

Advanced Practice Nursing has infiltrated various specialties of healthcare. How is it in mental health?

As society evolves, healthcare becomes more complex and challenging. Nurses, being iconic pillars of supports in healthcare, are stepping up across all settings to take on more complex tasks, leading to the advent of advanced practice nursing. Such nursing involves Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) who are registered nurses with expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for expanded practice. Though it is believed that APNs can provide effective and quality patient care, empirical evidence for such claims is lacking in the mental health settings both locally and internationally. Hence a team comprising APNs, nursing administrators and educators set forth to uncover the role of APNs in mental health and examined patients' clinical outcomes, satisfaction and perceived recovery following two-year follow-up with APNs at outpatient clinics of Institute of Mental Health (IMH).

The study showed that there was no significant difference in readmissions and the emergency room visits over the two years before and two years after patients' first consultation with APNs. However, patients followed up by APNs had significantly better attendance for their appointments. Patients' psychiatric symptoms were reported to be well-controlled after the two-year follow-up with APNs. They had good adherence to medications and were satisfied with the care provided by APNs. Patients also perceived their mental health recovery journey positively with high confidence in achieving their goals.



This study provided a valuable and important insight into the care delivered by mental health APNs and also offered the unique opportunity to assess the recovery of people with mental illness from perspectives of clinicians and patients. Findings from this study could potentially influence further development of mental health APNs roles to be more independent and autonomous in managing patients, especially with movement of prescribing privileges in Singapore.

(The study has since been published in the Archives of Psychiatric Nursing in the year 2020. Article is titled: "Advanced practice nurses led clinic in a psychiatric hospital: An outcome evaluation in Singapore" with APN Xu Changqing as the first author).

Dr Xie Huiting

Senior Nurse Educator, Nursing
Institute of Mental Health

Ms Xu Changqing

Advanced Practice Nurse, Nursing
Institute of Mental Health

Causes of stigma towards mental illness in Singapore – A qualitative Inquiry



The stigma attached to mental illness is widespread and often affects the lives of people with mental illness in several ways. As a result of stigma, a person with mental illness (PMI) may be denied equal life opportunities in areas such as employment and housing, and face discrimination from others in the form of social distancing. In fact, many individuals with mental illness feel that the experience of stigma is worse than the condition itself.

Although stigma is a universal phenomenon, specific experiences and reasons for stigma may differ across cultures. In this study, the researchers from IMH research division adopted a qualitative approach to (i) understand the causes and reasons of stigma towards mental illness in Singapore, and (ii) investigate the cultural influences of stigma from the general public's point of view. These findings could be helpful in informing the design of future anti-stigma interventions in Singapore.

A total of 9 focused group discussions (FGD) were conducted with 63 participants consisting of Singaporeans from the lay public. During the FGD, participants were asked to opine on

topics related to the stigma of mental illness. Discussions during the FGD were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis. Data were analysed and coded line-by-line by the study team using the inductive thematic analysis method, where statements made by the participants -related to the causes or influences of stigma in Singapore- which shares a common meaning or idea are grouped into a category that represents a theme.

In total, the study team identified 11 themes for the causes and reasons of stigma and these were conceptualized into a sociological model to illustrate how stigma is influenced by culture and environment (see figure and quotes for more information). The generic causes of stigma such as the 'fear towards PMI' and the 'intergroup bias' are universal and similar to what was reported in studies conducted overseas. The cultural influences of stigma identified in this study includes the 'Chinese culture of "face"' and 'Asian's conservative values'. The themes that were more unique to our local context were the 'elitist mindset among Singaporeans' and the 'perceived inability to handle interactions with PMI'.

Future anti-stigma campaigns in Singapore should incorporate this study's findings to ensure that cultural misgivings and beliefs are addressed adequately. Importantly, the findings of our study suggest that future anti-stigma campaigns in Singapore should incorporate social contact with PMI as a component and advocate that PMI can still lead successful lives with proper treatment.

Mr Gregory Tee Hng Tan

Research Assistant, Research Division
Institute of Mental Health

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The socioecological explanatory model for stigma

