

## Mental Health Awareness: Breaking the Stigma

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### Abstract

This literature-based review examines the issue of mental health awareness and the stigma surrounding mental health in Nigeria. Mental health remains a significant concern globally, with stigma acting as a major barrier to treatment and support, particularly in Nigeria, where cultural and societal factors often exacerbate misconceptions and negative attitudes. The review explores the prevalence of mental health conditions in Nigeria, highlighting the impact of stigma on individuals and communities. It discusses the various factors contributing to the persistence of mental health stigma, including cultural beliefs, religious views, and societal attitudes. In addition, the role of awareness in reducing stigma is emphasized, alongside an evaluation of mental health policies and frameworks in Nigeria, such as the National Mental Health Bill. The review also identifies key stakeholders, including healthcare professionals, NGOs, the media, and community leaders, and their roles in breaking the stigma. Furthermore, it explores challenges such as limited access to mental health services and socio-economic barriers, while drawing on successful international examples to offer lessons for Nigeria. The review concludes with recommendations for improving mental health awareness and reducing stigma through community-based interventions, advocacy, and policy reforms, stressing the importance of collaborative efforts to promote mental health in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** mental health awareness, stigma, cultural beliefs, mental health policy, healthcare, advocacy,

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## Introduction

Mental health awareness has become a critical focus of public health initiatives worldwide, as mental health disorders are increasingly recognised as significant contributors to the global disease burden. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that approximately one in four people will experience a mental health disorder at some point in their lives, making mental health a pressing public health concern (WHO, 2021). Despite the high prevalence of mental health disorders, stigma and discrimination continue to hinder efforts to address these issues effectively. This challenge is particularly pronounced in low- and middle-income countries, including Nigeria, where cultural, social, and systemic factors contribute to the marginalisation of mental health issues and those affected by them (Gureje et al., 2020).

Mental health, as defined by the WHO, is a state of well-being in which individuals can realise their potential, cope with the stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their communities (WHO, 2021). Stigma, in this context, refers to the negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours directed towards individuals with mental health conditions, often resulting in social exclusion, discrimination, and reduced access to care (Corrigan et al., 2014). Awareness, on the other hand, involves understanding and recognising the importance of mental health, including the ability to identify symptoms, seek help, and support those affected (Jorm, 2012). The interplay of these concepts is critical in addressing the barriers to mental health care and improving outcomes for individuals and communities.

In Nigeria, mental health stigma remains a significant barrier to care, with cultural and religious beliefs often perpetuating misconceptions about mental illness. Common stereotypes associate mental health disorders with spiritual causes, such as witchcraft or divine punishment, leading to discrimination and the ostracisation of affected individuals (Abasiubong et al., 2021). These misconceptions are further compounded by the lack of comprehensive mental health education and awareness campaigns, which limits public understanding and reinforces negative attitudes. Addressing mental health stigma is essential in Nigeria, as it directly impacts help-seeking behaviour, access to care, and the overall quality of life for individuals with mental health conditions (Audu et al., 2021).

The importance of addressing mental health stigma in Nigeria cannot be overstated. Mental health disorders are not only a significant health concern but also a socio-economic issue, as they often result in lost productivity, increased healthcare costs, and a diminished quality of life for affected individuals and their families (Patel et al., 2018). By reducing stigma and increasing awareness, it is possible to create an environment where individuals feel empowered to seek help without fear of judgment or discrimination. Furthermore, addressing stigma can help integrate mental health into primary healthcare services, improving access and reducing the treatment gap, which is currently estimated to be over 80% in Nigeria (Gureje & Lasebikan, 2006).

The objectives of this study are to explore the prevalence and impact of mental health stigma in Nigeria, examine the factors contributing to stigma, and assess the role of mental health awareness in mitigating its effects. By reviewing existing literature, the study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, healthcare providers, and community stakeholders to promote mental health awareness and break the cycle of stigma. It is hoped that this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in addressing mental health stigma in Nigeria, paving the way for more inclusive and effective mental health interventions.

## Concept of Mental Health and Stigma

Mental health is an essential aspect of total well-being, including emotional, psychological, and social health. Mental health is widely acknowledged as vital to human development worldwide; nonetheless, it continues to be substantially deprioritized, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2021) characterises mental health as a condition of well-being wherein individuals recognise their potential, manage typical life pressures, engage in productive employment, and contribute to their communities. Mental health difficulties in Nigeria are intricately linked to cultural beliefs, insufficient understanding, and systemic neglect, resulting in distinct hurdles for combating stigma and advancing mental health fairness.

