



CONSUMER UPDATE

Changing Attitudes Towards Voice Hearers: A Literature Review

What did we want to find out?

Stigma is a social construct that refers to the negative attitudes held towards an individual due to a particular characteristic. Despite voices (“Auditory Verbal Hallucinations”) being a common human experience and even occurring in the absence of any diagnosable disorder, the amount of stigma surrounding this experience continues to persist. Furthermore, dealing with the stigma associated with mental illness has been described as having a worse impact than the illness itself and previous studies have reported that stigma may increase the frequency and intensity of voices. Stigma is not only held by the general public, concerning, healthcare professionals have been thought to contribute to the stigma around mental illness. Due to the interactive nature healthcare professionals have with clients, this stigma can greatly impact clients’ willingness to stay in treatment and to have meaningful recovery. The aim of this literature review was to examine the effectiveness of different anti-stigmatizing methods amongst healthcare professionals and students in order to improve the well-being of individuals that experience voices.

What we found out

The following categories are the methods for reducing stigma that were examined in this study:

- **Simulation** - Allows a healthcare worker or student to experience firsthand hearing voices by listening to example derogatory voices through headphones or in imaginative exercises. aims to bridge the social gap and increase empathy. Results show that despite an increase in empathy for voice hearers, participants also reported increased negative implicit and explicit stigma, greater desire for social distance, and increased negative expectations about recovery. Therefore, simulation as a standalone strategy could cause more harm than good.
- **Education** - This method aims to overcome negative myths by delivering accurate information to the target audience in order to improve people’s attitudes towards mental illness. This can be delivered via lectures, role-plays, personal testimonials, etc. Overall this method has been found to be an effective intervention for reducing stigma. However, some information included in these education sessions is more effective than others.
- **Contact** - Refers to a range of methods whereby a participant can interact with people with mental illness to bridge the social gap and develop a deeper understanding of the illness. Results show that this was equally as effective at reducing explicit stigma as educational interventions.
- **Contact and education** - The combination of these two strategies has also been found to be effective in reducing stigma towards individuals suffering from severe mental illness.
- More research needs to look at how well all of these interventions work to reduce stigma surrounding voice hearers amongst healthcare professionals and students

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