



MENTAL HEALTH IN EDUCATION; STIGMA-BASED CHALLENGES

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the discourse surrounding mental health has gained significant momentum, with an increasing acknowledgment of its importance in various aspects of life. One domain where mental health plays a crucial role is education. The mental well-being of students and educators has a direct impact on the learning environment, academic outcomes, and overall personal development. However, the issue of mental health stigma poses a substantial challenge in educational settings. This article delves into the concept of mental health stigma in the context of education, exploring its manifestations, consequences, and strategies for reducing it.

Mental health stigma is deeply entrenched in Asian cultures, including Pakistan, often due to common themes such as collectivism, traditional beliefs, limited education, gender norms, restricted access to care, societal expectations, and inadequate support services. This stigma threatens family honor and societal harmony, attributing mental illness to supernatural causes or personal weaknesses. In patriarchal societies, men may avoid seeking help to maintain a facade of strength. Despite these challenges, efforts are underway to reduce stigma by promoting

In Pakistan, mental health stigmatization persists due to lack of awareness, cultural and religious beliefs, discrimination, gender norms, restricted access to care, secrecy, and misleading media portrayals. These factors hinder the understanding and acceptance of mental health issues, underscoring the need for comprehensive awareness campaigns and improved access to mental healthcare.

SALIENT CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS TRANSFORMING PERCEPTIONS; MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA

faced by individuals with mental health concerns, and their efforts contribute to the creation of

Authors have made significant strides in advancing mental health discourse. By exploring stigma's manifestation, these scholars and storytellers have paved the way for multidimensional understanding. Their works encourage societies to face and to acknowledge the unique challenges

culturally sensitive approaches that encourage open conversations, education, and support.

supportive and inclusive educational environments worldwide.

Arthur Kleinman a distinguished American psychiatrist and anthropologist, brought an intercultural perspective to mental health stigma. Through his influential work "Rethinking Psychiatry: From Cultural Category to Personal Experience," Kleinman emphasized the significance of understanding mental health within cultural contexts. His cross-cultural research challenged the universality of psychiatric norms and advocated for sensitivity toward diverse interpretations of mental well-being.



Patrick Corrigan an American psychologist, has significantly shaped the discourse on mental health stigma in Western societies. His research, such as "The Stigma of Disease and Disability: Understanding Causes and Overcoming Injustices," delves into the societal processes that perpetuate stigma. Corrigan's work has influenced interventions that target the root causes of stigma, promoting empathy, education, and policy changes to create more inclusive environments.

Brene Brown an American author and research professor, has made significant contributions to understanding vulnerability, shame, and empathy. Her work, including books like "Daring Greatly" and "The Gifts of Imperfection," has resonated globally, challenging societal norms that often contribute to mental health stigma. By emphasizing the importance of open

Vikram Patel an Indian psychiatrist and researcher, has been a driving force in changing perspectives on mental health in Asia. His work focuses on advocating for community-based mental health care models that are culturally sensitive and accessible. Through his research and writings, Patel emphasizes the importance of integrating mental health services into existing systems and reducing the stigma associated with seeking help.

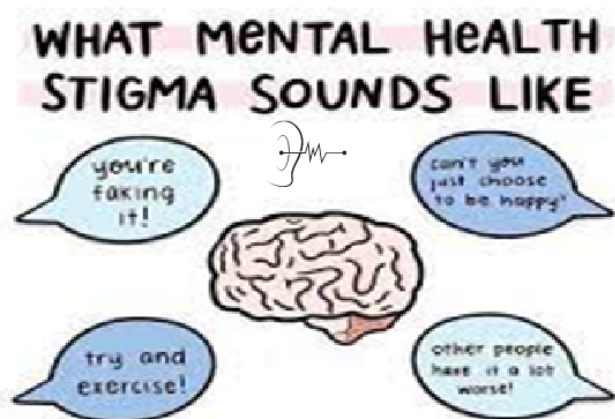
Saadia Faruqi, a Pakistani-American author, has focused on mental health awareness within the context of Pakistani culture. In her works, including "Brick Walls: Tales of Hope & Courage from Pakistan," Faruqi weaves narratives that explore mental health challenges faced by individuals in Pakistan. By incorporating relatable characters and situations, she contributes to breaking down cultural barriers and fostering empathy around mental health issues.