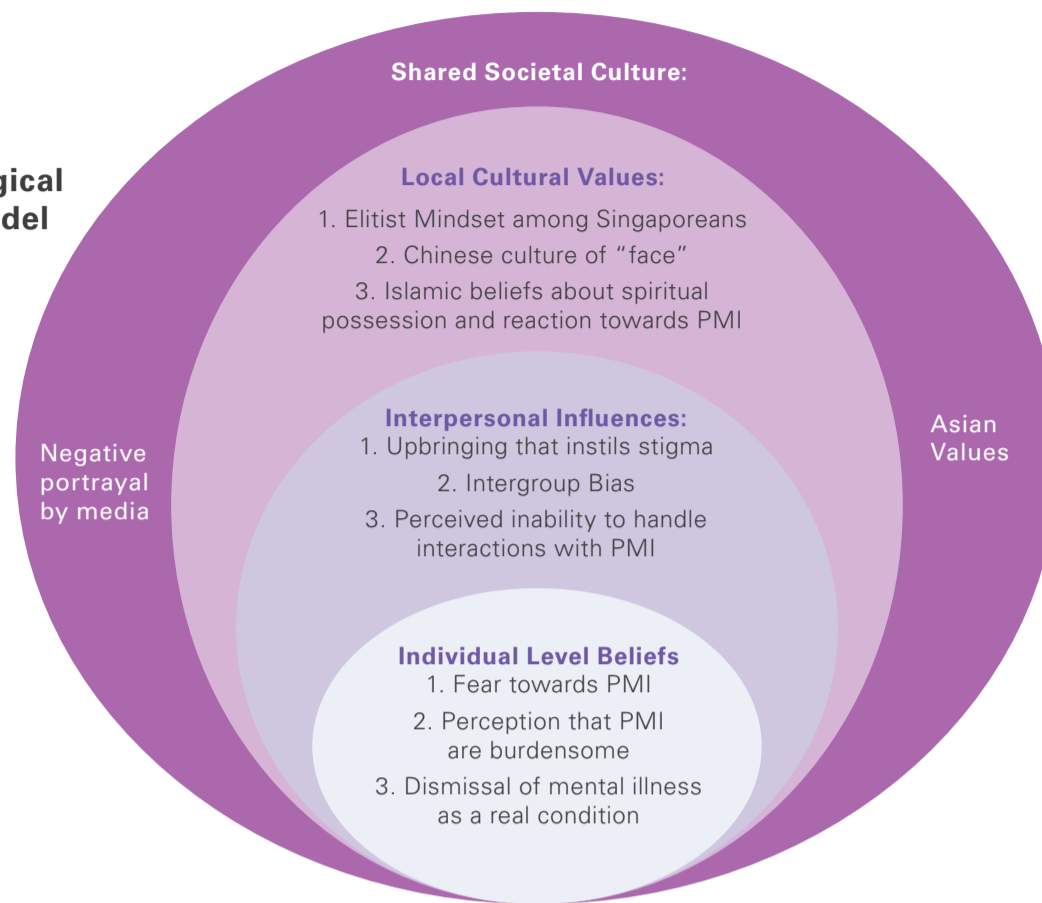


Table 1: Example of Quotes for each determinants of Stigma

| THEMES | QUOTES |
|---|---|
| INDIVIDUAL LEVEL BELIEFS | |
| Fear towards PMI | "Sometimes, fear can also come in the fact of maybe it can be dangerous being beside this person." [Age: 45] |
| Perception that PMI are burdensome | "If it is my colleague and we are part of a project then, then I will feel that...assuming that our bonus is at stake etc, then I might feel that he might be a...he might drag the team down and that is my honest opinion." [Age: 23] |
| Dismissal of mental illness as a real condition | "The word depression gets thrown around very loosely nowadays you know, I can say I am just...a lot of people just say I am depressed very easily, so this kind of thing I am afraid it becomes a habit...erm you...actually there's nothing wrong with you but you are treating something that is not there" [Age: 24] |
| INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCES | |
| Upbringing that instils stigma | "It really depends on what is your family upbringing of you towards mental health. Yah, probably your parents might say 'this person is siao (a pejorative term in Hokkien which means crazy) one, don't go near, later you will get killed or you get stabbed'" [Age: 25] |
| Intergroup bias | "I think because he is mentally crazy so being friends with someone like this sort of put in like a... I don't know how to put it, but in a more negative light in front of other people. [Age: 23] |
| Perceived inability to handle interactions with PMI | "I think because dealing with them right, sometimes we are not trained and we don't know how to deal with them. So like maybe we try to help someone with mental illness and it didn't work out, then we just give up because we try and it make them feel worse you know." [Age: 22] |
| ELITIST MINDSET AMONG SINGAPOREANS | |
| Local cultural values | "A person with mental illness requires care, he is not independent and therefore he is deemed as a loser and you don't...the society doesn't allow you to be associated with because it means you are a loser too. So I think it is because of this culture of "No, you have to be successful," "you have to be independent to be...for people to want to believe you." That's probably one of the main reasons why people tend to shun away from people with mental illness because they have perceived the people who are losers that can't take care of themselves." [Age: 43] |
| Chinese culture and "face" | "For Chinese I think it is more of the face, like how much less respect you get if someone in your family is known to have mental illness." [Age: 26] |
| Islamic beliefs about spiritual possession | "To me in our society, we are Malay, maybe Malay Muslim, like what I know from my aunties and uncles, they always think these kind of people are possessed." [Age: 32] |
| SHARED SOCIETAL CULTURE | |
| Negative portrayal of PMI by media | "The 9PM shows, and then usually the bad person in the movie, maybe something happened to him or her and then suddenly become depressed, and it always ends up either killing or injuring someone. So, when I grew up, my impression is like when someone is depressed, confirm will turn violent." [Age: 21] |
| Asian conservatism and collectivism | "It's definitely the Asian culture because we, however we are in Singapore, maybe we don't have to look far, it's just the Asians that we are, we are very closed off. Maybe if we compare ourselves to like the Westerns, they are very outspoken like they talk about these kinds of things." [Age: 26] |