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Stigma and Mental Health in Miami, FL

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COUN 6785: Social Change in Action:
Prevention, Consultation, and Advocacy

Social Change Portfolio

Nicholas Pujol

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OVERVIEW

Keywords: Serious Mental Illness (SMI), Stigma, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Baker Act and Mental Health

Stigma and Mental Health in Miami, FL

Goal Statement: To increase awareness of the issues that people with serious mental illness face in order to reduce stigma and increase treatment participation rates.

Significant Findings: Serious mental illness is a serious issue that is increasing every year. In Florida as of 2021 there are an estimated 725,239 people that have a serious mental illness (Florida Department of Health, n.d). Over the last 10 years that has been an upward trend. With the increase in population there too needs to be an increase in services in order to meet the needs of this population. Stigma against this population can only increase the barriers that this population faces. Bringing awareness to the community about this population and this issue should help lower stigma against this population. This will lower the barriers that this population faces and help them get the treatment that they need.

Objectives/Strategies/Interventions/Next Steps: Professionals can this population by doing the following:

1. Working with local community based organizations to increase awareness: In order to reduce stigma, increasing awareness in the community is an important step. By partnering with local community based organizations that work with the population we can increase awareness of the issues that this population faces and show the community local organizations that they can assist either through donations or volunteer work. An example

of a local community based organization in Miami, FL is Fellowship House (<https://www.fellowshiphouse.org>).

2. Increasing access to resources: Many members of this population are unaware of the resources that are available to them for treatment. As professionals we can be aware of local resources that help people with serious mental illness get the necessary resources that they may need.
3. Advocacy: As professionals we can advocate for people with serious mental illness in several different ways. This can help improve the situation that people with serious mental illness have to face.
4. Cultural Competence: People with serious mental illness come from every cultural and ethnic background. As professionals we can strive to increase our cultural competence in order to ensure the best possible service to every person in this population no matter what background the person may have.
5. Conducting Research: People with serious mental illness are a difficult group for many different reasons. With this in mind it is imperative that professionals conduct research in order to develop more effective treatment methods for this population. With more effective methods some of the issues with this population may lessen and it will make it easier for this population to remain successful with their treatment.

INTRODUCTION

Stigma and Mental Health in Miami, FL

Serious mental illness is an issue that affects many different people in many different ways. People with serious mental illness not only have to deal with the symptoms of the mental

disorder that they are diagnosed with but with stigma from the greater community. “The reduction of stigma towards people with a MD diagnosis is one of the great challenges of public health at global and local levels” (Grandón, Saldivia, Cova, Bustos, Vaccari, and et al, 2021, p. 1). Stigma from other about mental health can affect people with serious mental illness in different ways. For some this can make people hesitant on getting treatment for their diagnoses. This can make their condition worse and cause serious issues in the community if not treated. Miami, FL is a large city in South Florida that has many different resources and services for people with serious mental illness. Miami is also known to be a diverse city with many different cultures that live together and help the city thrive.

PART 1: SCOPE AND CONSEQUENCES

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Stigma towards people with serious mental illness is a serious issue. Stigma can cause people with serious mental illness to be hesitant about receiving treatment. If people are not getting treated for their serious mental illness their symptoms can worsen which can negatively impact their lives and the community as well. Possible consequences of stigma can be increases in the number of people with serious mental illness, increased stress of families with people that have a serious mental illness, and worsening physical condition for the person with a serious mental illness . In 2021 there are an estimated 725,239 people in the state of Florida that have a serious mental illness (Florida Department of Health, n.d). In the same year Miami-Dade county reported an estimated 93,604 people with serious mental illness live in the county (Florida Department of Health, n.d). In 2021, Miami-Dade County reported the highest number of serious

mental illnesses in the State. Also these statistics are only for adults. For the last 10 years the number of serious mental illnesses in the county and state have only been increasing.

PART 2: SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

Stigma and Mental Health in Miami, FL

People with serious mental illness have many risk factors across the levels on the social-ecological model. Due to the many different diagnoses that meet the criteria to place someone in this classification the risk factors vary depending on the diagnosis or symptoms present. There are also little to no protective factors for this population.

On an individual many of the risk factors come from the behaviors that a person may exhibit. Many of these behaviors are being affected by the symptoms that are present. This can include increased risk of violent behavior, increased risk for drug abuse, increased chances of being homeless, and etc (American Psychological Association, 2017). Also people with serious mental illness can be paranoid which can make them very difficult to treat or to remain medically compliant.

On a family level the main risk factor is that people with serious mental illness have little to no support system. “Research has indicated that SMI patients’ support networks are smaller than those among the general population” (Nicaise P, Garin H, Smith P, et al, 2021). This means that people with serious mental illness often lose a valuable resource that can help them succeed with their treatment. A protective factor at the family is the support system that it can provide. If the family members are able preserve and remain to support the person with a serious mental illness that can really propel the person forward for treatment.

At a peer group level the lack of a support system is still a risk factor. Also due to many different symptoms that are present for people with serious mental illness it is difficult for them to get and maintain a job. This means that people with serious mental illness usually need either government assistance or charity to help them maintain their daily lives. A lack of a steady income can also affect what treatments the person can afford to receive.

