Reviewer's report

Title: The effectiveness of interventions targeting mental illness stigma in the workplace: A systematic review

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Reviewer: Bonnie Kirsh

Reviewer's report:

This paper addresses an important and under investigated area, workplace anti-stigma interventions. The authors make a strong case for evaluating and identifying effective strategies to reduce mental illness stigma in order to increase help-seeking behaviour in the workplace.

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached).

The paper would benefit from a fuller discussion of the concept of stigma and its dimensions, in order to appreciate the approach to data collection and measurement that follows. For example, it is stated that “this review aims to provide a first systematic review on the effectiveness of workplace anti-stigma interventions by examining changes in: (1) knowledge of mental disorders and their treatment and recognition of signs/symptoms of mental ill health (2) attitudes towards people with mental health problems and (3) help-related behaviors.” A clear explication of how these variables comprise the construct of stigma is needed, based on research and theory that has been developed around stigma to date. The authors cite research that relates to lack of knowledge and poor help-seeking behaviours, but a fuller conceptual discussion of stigma is warranted.

On a related note, the authors state that the anti-stigma intervention evaluated most commonly in the workplace was Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training. MHFA is most often seen to be a mental health literacy program. An explanation of how programs were identified as anti-stigma programs would be useful.

The same holds true of outcomes; 11 studies targeted ‘knowledge’, including a) the identification of mental health problems and b) knowledge about effective treatments. A prior discussion of knowledge as a dimension of stigma would enable a fuller appreciation of knowledge of mental health problems and treatments is an indicator of stigma.

The Discussion also states that “the current review supports the notion that attitudinal change is neither required nor sufficient for a change in behavior. How was this conclusion reached?

Methods:
Was there a particular model followed for this systematic review?

It is not clear why the review excluded longitudinal studies, cohort studies, primary prevention studies, phase I and II study, ecologic studies, case reports, case series, cross-sectional studies, qualitative and economic evaluations, particularly because a meta-analysis was not conducted and a narrative synthesis approach was used.

What is the rationale for choosing papers in English, German, Spanish or Portuguese?

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

With regard to attitudes, the authors report that one study examined specific attitudes related to perceived dangerousness, unpredictability and recovery of mentally ill individuals. All of these might be more accurately defined as beliefs, rather than attitudes. It would be interesting to hear more about specific attitudinal changes.

Similarly, additional detail on behavior change would be useful. We are told that measures indicated that employees’ helping behavior improved, but what did this entail?

The Discussion addresses the ‘spillover effect’ that was found but this is not reported in the results section, and should be.

If MHFA showed similarly positive results in the general public (as described in the Discussion), why are targeted workplace approaches needed? The rationale for targeted approaches needs to be revisited in light of this discussion.

Methods:

Grey literature was searched and 3 unpublished studies were included. Were they checked for quality in the same way as the other peer-reviewed papers or was there additional quality assurance involved?

It is unclear whether quantitative papers addressing stigma related to drug use were included and if so, why/why not.

A flow chart illustrating the search strategy and selection process would be helpful.

The review would be enhanced by a fuller description of the narrative synthesis approach used.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Some references are incomplete.
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.