

Depression not so clear cut for teens

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Teenagers think mental illness carries much more stigma than it actually does, according to new research from The Australian National University.

A study of over 1,300 12 to 17 year-olds by the Centre for Mental Health Research (CMHR) at ANU found that mental illness does carry a [stigma](#) amongst adolescents, but that teenagers overestimate its extent.

The study differentiated between ‘personal depression stigma’, an individual’s beliefs about depression, and ‘perceived depression stigma’, or an individual’s perception of what other people think and feel about depression.

Lead researcher, Dr. Alison Cascar, said that identifying the levels of personal and perceived depression stigma in Australian adolescents is extremely important.

“Young people do not seek help for depression because of fear of negative attitudes in the wider community, especially from their peers,” said Dr. Cascar.

“Stigmatising attitudes and beliefs towards depression are not uncommon and can lead to feelings of fear, avoidance, bias, anger or distrust towards individuals with the disorder.

“Greater understanding of the development of stigmatising attitudes and beliefs can help inform new strategies and techniques to reduce stigma

in the community and ultimately increase help-seeking behaviour,” she said.

Another key finding in the study was that teenagers considered other people’s depression stigma as significantly higher than their own.

“Most young people do not believe that mental health problems arise from a ‘weakness of character’,” said Dr. Cate. “However teenagers are inclined to think that others their age would believe this to be the case.

“Because teenagers overestimate the extent of negative views surrounding depression publicising the actual levels of personal depression stigma will help reduce perceived stigma.

“Anti-stigma campaigns and interventions aimed at challenging stereotypes and increasing education about the nature of [mental illness](#) would help young people,” she added.

Other key findings in the study were that males were more likely to be stigmatising than girls, younger [adolescents](#) had more stigmatising views than older ones, and young people were more likely to think others would have stigmatising beliefs if they themselves had a parent who experienced [depression](#).

Provided by Australian National University

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