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LEVEL OF STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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SUMMARY

Keywords: Stigma, Discrimination, Mental Health.

Abstract: World Health Organization (WHO) emphasize on bringing the mental health services to the community and to facilitate the inclusion of people with mental disabilities in the society; one of the major obstacles which makes this process difficult is the high stigma and discrimination against them.

Purpose and objectives: To evaluate stigma and discrimination of people with mental health problems among adolescents.

Materials and methods: The study included a total of 100 adolescents. The Attribution Questionnaire for children (AQ-8-C) test, developed by Corrigan (2007), was administered in order to evaluate stigma among adolescents, before and after training. Results: The AQ-8-C Items for segregation and avoidance show the highest average (6,77 and 6,99 of a maximum of 9), which indicates that adolescents in our society don't want to study together with persons with mental health problems, and tend to avoid those, considering them dangerous (average 5,15).

Conclusion: The results of our study indicate that the level of stigma and discrimination against people with mental health problems are very high. In this way it is very important to find methods to eradicate this phenomenon.

REZUMAT

NIVELUL STIGMATIZĂRII ȘI DISCRIMINĂRII FAȚĂ DE OAMENII CU BOLI MENTALE ÎN RÂNDUL ADOLESCENȚILOR.

Întroducere: Organizația Mondială a Sănătății (OMS) accentuează necesitatea de a aduce serviciile de Sănătate Mintală mai aproape de comunitate și de a facilita integrarea persoanelor cu dizabilități mintale în societate; un obstacol important în acest sens este nivelul înalt de stigmatizare și discriminare față de aceste persoane, ceea ce face ca procesul de integrare să fie dificil.

Scopul și obiectivele: De a evalua nivelul de stigmatizare și discriminare a persoanelor cu probleme de sănătate mintală în rândul adolescenților în Republica Moldova. De a compara nivelul de stigmatizare în rândul adolescenților, între România și Republica Moldova.

Materiale și metode: Studiul a inclus în total 100 de adolescenți. Pentru a evalua nivelul stigmatizării în rândul adolescenților a fost administrat testul AQ-8-C, dezvoltat de către Corrigan (2007).

Rezultate: Itemii pentru segregare și evitare din testul AQ-8-C au obținut cea mai mare medie (6,77 și 6,99 din 9 maxim), ceea ce ne arată că adolescenții în societatea noastră nu doresc să învețe împreună cu persoanele cu probleme de sănătate mintală, și tind să-i evite, considerându-i periculoși (media 5,15).

Concluzii: Rezultatele studiului ne arată că nivelul stigmatizării și discriminării față de persoanele cu probleme de sănătate mintală este foarte înalt. În acest sens este foarte important de a găsi metode pentru eradicarea fenomenului.

Cuvinte Cheie: Stigmatizare, Discriminare, Sănătate Mintală, Adolescenți.

Introduction: One of the aspects of the mental illnesses is stigma (Sartorius & Schulze, 2005). In regards to stigma, the adolescent population is very important. Around 12% of adolescents are affected by mental health issues, but only 4% seek help (Potts, Gillies, & Wood, 2001). Previous studies have shown that adolescents have more pronounced negative attitudes towards mental illnesses than adults (Stuart & Arboleda-Florez, 2001).

Situational Analysis of Mental Health in the Republic of Moldova on the analysis of mental morbidity and behavior in Moldova shows that: at the end of 2013

in Moldova are 99223 registered patients with mental and behavioral disorders. Of the total number of sick children is 17%. There were 13,950 new cases of mental and behavior disorders in 2013. Of all these new cases, 4,317 were children, i.e. 30.9% of the total number of new cases.

In the Republic of Moldova is little studied phenomenon of stigmatization and discrimination against people with mental disabilities in society. The objectives of the present study is to evaluate the level of stigmatization in adolescents towards people with mental health issues.

The phenomenon of stigma towards people with mental health problems persist in our society in various categories and groups of people, from children to the elderly. Knowledge of issues related to the phenomenon of stigma and discrimination among different categories of people, including adolescents, can help in planning activities directed to its eradication.

Conceptual basis of the work is the research data on mental health, in particular to the phenomenon of stigma and discrimination conducted by scientists Corrigan PW, Watson A., Otey E, Westbrook A., Gardner A., Lamb T., & Fenton W. 2007.

Scientific novelty of the results obtained: For the first time in Moldova was carried Review of literature on the phenomenon of stigma and discrimination against patients with mental disabilities in adolescents, which allowed concepts of mental health, stigma, discrimination, mental health.

Theoretical importance and value of the work: Selection of scientific research methods for discrimination and stigmatization of patients with mental disabilities between adolescents will allow to evaluate the level of stigmatization by physicians, psychologists, social workers and contribute to the development of programs and specific actions to reduce the phenomenon of stigma and discrimination of people with mental health problems in adolescents.

