

Depression stigma in the eye of the older beholder

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Less educated, older men are more likely to view depression negatively, while almost one in five Australians say they wouldn't work with someone suffering depression, according to researchers from The Australian National University.

The research, published today by online open access journal BioMed Central, highlights the need for targeted programs to reduce levels of stigma attached to depression. The work was conducted by the Director of the Depression and Anxiety Consumer Research Unit at the University's Centre for Mental Health Research (CMHR) Associate Professor Kathy Griffiths, CMHR Director Professor Helen Christensen and Professor Anthony Jorm of the University of Melbourne.

To reach the findings over six thousand Australian adults, including some with depression, answered research surveys to investigate and compare their own levels of both personal stigma – the negative attitude a person has towards depression – and perceived stigma, which describes the negative attitudes that a person believes others have towards depression.

Lead author of the report Dr Griffiths said the findings were an important step in designing programs which de-stigmatised depression. "This is the first study to systematically investigate predictors of personal stigma among those people with high levels of depressive symptoms," she said.

“Personal stigmas were higher for males, those with less education, those born overseas and people in greater psychological distress. While our study showed that stigma is not as widespread as many members of the public think, it is still a problem. For example, as many as one in five Australians say they would not work with someone with depression.

“We already know that stigma is a leading cause of concern for people suffering from depression, but up until now not a lot has been done to examine it. Our work is critical to the successful design and targeting of programs that address the public’s negative attitudes to people with depression and help to reduce the stigma felt by those who are already depressed.

“We recommend developing targeted programs to reduce these levels of stigma. A good place to start might be with men, older people, those with lower education levels and those born overseas,” she said.

Dr Griffiths added that the study also revealed that attitudes towards depression differed little between regional areas and major cities.

“Interestingly, although it is often assumed that people from rural areas have more negative attitudes to mental disorders, we did not find any difference between stigma in the country and city,” she said.

Source: Research Australia

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