



(Image: Bing, 2019)

Mental Health and Disablism

**Challenging Negative Attitudes, Discrimination and Prejudice
Towards People with Mental Health Problems**

Aims of this Leaflet

Mental Health problems are very common, with around 1 in 4 people in the UK experiencing mental distress at any point in time (MIND, 2019).

Around 1 to 3 people in every 100 will experience symptoms which are severe enough to require treatment in hospital and sometimes long-term care or support (MIND, 2019).

People with mental health problems, however severe, may experience discrimination in many areas of their lives including accessing services, employment, housing, mobility and through negative attitudes, harassment and victimisation (MIND, 2019; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2017).

This leaflet explains what these terms mean and how those with mental health problems can challenge unfair or negative treatment, or decisions affecting them.

What is Disablism?

Disabilism is a fairly recent civil and social rights concept which aims to describe and highlight the disproportionately unfair treatment within society directly or indirectly affecting people with disabilities and other conditions (SCOPE, 2019). Disablism is also associated with Ableism which means discrimination which favours non-disabled people, therefore indirectly disadvantaging disabled people (SCOPE, 2019). Disabilism and Ableism frequently occur together (SCOPE, 2019). There is no accepted spelling of disablism as yet, and it is sometimes spelled in different ways, for example, disabalism, disabilism or disableism.

What are Civil and Social Rights?

Civil rights and social rights are the rights that you are entitled to as a citizen of the UK, or as someone visiting or resident in the UK. These rights are protected by law and include, for example, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010 which means you cannot be discriminated against on the grounds of your mental health or other disability (MIND, 2019; Equality

and Human Rights Commission, 2017). In Wales, the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 provides additional protection.

Some people with mental health disability have routinely had their civil rights denied or restricted. Disablism aims to highlight and challenge such denial or restriction on rights (Council for Europe, 2019: Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2017)

What is a Disability?

Disability has a specific meaning in the UK and is defined within the Equality Act 2010. Whether you have a disability depends on how your mental health problems effects your ability to carry out normal day to day activities, which must be ‘substantial’, meaning severe, and ‘long term’ which means 12 months or more (Equality Act, 2010, s.4). A mental health issue is not automatically a disability as a distinction is made between impairment and disability (equalities. gov.uk, 2010). Many people have minor impairments, such as long or short sightedness which can be corrected with glasses, which do not count as disabilities as these do not affect their ability to undertake usual daily activities even though they are long term (equalities.gov.uk, 2010).

Isn’t Disability Discrimination already illegal?

Discrimination against people with a disability has been illegal since 1996 (Disability Discrimination Act, 1995; Equality Act, 2010). However, the law only applies in certain circumstances, such as employment, housing and the provision of services (gov.uk, 2019; Equality Act, 2010). This type of anti-discrimination often focuses on structural difficulties faced by people with a disability, such as the requirement to provide ramps, or documents in large print (Reeve, 2015). Rather than focusing on these structural issues, the disablism movement is intended to change society’s perceptions of people with disability. People with mental health problems often face disablism

because of a lack of understanding of mental illness or distress and because of prejudiced or negative attitudes towards them (Reeve, 2015).

How Can Disabilism Change Attitudes?

Prejudice, discrimination and oppression of people with mental health problems and other disabilities often arise from misunderstanding, misconception, stereotyping and institutional discrimination (Council of Europe, 2019; Reeve, 2010). Disablism describes these attitudes which affect all levels in society and in social relationships (Yee, 2019). Whilst most people would claim that they are not disablist, many people do not consider people with disability as equals and fail to recognise their needs (Council of Europe, 2019). For example, parking spaces designated for drivers with a disability are routinely used by non-disabled people (SCOPE, 2019). Also planning and design of public facilities, education, spaces and transport often make special provision for the needs of people with disabilities rather than incorporating these into mainstream services (Council of Europe, 2019). Furthermore, people with a disability are often blamed for their condition and are expected to act and behave in a certain way (Oliver, 1983). Decisions are often made for people with a disability, such as in education, sex and reproduction, family and housing based on what is thought best for society, rather than for the individual (Council for Europe, 2019; Giddens, 2010; Oliver, 1983).

What are the Principles of Disablism?