Nadia Agha, a Pakistani psychiatrist, has made notable contributions to understanding and addressing mental health stigma within the Pakistani context. Through her writings, including "The Faces of Stigma," Agha explores how cultural norms and societal pressures contribute to stigma in educational settings. Her work advocates for a comprehensive approach that combines awareness campaigns, education, and policy changes to create a more supportive environment for students and educators.

Faiqa Mansab, a Pakistani author, has contributed to the reduction of mental health stigma within the Pakistani context. Her novel "This House of Clay and Water" delves into the experiences of characters grappling with mental health challenges and societal expectations. Mansab's narrative sheds light on the often-overlooked intersections between mental health and cultural dynamics, prompting conversations

emphasizing the importance of open conversations and self-acceptance, Brown's writings inspire individuals to overcome shame

that challenge stereotypes and encourage understanding.



Mental health stigma can manifest in various ways, both in how it looks and sounds. It often arises from misconceptions, stereotypes, fear, and a lack of understanding about mental health conditions. Reducing stigma is crucial to creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. Here's how mental health stigma can look and sound like:

1. Negative Stereotypes:

- 👁️ : Visual representations in media and popular culture can perpetuate stereotypes of people with mental health issues as violent, unpredictable, or "crazy."
- 🗣️ : People may use derogatory language or slurs to describe individuals with mental health conditions, reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

2. Fear and Avoidance:

- 👁️ : Students or educators might distance themselves from someone they know is struggling with their mental health, isolating them or treating them differently.
- 🗣️ : Comments like "I don't want to be around them; they're too unstable" contribute to the isolation of individuals dealing with mental health challenges.

3. Discrimination:

- 👁️ : Educational institutions may discriminate against students with mental health issues by denying them access to resources or accommodations they need.

REDUCING STIGMA



4. Silence and Secrecy:

- 👁️ : Students or educators may hide their mental health challenges due to fear of judgment or reprisal.
- 🗣️ : Phrases like "Don't tell anyone about this; they'll think I'm weak" show how stigma can force people into silence.

5. Minimizing or Dismissing:

- 👁️ : Mental health concerns might be trivialized or dismissed by students, educators, or staff.
- 🗣️ : Statements like "Just toughen up; everyone feels sad sometimes" minimize the seriousness of mental health issues.

6. Blame and Shame:

- 👁️ : Some people may blame individuals with mental health challenges for their conditions.
- 🗣️ : Statements like "They brought this on themselves" assign blame and shame to those suffering from mental health conditions.

7. Lack of Education and Awareness:

- 👁️ : The absence of mental health education and awareness programs in schools can contribute to stigma.

- 🧑🏻 : Comments like "They're just faking it for special treatment" can be indicative of
- 🧑🏻 : Phrases like "I don't get why they can't just snap out of it" reveal a lack of understanding about mental health

8. Media and Social Media Influence:

- 👁️ The media can sensationalize mental health issues, focusing on extreme cases rather than providing accurate information.
- 🧑🏻 : Viral social media posts or comments that ridicule or make fun of mental health struggles perpetuate stigma.

9. Professional Stigma:

- 👁️ : Educators or school staff may avoid seeking help for their own mental health concerns due to concerns about professional repercussions.
- 🧑🏻 : Statements like "If I admit I'm struggling, they'll think I'm unfit to work here" reflect professional stigma.