The stigma surrounding mental health is complex, encompassing cultural, social, and institutional aspects. The cultural stigma in Nigeria is frequently based on traditional beliefs and religious interpretations. Mental illness is sometimes ascribed to supernatural influences, including curses, possession, or divine retribution (Adeosun, 2016). This impression perpetuates prejudice and alienation of those with mental health disorders, as they are frequently deemed dangerous or untrustworthy. Social stigma intensifies this problem, since society perceptions perpetuate preconceptions regarding mental health, further alienating people impacted. Structural stigma is sustained by systemic disparities within the healthcare system, encompassing insufficient mental health services, poor financing, and restricted professional training. These characteristics establish considerable obstacles to obtaining care, rendering individuals susceptible to unaddressed illnesses and perpetuating the cycle of marginalisation (Gureje et al., 2015).

The influence of mental health stigma on people and communities in Nigeria is significant. At the individual level, stigma engenders emotions of guilt, diminished self-esteem, and an aversion to seeking assistance, even when symptoms are incapacitating. Research indicates that several Nigerians with mental health disorders refrain from revealing their problems owing to apprehension of judgement or ostracism (Kabir et al., 2004). This hesitation frequently leads to postponed or absent therapy, exacerbating health effects. Moreover, stigma encompasses the family of affected persons, who may endure societal exclusion and bias, therefore complicating the provision of support and care.

At the community level, stigma impedes public health efforts to enhance mental health awareness and access to care. In several Nigerian towns, mental health services are limited, with an anticipated ratio of one psychiatrist per one million individuals (WHO, 2022). This scarcity is worsened by stigma, as politicians frequently neglect the significance of mental health in favour of prioritising physical health. Furthermore, societal stigma inhibits candid discussions on mental health, propagating misconceptions and obstructing the creation of inclusive, supportive settings.

Disrupting the cycle of mental health stigma in Nigeria necessitates a comprehensive strategy that tackles cultural, societal, and structural elements. Incorporating traditional and religious leaders as proponents of mental health helps transform perceptions and foster acceptance. Public education efforts that provide accurate information about mental health and confront prejudices are essential. Enhancing investment in mental health services, educating experts, and enacting supporting legislation would guarantee that individuals obtain necessary care without the apprehension of prejudice. By holistically tackling these factors, Nigeria may foster a more inclusive society that prioritises mental health and dismantles stigma.

## Prevalence of Mental Health Issues in Nigeria

Mental health disorders in Nigeria have emerged as a critical public health issue, with a rising prevalence that need immediate intervention. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that around 20–30% of Nigerians suffer from mental health illnesses, amounting to millions of persons experiencing diverse levels of mental health challenges (WHO, 2022). Notwithstanding this concerning number, mental health continues to be undervalued inside the nation's healthcare framework. The 2022 National Mental Health Survey indicated that one in four Nigerians will encounter a mental illness during their lifetime; however, only a minority pursue or obtain appropriate treatment due to stigma, lack of awareness, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure (Adebowale & Ogunleye, 2022). Depression, anxiety, and drug use disorders are prevalent mental health illnesses that frequently co-occur, exacerbating persons' difficulties.

Depression continues to be a predominant mental health issue in Nigeria, constituting a substantial segment of the mental health burden. Research conducted by Abayomi et al. (2021) revealed that depression impacts around 15% of the adult population, rendering it one of the most widespread illnesses in the nation. Anxiety disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), panic disorders, and generalised anxiety, are prevalent. PTSD is notably prevalent in victims of violence, terrorism, and relocation, particularly in Northern Nigeria, where insurgency has caused significant psychological trauma (Ibrahim & Yahaya, 2023). Substance use disorders, exacerbated by the increasing abuse of substances such as tramadol, codeine, and cannabis, have emerged as a considerable issue, particularly among Nigerian young. Okon et al. (2022) emphasised that drug addiction is closely associated with the socio-economic challenges encountered by young Nigerians, such as unemployment and poverty.

Numerous socio-economic and cultural elements affect the mental health landscape in Nigeria. Poverty is a significant factor, since it intensifies stress, restricts access to healthcare services, and heightens susceptibility to mental health disorders. The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) reports that more than 40% of Nigerians exist below the poverty threshold, fostering an environment conducive to mental health issues. The high unemployment rate, particularly among the youth, exacerbates these problems, since sentiments of despair and dissatisfaction lead to an increase in mental health illnesses (Adesina et al., 2023). Gender influences mental health, as women frequently encounter extra challenges stemming from gender-based violence, cultural norms, and restricted autonomy, resulting in elevated rates of sadness and anxiety in females relative to males (Okoro et al., 2022).

