

I AM WHOLE

Executive summary



A report investigating the stigma faced by young people experiencing mental health difficulties

October 2016



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Growing up can be a positive time for many. However, there are hundreds of thousands of young people across England and Wales for whom the experience is very different. Mental health difficulties among children and young people are common and can be both persistent and damaging.

However, the challenges that young people face are not limited to the symptoms of their mental health difficulties; many must also take on the day-to-day stigma that too often goes with this.

By giving young people the platform to share their views and stories, *I AM WHOLE* seeks to go beyond the headline statistic 'one in 10 young people experience mental health difficulties' that so often dominates the discourse.

Instead, this report seeks to get under the surface and understand the real experiences of those with mental health difficulties. This is done by examining the prevalence of this stigma, who is experiencing it and how they are doing so, the impact of this stigma, and the potential solutions that the young people themselves have identified.

How prevalent is the stigma around mental health?

The stigma inflicted on those with mental health difficulties is widely and regularly recognised, witnessed and felt by young people.

- Three quarters of young people (75%) believe that people experiencing difficulties with their mental health are treated negatively as a result of stigma.
- More than one in three young people (38%) with mental health difficulties had felt the negative impact of stigma.
- More than one in three young people (37%) who experience this stigma did so at least once a week.

How and where does this stigma occur?

This stigma comes in many forms and is often inflicted by those closest to the young person in settings they depend upon most for support.

- Young people with mental health difficulties who had experienced this stigma said they have been subject to prejudice (70%), left out of activities (54%) and verbally abused (36%).
- School is the place where most young people (59%) experienced this stigma.
- More than half of young people (54%) who experienced this stigma said it came from their own friends.

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What impact does this stigma have on young people?

The impact of this stigma is both profound and pervasive as it infiltrates many areas of a young person's life.

- More than four in five young people (85%) who had experienced this stigma said it was their confidence that had been most negatively affected.
- Young people who had suffered this stigma also said it made them less likely to talk about their experiences (70%) or to seek professional help (56%).
- This stigma also resulted in young people who had experienced it being unwilling to go out (74%) and unable to perform day-to-day tasks (69%).

What do young people think can be done to address this stigma?

Education and awareness lie at the heart of normalising mental health difficulties and overcoming this stigma experienced by young people.

- Education (76%) and more people talking about mental health (66%) top the ways young people believe this stigma can be tackled.
- Four in five (81%) of those who believe this stigma exists said school is the best place to combat it.
- Young people who believe this stigma exists say they can best tackle it by talking more about mental health (64%) and sharing their experiences (60%).

Recommendations

To tackle this stigma, the evidence shows that interventions must:

- Start young
- Address the lack of knowledge on mental health difficulties
- Train those working and interacting with young people on mental health
- Challenge the negative language around mental health
- Normalise mental health difficulties
- Encourage young people to access mental health support
- Empower young people to tackle stigma

The fieldwork for this research was commissioned by YMCA and conducted by specialist youth research agency, YouthSight. The sample consisted of 2,072 interviews with young people aged between 11 and 24-years-old from across England and Wales. In addition to this, YMCA conducted 50 interviews with young people from across all regions in England and Wales. The full findings from the research are available at www.ymca.org.uk



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