

Adolescent Mental Health

Introduction

Adolescence is a formative and unique time in the development of human body as it is characterized by multiple emotional, physical, and social changes that may include, abuse, violence, or poverty. These changes can make an adolescent vulnerable to mental health issues. Research shows that nearly half of all the lifelong mental health conditions begin at the ages of 11 and 15 with typical disorders such as mood disorders beginning at 14 years (Kessler et al., 2005; Merikangas et al., 2010). It usually happens that one out of four persons will experience mental illness in their lifetime, illness that originated in childhood or the adolescence period. A recently conducted study by national representative of adolescent mental health prevalence showed that almost 50% of the 10,000 adolescents who participated in the study reported clear symptoms that would have met the threshold for mental health diagnostics. Moreover, many adolescents have tried to attempt suicide, which has become the third leading cause of deaths among this age group (Gunbaum et al., 2001). In addition, adolescents with mental health conditions are often subjected to prejudice, stereotypes, and misconceptions that normally reduce their quality of life. Stigma may arise in the process and, consequently, affect critically the disclosure of mental health problems among adolescents or help-seeking behaviors. Therefore, it is imperative to promote psychological well-being and protect adolescents from risk factors such as stigma and other experiences that may potentially impact their general mental status as they transit into adulthood. This can be achieved through implementation of anti-stigma strategies against mental illnesses as discussed herein.

Stigma

According to Link et al., (1997), stigma is a perception or an attitude that involves a negative social evaluation that discredits, taints, or invokes someone to reject certain individuals because of stereotypes associated with physical disability, drug use, ethnicity, or mental disorder. In other words, stigma is the predispositions to exclude others on a discriminatory potential basis and inflicting one's personal negative attitudes towards such. In normal circumstances, adolescents with mental health conditions are usually faced with public and self-stigma. Generally, public stigma refers to people's reactions towards adolescents with mental disorders. Fellow adolescents are the ones who usually trigger this form of stigma because they often possess negative beliefs about the mentally ill and, consequently, exclude them from their circles. On the other hand, self-stigma is a negative reaction of stigmatized adolescents towards themselves. It is usually a by-product of public inflicted stigma. Individuals who are stigmatized by feel short of themselves and end up downgrading themselves.