Material and Methods: The object of our research pertains to adolescents enrolled in high school.

Purpose: The objectives of the present study is to evaluate the level of stigmatization in adolescents towards people with mental health issues.

Objectives:

1. Evaluation of stigma and discrimination against people with mental disabilities between adolescents.
2. Determining the causes and conditions that makes to appear phenomena of stigma and discrimination against people suffering from mental disorders among adolescents
3. Finding phenomenal impact of stigma and discrimination against people with mental disabilities;

The experiment represents a study in four high schools in three different locations: The study consists of conducting trainings on mental health among adolescents with before and after training assessment of their attitudes.

Target group: 25 students from each school in total 100 high school students.

Questionnaire to assess the level of stigma against people with mental disabilities in adolescents (developed by Corrigan, PW, Watson, A., Otey, E., Westbrook, A., Gardner, A., Lamb, T., & Fenton W.2007)

This questionnaire contains 8 items version was developed for adolescents. Each item corresponds to one of the stereotypes often present in society for persons with mental disabilities.

Each item is rated from 1 to 9, with the higher the

score the greater the level of stigma towards people with mental health problems, except for items 1 and 7, where we talk about compassion and helping those with impaired mental health, and the higher the score on these two items, the more the student wishes to help a person with a mental disability, thus contributing to the inclusion in the community.

Item 1: Pity - the higher the score on this item more this student feel pities towards people with mental disabilities, showing compassion and care to those who suffer.

Item 2: Dangerousness - the higher the score the more the student believes people with mental health problem are dangerous.

Item 3: Fear - This item indicates the student's level of fear towards those with mental disorders.

Item 4: Blame - the higher the score on this item more the student believes that the mentally ill are responsible and guilty that they are sick.

Item 5: Segregation - This item indicates how much the student believes that the persons with mental health issues needs to stay away from community in specialized institutions.

Item 6: Anger - score on this item indicates the degree of irritation or annoyance student have toward people with mental disorders.

Item 7: Help - this item shows how much the student is ready to help a person with mental disabilities in situations where it is more difficult them to handle by themselves.

Item 8: Avoidance - score on this item indicates how many students are struggling to avoid people with mental disorders.

Every training was attended by five students from different classes of the same school, so at every training attended 25 students . The ratio between boys and girls was 1:1, so the trainings were attended by 50 boys and 50 girls.

Results:

Analyzing The study it gives following results in the level of Stigma against people with mental health disabilities among adolescents:

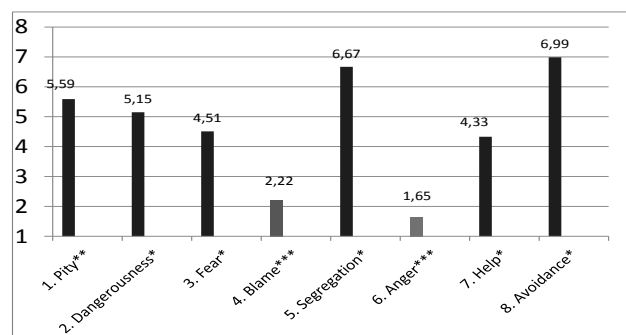


Fig.1 Level of Stigma in different Items, according to AQ-8-C Itmes

On the basis of Fig.1 We make the following affirmation: Averaged in descending order is: - 6.99 – Avoidance; - 6.67 – Segregation;- 5.59 – Pity;- 5.15 – Dangerous-

ness;- 4.51 – Fear;- 4.33 – Help;- 2.22 – Blame;- 1.65 – Anger.

Thus we can conclude that the stigmatization of people with mental health problem is very high and adolescents tend to avoid - 6.69 these people and additionally believes that people should be isolated in specialized schools (Segregation - 6.67), because they are considered dangerous - 5.15. The best results were obtained for items referring to Blame - and Anger 2.22 - 1.65, which means that adolescents in our society are not irritated by the mentally ill, and do not think that these people are responsible for disease.

Also if comparing items Pity and Help 5.59 and - 4.33, we notice that although the Pity towards mentally ill people among adolescents is high, though adolescents have less desire to help mentally ill people. This is because they do not know how they could do this and in addition because they consider the sick to be dangerous.

