



Centre for Applied Research & Evaluation
International Foundation

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**The Centre For Applied Research and Evaluation-International Foundation
Position Statement on
Stigma**

Careif is an international mental health charity that works towards protecting and promoting mental health and resilience with a special focus on young people, to eliminate inequalities and strengthen social justice. Our principles include working creatively with humility and dignity and balanced partnerships in order to ensure all cultures and societies play their part in our mission of protecting and promoting mental health and well-being. We do this by respecting the traditions of all world societies, whilst believing traditions can evolve for even greater benefit to individuals and society

As we begin to commemorate the centenary of the First World War it is saddening to think that despite the terrible losses and suffering caused by this conflict mankind continues to resort to brutal war to settle issues and disputes. In this complex second decade of the 21st century, we find ourselves caught up in global conflagrations in part based on romantic, idealised views of the past, or fuelled by skewed interpretations of sacred religious/sociological texts and teachings resulting in various -isms, inequalities, bigotry, symbolic and real violence. These stigmatising elements are experienced and propagated at personal, local, national and global levels. Is this why human beings appear not to learn from history, or, as nature is not democratic, is this inevitable?

If we needed reminding, several recent items in the world news highlight the potentially catastrophic effects of stigma, on the people directly involved, their loved ones and the world at large, especially for those whose ethnicity and sexuality breach traditional cultural values. In South Africa, the media coverage of two men accused of murder, one a physically disabled sportsman¹ another a bi-sexual British Asian²; meanwhile, two sets of British Muslim parents³ turned in their radicalised sons who were endangering the values of the families' adopted country; the CIA's acknowledgement of torture of prisoners⁴; the bloody executions of reporters⁵, aid workers and political dissidents; "barbaric"⁶ events in France and in Belgium.

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All these cases illustrate the tragic consequences of conflict in our sense of identity, and remind us of the need to address stigmatisation, both that which we impose on ourselves and that imposed on us by others. As migration and mass media blur boundaries and expose different values the potential for stigmatisation and conflict is ever increasing.

The Dialectic (Yin and Yang) of Stigma

In its original sense, stigma simply meant to mark out – a term which was pejorative, indicating membership of an undesirable group. This leads to a focus on the negative impact associated with belonging to a group that is outside the norm. Paradoxically, stigma is an inevitable outcome of our living in complex societies where order is maintained through rules and hierarchies which requires defining and labelling⁷. Definitions, from the apparently simple ‘dichotomous’ distinctions of male/female; black/white; God/devil; heaven/hell; fidelity/infidelity; hetero-/homo-sexual to the more elusive sense of social capital. In between, we have countless elements which come together to create in each of us our sense of self. A harmonious identity might be seen as a well-balanced rainbow, where each dimension co-exists happily without any one dominating.



Image 1. An integrated, non-stigmatised identity
Dimensions e.g. race, religion, sex, sexuality, age,
mental and physical capital.



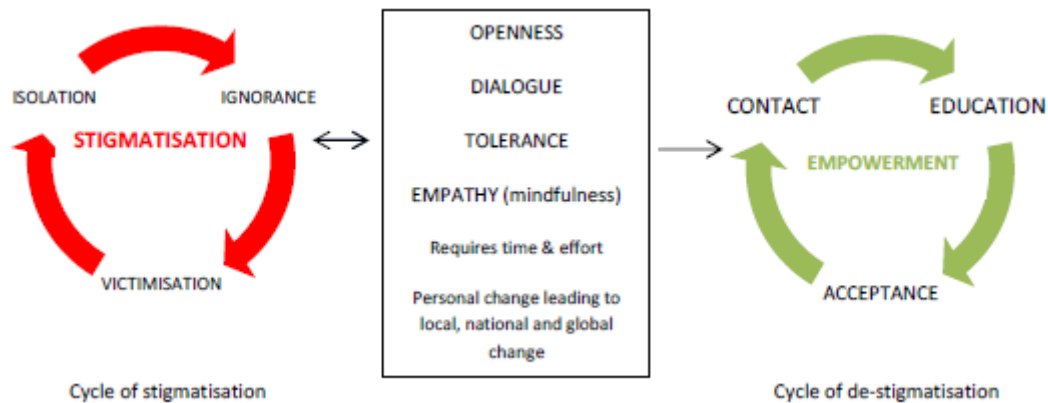
Image 2. Disrupted, stigmatised identity
when one dimension is dominant as a result of social,
personal perception or expectation of others.
Any dimension(s) could be disrupted. Red is used to
reflect the danger/persecution, caused/experienced.

The image shows what happens if either we or others have expectations that challenge our sense of identity: at the extreme, we will become fractured. If we multiply the impact for the individual we can see the problem for a community where one group adopts or is given a stigmatising label.

There is no stigma without compliance

If we are comfortable with our identity, if the rainbow is harmonious, prejudice does not have a catastrophic effect on us: there is no stigma if we do not buy into the image. But an ‘unhealthy’ group experience usually leads to persecution and isolation and can also result in radicalisation and/or violent retaliation. It affects individuals’ wellbeing⁸, but it also has local, national and global influences and repercussions. To maintain a healthy individual, and by extension community, national and global relations, Careif aims to address these aspects of stigma. We do this by identifying and confronting the sources of stigma and to empower all parties through dialogue, contact, education and research⁹.

The following graphic illustrates the process.



CAREIF proposes we can empower individuals and beat stigma through:

Community Development: non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Voluntary Sectors, other community groups and individuals, facilitate and support grassroots efforts to mobilise programmes that foster membership, increase influence, meet needs and develop a shared emotional connection among community members; and to serve as a catalysts for change and for engaging individuals and the community in decision-making and action;

Public Health: Public Health workers have stressed the importance of engaging the community in health decision-making and improving community participation in health promotion, health protection. Advocate on behalf of the communities for equity of funding and resources, education at all age levels - schools, employers, media and reporting;

Governments, Political Leaders and International Institutions: highlight and provide solutions to reduce the discrimination and bigotry associated with stigma; construct policies and pass legislation that effectively creates justice and promote the dignity of and reduction of stigma and discrimination against people;

Media and Business: to conduct comprehensive public information campaigns and partnerships, explicitly targeted at the facts and impact of stigma; sponsoring the activities of NGO and Community Sectors.

There is no doubt that cultural differences and exchanges can require great humility and sensitivity to avoid unintended insult or humiliation; the human desire to befriend and reach out can sometimes result in disagreements about entitlements and mutual obligations and rights; however collectively we can empower individuals leading to better personal, national and global harmony.

All the people involved with Careif, Trustees, International Advisors, Patrons, Friends, Supporters, etc give their time as volunteers. If you want to be part of this Careif experience, or indeed contribute your own or seek an opportunity to sponsor your ambitions, why not contact us: enquiries@careif.org.

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