

Service provision for people with mental health and substance misuse problems – the relationship between stigma and social exclusion

The Welsh Assembly Government recognises that issues around stigma, discrimination and social inclusion are closely linked in the area of mental health and substance misuse (WAG, 2005; 2008). The overall aim of the research was to inform the development of the co-occurring mental health and substance misuse agenda by exploring perceptions around stigma and social exclusion from the perspectives of statutory and third sector organisations and people with mental health and substance misuse problems.

From a range of stakeholder perspectives we:

- Explored and compared perceptions of stigma and barriers to social inclusion
- Identified factors which hindered and facilitated social inclusion of individuals with mental health and substance misuse problems

Qualitative data was collected across Wales from strategic staff in phase one. In-depth exploration in phase two focused on two Local Authority areas and involved operational staff from statutory and third sector organisations, and people with mental health and substance misuse problems. In total, we spoke to 76 members of staff from statutory and third sector organisations and 20 people with mental health. Our findings suggest that negative attitudes and discrimination exist amongst service providers and the general public. It has been suggested that people with mental health and substance misuse are likely to experience 'double stigma' (Evans-Lacko & Thornicroft, 2010). Although progress has been made in relation to stigma attached to mental health, there are particular issues linked to substance use. One of the main factors is the perceived responsibility for a condition. If substance use is interpreted as personal choice, attitudes are more likely to be negative. Overall, perceptions depend on a range of factors such as the severity of mental health problems and the type of substance used, and the familiarity of people with others who have mental health and substance misuse problems. We also found examples of structural discrimination and stigma. This is related to organisational policies and procedures which may restrict rights and opportunities of people with mental health and substance misuse and impact on collaborative working. Services need to be built around the problems that people present with rather than eligibility criteria and funding streams. The importance of third sector organisations has been highlighted in particular by people with mental health and substance misuse problems in relation to providing supportive and empowering services.

References

Welsh Assembly Government (2005) *Adult Mental Health Services. Raising the Standard. The revised adult mental health national service framework and an action plan for Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

Welsh Assembly Government (2008) *Working together to reduce harm. The substance misuse strategy for Wales 2008-2018*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.