

ADDRESS STIGMA IN MENTAL HEALTH, SAYS LANCET COMMISSION

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

On Monday, observed as World Mental Health Day, *The Lancet* released a new report calling for radical action to end stigma and discrimination in mental health, indicating that 90% of people living with mental health conditions feel negatively impacted by stigma and discrimination.

Further, 80% said stigma and discrimination can be worse than the condition itself. Additionally, 90% of those surveyed felt that media could play a major role in reducing stigma. The report was the result of the labours of the new Lancet Commission on Ending Stigma and Discrimination in Mental Health.

As per the commission, stigma can “cause social exclusion and disempowerment of people with mental health conditions leading to discrimination and human rights violations, including problems in accessing healthcare, challenges in securing employment, and increased likelihood of health complications leading to early death”.

Thara Rangaswamy, *The Lancet* commissioner and co-founder, Schizophrenia Research Foundation, Chennai, said though there is a gradual reduction of stigma in the country, it continues to be a real and present problem. She said women with a diagnosis of severe mental disorder and their family members face more stigma which has ramifications for marriage and employment. She also made a mention of the Indian visual media that still perpetuate mental illnesses negatively.

The commission called for immediate action from governments, international organisations, healthcare provider and media organisations, along with active contributions from people with lived experience, to work together to eliminate mental health stigma. For instance, it is recommended that countries take action to decriminalise suicide, therefore reducing the stigma around it. Employers are to promote full access to educational opportunities, work participation and return-to-work programmes for people with mental health conditions, and the school curriculum should include sessions to improve understanding of mental health conditions.

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