategy and aim to change their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

A key active ingredient to the training developed for this group in the ASTEC project is that which includes testimonies of users/consumers and carers. It is the contact with these individuals who have had first-hand experience of having a mental illness or caring for someone close to them that has the most sustainable impact in anti-stigma training programmes for mental health. ASTEC will be conducting a randomised controlled trial (RCT) with third-year medical students and an exploratory study with first-year trainee psychiatrists. The RCT will involve assessing knowledge, attitudes and behaviour towards people who have a mental illness with evaluative tools that are being developed by the IoP.

To assess knowledge a quiz-style checklist has been developed with true or false statements derived from the facts and figures component of the training intervention. Other tools assess attitudes, a reliable and valid scale called Mental Illness: Clinician's Attitudes (MICA©) scale is being developed. To assess behaviour, a role-play scenario is being developed based on real user/consumer and carer stories about situations in which they have felt stigmatised by a clinician, namely a general practitioner or psychiatrist. These evaluative tools along with the training provided by Rethink will comprise an effective and efficient anti-stigma toolkit that can be implemented both nationally and internationally.

### ***International Study of Discrimination and Stigma Outcomes (INDIGO)***

The Indigo study is an international study that is investigating stigma and discrimination against people with mental illness. The aim of Indigo is: to conduct qualitative and quantitative interviews with 25 people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia at each participating site, to elicit information about how the condition affects their everyday lives. The study brings together colleagues in 31 different countries, which include: Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey and the United States.

- **Stigma and Discrimination in Mental Health Research Group**

This research group is supported by the UK Mental Health Research Network (MHRN) and comprises a British alliance of those actively interested in research on stigma and discrimination in mental health. This group endeavours to address the following research questions:

- The development of high quality measures of stigma and discrimination suitable for cross sectional and longitudinal use both nationally and internationally
- The measurement of both stigma and discrimination with different groups of people with mental illness, including people with different diagnoses, those with substance misuse, and the impact of co-morbidity upon these characteristics
- Piloting candidate interventions to reduce stigma and discrimination
- Taking successful interventions on to the exploratory and definitive trial stages

The research methods to be used will include:

- Psychometric skills in the creation/adaptation of new measurement scales
- Survey measures, especially to compare different groups of people with mental illness and to conduct prospective studies to track trends in stigma and discrimination over time naturalistically and in relation to population level anti-stigma interventions
- Quasi-experimental studies, for example of health care professionals and employers, who do and do not receive clustered anti-stigma interventions

- Randomised controlled trials with either individual level or clustered random allocation to assess anti-stigma interventions

- **Previous Projects:**

***Tackling Stigma in Young People and Police Officers in West Kent, England***

This project, successfully delivered mental health awareness workshops to two community audiences: police (n=109 officers) and year 10 students (n=472 pupils). Workshops were facilitated by volunteers who have experienced mental health problems and by volunteers working in the mental health field.

**Key Results from Year 10 Students:**

- Personal contact between service users and students were vital in affecting attitude scores.
- There are differences in how young men and women learn about and conceptualise mental health and mental illness.
- Thorough evaluation of school mental health awareness programmes is needed to ensure that such health promotion resources are effective.

**Key Results from Police Officers:**

- Targeting a group in the work place provides the opportunity to challenge negative stereotypes while addressing specific work-based needs.
- Short educational interventions can produce changes in participants' reported attitudes towards people with mental health problems.
- Workshops left police officers feeling more informed and more confident to support people in mental distress.

For more information on the anti-stigma work being carried out in the Health Services Research Department of the IoP<sup>1</sup>, please e-mail: Aliya Kassam at [aliya.kassam@iop.kcl.ac.uk](mailto:aliya.kassam@iop.kcl.ac.uk)

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