

STIGMAS OF MENTAL ILLNESS

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the literature that is available on social psychology, with regards to stigmas of mental illness. According to the literature, is the science of people's behaviors, feelings as well as thoughts and the study of how they are influenced by imagined or the actual presence of people around.

Stigmas of Mental Illness

Section one

The scientific aspect implies that there is some investigative work that is involved in the study. Thus, human thoughts and behavior become variables that are measured in determining people's psychological characters. The fundamental idea is that the behavioral characteristics are significantly influenced by the surrounding, whether there is someone around or not. It's basically an attempt to conform to the social norms so that one is not considered deviant. The social psychological concepts or theories are quite diverse in nature. They can include psychoanalysis, cognitive theory, symbolic interaction, and behaviorism (Forgas 1981).

Section Two

I had initially thought mental illnesses were common among the all social groups and not only the black community. However, this belief changed completely after my internship in the relatively wealthy community. The people who came for treatment in the facility were mostly from the low income bracket or blacks. It made me wonder whether poverty triggered these diseases, particularly mental illnesses or if there was any correlation. The worst part of it is the fact that their family members who should have been around neglected the most of the time. This brought up the idea of social psychology, especially with regards to what their families could be thinking of them to the extent of ignoring them. Thus, I opted to treat each case as unique in its own way by getting the patients' background and the actual perception of their families. Later on, it occurred to me that most of the patients were struggling with social neglect, mental abuse or social violence. For some, it was overprotection by their families thereby, instilling in them a strong feeling of fear (Greenwood 1991).

It was due to this realization that I decided that putting them in different therapies would help to get the best way to deal with their problems. For some, group therapy worked best as they were immediately able to fit into various groups and behave normally thereafter. For instance, they got to

listen to their colleagues, played with them and they certainly felt enthusiastic about being part of the groups. In the end, most patients resisted attempts to get them out of the hospital when the therapy was deemed complete. Indeed, a significant number of them got to reveal their side of the story and it was obvious their families were the problem. For instance, an adult who has previously worked and provided for his or her young ones would certainly feel oppressed when he or she is not allowed to make independent choices. Basically, the feeling that the society around them considered them little babies caused them all their mental illness. Worse still, the same society was quick to discriminate them on the same basis, thereby causing them social stigma (Forgas 1981).

Section Three

Behaviorism as a social psychology concept holds that people's behaviors or feelings are so defined by their environment that they can only be changed by altering the environment altogether. According to this concept, human behavior should be studied independently of internal mental status. Thus, the mental illnesses of the patients that I met at the facility should be looked at from the perspective of the larger society. For instance, the idea that the society or the close families of the patients were being too tough on them to the extent of not allowing them to make their own decisions could have caused them the mental illness. In most instances, one may feel socially oppressed but unwilling to confront the oppressors, especially if one is dependent upon such people. Indeed, the patients who bitterly complained of being treated like a baby although he is old enough to make his decisions must have felt unduly oppressed. He stressed that he had worked before and indeed provided for other people when he was working. Ideally, when things change that suddenly, one is bound to be mentally disturbed considering that everyone has a conscience. They will start to wonder why they have to be treated so unfairly when they certainly deserve better treatment. This would result in a lot of stress that can cause mental illness. According to the patient, the problem does not stop when one begins to suffer mental illness. In fact, it gets worse as the same society begins to look at you as an outcast that does not deserve much respect. This is the reason social stigma is considered unacceptable as it can aggravate ones mental illness

due to feeling of isolation and alienation (Levine 2008).

Social interaction is another social psychology concept that determines how humans behave towards one another. According to this concept, mental illness could simply result from interacting with people who are mentally disturbed. This can result to the cases that I met at the hospital in the sense that most of the patients seemed to get over their illnesses due to group therapy. It basically pointed to the possibility that either their families were too harsh to relate with or just too intolerable. Thus, the patients developed a sense of loneliness and social un-acceptance that caused them mental stress and eventually mental illness. In addition, this theory explains the aspect of social stigma by emphasizing the idea of group therapy. For instance, people who are close to a patient who is mentally ill would also start behaving abnormally. In most instances, they would see nothing wrong in disparaging the patient. In the end, their actions serve to aggravate the mental illness of the patient and worsen their own conditions. This would certainly show that human behavior evolves from their constant interactions with the environment as well as with the people around as postulated in the concept of social interaction (Forgas 1981).

Cognitive psychology is equally a significant concept in the scientific investigation of social psychology. However, it differs from the rest in that it focuses on the individual internal mental process as compared to the social environment. Thus, I would only have applied it by listening to the patients and understanding how they reasoned so as to use it in determining their mental capacity. This concept emphasizes on individual motivation or desires as the cause of mental illness. For instance, one may be too preoccupied with his or her future to the extent of loudly talking about it as he or she walks along the roads. This cannot be said to have been caused by the social environment. Indeed, medical diagnosis has confirmed the existence of internal mental illnesses that are not induced by the immediate surroundings. For instance, psychosis is a mental disease that results from malfunction of certain neuronal pathways. According to literature, this illness may cause a feeling of loneliness in patients and cause them to think of committing suicide. This, in itself is a sign of mental disturbance because a normal individual who is not mentally disturbed would not have suicidal thoughts. Such a person would simply begin to withdraw from the society

and eventually suffer self imposed stigma. In some cases, the family members could be very supportive of the patient. However, the patient's mental illness draws him or her from them leaving her socially alienated and stigmatized (Greenwood 1991).

On the other hand, psychoanalysis deals with the conflict that usually exists between one's conscious view of reality and the repressed view. According to literature, certain mental illnesses like psychosis or depression could result from this conflict. For instance, the case of the old man I met during my internship would perfectly fit in that he was trying to compare his past life as a responsible adult to his present life as a "looked up child". Indeed, it could result in self pity that can eventually cause mental illness. This form of mental illness can easily be treated by guiding the patient's mind into a conscious reality. For instance, a therapist would help him to accept his current status as a retiree who cannot fend for himself. In this manner, he would cease to blame himself for it or his relatives and accept it as one of the social setbacks in life. Psychoanalysis is done in a series of steps that quite related. For example, the therapist must first understand that abnormal human behavior is caused by irrational drives and that any attempts normalize patient's reasoning would certainly meet resistance as the patient would be looking for a self defense mechanism against retribution (Forgas 1981).

In conclusion, the behaviors, feelings as well as thoughts are influenced by imagined or the actual presence of people around. It's the fundamental idea behind the feeling of guilt and social withdrawal when one is mistreated by his or her relatives. The social psychological concepts that explain this phenomenon are quite diverse, but mainly focusing on the social environment.

References

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