

## CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF STIGMA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN FAMILIES OF PATIENTS WITH SEVERE PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS IN IRAN

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**Introduction:** The Stigmatization of psychiatric patients has been observed across the world, and the family members who care for them are the first-hand witnesses of any discriminatory attitudes. Little is known about how the problem manifests differently across cultures.

**Amis:** Study the cultural differences of the experience of stigma in families of patients in Iran.

**Methods:** The qualitative data obtained was based on the responses of 20 families to 10 open-ended questions about stigma. The effect of stigma was rated by two coders with high inter-rater reliability. The rating ranged from “no effect” to “severe effect” of stigma.

**Results:** In 40% of the interviews, family members reported that stigma had had a moderate effect on their lives. The content analysis of the data developed some various categories that showed the caregivers' perceptions of stigma. Main categories included: concealment (unsupported network, blame for causing the illness, embarrassment); limitations (work, education, relation with other); genetic attribution (tainted other family members via genetic connection with patients); traditional beliefs in society about patient (patients seen as weak and unworthy people); God's wish, burden (burden because of covering and burden of caring) and the importance of gender differences in the stigma of the illness.

**Conclusions:** Patients with psychiatric disorder and their families suffer from stigma with a broad range of negative attributes which may interfere with various aspects of their lives. Concealment and limitations are common experiences in families. Gender differences and God's wish conception are specifically related to cultural factors.