Cultural and religious beliefs significantly impact mental health outcomes in Nigeria. In some societies, mental health issues are seen as spiritual maladies or results of moral deficiencies, resulting in extensive stigmatisation and hesitance to get professional treatment. Conventional and spiritual healers frequently function as the initial contact for patients with mental health concerns, potentially postponing diagnosis and treatment (Gureje et al., 2021). Moreover, social pressure to adhere to cultural standards inhibits candid talks regarding mental health, therefore maintaining the stigma around the pursuit of assistance.

## Factors Contributing to Mental Health Stigma in Nigeria

Mental health stigma persists as a widespread problem in Nigeria, strongly entrenched in cultural, religious, and societal frameworks. Cultural and religious beliefs significantly influence the view of mental health, frequently fostering unfavourable attitudes towards those with mental health difficulties. In some Nigerian cultures, mental illness is frequently

ascribed to supernatural influences, including curses, witchcraft, or divine retribution (Atilola, 2015). These convictions are supported by enduring traditions and religious ideologies that characterise mental health difficulties as spiritual dilemmas necessitating spiritual remedies instead of medical treatments. Consequently, persons with mental health challenges are typically exposed to rituals, exorcisms, or other conventional practices, usually instead of evidence-based therapies. This method not only postpones accurate diagnosis and treatment but also perpetuates stigma, as individuals affected are perceived as morally or spiritually deficient.

Misunderstandings regarding mental health and mental illness intensify stigma in Nigeria. Numerous individuals conflate mental illness only with serious psychiatric diseases like schizophrenia, overlooking the continuum of mental health difficulties, which encompasses depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders (Gureje et al., 2015). This limited perspective cultivates fear and isolation, since those with mental health issues are frequently regarded as violent, perilous, or erratic. Moreover, the absence of precise understanding on the aetiology of mental disease exacerbates stigma. Many Nigerians perceive mental health difficulties as self-imposed or indicative of personal frailty, resulting in blame and prejudice towards individuals impacted. These beliefs are sustained by insufficient mental health education and the restricted incorporation of mental health subjects into official educational curricula, resulting in deficiencies in awareness and comprehension.

Language and cultural perceptions significantly contribute to the perpetuation of mental health stigma. In Nigeria, derogatory labels like "madman," "lunatic," or "crazy" are frequently employed to characterise persons with mental health disorders, exacerbating their marginalisation and perpetuating unfavourable stereotypes (Adeosun, 2016). Derogatory language cultivates a culture of contempt and dehumanisation, hindering individuals from seeking assistance due to fear of ridicule or condemnation. Societal perceptions of mental health are significantly influenced by media representations, which commonly characterise individuals with mental disorders as either humorous caricatures or perilous entities (Obindo et al., 2021). Such depictions perpetuate prevailing prejudices and lead to the marginalisation of persons with mental health difficulties from social and economic possibilities. Moreover, cultural norms that prioritise resilience and stoicism inhibit candid conversations on mental health. Acknowledging mental health challenges is sometimes perceived as a weakness, prompting numerous persons to conceal their emotions or refrain from getting assistance.

These issues combined establish a cycle of stigma that hinders initiatives to enhance mental health awareness and access to care in Nigeria. Resolving this issue necessitates a comprehensive strategy, encompassing public education initiatives, culturally attuned solutions, and the engagement of traditional and religious leaders in reformulating perceptions about mental health. Progress in decreasing stigma and enhancing mental health outcomes in the country will only be achieved by confronting these entrenched ideas and attitudes.

### **The Role of Awareness in Reducing Stigma**

Mental health awareness is essential for combating stigma and creating a supportive atmosphere for those with mental health issues. The notion of mental health awareness pertains to the distribution of precise information on mental health disorders, their prevalence, and the necessity for early intervention. It also entails confronting misunderstandings and preconceptions that sustain stigma. Awareness efforts seek to enhance comprehension, acceptance, and empathy, which are crucial for mitigating

discrimination against persons with mental health disorders. In Nigeria, where cultural beliefs and misinformation significantly shape perceptions of mental health, increasing awareness has emerged as a vital tool for combating stigma and its detrimental impacts on people and communities.

