THE ROLE OF FAMILY IN INTERNALIZED STIGMA AMONG PEOPLE LIVING WITH SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS

Min Yin, Zheng Li.

School of Nursing, Peking Union Medical College, Beijing, China

Background and Aims

Family is one of the main areas for investigation if we want to understand the process of stigma internalization of people with severe mental illness (SMI). However, limited studies explored the role of family played in patients' internalized stigma, especially in Chinese culture. Our study aims to explore the role of family in strengthening and/or nullifying internalized stigma among people with severe mental illness in mainland China.

Materials and methods

The patients with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or schizoaffective disorder and their caregivers were enrolled using purposive sampling and theoretical sampling in a community health care center in Beijing, China. Semi-structured interviews about personal and family experiences with mental illness and related stigma were carried out among 22 participants (13 people with severe mental illness and 9 caregivers). Meanwhile, we also implemented non-participatory observation to get more information about the family interactions in daily activities. Open and axial coding procedures were employed to identify the themes and relations.

Results

Our findings revealed that family could both facilitate and impede the process of stigma internalization in people with SMI. Family related factors of patients' internalized stigma can be categorized into cognition-related, behavior-related, and environmental factors. The main sub-factors facilitating the process of stigma internalization in family were identified: families' higher expressed emotion, lower family support, poor family acceptance, and inappropriate familial stigma coping.

Families' beliefs about mental illness

- Disease attribution
- Social expectations
- Stereotype
- Perceived public stigma
- Face concern

Families' reactions to family member with mental illness

- Expressed emotion
- Family support
- Family acceptance
- Stigma coping

Diversified family context and individualized person

Internalized stigma of patients

- Cognition
- Emotion
- Behavior

Conclusions

The results indicated the importance to consider mental illness stigma issues in family level. Future research should explore how to incorporate family related factors into interventions reducing internalized stigma.