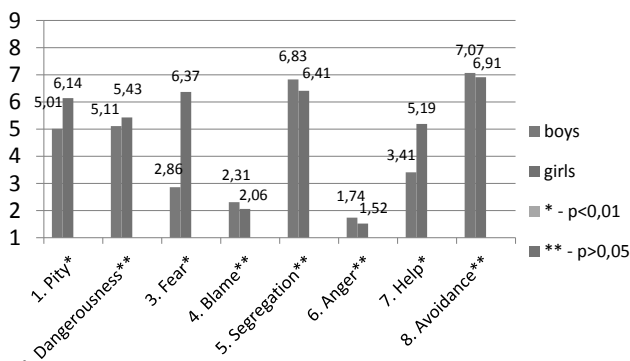


Fig. 2 Comparison between results from girls and boys included in the study

Based on Fig. 2 we can conclude that the statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between boys and girls took only 3 items - Pity (boys - 5.01 girls- 6.14), Fear (boys - 2.86, girls - 6.37) and Help (boys - 3.41 girls - 5.19). Thus it is understood that girls feel more Pity and more compassion for suffering people while having much more Fear than boys. However the girls have a much greater tendency to somehow Help people with mental health problems, unlike boys.

Discussions:

In the attempt to describe the extent to which adolescents stigmatize people with mental illnesses, in one study from Romania some rather interesting findings were obtained - 26.3% of the participating adolescents declare they have interacted at school with a classmate suffering from a mental illness (vs. 50%), 9.1% declare they have a friend of the family suffering from a mental illness (vs. 28%), 12.9% declare they have a relative suffering from a mental illness (vs. 29%), and 2.6% declare they live with a person with a mental illness (vs. 7%) (Corrigan, Lurie, Goldman et al., 2005). We presume that those who suffer from a mental illness (i.e., classmates, friends, relatives, cohabitants) do not disclose their diagnoses in order to avoid possible repercussions

and that the lack of proper knowledge keeps adolescents from recognizing those individuals. Intimate exposure to individuals suffering from mental illnesses is of great importance given the fact that the higher the level of familiarity, the less likely it is to stigmatize (Corrigan, Green, Lundin et al., 2001).

Similar to the assessment of familiarity with mental illnesses, adolescents have a low level of mental health literacy, with trends more or less consistent with those in the literature. Adolescents encounter difficulties in correctly recognizing schizophrenia (17.7% vs. 42.7%), and often misidentify schizophrenia as depression (24.1% vs. 42.5%) (Farrer, Leach, Griffiths et al., 2008). Also, most participants considered the described problem to be psychological in nature, and very few adolescents considered the described problem to be medical in nature. In correspondence to the perceived causes, the majority of participants declared that of help can be a psychologist. However, they also closely reported that of help can be a psychiatrist. We posit that the contrasting results regarding not perceiving the described problem as a medical problem, but believing that a psychiatrist could help, can be explained by the conceptual confusion amongst adolescents in what being a psychiatrist entails. Adolescents are aware of the existing stereotypes and believe that most people stigmatize individuals with mental illnesses.

If compare adolescents from Romania and Republic of Moldova we can assess that the stigmatization of people with mental health problem is very high and adolescents tend to avoid these people- 6.69 Moldova, and 6.54 in Romania and additionally think that they are dangerous - 5.15 Moldova and 5.32 Romania. In Moldova item Pity gives result 5.59, in Romania 5.87. The best results were obtained for items referring to Blame - 2.22 Moldova, and 2.14 Romania, and anger - 1.65 Moldova and 1.53 Romania, which means that adolescents in our society are not irritated by the mentally ill, and do not think that these people are responsible for disease.

Difference in results between study in Romania compare to Moldova has shown the item about segregation, adolescents in Moldova believes that people should be isolated in specialized schools (Segregation – 6.67 Moldova), when in Romania this item is much lower (Segregation – 2.63 Romania), in this way we can conclude that integration into society is on a higher level in Romania than in Moldova. One more item that has shown different results in 2 countries is Help item – 4.33 in Moldova and 2.74 in Romania which shows us that willingness to help is higher in Moldova.

During the study we faced following limitations: Although in this group were included 100 adolescents from different schools, though this study can not be representative because we still need to research different regions of the country and to conduct this study in South and North of the country. However taking in consideration results from this study gives us an indications to continue and to make broader our study.

In Moldova there are a few minorities – Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauzians in this situation we need to conduct this study including this minorities, to analyze and to compare to see similarities and differences.

Conclusions

- Levels of stigmatization of people with mental health problems among adolescents is very high in both countries Romania and Moldova.
- Among the items analyzed in this study the greatest results gave items with the reference to „avoidance” the tendency of „segregation” - in other words, adolescents tend to marginalize and exclude from society those who are suffering from mental health, in Romania the item about segregation is lower and tendency to marginalize is lower.
- Phenomena of stigma and discrimination are major obstacles currently in the process of social integration of people with mental health problems.

Recommendations:

- Selection of scientific research methods for discrimination and stigma against patients with mental disabilities among adolescents to enable assessment of the level of stigmatization by physicians, psychologists, social workers
- Develop programs and specific actions to mitigate the phenomenon of stigma and discrimination against people with mental health problems among adolescents.

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