



# Definitions of Stigma and Discrimination

## 1. What is stigma?

Stigma refers to attitudes and beliefs that lead people to reject, avoid, or fear those they perceive as being different. Stigma is a Greek word that in its origins referred to a kind of mark that was cut or burned into the skin. It identified people as criminals, slaves, or traitors to be shunned.

## 2. What types of stigma affect people with mental health conditions?

There are three major categories of mental health related stigma: Public Stigma, Institutional Stigma, and Self Stigma.

## 3. What is public stigma?

“Public Stigma” refers to the attitudes and beliefs of the general public towards persons with mental health challenges or their family members. For example, the public may assume that people with psychiatric conditions are violent and dangerous.

## 4. What is institutional stigma?

“Institutional Stigma” refers to an organization’s policies or culture of negative attitudes and beliefs. For example, stigma is often reflected in the use of clinical terms, such as a “schizophrenic.” It is preferable to use “people first” language, such as “a person experiencing schizophrenia.”

## 5. What is self-stigma?

“Self-stigma” occurs when an individual buys into society’s misconceptions about mental health. By internalizing negative beliefs, individuals or groups may experience feelings of shame, anger, hopelessness, or despair that keep them from seeking social support, employment, or treatment for their mental health conditions.

## 6. What is discrimination?

While “stigma” is an attitude or belief, “discrimination” is behavioral because of those attitudes or beliefs. Discrimination occurs when individuals or institutions unjustly deprive others of their rights and life opportunities due to stigma. Discrimination may result in the exclusion or marginalization of people and deprive them of their civil rights, such as access to fair housing options, opportunities for employment, education, and full participation in civic life.

## 7. How does discrimination occur?

Discrimination includes “disparate or different treatment” on the basis of disability. For example, neighborhood groups often organize to block housing for people with mental health challenges. This type of Not In My Back Yard protest (so-called “NIMBYism”) can deny housing opportunities. Further, almost a quarter of U.S. employers reported in 1995 that they would dismiss someone who had not disclosed a mental illness. Discriminatory intent may be stated or inferred in these situations.

Discrimination also includes a failure to provide a reasonable accommodation to a person with a disability. For example, accommodations for workers with psychiatric disabilities may include changes in the supervisory process, the provision of human assistance, schedule modifications, changes in physical

aspects of the workplace, re-structuring of job duties, and adjustments in policies.

We want to hear from you! After reading this fact sheet please take this short survey and give us your feedback.

English version: <http://fs12.formsite.com/disabilityrightsca/form54/index.html>

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