

Review Article

The Health System's and the State's Approach to Mental Illness and Stigma

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Abstract

Background: The stigma of mental illness has been in the collective consciousness of humanity for eons. Speaking specifically for Greece, it is generally accepted that the stigma is still at high levels and at least higher than that of Western countries.

Objective: This study aims to draw the attention of health professionals and the community to the stigma of mental illness and its approach from society and health professionals.

Methodology: Extensive literature search in the electronic database "Pubmed", "Google Scholar" and "Scopus" and in scientific journals via search engines using the keywords : mental illness, stigma, depression, health professionals. There was a time restriction,(the last ten years.) A key criterion for the selection of the articles was the English language.

Results: The stigma of mental illness is attributed to situations of exclusion and negative social reaction which form part of the overall social dynamics, serving the needs and situations that are born in the context of social interaction. The mentally ill tend to receive lower level health facilities worldwide. This is due to the fact that the health professionals, who do not have the appropriate expertise, cannot manage the mentally ill as needed and the communication between them becomes dysfunctional, while they themselves are unable to describe accurately the symptoms they are experiencing. The result is the mentally ill do not receive the care they are entitled to, even if they suffer from several serious health problems. The diagnostic label is an umbrella under which cases of patients are grouped who may nevertheless have very strong differences between them, both as to the condition and as to the diagnosis. Many programs and various measures aimed at combating the stigma and discrimination that accompany the most serious mental disorders have been enacted in Greece.

Conclusions: A significant step in combating the stigma is to raise public awareness about mental health issues. Various initiatives and campaigns can contribute to this, at a local or national level.

Key Words: Mental illness, stigma, depression, health professionals