

## STIGMATIZING ATTITUDES TOWARDS MENTAL ILL PATIENTS AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

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**Introduction:** Stigma of mental illness can be defined as a set of stereotypes and prejudice established in the society that leads to discriminatory behavior against people who suffer from a psychiatric condition. Mental illness stigma is widely spread in community and reaches not only general population but also health professionals. The impact of these negative attitudes in mental ill people is severe and is becoming more relevant as mental illness gets more prevalent.

**Objectives:** To characterize and evaluate attitudes and prejudicial reactions adopted by a population of medical students and doctors from psychiatry, internal medicine and surgery that study/work in Braga's region (North of Portugal).

**Methods:** Students and professionals were surveyed using a socio-demographic questionnaire and AQ27 questionnaire - Portuguese version, a validated questionnaire to measure stigmatizing attitudes and reactions. A total of 353 questionnaires were collected. Response rate was 68,8% among doctors (n=150) and 32,6% among medical students (n=203). Scores between groups and contributes of age, sex and past experience were analyzed with linear regression modeling.

**Results:** High scores in several stigmatizing attitudes were found in both medical students and professionals. Psychiatrists displayed lower levels of stigmatizing attitudes in all categories analyzed, except "pity" which was dependent on age of responders. Interestingly, students showed significantly lower stigmatizing attitudes in help, pity and avoidance. No differences were found between groups among coercion and segregation.

**Conclusions:** The results show that both medical students and professionals, including psychiatrists, exhibit stigmatizing attitudes, which should be specifically addressed in order to improve care.