

Stigma and Global Mental Health: Association between Country-Level Characteristics and Mental Illness Stigma in 16 Countries

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BACKGROUND

It is estimated that neuropsychiatric disorders affect 400 million people worldwide and they constitute about 14% of the Global Burden of Disease. The treatment gap for serious mental disorders is considerable; 35-50% unmet needs in developed countries and 76-85% unmet needs in developing countries. In addition to the scarcity of available resources for mental healthcare, stigma and discrimination are critical factors in the reluctance of individuals with mental disorders to seek or continue care. Stigma and discrimination are believed to account for a significant portion of the treatment gap for individuals with mental disorders. Since the stigma related to mental illness is implicated on multiple levels of influence, it is crucial to assess the impact of the various individual, social and cultural characteristics associated with it. The objective of this analysis is to examine the association between country-level characteristics and mental illness stigma in 16 countries.

METHODS

Estimates of percent prevalence of perceived stigma among individuals with mental disorders in 16 countries were obtained from the World Mental Health Surveys (Alonso et al., 2008). Estimates of country indicators were obtained from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The following variables were examined: Human Development Index (HDI) rankings (2010), Internet Users/100 (2008), and Homicide Rate/100,000 (2008). The HDI variable is a composite measure of human development that reflects 3 country dimensions (health, education and living standards). HDI is inversely proportional to development. The Internet Users variable was used as a proxy for social globalization (Dreher, 2006) and the Homicide Rate variable was used as a proxy for violence and crime. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was computed to assess the correlation between the Perceived Stigma and the 3 variables. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated, however, the coefficients were not statistically significant. This is possibly due to the limited number of observations in this dataset.

RESULTS

Table 1. Correlation between Perceived Stigma and HDI Ranking, Internet Users and Homicide Rate in 16 countries			HDI Ranking, 2010	Internet Users, 2008	Homicide Rate, 2008
Spearman's rho	Perceived Stigma	Correlation Coefficient	0.500 [†]	-0.509 [†]	0.562*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.048	0.037	0.019

CONCLUSION

On the country level, it is concluded that improved health, education and living standards, increased cultural awareness and social globalization through internet, and lower crime and violence rates, may be associated with reduced perception of stigma among individuals with mental illness.

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