Reducing mental health stigma in education involves creating a safe and supportive environment where open conversations about mental health are encouraged, and accurate information is provided. Education, empathy, and challenging stereotypes are essential steps in combating mental health stigma. Schools can also implement anti-stigma campaigns, provide mental health resources, and promote inclusivity to create a more accepting educational community for all.

INTERPRETING MENTAL HEALTH

STIGMA: TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Traditional practices for interpreting mental health stigma have often been rooted in misunderstanding and fear. In many cultures, mental health issues were historically attributed to supernatural causes or moral failings, leading to further stigmatization. These misconceptions reinforced the idea that individuals grappling with mental health concerns were somehow "different" or "dangerous." Such interpretations perpetuated stereotypes and hindered efforts to create an inclusive and empathetic environment.



In Asian cultures, including Pakistan, there is often a strong link between mental illness and stigmatization. While it's important to note that Asia is a diverse continent with a wide range of cultures and beliefs, there are some common themes that can help explain this connection:

Many Asian cultures prioritize collectivism and maintaining a positive image within the community. Mental illness can be seen as a threat to family honor and societal harmony. As a result, individuals and families may go to great lengths to hide mental health issues to avoid shame and loss of face.

They have strong traditional beliefs and superstitions related to mental illness. These beliefs can lead to stigma, as mental health problems are sometimes attributed to supernatural causes, curses, or moral failings.

There is limited awareness and education about mental health. This lack of understanding can contribute to stigma, as people may associate mental illness with personal weakness, laziness, or a lack of faith.

In some Asian cultures, particularly in patriarchal societies, there are rigid gender norms. Men, in particular, may be discouraged from showing vulnerability or seeking help for mental health issues, which can exacerbate stigma.

Access to mental health care is limited or stigmatized itself. This can discourage individuals from seeking help, as they fear being labeled as "crazy" or "weak" for doing so.

Asian cultures often have high expectations for academic and career success. The pressure to conform to these expectations can lead to the denial of mental health problems and a reluctance to seek treatment.

There is a lack of mental health services and support networks. This can make it difficult for individuals and families to find help and support, further perpetuating stigma.

It's important to recognize that there is growing awareness and efforts to reduce mental health stigma in many Asian countries, including Pakistan. Mental health advocates, professionals, and organizations are working to raise awareness, improve access to care, and challenge the stigma surrounding mental illness. However, progress may be slow, and cultural attitudes

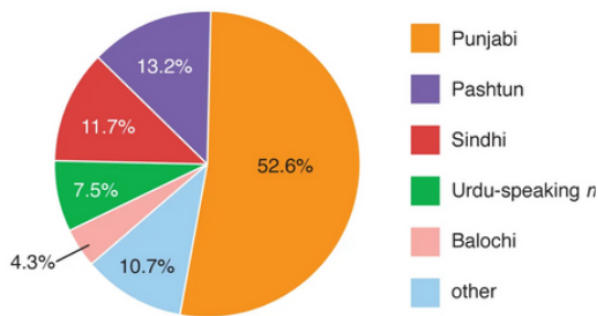


can be deeply ingrained.

CHALLENGES IN ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA

Approaching mental health stigma is not without challenges. One major obstacle is the deeply entrenched societal attitudes that perpetuate negative perceptions. These attitudes can manifest as avoidance, derogatory language, or even institutional discrimination. Moreover, the fear of being labeled as "mentally ill" often prevents individuals from seeking help, which in an educational context can impact both academic performance and personal well-being.

Ethnic composition (2000)



Pakistan is one of the most populous countries in the world. The population continues to grow, but as of 2021, it was estimated to be over 225 million people. Addressing mental health stigma in Pakistan presents unique challenges due to the country's vast ethnic and religious diversity. Pakistan is home to numerous ethnic groups, each with its distinct cultural norms and beliefs, and a significant population of various religious affiliations, primarily Islam. These diverse backgrounds influence attitudes towards mental health, leading to a complex tapestry of perceptions. Strategies to combat stigma must be sensitive to these cultural and religious nuances, as well as the socioeconomic disparities that exist within this diversity. Awareness campaigns and education initiatives need to be tailored to



REDUCING MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA

Reducing mental health stigma in Pakistan requires a multi-faceted approach that involves education, advocacy, and changes in cultural attitudes. It's essential to promote understanding, empathy, and support for individuals living with mental health conditions to create a more inclusive and compassionate society.

