Mental Health Stigma in Schools: What Needs to Change

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02/11/2026

Introduction

What is mental health stigma in schools, and how can we cope with stigma? The concept of mental health and mental illness is rooted in the culture of every society; in some cultures, family members try to normalize the behaviors and try to find an explanation for the behaviors (Townsend & Morgan, 2020). Mental illnesses in children and adolescents are ignored because there is still a widespread stigma around mental illness. People stigmatize mental illness because of their lack of understanding or their fear of mental illness (Patafio at el., 2021). Every child deserves to grow up in a healthy and supportive environment; the prevention and treatment of children and adolescents with mental health conditions are key to the health of our future world (Nobbre at el., 2021). The purpose of this project is to identify mental health stigma in schools and establish an educational environment that supports school staff, children, and their families in reducing stigma, improving mental health among children and adolescents, and engaging in regular mental health and well-being programs.

Mental health stigma is defined as negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes about people who experience mental illnesses. Although there has been some understanding and acceptance of mental health conditions around the world, many families and communities still have beliefs and attitudes towards individuals with mental health conditions (Kung, 2025). Mental health stigma can be categorized into three categories (Kung, 2025):

1. **Structural Stigma**: defines communities' rules and policies that can limit the rights of the population with mental health illness.
2. **Public Stigma**: defines negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes from a larger group towards the population with mental health conditions and their families.
3. **Self-Stigma**: refers to people with mental health disorders who blame themselves for having this condition.

Mental health stigma in schools can have a pervasive impact on the real world. Although many communities have initiated significant strategies to identify mental health stigma and address this problem to be accepted and treated appropriately, children with mental health conditions are still more at risk of being discriminated against and marginalized. This population may be excluded from social groups and be treated negatively (Kung, 2025). Mental health conditions can significantly impact students' learning and behaviors (Nobbre at el., 2021). This can result in a drastic negative outcome, which can be prevented by appropriate education programs for teachers, children, families, and communities.

From a psychological standpoint, children with mental health conditions are more likely to be discriminated against, teased, bullied, and suffer from low self-esteem. They are also more likely to grow up to become adults with mental health disorders (Townsend & Morgan, 2020). While health disparities across racial and ethnic groups continue to exist, mental health conditions in children are now recognized in both genders and all cultural and racial groups (Nobbre at el., 2021). Lack of mental health literacy is the leading cause of mental health stigma in schools.

Studies have shown that initiating an educational environment in schools for children and their families and public awareness campaigns can improve mental health literacy and reduce stigma (Kung, 2025). First, we need to acknowledge normal stages of growth and development. Behavioral responses are individualized. Therefore, it is difficult to determine if a child has behavioral problems. Mental health education should consider gender, age, culture, and social determinants. " To effectively address and reduce stigma, developing culturally sensitive interventions and promoting understanding and acceptance of mental health issues is crucial (Ahed at el., 2023). Schools play an important role in shaping lifelong mental health and wellbeing by offering educational materials that can provide some coping strategies, support groups, and community resources to effectively care for school children's mental health conditions. This includes educational classes for teachers, children, and families, and teaches children to speak about their emotional issues without shame and fear. This can help them get help appropriately. Schools should provide all students with the best approach and resources

if they need help. School teachers should have mental health and wellbeing programs to receive mental health support in order to help students' mental health (Kung, 2025).

Reducing mental health stigma in schools, school administrations need to have open conversations about mental health conditions and share their mental health struggles and experiences with students. They can also create some practices, such as regular assessment and role play, to practice normal behaviors and develop ways to cope with stigma (Kung, 2025). This helps to reduce barriers that students face and provides empathy and acceptance. Therefore, students feel that there is no need to hide their mental health conditions (Kung, 2025).

Conclusion

The concepts of mental health and mental illness are culturally defined. Mental illnesses are ignored because there is still a widespread stigma around mental illnesses (Townsend & Morgan, 2020). Mental health stigma in schools is the result of a lack of understanding or fear of having mental illnesses. Therefore, it is essential to initiate a widespread mental health and well-being educational program in schools across the world to reduce the stigma, cope with existing stigma, and create a healthy world in the future.

References

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