

THE STIGMAS OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND THE IMPACTS OF INTERNALIZATION: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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Abstract: **INTRODUCTION** Stigmas related to mental illnesses are perpetuated through time, presenting many negative consequences for individuals with mental disorders. Among the negative repercussions, the internalization process, through which the individual incorporates the negative aspects attributed to him/her into his/her behavior, presents serious consequences, compromising the treatment and the way in which the person with the mental disorder views the illness process. **OBJECTIVE** To review the literature regarding stigma surrounding mental illnesses, evaluating the negative consequences of the stigmatization process - and consequent internalization of stigma - in the life of individuals with mental disorders and rethinking public health strategies aimed at solving this problem. **METHODS** Six articles on the topic were chosen so that an analysis could be made of the common aspects related to the stigmas attributed to mental disorders and the main consequences arising from internalized stigmas, as well as an objective analysis of the theoretical and political positions on the topic "stigma of the disease mental" and the main consequences arising from this social ostracism. **RESULT** Although there is still a lack of projects that seek the social inclusion of mentally ill people, those that already exist have their effects conditioned by the cultural practices of the places where they are carried out. Thus highlighting the need to expand understanding of the topic and the areas where the subject is addressed. There is no doubt that the internalization of stigma is one of the main obstacles to treatment and one of the main factors aggravating the individual's mental condition. **CONCLUSION** Understanding the origins of stigmatization related to mental illnesses, seeking to reverse this process, constitutes the main challenge to minimize the impacts of internalization and to provide a

more inclusive and prejudice-free approach to those with mental disorders, minimizing the marginalization of these patients and enabling more effective and humanized treatment.

Keywords: stigma, social stigma, stigmatization, internalized stigma, internalization, psychiatry, mental health, mental disorders, health policy.

INTRODUCTION

People with mental disorders were treated, for a long time, as dangerous individuals and, therefore, marginalized, excluded from society and from their daily relationships with their families, often becoming beggars or residents of "hospices" (as historically they were called psychiatric hospitals). As a result of these particularities, the concept of "stigma" arises, being conditioned to the deviation from pre-established characteristics by a majority who consider themselves "normal", due to not having a psychiatric illness³. In addition to representing a setback, this stigmatized view has numerous repercussions, from a practical point of view, in the lives of those with mental disorders: in addition to the internalization of stigma, which interferes with the way the individual understands their illness process, such a distorted view culminates in the difficulty of adequate diagnosis and treatment, due to the failures of a system residually unlinked to such diseases and professionals unprepared to care for patients with such needs. Despite the fact that psychiatric reform in Brazil began in 1980 - which the current reality began to be challenged - promoting important changes in care, implementing a community model, no longer centered on the psychiatric hospital, there are still multiple challenges to be overcome, including society's view of mental illness.

Understanding the effects of internalizing stigma allows treatment to be targeted to the needs of the individual with the

disorder. Recent studies have demonstrated a link between internalized stigma and decreased self-esteem, considering that such internalization comprises a process in which the individual becomes aware of the stigma attributed to them, starting to incorporate negative stereotypes related to their illness, causing serious repercussions in the context of this individual's interaction with society and making treatment difficult, in all its aspects.

METHODS

To search for articles, the Scielo platform database was consulted. The descriptors "stigma", "mental illnesses" and "internalization" were researched, as well as through a search in journals in both the health and interdisciplinary areas. There was no restriction on the publication period, consisting of a search that covered the entire period available in the databases.

The following inclusion criteria were defined: the research must be carried out in Brazil and with Brazilian patients; The scope of mental disorders as a whole and not just specific psychiatric pathologies in each article.

RESULTS

The studies unequivocally highlight the relationship between stigmas related to mental illness, the consequent process of internalization of these stigmas and the intensification of the patient's symptoms, incorporating negative behaviors - which are outlined by prejudice and misinformation - into the various "spheres" of their life, interfering in the way the individual perceives themselves - and their self-esteem¹ -, in the way they guide their personal relationships and in the way they act in the professional field.