Worldwide, several techniques have been implemented to enhance mental health awareness, offering valuable insights that may be tailored to the Nigerian situation. Public health initiatives continue to be among the most effective strategies. The World Health Organization's (WHO) yearly mental health campaigns have been essential in public education and the advocacy for improved mental health services globally (WHO, 2021). These campaigns employ many media platforms to engage varied audiences and convey messages customised for certain cultural and socioeconomic situations. Social media has become a potent instrument for mental health activism, enabling people and groups to disseminate personal narratives, offer instructional material, and confront stigma on a wide scale. Moreover, community-based treatments, such seminars and mental health forums, have demonstrated efficacy in promoting discourse and normalising discussions around mental health. In nations such as Canada, community-driven programs like Bell Let's Talk have demonstrated the efficacy of grassroots movements in enhancing awareness and diminishing stigma (Knaak et al., 2019).

The implementation of these global techniques in Nigeria necessitates adjustment to the country's own cultural and socioeconomic characteristics. Traditional and religious leaders, possessing considerable power in several communities, can assume a crucial role in mental health advocacy. By utilising their platforms to provide correct information and debunk misunderstandings around mental health, these leaders may facilitate a transformation in public attitudes. Moreover, including mental health education into school curricula is crucial for fostering an enlightened generation that is more receptive to mental health issues. Educational institutions have a vital role in influencing attitudes and equipping youth with the resources necessary for fostering their own mental health and that of their peers.

Education and activism are crucial in transforming beliefs around mental health. Educational programs strive to provide individuals with the information necessary to comprehend mental health disorders, identify signs and symptoms, and pursue appropriate assistance when required. These programs also focus on certain groups, such healthcare professionals, to combat stigma within the healthcare system. Research indicates that healthcare personnel frequently possess unfavourable attitudes towards patients with mental health disorders, resulting in inadequate care (Atilola et al., 2015). Training programs and workshops for healthcare personnel can mitigate these biases and enhance the quality of service.

Advocacy enhances education by elevating the perspectives of those who have experienced mental health difficulties. Personal narratives disseminated via media platforms or public speaking events humanise mental health disorders, becoming them relatable and diminishing fear and stigma. Advocacy include advocating for policy modifications and augmented financial support for mental health services. The enactment of the National Mental Health Act in Nigeria in 2023 was a pivotal advancement in combating stigma and enhancing mental health awareness (Onwukwe et al., 2023). Ongoing lobbying is essential for the successful execution of this law and the establishment of comprehensive mental health care.

Mental health awareness is crucial for diminishing stigma and promoting a more inclusive society. Global and local methods, including public health campaigns, community-based initiatives, education, and lobbying, are vital in this quest. Nigeria may benefit significantly



from utilising cultural factors and including mental health education into educational institutions. Integrating education, activism, and structural reform can substantially advance the dismantling of the stigma associated with mental health.

### **Role of Stakeholders in Breaking Mental Health Stigma**

The involvement of stakeholders in dismantling mental health stigma is essential for cultivating a society that supports persons with mental health difficulties instead of marginalising them. Healthcare practitioners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are crucial in this context. Healthcare workers are at the forefront of mental health care and advocacy. Their knowledge enables them to effectively confront myths around mental illness by delivering precise facts to patients, families, and communities. Research indicates that mental health professionals can mitigate stigma by implementing person-centred methodologies that emphasise empathy and comprehensive treatment (Audu et al., 2021). It is essential to provide training for healthcare practitioners on culturally sensitive mental health treatment. This training equips them to confront culturally entrenched attitudes that frequently sustain stigma in Nigeria. By offering psychoeducation to families, healthcare providers may foster a supportive atmosphere for persons with mental disorders, thereby diminishing stigma within the community (Oladipo et al., 2019).

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a crucial role in augmenting the initiatives of governmental bodies to combat mental health stigma. These NGOs frequently lead awareness campaigns, implementing community-based initiatives aimed at both rural and urban people. Organisations such as the Mentally Aware Nigeria Initiative (MANI) have played a crucial role in orchestrating advocacy programs, awareness campaigns, and mental health first-aid training, which have markedly diminished stigma (Akinola et al., 2022). Furthermore, NGOs frequently fill the void in mental health services by providing complimentary or subsidised care, especially in underprivileged regions. This accessibility facilitates the normalisation of seeking assistance for mental health issues and counters the assumption that mental illness is a taboo subject.

