

[Stigma]

How media professionals can reduce
the impact of prejudice and discrimination
on people affected by mental illness

[Stigma]

How media professionals can reduce
the impact of prejudice and discrimination
on people affected by mental illness



“ The community is not given enough information to improve knowledge and influence attitudes . . . This can limit their ability or willingness to help. Mental illness has long carried a stigma and was often mentioned only in whispers. Old-fashioned taboos, barriers and stereotypes need to be dropped.

Daily Liberal newspaper ”

Calling stigma what it is

Assumptions, values, judgments, and beliefs all affect the way we think and behave. Stigma against people affected by mental illness involves a variety of myths, prejudices, and negative stereotypes about mental illness. Stigma includes inaccurate and hurtful representations of people as violent, comical or incompetent – objects of fear or ridicule. Stigma is broken down when we realise the true facts about mental illness, acknowledge the harm stigma does, and understand that mental illness can happen to anyone, like any other health problem.

Stigma means believing that people affected by mental illness:

- don't deserve to be treated with the same respect as others
- can't ever recover from a mental illness or live as a regular members of society
- cause their own problems and can simply change this if they had the will
- don't have the same rights as to access employment, housing and other supports.

The impact of stigma

It is estimated that more than 2 million Australians don't seek help for mental health problems every year. Stigma can discourage people from telling others about their symptoms and getting help when they need it, resulting in delayed treatment, reduced quality of life – social, financial, housing and employment – and even a higher risk of suicide.

The effects of stigma are so harmful they can even alter how people affected by mental illness value themselves. If those with a mental illness accept stigma it can lead to social withdrawal, poor self-worth, excessive reliance on others and even the abuse of alcohol or drugs.

Many people describe stigma as more debilitating than the illness itself at times.

I get hurt when I see remarks that label people who are mentally ill with names such as 'fruitcake', 'nutter' or 'psycho'. Don't they realize that this is my son they are talking about? There are times when carers feel forced to lie to avoid facing the possibility of demeaning actions or remarks. As if it's not bad enough for someone to have a mental illness, to be punished of it, being the victim of stigmatising comments is like kicking a man when he's down.

Carer

Contributing to change

The media play a crucial role in influencing public attitudes when it comes to mental illness. Australian media can contribute to a dramatic change in the lives of those affected by mental illness by upholding standards of accuracy, balance, respect and compassion. You can also save lives.

Know the facts

Information about treatment and diagnosis of mental illness is changing constantly, try and find current research on the illness you are portraying. The SANE Media Centre can help by providing expert comment, interviews and advice.

Include people with lived experience

The experience of someone affected by mental illness can vary from person-to-person. Talk to a range of people affected by the illness to get a holistic picture.

Be aware of your own attitudes and behaviour

We've all grown up with prejudices and stereotypes that are passed on in society and reinforced by the people that we know. These can influence your portrayals of mental illness even without you knowing. Take the time to review what you produce and think, how will this look to someone affected by mental illness?

Choose your words and images carefully

Use accurate words when talking about people with a mental illness, for example 'someone with schizophrenia' rather than 'a schizophrenic'. The way you speak can affect the way others speak and act. Ask yourself if the image or footage you have used accurately portrays the situation.

SANE Media Centre

The SANE Media Centre provides media professionals with advice, information, statistics, and comment on mental health or suicide-related issues.

Contact the SANE Media Centre for:

- Facts, information, and statistics about mental illness and suicide prevention
- Expert comment about mental illness and suicide prevention
- Referral to people with lived experience of mental illness or their carers, for interview
- Information and advice for reporting on mental illness and suicide-related issues.

www.sane.org/sane-media

Contacts

Robyn Thompson
robyn.thompson@sane.org

Jenni Henderson
jenni.henderson@sane.org

Office 03 9682 5933
Mobile 0414 427 291

The SANE Media Centre is supported by the Australian Government's National Mental Health Strategy and National Suicide Prevention Strategy through the Mindframe National Media Initiative.

SANE Australia

A national charity helping all Australians affected by mental illness lead a better life – through support, training, and education.

www.sane.org

www.saneforums.org

Helpline 1800 18 SANE (7263)



Everyone can contribute to a less-stigmatising society – by reporting examples of thorough, informative, and compassionate stories to StigmaWatch.

You can add to the body of responsible reporting as examples for the next generation of journalists, while encouraging more coverage of issues surrounding mental illness and suicide.

