Mental illness stigma, suicide stigma and suicide prevention

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Background

- Approx. 1 million suicides/year worldwide.
- Many more attempts (estimation: 10-40 attempts/completed suicide).
- Strongest risk factors for suicide: past suicidal behavior, mental illness, suicide loss.
Mental illness stigma

Public stigma

Stereotypes → Prejudice → Discrimination

Self-stigma

Corrigan & Watson, 2002
Mental illness stigma

Public stigma

Stereotypes → Prejudice → Discrimination

Self-stigma

Shame, Mental distress, Loneliness, Hopelessness,…

Corrigan & Watson, 2002
Mental illness stigma

Public stigma

Stereotypes ➔ Prejudice ➔ Discrimination

Self-stigma

Shame, Mental distress, Loneliness, Hopelessness,…

Suicidality

Mental illness

Weak, dangerous, self-inflicted,…

Corrigan & Watson, 2002
Does mental illness stigma contribute to suicidality?

Mental illness stigma → Distress, hopelessness, loneliness, low self-esteem, shame, etc. → Suicidality


Suicide stigma

- Conceptually similar to mental illness stigma (SPD, Sheehan et al. 2016)
- Consequences:
  - Self-stigma
  - Secrecy and low help-seeking
  - Loneliness, hopelessness
Does suicide stigma contribute to suicidality?

Mental illness stigma → Direct consequences: distress, hopelessness, loneliness, low self-esteem, shame, etc. → Distal consequence: Suicidality → Suicide stigma
Qualitative study

- Individual interviews with 13 suicide attempt survivors with mental illness
- Narration and pre-developed interview guide
- Qualitative content analysis
- Participants: aged 23-65, 54% female, 77% affective disorders, 70% reported more than one previous attempt

Qualitative study

Core themes

– External:
  (1) stereotype awareness
  (2) lack of understanding from others

– Internal:
  (3) avoidant behavior
  (4) internalization of stereotypes
  (5) emotional strain

Qualitative study

“It makes you feel lonely, like you are already far away from everyone else. No one would notice when you are gone, and no one would care”

(#2, ♀, 45y).

Summary:

- Both mental illness stigma and suicide stigma can contribute to suicidality among people with mental illness
- Suicide stigma increases distress before and after a suicide attempt

Summary: Implications for suicide prevention

- Interventions to reduce mental illness stigma and suicide stigma have great potential for suicide prevention
- More research needed
  - Suicide stigma ↔ suicidality
  - Suicide stigma ↔ disclosure (past/current experiences)
- Suicide loss survivors
- Goal: Intervention development
Summary: Intersectionality?

- People with mental illness
- Suicide attempt survivors
- Suicide loss survivors
Thank you!
References


