

The Impact of Stigma on Suicide

There are negative outcomes when people hesitate to talk about mental health and suicide because of stigma. Breaking the stigma encourages more individuals to seek the support they need. Mental health is health—just as vital and real as any physical condition.

What is Stigma?

Stigma refers to negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes people may hold toward those who experience mental health conditions. Mental health stigma can include:¹

Structural stigma, involving laws, regulations, and policies that can limit the rights of those with mental health conditions.

Public stigma, which include negative attitudes and beliefs from individuals or from larger groups toward people with mental health conditions, or their families or health care providers that care for them.

Self-stigma, which comes from within the person with a mental health condition.

People living with a mental health condition may believe they are flawed or blame themselves for having the condition.



Why is Stigma a Problem?

When individuals hesitate to talk about suicide because of stigma, studies indicate that those impacted tend to suffer a loss of self-esteem, a greater sense of hopelessness and shame, and face elevated rates of unemployment or discrimination during job applications. Additionally, they are more likely to encounter bullying, harassment, and physical violence.

Those bereaved by suicide report higher levels of rejection, shame, and blame than other bereaved people.² Stigma acts as a barrier to help-seeking for those with suicidal thoughts, prior attempts, or who have lost someone to suicide.³

Resources

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
<https://www.samhsa.gov/>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)
<https://afsp.org/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suicide prevention resources
<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/index.html>
- Ohio's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

“[Treat] those living with mental health conditions with empathy and acceptance, so that no one feels the need to hide their struggles.”

What Can Be Done to Combat Stigma & How Can You Help?

If stereotyping, discrimination, and isolation are risk factors for suicide, then we can reduce the risk of suicide by responding to suicide ideation and attempts with compassion, support, and connection.

Breaking the stigma starts with awareness and education backed by a multilevel approach of policy, programming, and resources:¹

1. Promoting open discussions about mental health is important. Using non-stigmatizing language helps, and influential figures can share their own experiences to raise awareness.
2. Setting appropriate policies and practices that support people with a mental health condition, reducing barriers they face in settings like workplaces and health care.
3. Reporting about mental health responsibly. Journalists, communicators, and others in the media can educate the public responsibly about mental health. This includes taking care to portray those with mental health conditions accurately with nuance and context, and avoiding perpetuating negative, harmful stereotypes.
4. Treating those living with mental health conditions with empathy and acceptance, so that no one feels the need to hide their struggles. Having personal, direct contact with those mental health conditions have been shown to combat negative stereotypes and reduce stigma.

5 Ways to Reduce Stigma⁴



Be Informed about mental health and mental health issues.



Have a Conversation with others about mental health, such as sharing facts and personal experiences.



Use People-First Language to emphasize that a person is not a disorder. (e.g., "She is bipolar", try, "She has bipolar disorder.")



Normalize Mental Health Treatment as a part of health care.



Recognize Self-Stigma which is holding negative attitudes or beliefs about oneself.

References

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Mental health stigma. Accessed May 9, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health/stigma/index.html>.
- 2 Azorina V, Morant N, Nesse H, et al. The Perceived Impact of Suicide Bereavement on Specific Interpersonal Relationships: A Qualitative Study of Survey Data. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2019;16(10):1801. Published 2019 May 21. doi:10.3390/ijerph16101801.
- 3 Zamorano S, González-Sanguino C, Muñoz M. Implications of stigma towards mental health problems on suicide risk in people with mental health problems: a systematic review. *Actas Esp Psiquiatr*. 2022;50(5):216-225.
- 4 American Psychiatric Association. Stigma, Prejudice and Discrimination Against People with Mental Illness. Accessed May 9, 2025. <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/stigma-and-discrimination>.

ABOUT

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.



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