

# Stigma: Lessons and New Directions from a Decade of Research on Mental Illness

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## **Abstract**

While the prejudice and discrimination associated with mental illness has long been a concern for researchers, providers and consumers, a two-pronged malaise characterized the research agenda in the 20 years from the 1970's through the 1990's. However, the mid-1990s witnessed a resurgence in both research and policy efforts devoted to mental illness stigma. In this presentation, the findings from a series of collaborative, multi-method studies targeting public stigma, media, and change efforts are described. Results from the first national study of stigma in over 40 years (1996), to the first study of public stigma toward children with mental health problems (2002), to the first theoretically and methodologically coordinated study across 15 countries (2003 – present) reveal both consistent and surprising findings about the public's view of the underlying causes of mental illness, the social rejection associated with it and its treatment, and the widespread concern with dangerousness and coercion. In addition, the impact of current stigma reductions efforts and logics (i.e., the promise of neuroscientific/biomedical explanations and the most recent PSA campaign) are evaluated in the light of recent data. Together, these studies suggest a set of principles regarding stigma and offer direction on future efforts to improve the lives of persons with mental illness, those who care for them in the community, and the practitioners who develop and deliver services in the treatment sector.