

## Stigmas Surrounding Mental Illness

Mental illness is a very common issue in the world. In fact, 57.8 million people suffer from it in the U.S. alone. With so many people suffering from mental illness, one would assume that it is an open and broadly spoken about topic. Unfortunately, they would be wrong. In reality, there are many stigmas regarding mental illness that can cause anyone suffering from them to feel a variety of negative symptoms.

For those who may not know, a stigma is when someone views you in a negative way because you have a distinguishing characteristic or personal trait that's thought to be, or actually is, a disadvantage. It can also be referred to as a negative stereotype. Experiencing stigma can cause reluctance to seek help or treatment, social isolation, lack of understanding from others, harassment or bullying, and belief that you will never succeed at certain challenges you face. These side-effects along with many more can make a person's life even more difficult on top of already suffering from a mental illness that more than likely impedes their daily life.

With stigma comes constant questioning of yourself and your actions, along with a lack of understanding from your coworkers. In a 2019 study, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) found that mental health stigmas are a major issue in the workplace. One factor that contributes to the issue is fear of repercussion and retaliation. "About half of workers were concerned about discussing mental health issues at their jobs" (American Psychiatric Association). This fear not only stops discussions from happening within the workplace but can also stop many from seeking treatment. "More than one in three were concerned about retaliation or being fired if they sought mental health care" (American Psychiatric Association). Not feeling comfortable to seek treatment or be open and honest with coworkers and employers can cause many people to struggle within the workplace and possibly put their job in jeopardy. One way stigma can be reduced is when people can lean on their coworkers for support. However, although most people say they would reach out to a suffering coworker, "one in four workers say they would not know where to guide their co-worker for mental health help" (American Psychiatric Association). With reduced stigmas, mental health could be a more open conversation and people would know how to support and guide their coworkers and loved ones when they need it.

Stigmas don't only come from onlookers; people suffering from mental illness can also experience what's called self-stigma. Self-stigma is when people with mental illness experience negative thoughts or feelings about their condition. Self-stigma can cause people to experience reduced hope, low self-esteem, trouble at work, and issues with social interactions.

With all the stigmas surrounding mental health it's not uncommon for people suffering from mental illness to feel negative thoughts towards themselves. Adding that on top of the fact that most people don't know how to support or guide people suffering, many can struggle to keep friends and hold down jobs.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is a national mental health organization that offers educational programs, advocates for individuals and families suffering from mental illness, and offers a toll-free help line. NAMI offers many tools and suggestions for people suffering from mental illness. NAMI recommends you talk openly with others, educate yourself and others, be cautious of language, encourage equality, and show compassion. If people suffering and those around them utilize these tips and start a conversation about mental health, stigmas and struggles can be reduced allowing people to lead a full and normal life.