DISCUSSION

Stigmas related to mental illnesses have a complex origin in historical, social and cultural factors, and are rooted in prejudices that have spread over time. The internalization of stigma - which, as previously discussed, constitutes the process by which individuals with a mental disorder assimilate and incorporate the negative aspects attributed to their psychopathology into their behavior and conduct, enhancing the illness process and making adequate treatment difficult - has several implications for the individual's quality of life, in all spheres: individual, social, professional, emotional - thus harming not only the evolution of the psychopathological condition, but also the entire context of that individual's social relationship, affecting the way he sees himself and the way he relates to society.

CONCLUSION

When analyzing the articles, although some divergences were found in relation to the methods, types of studies and approaches to the themes, it was possible to identify conclusions common to all research: the serious negative impact arising from the process of internalization of stigma in the different spheres of the individual's life - social, personal, professional - and the consequent losses related to the effectiveness of the treatment, increasing the harm caused by the illness process; and the importance of understanding the implications of stigma arising from mental illnesses in individuals' lives, seeking ways to reverse the stigmatization process, ensuring a better quality of life for these individuals, as well as more effective treatment.

Studies show that the stigmas attributed to these individuals result from a complex process that comprises a set of factors, originating in a historical and social context of

Reference	Sample	Result
Internalized stigma and self-esteem: a systematic literature review (2013)	Article analytics (n=19)	Internalized stigma and self-esteem have a strong correlation. Internalized stigma brings negative impacts and consequences in the short and long term.
Paradigms of attention and stigma of mental illness in Brazilian psychiatric reform (2017)	Analysis of studies on the National Public Mental Health Policy	The results of the studies demonstrate that despite the recognition of the importance of substitute services in the process of social inclusion of mentally ill people, achieving this objective faces several economic, social, cultural and political barriers.
The stigma of mental illness and therapeutic residences in the city of Volta Redonda - RJ (2013)	Professionals (n=6)	Stigma reduces the chances of individuals with mental disorders forming bonds with society and sharing social environments. In this sense, nurses played a fundamental role in intervening in the process of stigmatization of patients, reversing the harm caused, through guidance and initiatives, by adopting a proactive stance and instituting and encouraging changes in the form of care.
Stigmas associated with mental disorders: a brief reflection on their consequences (2017)	Analysis of scientific productions (n=17)	Stigmas associated with mental disorders lead to negative events associated with the diagnosis and stigmatizing attitudes proffered by society through discriminatory acts.
Social stigma and internalized stigma: the voice of people with mental disorders and the necessary confrontations (2019)	Psychiatric patients (n=5)	Internalized stigma has negative effects on the individual, and is also influenced by the family.
Prejudice towards individuals with mental disorders as an aggravation of suffering (2018)	Psychiatric patients (n=21)	All patients interviewed suffered some type of prejudice, worsening the psychopathological condition due to the increased emotional burden resulting from the traumas experienced.

Table 1– Main results found in the analysis of articles concerning the topic “stigma related to mental disorders” and the repercussions of internalization on the individual’s illness process and response to treatment.

great prejudice in relation to mental illnesses and neglect and marginalization of individuals with mental disorders. Even though there has been a historical, cultural and social evolution, which culminated in the changes instituted by the psychiatric reform, it is known that such advances are not sufficient, in themselves, to resolve the complex and delicate issue that involves the stigmatization process.

Raising awareness and educating society are fundamental precepts to form citizens more prepared to deal with mental disorders; knowledge and education are the main

resources for dispelling prejudice and the main tools for social inclusion.

Realizing the practical applicability of psychosocial support centers, recommended by the psychiatric reform, seeking treatment focused on inclusion, is an extremely important factor to ensure better adherence to treatment and to abolish prejudices arising from the exclusion and marginalization of individuals with mental disorder.

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