Addressing mental health stigma requires a multifaceted approach involving educators, students, parents, and the community. Here are some essential tips:

1. **Education and Awareness:** Promote understanding by providing accurate information about mental health conditions, debunking myths, and fostering empathy.
2. **Language Matters:** Encourage the use of respectful and non-stigmatizing language when discussing mental health issues.
3. **Inclusive Policies:** Develop and implement policies that prioritize mental health support and create a safe space for open conversations.
4. **Role Models:** Highlight stories of individuals who have overcome mental health challenges, showcasing resilience and success.
5. **Art and Media:** Utilize art, documentaries, and social media campaigns to challenge stereotypes and promote positive narratives.
6. **Peer Support Programs:** Establish peer support networks where students can openly discuss mental health concerns and receive support.

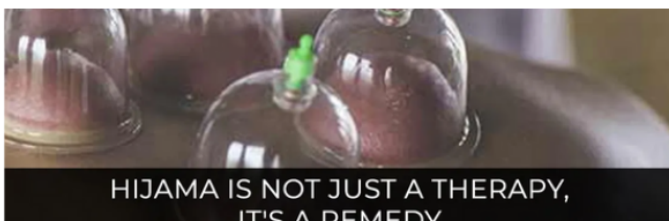
education initiatives need to be tailored to accommodate these variations, and mental health services should be accessible and culturally

discuss mental health concerns, reducing feelings of isolation.

7. Collaboration with Mental Health

WESTERN PRACTICES VS CULTURALLY SENSITIVE PRACTICES

Traditional healing practices for mental health in Pakistan reflect the rich cultural and spiritual diversity of the region. These practices often blend cultural, spiritual, and holistic approaches to address mental health concerns. They include spiritual healing, herbal remedies, cupping therapy (Hijama), aromatherapy, meditation, yoga, traditional counseling, community support, Prophetic Medicine, and Unani Medicine. While traditional healing can offer comfort and support, it's essential to approach them with caution and not as replacements for evidence-based psychiatric or psychological treatments, especially for severe mental health conditions. In contrast, Western mental health practices often prioritize scientific evidence, individual-centered approaches, psychiatric diagnoses, and psychotropic medications. Culturally sensitive approaches, as seen in traditional healing, respect and incorporate cultural beliefs, involve the community, use local languages and metaphors, adopt a holistic perspective, and integrate traditional practices where appropriate. The key lies in striking a balance between respecting cultural values and promoting evidence-based practices to provide a holistic approach to mental health treatment in Pakistan.

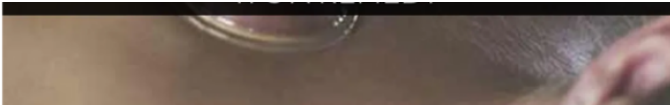


INSTILLING AWARENESS THROUGH CLASSROOM LESSONS

Educational institutions play a pivotal role in instilling awareness about mental health. Incorporating lessons about mental health, emotional well-being, and coping strategies into the curriculum can foster a culture of understanding. These lessons can normalize conversations about mental health from an early age, reducing stigma and promoting self-care.

Classrooms are not just places for academic learning; they are also ideal settings for imparting essential life skills and values, including understanding and destigmatizing mental health issues. To reduce mental health stigma, it's crucial to integrate awareness into classroom lessons. Here's how this can be achieved:

1. Incorporate Mental Health into the Curriculum: Begin by integrating mental health topics into the school curriculum. This can include lessons on understanding emotions, stress management, and the importance of seeking help when needed. By making mental health a part of formal education, you normalize the conversation.
2. Promote Open Discussions: Create a safe and non-judgmental environment where students feel comfortable discussing mental health. Encourage open dialogues about feelings, emotions, and personal experiences. These discussions can take place during classroom



activities, group sessions, or even circle time.

