

EFFECTS OF INTERNALIZED STIGMA OF MENTAL DISORDER ON QUALITY OF LIFE AND SELF-ESTEEM IN SCHIZOPHRENIC PATIENTS

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Introduction and objectives: Research suggests that internalized stigma of mental disorder (which reflects the degree to which a person holds internalized stigmatizing beliefs about mental illness) leads to decreased self-esteem, depression, delayed seeking of treatment, prolonged course of illness, poor outcome, social withdrawal, reduced self-efficacy and worsening of quality of life.

Methods: On a sample consisting of 40 outpatients with ICD-10 diagnosis of schizophrenia, with average age of 40.73 (SD= 9.168) and mean illness duration of 15.525 (SD=8.202) years, we administered the Internalized Stigma of Mental Illness Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Manchester Short Assessment of Quality of Life and Beck Depression Inventory II . The questionnaire also included several socio-demographic and clinically-related variables.

Results: Schizophrenic patients showed a moderate level of internalized stigma (M= 40.125, SD= 9.946). Patients with higher levels of internalized stigma had significantly poorer quality of life ($r = -0.422$) and lower self-esteem ($r = -0.318$). There was a positive correlation between the level of depressive symptomatology and the level of internalized stigma ($r = 0.385$). Correlation with the duration of illness was not statistically significant ($r = -0.145$).

Conclusions: Our results confirm the data of numerous researches, as well as our earlier findings on the negative effects of internalized stigma of mental disorder on self-esteem and quality of life in panic disorder patients. In order to improve the quality of life of schizophrenic patients, we should increase awareness of the negative effects of internalized stigma and focus interventions on altering stigmatizing attitudes and enhancing coping skills.