



Stigma as a behavioral determinant of healthy aging: ageism and dementia as illustrative contexts †

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

Ageism: stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination based on age, shapes how older adults are perceived and how they perceive themselves.



Stigma influences expectations about capability, recovery, and participation. Dementia-related stigma contributes to delayed help-seeking and reduced access to supportive and rehabilitative interventions. This paper examines stigma as a behavioural determinant of healthy ageing.

METHODS

Conceptual review

Using World Health Organisation policy documents and frameworks addressing ageism and healthy ageing, alongside selected literature on dementia stigma and behavioural responses in care-seeking and service provision.

Synthesis of mechanisms and outcomes

The review synthesises evidence on how stigma operates at individual and professional levels, with particular attention to behavioural consequences, which subsequently affect clinical outcomes.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Domain	Mechanism	Behavioral Impact	Clinical / System Outcome
Ageism (Individual)	Internalized stereotypes of decline	Reduced physical activity, disengagement from care	Functional decline, poorer mental health
Ageism (Professional)	Implicit bias, low expectations	Under-screening, conservative treatment	Inequitable care, missed interventions
Dementia stigma (Individual)	Fear, denial, shame	Delayed help-seeking, symptom concealment	Late diagnosis, reduced treatment window
Dementia stigma (Family/Society)	Misconceptions, social exclusion	Reduced disclosure, reliance on informal care	Care burden, inadequate support
Dementia stigma (Healthcare)	Therapeutic nihilism	Under-referral to interventions	Reduced function, poorer outcomes
System-level stigma	Policy neglect, resource bias	Limited service development	Structural inequities

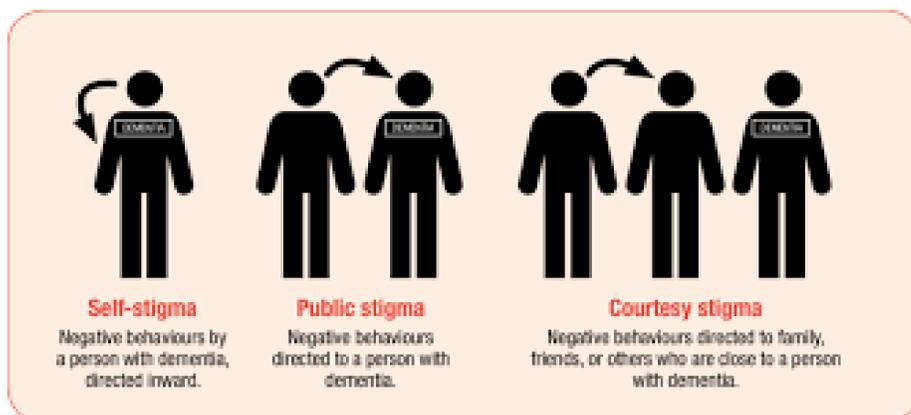
Table 1. Stigma as a Behavioral Determinant: Pathways and Consequences



CONCLUSION

Stigma in ageism and dementia are behavioural determinants that undermine healthy ageing by shaping beliefs, expectations, and actions at both individual and institutional levels. Addressing stigma is essential to improve help-seeking, support engagement with treatment and rehabilitation, as well as enable more inclusive approaches to healthy ageing and dementia.

FUTURE WORK / REFERENCES



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