What is this research about?

For people living with mental illness, stigma can be a large barrier that prevents improvement in their lives. But little research has been done to understand how stigma emerges in youth.

This research explores how adolescent stigma toward people with schizophrenia is related to demographics. It also looks at how much knowledge adolescents have about the mental disorder.

What did the researchers do?

Over 3100 students from grades 7 to 12 were surveyed in 2005 through the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey. They were asked to provide demographic information such as their grade level and sex. Their knowledge of schizophrenia was measured by asking how much they agreed with statements such as, “People with schizophrenia cannot work.” Social distancing (a measure of stigma) was assessed with questions like, “Would you be afraid to talk to someone who has schizophrenia?” (Answers ranged from “definitely” to “not sure” and included “don’t know what schizophrenia is.”)

What did the researchers find?

Overall, the majority of adolescents (71%) had some knowledge of schizophrenia while 29% reported that they did not know what schizophrenia is. Older students were less likely to report that they did not know about schizophrenia.

With regard to social distancing / stigma toward people with schizophrenia:

- Social distancing scores were low on average.
- Having more knowledge about schizophrenia decreased social distance.

What you need to know:

Stigma has a very negative impact on the well-being of those suffering from mental illness. On average, adolescents in the study had some knowledge of schizophrenia, and stigma toward people with schizophrenia was low. Greater knowledge of schizophrenia, higher age, being female, and having parents with lower education were associated with less distancing attitudes.
• Grade 12 students had lower social distance scores than grade 7 students.

• Females had lower social distance scores than males.

• Having parents with higher education levels increased social distance.

• Going to a school in an urban or rural setting did not change social distancing.

**How can you use this research?**

People designing anti-stigma campaigns can use this research to inform and target their efforts. This research can also be used by people seeking to learn the causes behind stigma.

**About the researchers**

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*Mental health, Mental illness, Stigma, Social distancing, Schizophrenia*

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