Internalized stigma among people with severe mental illness in rural China

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Objectives: To understand the stigma of mental illness in people with severe mental illness (SMI) in rural China.

Background and aims: Although stigma of mental illness can prohibit accessing to health and social services for people with SMI, it is unknown about the internalized stigma among these people in rural China. This study aimed to explore the internalized stigma and its influencing factors among people with SMI in Chengdu China.

Materials and Methods: 453 people with schizophrenia (n=232), major depressive disorder (n=182), or bipolar disorder (n=39) in Xinjin, Chengdu participated in this study. Sociodemographic data, illness characteristics, internalized stigma of mental illness (ISMI), social support and social functioning were assessed.

Results: Internalized stigma was moderate and severe with 94.7% of the total sample. The ISMI mean score ≥ 2.5 were found in persons with schizophrenia (48.3%), major depressive disorder (42.9%), and bipolar disorder (33.3%). Persons with schizophrenia had significantly higher mean scores of total ISMI, alienation and discrimination experience than those with bipolar disorder. Lower family income was significantly associated with higher levels of internalized stigma in persons with schizophrenia and major depressive disorder. A hierarchical regression model showed that social support and social functioning were factors influencing internalized stigma.

Conclusions: This study shows that the internalized stigma is common and severe in persons with schizophrenia, major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder, especially those with lower income status in rural China. People with different type of SMI have different influencing factors of their internalized stigma. Cultural-specific interventions on reducing stigma should be conducted for people with SMI within the Chinese rural context.

Factors related to self-stigma among subjects

Diagnosis	Variables	B	SE	Wald	Exp (B)	95% CI
Total Sample (N=453)	Gender	-0.188	0.211	0.790	0.829	0.547-1.254
	Age	0.015	0.008	3.131	1.015	0.998-1.032
	Marital Status	0.011	0.228	0.002	1.011	0.646-1.581
	Years of Education	0.018	0.032	0.337	1.018	0.957-1.083
	Family Income level	-0.325	0.090	12.945***	0.723	0.605-0.862
	Income Earner	-0.719	0.208	11.956**	0.487	0.324-0.732

Logistic regression analysis of ISMI

Lower family income and non-income earner were significantly associated with higher levels of internalized stigma in persons with severe mental illness, especially schizophrenia and major depressive disorder

Path model of Internalized stigma and Recovery-related Outcomes

Schizophrenia subjects; Path analysis: IS=Internalized Stigma, PSS=Perceived Social Support, SI=Social Interaction, SF=Social Functioning, SS=Symptom Severity; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; *** p<0.001

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Table 1. Internalized stigma of persons with severe mental illness

	Schizophrenia (N=232)		Major Depressive Disorder (N=182)		Bipolar Disorder (N=39)	
	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)
Gender						
Male	95	71.4 (9.3)	66	70.2 (7.6)	16	70.1 (9.8)
Female	137	71.5 (7.8)	116	70.7 (8.7)	23	67.5 (8.1)
Age (years)						
18-64	176	71.9 (8.7)	114	70.8 (8.6)	22	68.3 (9.7)
≥65	56	70.1 (7.6)	68	70.2 (7.6)	17	68.9 (7.8)
Marital status						
Single	39	71.9 (7.9)	11	70.7 (6.6)	1	74.0 (0.0)+
Married	148	71.8 (8.3)	144	70.0 (8.3)	30	68.7 (8.4)
Divorced	22	68.5 (8.5)	7	73.1 (6.7)	2	84.0 (0.0)
Widowed	23	71.0 (10.2)	20	73.3 (9.1)	6	61.7 (4.8)
Education (years)						
≤ 9	210	71.4 (8.5)	172	70.6 (8.4)	34	67.7 (8.8)*
> 9	22	72.3 (7.4)	10	68.9 (5.6)	5	74.4 (6.7)
Family Income level						
≥ mean level	58	68.4 (6.8)++	54	68.6 (6.9)+	10	65.6 (6.9)
< mean level	174	72.5 (8.7)	128	71.3 (8.7)	29	69.6 (9.3)
Income earner						
Major earner	20	71.1 (10.8)	25	66.0 (5.2)++	8	65.4 (8.3)
Partly earner	88	70.9 (7.7)	64	69.4 (8.4)	14	67.5 (8.9)
No income	124	71.9 (8.4)	93	72.5 (8.4)	17	70.9 (8.9)

* p<0.05 (among three groups); +p<0.05, ++p<0.01 (within one group)