Stigma and Resilience

Public health emergencies, such as the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), are stressful times for people and communities. Fear and anxiety about a disease can lead to social ***stigma*** toward people, places, or things. For example, stigma and discrimination can occur when people associate a disease, such as COVID-19, with a population or nationality, even though not everyone in that population or from that region is specifically at risk for the disease. Stigma can also occur after a person has been released from COVID-19 quarantine even though they are not considered a risk for spreading the virus to others. Some groups of people who may be experiencing stigma because of COVID-19 include:

- Persons of Asian descent
- People who have traveled
- Emergency responders or healthcare professionals

Stigma hurts everyone by creating fear or anger towards other people.

Stigmatized groups may be subjected to:

- Social avoidance or rejection
- Denials of healthcare, education, housing or employment
- Physical violence.

Stigma affects the emotional or ***mental health*** of stigmatized groups and the communities they live in. Stopping stigma is important to making communities and community members ***resilient*** .

Everyone can help stop stigma related to COVID-19 by knowing the facts and sharing them with others in your community.

Communicators and public health officials can help counter stigma during the COVID-19 response.

- Maintain privacy and confidentiality of those seeking healthcare and those who may be part of any contact investigation.
- Quickly communicate the risk or lack of risk from associations with products, people, and places.
- Raise awareness about COVID-19 without increasing fear.
- Share accurate information about how the virus spreads.
- Speak out against negative behaviors, including negative statements on social media about groups of people, or exclusion of people who pose no risk from regular activities.
- Be cautious about the images that are shared. Make sure they do not reinforce stereotypes.
- Engage with stigmatized groups in person and through media channels including news media and social media.
- Thank healthcare workers and responders. People who have traveled to areas where the COVID-19 outbreak is happening to help have performed a valuable service to everyone by helping make sure this disease does not spread further.
- Share the need for social support for people who have returned from China or are worried about friends or relatives in the affected region.

Key Terms

1. **Stigma** occurs when people associate a risk with a specific people, place, or thing – like a minority population group – and there is no evidence that the risk is greater in that group than in the general population. Stigmatization is especially common in disease outbreaks
2. **Resilience** is the ability to withstand and recover from stress.
3. **Mental health** is defined by the World Health Organization as a state of well-being in which a person realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community