

Name: Kirby Balogun

Student Number: (2514806)

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Lecturer Name: Bianca Dodgen

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Mental Health Stigma

This report looks at mental health stigma and how it affects people within health and social care. It focuses on how stigma can influence people's experiences, including their willingness to seek help and the support they receive. The report also reviews different sources of information and what they show about the issue.

What is Mental Health Stigma

Stigma refers to negative attitudes, stereotypes, and discrimination towards people who experience mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder. These attitudes can lead to people being judged, treated unfairly, or excluded because of their mental health. Even though awareness of mental health has improved in recent years, stigma still affects many people. For example, many individuals living with mental health problems say they experience stigma and discrimination in their daily lives (Mental Health Foundation, 2021).

Mental health stigma can affect individuals, families, healthcare professionals, and wider communities. People experiencing mental health difficulties may feel embarrassed or worried about how others might react if they speak openly about their struggles. Because of this, some people choose not to seek professional support. Research shows that stigma can stop people from asking for help or accessing mental health services when they need them (Yonemoto et al., 2022). This can lead to delays in getting support and can make mental health conditions worse over time.

Stigma can also affect how comfortable people feel when talking to healthcare professionals about their mental health. If someone feels they might be judged or misunderstood, they may not fully explain what they are going through or may avoid support services altogether. Research looking at public attitudes towards mental illness in England shows that stigma and discrimination are still present, even though awareness has improved (Ronaldson et al., 2024). This shows that stigma is still a real issue in society and within health and social care.

I chose mental health stigma as my research topic because mental health is an important part of overall wellbeing, yet it is still often misunderstood. This topic also links to my previous experience working in a care coordinating role, where I supported individuals with mental health conditions, learning disabilities, and additional needs. I noticed that some individuals felt uncomfortable speaking about their mental health or did not fully understand what support was being provided, which meant they needed more support with communication, daily tasks, and routines such as eating and taking medication. In some cases, this also meant taking a more patient and understanding approach and making sure their safety and wellbeing were monitored. This experience helped me see how stigma and lack of understanding can affect people's willingness to engage with care. Within health and social care, it is important to treat individuals with respect and provide clear, supportive communication.

Reviewing the sources

It is important to use sources that are reliable and up to date when researching mental health stigma as it ensures the information is accurate and can be trusted. The three sources used in this report are from the Mental Health Foundation (2021), Yonemoto et al. (2022), and Ronaldson et al. (2024). Each of these sources gives useful information about mental health stigma, but it is still important to look at how reliable they are.

The Mental Health Foundation (2021) is a well-known UK charity that focuses on mental health. This makes it a trustworthy source because it works with professionals and researchers. The information is clear and easy to understand, and it explains how stigma affects people's lives. It is also recent, so it is still relevant.

The study by Yonemoto et al. (2022) is a peer-reviewed systematic review, which makes it very reliable. This means it has been checked by experts and is based on a range of studies rather than just one. It shows that stigma can stop people from seeking help, which clearly links to this topic. One limitation is that it includes research from different countries, so not all of the findings may apply directly to the UK. However, it still gives a strong overall understanding.

The research by Ronaldson et al. (2024) is also peer-reviewed and focuses on England, which makes it especially relevant. It uses data collected over time to show how attitudes towards mental health have changed. This makes the findings more reliable and useful. It also shows that even though awareness has improved, stigma is still present.

I did find that Some studies do not fully focus on specific groups or local areas. For example, Yonemoto et al. (2022) includes research from different countries, it does not always show how stigma affects people specifically in the UK. Also, Ronaldson et al. (2024) focuses on England but there is still limited detail on how stigma affects different communities or cultural groups. This shows that more research could be done to better understand how stigma impacts different people in different situations.

What research shows

My research shows that mental health stigma still has a strong impact on individuals and health and social care services and that many people with mental health conditions feel judged or misunderstood, which can affect their confidence and overall wellbeing. Stigma and discrimination can also make people feel isolated or unsupported in their daily lives (Mental Health Foundation, 2021).

One of the main issues is that stigma can stop people from seeking help. Yonemoto et al. (2022) explain that some individuals avoid reaching out for support because they are worried about being judged. This can delay treatment and make mental health conditions worse over time. If people do not feel comfortable asking for help, they are less likely to access the support they need.

Research also shows that stigma is still present today. Ronaldson et al. (2024) found that although awareness of mental health has improved, negative attitudes and discrimination still exist. This means that many people continue to face challenges when trying to talk about their mental health or seeking support. Stigma can also affect how services are used. If people avoid seeking help, it can make it harder for services to provide early support.

Conclusion and Reflection

In conclusion, mental health stigma is still an important issue within health and social care. My research shows that stigma can affect how people feel, how they are treated, and whether they choose to seek help. It can also make it harder for services to provide early support. From my previous experience working in a care coordinating role, I had already seen how some individuals struggled to talk about their mental health or fully engage with support. Looking at the research has helped me better understand why this happens and how stigma plays a part in it. It has also made me more aware of how important clear communication, patience, and understanding are when supporting individuals with different needs.

Going forward, this will be important for both my studies and future career. It shows how important it is to create a supportive and non-judgemental environment where people feel comfortable asking for help. Reducing stigma can help improve people's wellbeing and make it easier for them to access the support they need.

Reference List

Mental Health Foundation (2021) <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/stigma-and-discrimination>

Ronaldson, A. et al. (2024) <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11698152/>

Yonemoto, N. et al. (2022) <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9684094/>