3. **Share Personal Stories:** Invite guest speakers, such as mental health advocates or individuals with lived experiences, to share their stories with the students. Personal narratives can be powerful tools for reducing stigma by humanizing mental health challenges.

4. **Use Age-Appropriate Materials:** Select age-appropriate resources like books, videos, and interactive activities that explain mental health concepts in a way that children and adolescents can understand. These materials can help demystify mental health and reduce fear or misconceptions.

5. **Teach Empathy and Understanding:** Include lessons on empathy, kindness, and the importance of supporting one another. Teach students how to recognize signs of distress in their peers and how to offer help or seek help on behalf of someone who may be struggling



6. **Highlight Resilience and Coping Strategies:** Teach resilience-building techniques and healthy coping mechanisms. Help students understand that facing challenges is a part of life, and there are constructive ways to deal with them.

7. **Address Bullying and Cyberbullying:** Discuss the harmful effects of bullying

8. **Challenge Stereotypes:** Examine media portrayals and stereotypes related to mental health. Encourage critical thinking by discussing how these stereotypes contribute to stigma and how they can be challenged.

9. **Role-Playing and Scenarios:** Engage students in role-playing activities and scenarios that help them practice offering support to someone experiencing mental health difficulties. This can enhance their interpersonal skills and empathy.

10. **Regular Check-Ins:** Implement regular check-ins to gauge students' emotional well-being. These can be simple discussions where students share how they are feeling that day or week. It's an opportunity to identify students who may need additional support.

11. **Collaborate with Mental Health Professionals:** Partner with mental health professionals to provide guidance, resources, and workshops for both students and teachers to ensure that the information presented is accurate and up-to-date.

12. **Encourage Art and Expression:** Utilize creative outlets like art, music, or journaling to allow students to express their emotions. These mediums can be therapeutic and help students process their feelings.

13. **Promote Self-Care:** Teach students about self-care practices, e.g mindfulness, relaxation techniques, and physical activity, which are essential for maintaining good mental health.

14. **Foster a Supportive School Culture:** The entire school environment should reflect a commitment to mental health awareness. This includes training staff, promoting staff well-being, and establishing a clear reporting system for students in need of support.

15. **Parent Involvement:** Involve parents in

Discuss the harmful effects of bullying, including its impact on mental health. Teach students the importance of standing up

CASE EXAMPLES FROM PAKISTAN: REDUCING MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA

Ninety percent of children with mental health problems live in low or middle-income countries (LMICs). School-based programs offer opportunities for early identification and intervention, however implementation requires cross-sector collaboration to assure sustainable delivery of quality training, ongoing supervision, and outcomes monitoring at scale. In Pakistan, 35% of school-aged children are reported to have emotional and behavioral problems. As in many other LMICs, the government agencies who must work together to mount school-based programs have limited resources and a limited history of collaboration. The “Theory of Change” (ToC) process offers a way for new partners to efficiently develop mutual goals and long-term prospects for sustainable collaboration.

CAMPAIGN GOALS:

Develop a model for scale-up of school based mental health services in public schools of Pakistan.

METHODS

ToC workshops to develop an empirically supported, ‘hypothesized pathway’ for the implementation of WHO’s School Mental Health Program in the public schools of rural Pakistan. Three workshops included 90 stakeholders such as policy makers from education and health departments, mental health specialists, researchers, head teachers, teachers and other community stakeholders including non-governmental organizations.

awareness initiatives by organizing workshops and information sessions that help them understand the importance of reducing

school mental health services to develop common goals and relate them (improved child socioemotional wellbeing, grades and participation in activities) to interventions (training, monitoring and supervision of teachers; collaboration with parents, teachers and primary health care facilities and schools). Key testable assumptions developed in the process included buy-in from health care providers, education officials and professionals, community-based organizations and families. For example, teachers needed skills for managing children’s problems, but their motivation might come from seeking improved school performance and working conditions. Poverty, stigma and lack of child mental health literacy among teachers, administration, and parents were identified as key hypothesized barriers. Children and their families were identified as key stakeholders to make such a program successful.



CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

- Public Awareness Campaigns: Employ various media channels, including television, radio, social media, and billboards, to disseminate messages that challenge mental health stigma. These campaigns feature real stories, expert opinions, and practical advice.
- School Programs: Recognizing the significance of early intervention, the campaign collaborates with schools to

IMPACT

The ToC process linked implementers

- **Community Workshops:** Organize workshops, seminars, and community events to raise awareness and facilitate conversations about mental health. These events often involve mental health professionals and individuals with lived experiences.
- **Online Resources:** A dedicated website and social media platforms offer a wealth of information, self-assessment tools, and resources for seeking help. These platforms also provide a safe space for sharing personal stories and seeking support.
- **Helpline and Support Services:** "Strong Minds Pakistan" operates a mental health helpline staffed by trained professionals. It provides immediate support, information, and referrals for those in need of assistance.
- **Partnerships and Collaborations:** The campaign collaborates with mental health organizations, healthcare providers, educational institutions, and governmental agencies to create a network of support and resources.

IMPACT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

The ToC approach was most suited to develop an implementation pathway for scaling-up school mental health program in public schools of rural Pakistan as it not only made the planning more rigorous and fruitful, but also allowed us to build on the local knowledge base of our stakeholders and end-users. It proved to be a powerful tool in promoting collaboration and involvement of diverse community members, increasing the chances of scaled-up implementation of school mental health program, encouraging

campaign collaborates with schools to incorporate mental health education into the curriculum. It promotes open

CONCLUSION

Mental health stigma remains a significant challenge in educational settings, affecting the well-being and development of students and educators alike. By acknowledging the manifestations of stigma, understanding its implications, and implementing comprehensive strategies, societies can create inclusive environments where mental health is valued and respected. Through collective efforts, we can break down the barriers of stigma and pave the way for a more empathetic and supportive educational landscape.

RELEVANT SURVEYS

: Several surveys and studies have been conducted to assess mental health and stigma in Pakistan. These surveys provide valuable insights into the state of mental health awareness, attitudes, and stigma within the country. Here are some relevant surveys and studies related to mental health and stigma in Pakistan:

1. **Pakistan Mental Health Survey (PMHS):** The PMHS is a comprehensive national survey conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO). It assesses the prevalence of mental disorders, the utilization of mental health services, and the stigma associated with mental health issues in Pakistan.
2. **Aga Khan University's Research on Mental Health in Pakistan:** The Aga Khan University has conducted various studies and surveys on mental health in Pakistan, including research on stigma associated with mental health conditions and barriers to seeking mental health care.

collective change. Future workshops with adolescents will be valuable to bring end

- **BasicNeeds Pakistan Mental Health Research:** BasicNeeds Pakistan, an organization focused on mental health issues, has conducted research on the impact of stigma and discrimination on individuals with mental health conditions in Pakistan.
- **World Health Organization's Assessment Instrument for Mental Health Systems (WHO-AIMS):** WHO-AIMS surveys have been conducted in Pakistan to assess the mental health system's infrastructure, human resources, and the presence of stigma-reduction programs within the country.
- **Community-Based Studies:** Many community-based organizations and academic institutions in Pakistan have conducted smaller-scale surveys and studies on mental health awareness, attitudes, and stigma within specific regions or populations.
- **NGO Reports:** Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on mental health issues in Pakistan often publish reports and research findings related to stigma reduction efforts and the impact of mental health awareness campaigns.
- **Academic Research:** Pakistani universities and academic institutions frequently conduct research on mental health stigma. These studies may be published in academic journals and provide insights into cultural and regional variations in stigma.

