

S52.2

Crazy? So what!? Effects of a school project on mental health and illness on students' attitudes

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Objective: As part of the WPA Programme against Stigma, project weeks were carried out with secondary school students aged 14–18 in Germany (n=90). Key to the project week is meeting a (young) person with schizophrenia who is part of the project team.

Method: Students' social distance towards people with schizophrenia as well as the presence of stereotypes about the illness were assessed before and after the project. Parallel, a control group of students not participating in the project was questioned (n=60). The assessment was repeated one month and three months after the project.

Results: Even at baseline, students appeared little prepared to endorse negative views about people with schizophrenia. Despite expected ceiling effects, a clear reduction of social distance and negative stereotypes could be observed for all relationship situations enquired as a result of the project. These trends could not be observed for the controls.

Conclusion: Results lend support the hypothesis that young people are less prejudiced against people with schizophrenia, and that the stereotypes they may hold are susceptible to change.

S52.3

The antistigma action programme in Slovakia: a catalyst to integration

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After conducting surveys about stigma, the Slovak Local Action Team has developed activities in three areas: health services, social care and human rights. Our efforts, based in Michalovce, focus on changing the status quo: from segregation to integration, from fragmentation to holism, from monologue to dialogue, and from barriers to catalysts.

To coordinate our activities, we have founded a new association, Open the Doors, Open Your Hearts, and are supporting groups in four cities across Slovakia to develop new programmes. Using the model of the national Local Action Team, these groups comprise representatives of users, relatives and professionals. We are able to share the experiences from Michalovce, including the Club of People with Schizophrenia working with the public and the media, patients' advocacy, and questionnaires about satisfaction with services and experiences with stigma and discrimination, treatment plans, and psychoeducation for relatives.

Our activities are based on the tetralogue, a dialogue of four parties: people with mental disorders, their relatives, professionals and the public. The strongest catalyst for our work has become the WPA Antistigma programme, a challenging worldwide effort fostering discussion about discrimination without shame.

S52.4

On stigma and discrimination of mentally ill – report from a WHO/EURO Task Force

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Mentally ill persons have in most societies been stigmatised and discriminated against WHO/EURO has appointed a task force to study the situation regarding stigma and discrimination of mentally ill in Europe. An enquiry has been made to describe the situation in the different countries in Europe and the results will be presented. A study has also been done looking at different kinds of activities undertaken to try to change the perception of the mentally ill in different countries. In a number of countries there have been different kinds of initiatives, for example the Changing Mind Campaign in England, the Psyche Campaign in Sweden, the WPA Global Programme Against Stigma and Discrimination because of Schizophrenia and a number of local initiatives. A summary of the kind of activities undertaken and evaluations of these will also be presented. Finally an action plan for combating stigma and discrimination of the mentally ill in Europe will be presented.

S53. Hemispheric function and hemispheric transfer in alexithymia

Chairs: H.J. Grabe (D), M. Joukamaa (FIN)

S53.1

Neurobiological basics of transfer in brain

B.U. Meyer. Germany

No abstract was available at the time of printing.

S53.2

Alexithymia and cerebral hemispheres

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Since Sifneos coined the term Alexithymia one thousand papers have been published on this topic. There are, however, still many lacks in our knowledge concerning alexithymia as its etiology. Several neurobiological theories have been presented dealing with e.g. anterior cingulate cortex, orbito-prefrontal cortex and corpus callosum. One interesting theory deals with cerebral hemispheres. In right handed people the left hemisphere displays an advantage for verbal and analytical functions and the right hemisphere is at an advantage for a nonverbal spatial and holistic mode of processing, including imagery and the perception and nonverbal expression of emotion. It has been hypothesized that alexithymia is related to an impairment of the right hemisphere and/or a deficiency in interhemispheric transfer. The hemisphere theory originated from observations of alexithymic features in "split-brain" patients (commissurotomy because of epileptic seizures). Empirical support for the theory has been provided by studies using conjugate lateral eye movements (CLEMs), chimeric tasks, and tactile finger localization task. How specific these findings are for alexithymia is an open question. Another limitation is that most studies have dealt only with right-handed male subjects.