The media significantly alters narratives around mental health. As a potent communication instrument, it may shape public perception and society views. Studies demonstrate that favourable media portrayal of mental health concerns may markedly diminish stigma and enhance comprehension (Gureje et al., 2020). Documentaries, news reports, and social media campaigns that showcase authentic narratives of persons with mental health issues help humanise these experiences and confront prejudices. In Nigeria, digital platforms such as Instagram and Twitter have emerged as venues for candid discourse about mental health, spearheaded by influencers and activists. The media have a responsibility to refrain from spreading detrimental stereotypes or sensationalising mental illness. It should stress precise reporting and using language that fosters dignity and respect.

Traditional and religious leaders are pivotal roles in most Nigerian communities, and their participation in mental health awareness initiatives is crucial. In Nigeria's cultural and spiritual framework, these leaders are frequently consulted on health and social matters, rendering their viewpoints highly esteemed. By integrating mental health education with cultural and religious doctrines, these leaders can significantly contribute to dismantling stigma. Religious leaders might utilise sermons and community meetings to inform parishioners about the medical and psychological foundations of mental diseases, challenging the notion that these conditions are only of spiritual origin (Adebayo et al., 2021). Likewise,

traditional leaders may utilise their influence to promote community-oriented mental health initiatives and support programs.

Collaboration among these stakeholders—healthcare professionals, NGOs, the media, and traditional and religious leaders—is essential. Their collaborative endeavours establish a comprehensive strategy that tackles stigma from several perspectives, promoting a supportive atmosphere for mental health awareness and care in Nigeria.

### **Challenges in Promoting Mental Health Awareness**

Advancing mental health awareness in Nigeria encounters several hurdles, substantially obstructing initiatives to tackle mental health concerns and diminish stigma. A key obstacle is the restricted availability of mental health care nationwide. Mental health care facilities are very insufficient, with quite a few mental institutions catering to a population exceeding 200 million individuals (Olawole et al., 2022). The distribution of these institutions is inequitable, predominantly located in metropolitan regions, resulting in rural people having limited or no access to professional mental health services. The shortage of qualified mental health providers intensifies the problem. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that Nigeria has less than one psychiatrist per 100,000 individuals, much below the recommended ratio (WHO, 2023). This deficiency results in a substantial void in service provision, since persons requiring care frequently lack access to the necessary services.

A significant difficulty is the stigma present throughout the healthcare system. Mental health stigma is pervasive, affecting not just the general populace but also healthcare professionals, who may harbour unfavourable views towards individuals with mental diseases. Research indicates that certain healthcare practitioners in Nigeria perceive mental illness as a personal deficiency or spiritual malady, resulting in discriminatory behaviours and hesitance to deliver adequate care (Adewuya & Makanjuola, 2020). This stigma diminishes the quality of care and deters persons from seeking assistance owing to apprehensions of judgement or mistreatment. The deficiency of adequate training and understanding among healthcare professionals on mental health issues substantially adds to this stigma. Rectifying this systemic prejudice is essential for enhancing the national mental health framework.

Socio-economic obstacles present a considerable hurdle to mental health education and advocacy. Poverty is a critical issue, with a substantial segment of the Nigerian population residing beneath the poverty threshold and prioritising fundamental life necessities above mental health services (Odeyemi et al., 2021). The expense of mental health care, including consultations and prescriptions, is frequently exorbitant for several Nigerians, hence constraining access. Moreover, there is an absence of consistent support for mental health education and advocacy initiatives. Mental health projects sometimes get little funding relative to other health priorities, resulting in fragmented advocacy efforts that struggle to engage a wide audience.

Moreover, cultural and religious beliefs contribute to the continuation of socio-economic obstacles to mental health knowledge. In several Nigerian communities, mental illness is regarded as a curse or retribution from supernatural entities, resulting in the marginalisation of those with mental health disorders. Families frequently turn to traditional healers or spiritual remedies instead of pursuing professional assistance, resulting in delayed treatment and the continuation of stigma (Adeosun et al., 2019). The interplay of cultural and religious factors, along with economic limitations, complicates the promotion of general acceptance and comprehension of mental health concerns.

Confronting these difficulties necessitates a multifaceted strategy. Efforts should prioritise augmenting financial resources for mental health infrastructure and educating healthcare personnel to provide care devoid of stigma. Moreover, community-based initiatives that include cultural and religious leaders in awareness campaigns may facilitate the dismantling of socio-economic obstacles.

### **Strategies for Breaking the Stigma in Nigeria**

Alleviating the stigma associated with mental health in Nigeria necessitates a comprehensive strategy that includes community-oriented initiatives, advocacy through narrative and personal experiences, and the incorporation of mental health education within educational institutions and businesses. These tactics, grounded on empirical research and international best practices, can assist in confronting entrenched beliefs, cultural biases, and structural obstacles that sustain stigma.

