Reviewer's report

Title: Anticipated and experienced discrimination amongst people with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depressive disorder: a cross sectional study

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Reviewer: Piotr Switaj

Reviewer's report:

This paper describes an exploratory, cross-sectional analysis of anticipated and experienced discrimination among a sample of 202 service users from South London. The topic is highly relevant, since stigma and discrimination are widely recognized as major barriers to recovery from mental illness. It is often argued that counteracting their harmful effects poses a significant challenge for public health. Hence, identifying factors related to the extent of discrimination anticipated and experienced by people receiving psychiatric treatment is vital for increasing the effectiveness of therapeutic programs and for developing interventions promoting social inclusion of people with mental illnesses. Generally, the paper is well written, concise and easy to follow. The results obtained may have important implications for research and clinical practice. While the issues raised by the authors are not new and have already been investigated by a number of studies, the present paper has strengths which distinguish it from most research in this field. Its main advantage is the use of well-validated measures comprehensively assessing the phenomena of anticipated and experienced discrimination related to mental illness. This is in contrast with many previous studies that have used psychometrically untested or weak measures of discrimination, which may have contributed to conflicting results or difficulties in interpreting the findings. Another strength of this study is an attempt at comparing the intensity of self-reported discrimination across various psychiatric diagnoses (schizophrenia, depression and bipolar affective disorder) and various ethnic groups. Overall, I find the paper to be an interesting and useful addition to the existing literature on mental health stigma and discrimination. Below I offer comments that the authors might wish to address in their revision of the manuscript.

Major Compulsory Revisions:
None

Minor Essential Revisions:
1) Since the analyses presented in the paper are exploratory in nature, I think that the formulation of specific, formal hypotheses and predictions is not absolutely necessary. However, I would recommend that the authors justify in the introduction in somewhat more detail why these and not other variables were selected as potential predictors of anticipated and experienced discrimination.
Why are they particularly important and worth investigating in this context?

2) From the introduction and the methods section it is not clear what the purpose of using the Internalized Stigma of Mental Illness Scale (ISMI) in the study was. The reason for using the ISMI is not justified by any of the research questions and the instrument is not used in the main analyses. It seems that the authors only made use of it in an attempt to explain the increased severity of experienced discrimination in the mixed ethnicity group. I would suggest that the rationale for using all the instruments, including the ISMI, should be clearly stated before the results are reported.

3) Given that the Brief Psychiatric Rating Scale (BPRS) has no formal subscales and various factor models are proposed in the literature, the authors should specify what the basis of distinguishing the subscales they used was.

4) The authors decided to investigate specific areas of experienced discrimination by ethnicity and areas of anticipated discrimination by gender. Please give the reason for this, since there were also other variables significantly associated with the two aspects of discrimination.

5) In the discussion (first paragraph), the authors state that the lack of difference in the overall severity of experienced discrimination is consistent with previous research and cite one survey to support their claim. However, I believe this statement may be somewhat misleading, since there are also important studies demonstrating significant differences in the magnitude of experienced stigma or discrimination between various types of mental disorders. For example, in a study by Angermeyer et al. (2004) patients with schizophrenia and patients with depression did not differ in terms of anticipated stigmatization, but the former reported more frequent concrete stigmatization experiences than the latter. Similarly, Verhaeghe et al. (2007) reported the association of a diagnosis of psychotic disorder with more frequent social rejection experiences and no impact of psychiatric diagnosis on stigma expectations. Another example is a recent study by Ilic et al. (2013), who found that some forms of discrimination (hostile and benevolent discrimination) were more frequent among people with severe mental illness (i.e. psychosis or bipolar disorder), others (experiences of denial and taboo) among people diagnosed with depression or anxiety disorders. Thus, I think this issue merits a somewhat broader discussion in the light of the literature, also taking into account studies yielding results contradicting those of the authors.

References:


mental health services: A comparison of psychiatric and general hospitals.
Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research, 34, 186-197.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.