

Addressing Stigma to Improve Care for Persons with Serious Mental Illness in China

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Abstract

This project is a two year collaborative program of research and health services development aimed at addressing critical questions for the future of mental health care in China: How can we understand the remarkably high levels of social stigma associated with mental illness in Chinese culture and society? Can new ways of thinking about this problem, grounded in anthropological understandings of Chinese culture and of stigma as a form of local moral experience, contribute to more effective approaches to reducing stigma and its effects on individuals suffering mental illness and their families? To address these questions, we will work closely with colleagues in the Shanghai Mental Health Center and the Peking University Institute for Mental Health to build a deeper understanding of social stigma and local forms of resilience and recovery, while concomitantly developing anthropologically grounded and evidence-based interventions aimed at reducing social stigma and improving care for persons with serious mental illness. Key elements in the project include the organization of a working group on stigma reduction for mental illness in China, linking these three institutions; the development, piloting and evaluation of an innovative model of a mutual support family group intervention for family care providers of persons with schizophrenia; the development of a strategic plan for addressing social stigma associated with mental illness in China; and the initiation of a program of activities at Harvard, including supporting student research in China and organizing a set of seminars and workshops focused on the issues in this project, to be carried out over the two years of the program.