Report an item to StigmaWatch

www.sane.org/stigmawatch/report-a-media-item

Image: Jorge Corona

sane
AUSTRALIA



“ The community is not given enough information to improve knowledge and influence attitudes . . . This can limit their ability or willingness to help. Mental illness has long carried a stigma and was often mentioned only in whispers. Old-fashioned taboos, barriers and stereotypes need to be dropped.

Daily Liberal newspaper ”

Calling stigma what it is

Assumptions, values, judgments, and beliefs all affect the way we think and behave. Stigma against people affected by mental illness involves a variety of myths, prejudices, and negative stereotypes about mental illness. Stigma includes inaccurate and hurtful representations of people as violent, comical or incompetent – objects of fear or ridicule. Stigma is broken down when we realise the true facts about mental illness, acknowledge the harm stigma does, and understand that mental illness can happen to anyone, like any other health problem.

Stigma means believing that people affected by mental illness:

- don't deserve to be treated with the same respect as others
- can't ever recover from a mental illness or live as a regular members of society
- cause their own problems and can simply change this if they had the will
- don't have the same rights as to access employment, housing and other supports.

The impact of stigma

It is estimated that more than 2 million Australians don't seek help for mental health problems every year. Stigma can discourage people from telling others about their symptoms and getting help when they need it, resulting in delayed treatment, reduced quality of life – social, financial, housing and employment – and even a higher risk of suicide.

The effects of stigma are so harmful they can even alter how people affected by mental illness value themselves. If those with a mental illness accept stigma it can lead to social withdrawal, poor self-worth, excessive reliance on others and even the abuse of alcohol or drugs.

Many people describe stigma as more debilitating than the illness itself at times.

I get hurt when I see remarks that label people who are mentally ill with names such as 'fruitcake', 'nutter' or 'psycho'. Don't they realize that this is my son they are talking about? There are times when carers feel forced to lie to avoid facing the possibility of demeaning actions or remarks. As if it's not bad enough for someone to have a mental illness, to be punished of it, being the victim of stigmatising comments is like kicking a man when he's down.

Carer

Contributing to change

The media play a crucial role in influencing public attitudes when it comes to mental illness. Australian media can contribute to a dramatic change in the lives of those affected by mental illness by upholding standards of accuracy, balance, respect and compassion. You can also save lives.

Know the facts

Information about treatment and diagnosis of mental illness is changing constantly, try and find current research on the illness you are portraying. The SANE Media Centre can help by providing expert comment, interviews and advice.

Include people with lived experience

The experience of someone affected by mental illness can vary from person-to-person. Talk to a range of people affected by the illness to get a holistic picture.

Be aware of your own attitudes and behaviour

We've all grown up with prejudices and stereotypes that are passed on in society and reinforced by the people that we know. These can influence your portrayals of mental illness even without you knowing. Take the time to review what you produce and think, how will this look to someone affected by mental illness?

Choose your words and images carefully

Use accurate words when talking about people with a mental illness, for example 'someone with schizophrenia' rather than 'a schizophrenic'. The way you speak can affect the way others speak and act. Ask yourself if the image or footage you have used accurately portrays the situation.

SANE Media Centre

The SANE Media Centre provides media professionals with advice, information, statistics, and comment on mental health or suicide-related issues.

Contact the SANE Media Centre for:

- Facts, information, and statistics about mental illness and suicide prevention
- Expert comment about mental illness and suicide prevention
- Referral to people with lived experience of mental illness or their carers, for interview
- Information and advice for reporting on mental illness and suicide-related issues.

www.sane.org/sane-media

Contacts

Robyn Thompson
robyn.thompson@sane.org

Jenni Henderson
jenni.henderson@sane.org

Office 03 9682 5933
Mobile 0414 427 291

The SANE Media Centre is supported by the Australian Government's National Mental Health Strategy and National Suicide Prevention Strategy through the Mindframe National Media Initiative.

SANE Australia

A national charity helping all Australians affected by mental illness lead a better life – through support, training, and education.

www.sane.org

www.saneforums.org

Helpline 1800 18 SANE (7263)



Contribute to StigmaWatch

Everyone can contribute to a less-stigmatising society – by reporting examples of thorough, informative, and compassionate stories to StigmaWatch.

You can add to the body of responsible reporting as examples for the next generation of journalists, while encouraging more coverage of issues surrounding mental illness and suicide.

Report an item to StigmaWatch

www.sane.org/stigmawatch/report-a-media-item

Image: Jorge Corona

sane
AUSTRALIA