

research snapshot

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How do we improve social inclusion for people with mental disabilities?

What is this research about?

People with mental disabilities face stigma and discrimination in their daily life. Promoting social inclusion is important in order to overcome the discrimination and social barriers that prevent marginalized groups from living a full and meaningful life. This article reviews current research addressing the social inclusion of persons with mental disabilities.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers described four tools which can be used to improve the social inclusion of persons with mental disabilities.

What did the researchers find?

Four tools that can promote social inclusion are discussed:

Law: Some laws intend to protect the human rights of persons with mental disabilities, for example laws may prevent employers from discriminating against these individuals. While laws have helped advance social inclusion, in the past they have often been flawed and insufficient.

What you need to know:

There are four common tools which can improve social inclusion for people with mental disabilities: 1) Laws have had success in protecting persons with mental disabilities against discrimination, but historically they have been less than perfect; 2) Community-based rehabilitation has helped improve the lives of persons with mental disabilities, but is not widely available; 3) Anti-stigma efforts have targeted various groups, but efforts still have to be made; 4) Evaluation of programs and policies is important to identify what needs to be improved, but currently there is a lack of data.

Community-based supports and services:

It is important for persons with mental disabilities to be able to participate fully in their community. This includes voting and seeking employment on an equal platform with others. Unfortunately, these individuals often encounter barriers which prevent them from using mainstream services. These barriers include a lack of training and awareness among professionals and policy-makers. Community-based rehabilitation helps people with a mental disability contribute to their communities, improve their

income, and promote respect for their human rights. Despite such benefits, these programs are not widely available, nor have they been well evaluated.

Anti-stigma/anti-discrimination initiatives:

Persons with mental disabilities experience stigma from members of the public and professional caregivers. Some stigmatizing beliefs include: persons with mental disabilities are a threat to society, they lack the ability for personal decision-making, and they need to be “fixed.” Efforts have been made to address the false beliefs of professional caregivers and the public, but further efforts are still needed.

System monitoring and evaluation:

Evaluating policies and programs that support persons with mental disabilities is an important tool for improving their social inclusion. It identifies when persons with mental disabilities are being discriminated against or are not receiving proper support so that changes can be made. Currently there is a lack of data surrounding the inclusion and exclusion experiences of persons with mental disabilities.

How can you use this research?

This research is helpful for anyone seeking to learn more about stigma, discrimination, and social inclusion. It also provides a good starting point for people seeking to advance equality for marginalized populations.

About the researchers

Virginie Cobigo and Heather Stuart work in the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology at Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

This Research Snapshot was created based on their article “Social inclusion and mental health” published in *Current Opinion in Psychiatry* in 2010.

cobigov@queensu.ca

More information on their work on social inclusion is available at www.mapsresearch.ca

Keywords

Disability rights, Discrimination, Stigma, Mental disability, Mental health, Social inclusion

Evidence Exchange Network (EENet; formerly OMHAKEN) has partnered with the **Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University** to produce Research Snapshots in the field of mental health and addictions in Ontario. EENet actively promotes the use of research evidence in decision-making by supporting engagement and connections between researchers and mental health and addictions stakeholders across Ontario. EENet works to develop targeted KT products and tools and supports interactive exchanges. It is supported by the Ontario Government and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. This summary was written by Karl Smyth.

[EENet](http://www.ehealthontario.ca) is located in the mental health and addictions section of www.ehealthontario.ca

