

Impact of Mental-Health Stigma on Help-Seeking Among Adults Living with Schizophrenia in the UK: A Systematic Review



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Background

- **Global & UK Context:** Schizophrenia is a severe, enduring mental health condition affecting approximately 1% of the global population (WHO, 2022). In the UK, it impacts around 220,000 individuals at any given time (NICE, 2020; Mental Health Foundation, 2021).
- **Public Health Burden:** Stigma attached to severe mental illness (SMI) remains a major public health challenge across the UK.
- **Prevalence of Stigma:** Over 84% of UK adults with a diagnosis of schizophrenia report experiencing discrimination and public stigma (Thornicroft et al., 2019).
- 61% report internalized (self) stigma, leading to severe delays in seeking primary or specialist psychiatric help (Rethink Mental Illness, 2021).
- **Treatment delay:** The average duration of untreated psychosis (DUP) in the UK often exceeds the recommended 2-week target set by NHS England due to stigma-driven avoidance (NHS England, 2022; Public Health England, 2021).



Methodology



Design Systematic Review (Secondary Research) guided by PRISMA principles (Page et al., 2021).



Search Strategy Comprehensive search across databases including PubMed, PsycINFO, CINAHL, Scopus, and Google Scholar.



Keywords Schizophrenia AND Mental-Health Stigma AND Help-Seeking OR Care Engagement AND UK / United Kingdom.



Inclusion Criteria UK-based studies published between 2018–2026.



Target Population Adults (≥18 years) diagnosed with schizophrenia or first-episode psychosis.



Peer-reviewed Primary research (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods).



Critical Appraisal Evaluated using CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) tools to ensure high quality.



Urgency & Need

- Delayed help-seeking in schizophrenia directly correlates with poorer clinical prognosis, higher rates of crisis hospitalizations, increased risk of self-harm, and long-term social impairment (Clement et al., 2015; DHSC, 2022).
- **Service Gaps:** While public anti-stigma campaigns (e.g., Time to Change) raised general mental health awareness, targeted structural and social stigma affecting individuals with schizophrenia and community settings (Henderson et al., 2020).
- **Originality:** Existing literature predominantly focuses on general depression or anxiety. This research specifically synthesizes contemporary UK evidence on how multidimensional stigma (public, internalized, and structural) acts as a distinct mechanism inhibiting early intervention and care engagement in adults with schizophrenia.



Key Findings



Public Health & Policy

Provides evidence to inform NHS England mental health policy and local public health anti-stigma strategies targeted specifically at complex SMI (DHSC, 2023).



Social Care & Practice

Informs trauma-informed training for social care practitioners and Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) to reduce perceived structural stigma in care settings.



Service Delivery

Identifies clear intervention points to reduce the Duration of Untreated Psychosis (DUP) through stigma-reduction frameworks in primary care.



Service Users

Empowers adults living with schizophrenia by championing co-produced interventions that promote dignity and facilitate timely care-seeking.



Research Question & Aim



Research Question

What is the impact of mental-health stigma on help-seeking among adults living with schizophrenia in the UK?



Research Aim

To explore stigma and its relationship with help-seeking among adults with schizophrenia in the UK.



Research Objectives



To examine the existing evidence regarding mental-health stigma experienced by adults living with schizophrenia.



To explore how stigma may influence help-seeking and engagement with mental health services.



To identify barriers and facilitators affecting access to appropriate mental-health support.



To consider implications for public health and social-care practice and identify potential areas for improvement.



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