

# Stigma Experienced by Family Carers

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## Types of Stigma

### Age Stigma

- Both Young Carers and Older Carers stigmatised
- Young Carers may not identify due to parental pressure/fear
- Non-working-age carers (65+) often dismissed by policy which focusses on back-to-work education for former carers

### Gender Stigma

- Caring a "feminised" activity – given lower status (4)
- Irish Constitution places working in the home firmly in female domain (5)
- Overlap with homophobia & heterosexism

### Institution Stigma

- Stigma of "putting Mum into a home" etc.
- Seen as abandonment of familial duty/responsibility
- Family Carers experience guilt & stigma even though care at home may no longer be appropriate (6) – Family Carers may continue to care beyond this time to combat this stigma

### Condition Stigma

- Mental health conditions (both person cared for, and Family Carer) stigmatised
- "Self-inflicted" conditions (e.g. drug/alcohol abuse; injuries resulting from accidents caused by driver error)
- Infectious conditions (e.g. HIV/AIDS) and related stigmas (homophobia/attitudes towards sex-workers etc.)

### Welfare Stigma

Some Family Carers report feeling stigmatised by attitudes towards those in receipt of income supports

"[There's] no appreciation from society, you're seen as being jobless and on the dole by the social welfare and government (7)"

"We are seen as dole bludgers. Or people who get top ups aren't we lucky. Especially the respite care grant, there is a lot of jealousy about that." (7)

## Introduction/Background

- Stigma is a set of misguided opinions about a group of people, built upon assumptions which have developed over time (1)
- Many Family Carers care for a person stigmatised because of their condition
- Ireland has a long history of stigma (2)
- Literature review (3) identified five main "categories" of stigma that affect Family Carers
  - Age Stigma
  - Gender Stigma
  - Institution Stigma
  - Condition Stigma
  - Welfare Stigma
- There is relatively little research on the impact of stigma on Family Carers

## Policy Responses

- Push for understanding of effects of stigma at policy level
- Measures to tackle attitudes toward stigmatised conditions etc.
- Understanding of intersectionality (how homophobia & sexism contribute to gender stigma for Family Carers etc.)
- Examination of how national policies interact to create/break down stigma

## Effect of Stigma on Family Carers

- Family Carers may not identify themselves for fear of discrimination
- Family Carers may not access services because cared-for person does not want to be "outed" as needing care
- Isolation, loneliness etc. high in Family Carers - difficult to tackle if not in receipt of supports
- Higher rates of depression etc. in stigmatised individuals
- High levels of frustration with "image" of Family Carers

## Societal Responses

- Openness to understanding truths related to certain conditions etc. to counter the myths which perpetuate stigma
- Engagement with (and support of) anti-stigma and awareness campaigns (eg #GreenRibbon (IRL); National Day Without Stigma; World Aids Day etc.)

## Organisational Responses

- Further research into the effects of stigma on Family Carers
- Training for staff members to recognise Family Carers who may be experiencing stigma – and to address the issue
- Conscious addressing of stigma within organisational policies
- Cultivation of "resilience"

## References

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