Disabilism is about changing attitudes so that everyone in society recognises and challenges the discrimination faced by people with disability (Reeve, 2010; Oliver, 1990). It is based on the principle that those with disabilities are equals but are not able to participate fully in society because of the way they are perceived, and how services are planned and delivered which results in structural, institutional and

attitudinal barriers to participation (Miller et al, 2004). It also recognises that disability takes various forms and requires a range of responses (Miller et al, 2004).

What Kinds Mental Health Discrimination can Disablism Challenge?

There are several types of discrimination recognised including direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, and discrimination arising from disability (MIND, 2019; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2019). These are not the only kinds of discrimination.

Direct discrimination means being treated unfairly because of your mental health problem, for example someone may be refused service in a café or not allowed on a bus because of assumptions about their behaviour or appearance. This could also be discrimination by perception as assumptions are made about someone based on opinion and not facts (MIND, 2019; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2019).

Indirect discrimination occurs when services and arrangements favour non-disabled people, even though they may appear fair. This is a form of Ableism (MIND, 2019; Yee, 2019).

How Can Disablism be Challenged?

As a social movement, disablism aims for social change (Giddens and Sutton, 2014). For this to happen people and organisations need to understand what disablism means **for you**. Therefore, you can use the words ‘disablism’ ‘disablist’ and ‘ableist’ to describe your experiences when you have encountered negative attitudes towards you (Yee, 2019).

Complain when you have encountered discrimination of any sort.

Find out more information and/or join or support a campaign (SCOPE, 2019).

Additional Resources:

MIND (National Association for Mental Health)

www.mind.org.uk

SCOPE (Equality for Disabled People) www.scope.org.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission

www.equalityhumanrights.com

Council of Europe www.coe.int/en/web/compass/disability-and-disabilism

UK Government: Guide to the Equality Act 2010 easy read pdf. www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/equality-act-2010/85012/easy-read.pdf

Justification

The title of this leaflet is:

Mental Health and Disablism: Challenging Negative Attitudes, Discrimination and Prejudice Towards People with Mental Health Problems.

The aim of the leaflet is to provide information and advice on Disablism. According to Miller et al (2004, p9.) disablism can be defined as ‘Discriminatory oppressive or abusive behaviour arising from the belief that disabled people are inferior to others.’ Miller et al (2004) also make the point that the term is not in widespread use and would ‘not be found in any dictionary’ (p9). An internet search of the single word ‘disablism’ returned just 40,400 results, whereas the term ‘disability’ returned 18,600,000. The Council of Europe (2019), a leading proponent of disability rights in Europe has 7 web-pages dedicated to Disability and Disablism, but disablism accounts for just one paragraph of around 400 words. However, the Council for Europe does make the case that disablism is a human rights issue (Council for Europe, 2019).

Disablism can be described as a social movement intended to change society; in this case in attitudes towards those with disability (Giddens and Sutton, 2014). Examples of social movements include women’s,

environmental, lesbian and gay and race equality movements, many of which have had marked successes through collective action (Giddens and Sutton, 2014). For social movements to be successful they must garner broad societal support, and therefore The Disablement movement was popularised by SCOPE, the disability equality charity for England and Wales (Scope, 2019.). Scope also advanced the Social Model of Disability (Giddens and Sutton, 2014) which was established from principles of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), an early UK disability rights organisation which strongly advocated for a distinction between impairment from disability (Giddens and Sutton, 2014). This distinction is referred to in the leaflet as it is now an accepted means of identifying societal barriers as a cause of disability rather than through impairment or other differences (Scope, 2019; Giddens, 2010). Social movements of disability also emphasised identity politics and the importance of people with disability having their own voice (Haralambos and Holborn, 2013).

Finally, whilst the aims of the leaflet are raising awareness of disablism, wherever possible emphasis is placed on disablism towards those with mental health issues. As described, mental health issues are very common (MIND, 2019), however, as Reeve (2015) points out, the traditional social model of disability may bear little relevance for people experiencing mental ill health. Indeed, those suffering mental distress,

even if not classified as disabled under the Equality Act 2010, may experience different forms of social disability because of the lack of visibility of their impairment (Reeve, 2015).

The leaflet is produced in 12 point Times New Roman Font, with headings centred and in bold and is intended to meet the readability criteria of the Royal National Institute for the Blind (2019) 'See it Right' Guidelines.

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