At a community level the main risk factor is that people with serious mental illness are stigmatized. Stigma can cause many issues for this population. As mentioned earlier most people with serious mental illness require some form of assistance from either the government or a nonprofit organization. This does place a financial burden on the community. This may cause further resentment from some people who disagree on how to spend government resources.

PART 3: THEORIES OF PREVENTION

Stigma and Mental Health in Miami, FL

Theories can provide a solid foundation for prevention programs in order to ensure success in remedying the issue at hand. These theories can provide an approach in order to create a viable solution for the community. The Theory of Planned Behavior is one theory that can be used to address the issue of stigma against people with serious mental illness. “The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)...explore the relationship between behavior and beliefs, attitudes, and intentions” (National Cancer Institute, 2005, p. 14). Stigma can be seen as a person’s negative beliefs and attitudes towards a certain group. This can affect the person’s behavior so having a theory that focuses on the relationship between these different factors can help ensure

the creation of a viable solution for the community. “Stigma can occur at different levels and thus the TPB provides constructs which can separately account for the different levels of stigma” (Nichols, & Newhill, 2023, p. 812). With this in mind, The Theory of Planned Behavior can provide an approach to be able to address stigma against people with serious mental illness at different levels. This can provide a framework that can be used to create a solution that can address the many different levels that stigma can be found in.

One existing evidence-based program that can help with this problem is Getting to Outcomes (GTO). “Getting to Outcomes is a 10-step program for implementing, evaluating, and continuously improving prevention programs” (RAND Corporation). This program specializes in evaluating a program so that the program can improve. This will help ensure that the target population is getting the best service to address the problem. This program will help this prevention program ensure that needs of people with serious mental illness are being met and that stigma against this group be addressed. This program will also give us the flexibility to make changes as needed to ensure success.

PART 4: DIVERSITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Stigma and Mental Health in Miami, FL

The target population for this prevention program is adults with Serious Mental Illness. “Stigma crosses all boundaries of gender, nationality, and culture as it is present in both developing and developed countries” (Al Omari, Khalaf, Sabei, Wynaden and et al, 2022, p. 1736). This would suggest that stigma is present for every possible subgroup in this population. The subgroup that will be focused on is hispanic culture. The reasoning for this is that Hispanics

are one of the most prevalent groups in Miami, Fl. This culture is highly influential on this city and this can suggest that a majority of the people being served by this prevention program would be Hispanics.

Hispanics have a tendency to have a negative view on mental health. One aspect of stigma is the perception of dangerousness of the targeted group. “Among adults, race was associated with perception of dangerousness. African American, Asian or Pacific Islander (API), and Hispanic individuals were more likely than White individuals to believe that individuals with mental illness are dangerous” (Parcesepe and Cabassa, 2013). With the Hispanic culture’s views on mental health it makes it difficult for people with mental illness to seek treatment for their diagnoses.

One mechanism that I will use to make this prevention program more culturally relevant for Hispanics is to have materials in the participants preferred language. This will also include having staff that can speak the preferred language. This is important because many people in Miami can speak little to no English. Providing an option in another language will make the program more accessible for the members in the community. Another mechanism that can be used is to have staff that not only speaks spanish but is hispanic as well. This will make the clients more comfortable working with the program.

As mentioned earlier, ensuring that clients can understand what is being provided to them is important for the prevention program. This is especially true for informed consent. According to standard A.2.c of the ACA code of ethos, “When clients have difficulty understanding the language that counselors use, counselors provide necessary services (e.g., arranging for a qualified interpreter or translator) to ensure comprehension by clients” (American Counseling

Association, 2014). This standard will be met by providing material and having staff that can speak the client's primary language.

PART 5: ADVOCACY

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For people with serious mental illness stigma is the main barrier that they face for treatment. Stigma can be seen in the institutional and community levels. For the institutional level the can be the treatment that these individuals receive at hospitals and other community organizations. Since people with serious mental illness are difficult to work with at times people may be hesitant to work with this population or burnout really quickly. This can cause a shortage of personnel for treatment services for this population. On the community level this can be seen by the negative perception of this population. People with serious mental illness may violate the norms, values and regulations of society. This can cause the society to view them negatively. Depending on the diagnosis some of the behavior may have been caused due to the symptoms that they currently exhibit.

In Florida the main law that concerns people with serious mental illness is the Florida Mental Health Act or Baker Act. The main barrier can be the involuntary detainment or Baker Act of a person with serious mental illness. According to Florida Law people can be involuntary detainment under certain circumstances. One example is when the patient is considered to be a threat to themselves and others. When these acts are done they are for the intention of protecting life so they can be necessary at times but depending how the situation was handled it can be a

traumatic experience for the person. This can make matters worse for their treatment moving forward.

The advocacy action that can be taken on an institutional level is to address stigma that can occur at hospitals or other community organizations. This can be done in several ways like collaborating with this institution in order to create better training or work environments so that staff will have an easier time working with this population. This can help reduce the burnout in these institutions and maybe find more success for treatment. On the community level, stigma can be addressed through advocacy as well. This can be done by bringing awareness to the community about serious mental illness. This can also include discussing what the symptoms are and what behaviors can manifest. On public policy level advocacy can be done by having discussion about involuntary detainment and to see if there can be procedure changes that can make the experience less traumatic for this population. Also there can be policy discussions about more funding for services.

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