To access most recent and specific survey data on mental health and stigma in Pakistan, explore the websites and publications of organizations such as the Pakistan Psychiatric Society, The Recovery House, and various

to seeking mental health care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Certainly, here are some recommendations for the lesson on bridging theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and community intervention into action regarding mental health and reducing stigma:

- **Prioritize Cultural Sensitivity:**

Emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity and respect for local beliefs and practices when addressing mental health and stigma. Encourage learners to adapt interventions to the cultural context.

- **Interactive Learning:**

Promote interactive learning methods, such as case studies, group discussions, and role-playing, to encourage active engagement with the material.

- **Guest Speakers and Experts:**

Invite mental health professionals, community leaders, or individuals with lived experience to share their insights and experiences. Guest speakers can provide valuable real-world perspectives.

- **Community-Based Projects:**

Encourage learners to develop practical projects or initiatives related to mental health and stigma reduction within their own communities. Hands-on experience is a powerful learning tool.

- **Incorporate Diverse Perspectives:**

Highlight diverse perspectives and examples from various cultural contexts to illustrate the universal principles of stigma reduction while respecting local nuances.

- **Ethical Considerations:**

Discuss ethical considerations when working in the field of mental health, such as confidentiality, informed consent, and the potential impact of interventions.

- **Resources and References:**

academic institutions. Additionally, refer to government health reports and publications

Provide a list of recommended resources, including books, research papers, websites, and organizations dedicated to mental health and stigma reduction. Encourage learners to explore these sources for further learning.

- **Peer Learning:**

Encourage peer learning and collaboration among participants. Allow them to share their experiences and insights, fostering a supportive learning community.

- **Evaluation and Reflection:**

Incorporate opportunities for self-assessment and reflection. Encourage learners to assess their own attitudes and beliefs about mental health and stigma throughout the course.

- **Practical Action Plans:**

Challenge learners to develop action plans for stigma reduction initiatives in their communities. Provide guidance on how to turn theoretical knowledge into concrete action steps.

- **Feedback and Adaptation:**

Continuously seek feedback from participants about the effectiveness of the lessons and the relevance of the content. Use this feedback to adapt and improve the course.

- **Global Perspective:**

Highlight global initiatives and collaborations in the field of mental health and stigma reduction. Showcase successful projects from different parts of the world to inspire learners.

- **Advocacy Skills:**

Include lessons on advocacy skills, empowering learners to become advocates for mental health awareness and stigma reduction within their communities and beyond.

- **Evaluation Metrics:**

Define clear metrics for evaluating the success of stigma reduction initiatives.

- **Community Engagement Strategies:**

Provide strategies and techniques for engaging communities effectively in mental health initiatives, including building trust and involving local leaders.

Resources and References.

- **Celebrating Successes:**

Celebrate and showcase the successes of learners who have successfully implemented stigma reduction initiatives in their communities. This can inspire others to take action.

By incorporating these recommendations, the lesson can empower learners to not only acquire knowledge and skills but also apply them effectively to create positive change in the realm of mental health and stigma reduction.

TIPS

- 1. Building a Knowledge Base:
- 2. Developing Practical Skills
- 3. Collaborating with Experts
- 4. Community Needs Assessment
- 5. Designing Tailored Interventions
- 6. Mobilizing Community Resources
- 7. Education and Awareness
- 8. Training and Capacity Building
- 9. Peer Support Programs
- 10. Advocacy and Policy Change
- 11. Monitoring and Evaluation
- 12. Cultural Sensitivity
- 13. Collaborative Partnerships
- 14. Community Engagement
- 15. Continuous Learning
- 16. Sustainability

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- Long-Term Impact:

Emphasize the importance of sustainability in mental health projects. Discuss strategies for ensuring that initiatives have a lasting impact on reducing stigma.

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