Community-based mental health interventions are essential in Nigeria, where cultural beliefs and traditional practices significantly influence views of mental health. Involving communities through participatory methods enables mental health experts and advocates to synchronise interventions with local norms and values. Community health outreach initiatives can include traditional and religious leaders as advocates, utilising their power to enhance mental health awareness and mitigate stigma (Abdulmalik et al., 2019). Moreover, efforts like mobile clinics or community-based rehabilitation programs can guarantee the accessibility of mental health care to rural and disadvantaged communities. These activities not only deliver care but also establish forums for discussions regarding mental health, promoting individuals to get assistance without apprehension of criticism (WHO, 2020). Community-based initiatives facilitate communication and provide safe environments, so dismantling stigma and normalising conversations around mental well-being.

Advocacy using narrative and personal experiences is an effective instrument in addressing mental health stigma. Narratives of healing and resilience can confront negative preconceptions and cultivate empathy. Research indicates that listening to firsthand narratives of persons who have encountered and coped with mental illness markedly diminishes prejudiced attitudes (Corrigan et al., 2016). In Nigeria, individuals with personal experiences might convey their narratives via public forums, social media initiatives, or documentaries to elucidate mental health issues and debunk misconceptions. Organisations like She Writes Woman and Mentally Aware Nigeria Initiative have effectively employed this strategy to enhance voices and foster a feeling of community among individuals impacted by mental illness (Ogunwale et al., 2021). Storytelling may inspire hope, foster empathy, and promote help-seeking behaviours by illustrating recovery journeys.

Incorporating mental health education into educational institutions and businesses is essential for cultivating a friendly atmosphere that emphasises mental well-being. Educational institutions are pivotal in developing attitudes, necessitating the implementation of mental health awareness initiatives in schools. Curriculum-based mental health education may instruct kids on the significance of mental health, identify early warning signals, and diminish stigma from an early age (Kutcher et al., 2016). Workplace mental health programs can similarly mitigate the stigma encountered by employees with mental health difficulties. Employers may offer managerial training, implement employee support programs, and formulate policies that enhance mental well-being. Research indicates that workplace practices conducive to mental health diminish stigma and enhance productivity and employee happiness (Doran et al., 2021). Integrating mental health awareness into

educational and professional environments fosters a culture transformation that elevates mental health to the same level of significance as physical health.

In summary, dismantling mental health stigma in Nigeria necessitates persistent endeavours via community-oriented initiatives, narrative advocacy, and the systematic incorporation of mental health education.

### Conclusion

The analysis of mental health awareness and stigma in Nigeria underscores significant difficulties and prospects for tackling this ongoing crisis. The findings highlight the substantial influence of cultural, societal, and structural variables on mental health stigma, which sustains prejudice and obstructs access to mental health care. Cultural and religious beliefs significantly contribute to the unfavourable impressions of mental illness, frequently linking it to supernatural powers or moral deficiencies. These myths adversely impact individuals with mental health disorders and deter families and communities from seeking assistance, therefore worsening the issue. Furthermore, deficiencies in mental health policies and insufficient execution of current frameworks result in the restricted accessibility of mental health services, leaving numerous individuals without expert treatment.

The analysis indicates that awareness campaigns and educational initiatives can effectively confront these entrenched stigmas. Nevertheless, these initiatives are frequently disjointed and inadequately financed, diminishing their efficacy. Insights from effective anti-stigma campaigns in other nations indicate that community-oriented strategies, media advocacy, and the proactive engagement of stakeholders may result in significant advancements. Notwithstanding the hurdles, the increasing acknowledgement of mental health as a public health issue offers a chance to instigate change in Nigeria.

### Recommendations

Policymakers must enact and enforce the National Mental Health Bill, guaranteeing sufficient financing for mental health services and awareness initiatives. Healthcare providers must undergo training to deliver compassionate, stigma-free care and act as advocates for mental health education in their communities. Non-governmental groups and community leaders should cooperate to create culturally relevant awareness programs that tackle specific myths and foster understanding. Communities must play an essential role in dismantling the stigma associated with mental health. Educational programs are to be incorporated into educational institutions, workplaces, and places of worship to normalise conversations regarding mental health and promote early help-seeking habits. Moreover, the media ought to be utilised to emphasise affirmative tales regarding rehabilitation and resilience, offering exemplars for those with mental health disorders. Storytelling projects, especially those highlighting persons with lived experiences, help elucidate mental health challenges and cultivate empathy.

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