The Stigma Associated with Mental Illness

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The Nature and Forms of Stigma Connected to Mental Illness

- Common stereotypes of individuals with mental illness
  - Dangerousness
  - Unpredictability
  - Controllability
- Three types of stigma
  1. Public Stigma: large social groups endorse stereotypes about, and act against a stigmatized group (Ben-Zeev, Young, & Corrigan, 2010)
  2. Self-Stigma: occurs when the person internalizes the prejudice and discriminates against themselves (Corrigan & Bink, 2016)
  3. Label Avoidance: to avoid discrimination, individuals may choose not to pursue mental health services (Ben-Zeev et al., 2010)

Causes of Stigma

- No single cause to the stigmatization of individuals with mental illness
- The Media’s Influence
  - Negative information about individuals with mental illness released by media outlets
  - United States newspaper articles fail to mention other factors that may contribute to the crime other than mental illness
  - Television plots where characters with a mental illness harms or kills another character
- Asian Culture
  - Conforming to norms and having emotional self-control are highly valued
  - Exhilarating any form of emotion is devalued
- Middle Eastern Culture
  - Values: family honor, patriarchy, and concealment of emotions
  - Conformity of emotions prevents a person with mental illness from seeking treatment and services
- Mental illness derived from evil spirits or weakness in faith

What is a mental illness?

“A mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual’s cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 20)

Types of Mental Illness

There are many types of mental illnesses that exist and are further described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5):

- Anxiety Disorders (i.e panic disorder, phobias)
- Mood Disorders (i.e depression, bipolar disorder)
- Psychotic Disorders (i.e schizophrenia)
- Eating Disorders (i.e anorexia, binge eating)
- Addictions
- Personality Disorders

The Effects of Stigma on People with Mental Illness

- False assumptions associated with mental illnesses prevent individuals from optimizing on life opportunities and achieving their personal goals
- At risk for social isolation, inadequate health care, poor employment opportunities, and inadequate housing (Huggett et al., 2018)
- Employees and landlords may not hire or lease to an individual with a mental illness to “protect” their customers and property
- Do not seek mental health services due to fear of discrimination and becoming socially ostracized by family, peers, and society.
- Physicians may not take physical symptoms seriously, exclude the patient from decisions, talk to them in a demeaning manner, and threaten coercive treatments
- Prevents individuals with mental illness from seeking out care and receiving high quality patient care
- At risk for reduction in self-esteem and sense of worth
- Victims of the “Why Try” phenomenon: people believe they are unworthy or incapable of achieving personal goals because they apply the stereotypes of mental illness to themselves (Corrigan et al., 2015)
- Treatment options and services are not as broad compared to physical health conditions.
- Less funding is dedicated to research and less money is allocated for adequate treatments and services are not as broad compared to physical health conditions.
- Victims of the “Why Try” phenomenon: people believe they are unworthy or incapable of achieving personal goals because they apply the stereotypes of mental illness to themselves (Corrigan et al., 2015)
- Police the healthcare system for stigmatizing attitudes, such as use of language, discriminating behaviors, and advocating for clients who do not receive the full scope of treatment (Pinto-Politz & Logsdon, 2009)
- Role of the nurse in reducing stigma
  - A person who has a mental illness shares his or her experience with others
  - Increased personal contact results in fewer stigmatizing attitudes
  - Allows others to perceive them as an individual who is like them and relatable

How can we reduce the stigma?

- Education
  - Convey information and debunk myths about mental illness (i.e providing statistics about the number of crimes committed by individuals with a mental illness)
- Direct Contact
  - A person who has a mental illness shares his or her experience with others
  - Increased personal contact results in fewer stigmatizing attitudes
  - Allows others to perceive them as an individual who is like them and relatable
- Role of the nurse in reducing stigma
  - As one of the most trusted professions, nurses can shape the attitudes of others on mental illness through their education and support.
  - Join and/or support anti-stigmatizing organizations.
  - Share their knowledge with patients and colleagues
  - If they are comfortable, nurses living with mental disorders can disclose their personal experience
  - Voting for representatives that support mental health and protesting unequal treatment are methods of advocacy for this population
  - Police the healthcare system for stigmatizing attitudes, such as use of language, discriminating behaviors, and advocating for clients who do not receive the full scope of treatment (Pinto-Politz & Logsdon, 2009)

Statistics

- In 2019, approximately 51.5 million adults aged 18 or older in the U.S with any mental illness (20.8%)
- 23 million of the 51.5 million adults received mental health services in the past year.
- In 2019, it is estimated that 13.1 million adults aged 18 or older in the United States has a serious mental illness
- Of the 13.1 million adults with a serious mental illness, 8.6 million received mental health treatment in the past year.
- Only roughly 3-5% of people with severe mental illness engage in ‘serious’ violence

References


