Free evidenced-based program to help individuals with disclosure and reduce stigma

Self-Stigma and Mental Illness

Self-stigma is the process in which individuals internalize prejudice attitudes from the public by agreeing with stereotypes and applying them to themselves; it is harmful for self-esteem and overall health. It can create or worsen symptoms of depression, decrease social functioning, diminish help seeking behaviors and inhibit engagement in treatment. Traditional educational and cognitive approaches to self-stigma treat it as an individual’s problem, not the result of internalizing societal bigotry and can therefore unintentionally promote secrecy surrounding mental illness. Keeping mental illness closeted can lead to increased shame. Research shows those who have disclosed aspects of their mental illness frequently report a sense of personal empowerment that enhances self-esteem and promotes confidence to seek and achieve individual goals. In this light, a group of people with lived experience and stigma researchers developed the Honest, Open, Proud program.

Honest, Open, Proud Program

Honest, Open, Proud (HOP)—formally known as Coming Out Proud (COP)—utilizes disclosure and contact strategies to counter self-stigma; research shows that people living with mental illness who are publicly “out” about their illness have better physical and mental health, functioning and relationships. The program consists of three sessions related to the subject of self-disclosure: 1) Pros and cons of disclosing, 2) Strategies for self-disclosing and 3) Shaping personal stories in ways that reflect disclosure goals. HOP is usually run by pairs of trained leaders with lived experience. HOP has a comprehensive, user-friendly manual; step-by-step workbook and corresponding worksheets; fidelity measure; and leader training program which can be obtained from www.HOPprogram.org. The program goal is to empower and prepare participants to “come out” with their mental illness and reduce self-stigma by being open and honest about their authentic lives. Coming out also works against public stigma by challenging stereotypes and prejudice through engagement with the public and people with lived experience.

Honest, Open, Proud Around the World

The original HOP program was designed for people aged 18 and over who are living with mental illness. Since HOP debuted there have been locations around the world who have adopted the program and many more who have developed new versions for special populations. The program has been running in Wisconsin, California, New York and Illinois in the United States as well as a special version just for veterans that has been used in the Veterans Affairs system in the United States. Additionally, versions have been developed for high school students, those involved with the criminal justice system as well as college students. The HOP program has also been implemented in Scotland, Germany, and adapted in the Netherlands. Other versions of HOP are currently being developed to work with people who lives with substance use disorders, gambling, professionals in the mental health field, people living with HIV, and parents of children with mental illness.
**Research on HOP**

Research on HOP has shown that participants experience: significant reduction in stigma stress, including aspects of self-stigma and improved self-esteem; less distress at the idea of disclosing their mental illness experience; perceived less need to keep their identity a secret after completing the program. The program is designed to aid in the facilitation of disclosure of certain aspects of lived experience with the objective of reducing the self-stigma associated with mental illness.


**Additional information**

For individuals attending the IIMHL Combined Meeting in Sydney during March 2-3, 2017, please contact Keith Mahar to schedule a meeting to discuss HOP in person: (keith.mahar@gmail.com).