

# **The clinical and psychosocial correlates of self-stigma among people with schizophrenia spectrum disorders across cultures: A systematic review and meta-analysis**

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### Abstract

**Background:** Individuals with schizophrenia spectrum disorders (SSD) are at heightened risk of experiencing self-stigma, and some cultures are more stigmatizing toward SSD than others. The first purpose of this review is to provide an estimate of the relationship between self-stigma and clinical and psychosocial outcomes. The second purpose is to examine how these relationships vary across cultures.

**Method:** Studies reporting correlations between self-stigma and outcome variable(s) were identified through electronic database searches from June 1, 2021, to January 2, 2022. Mean effect sizes were calculated using Fisher's *r*-to-*Z*-transformation.

**Results:** Sixty-three articles ( $N = 8925$ , 22 countries) were included in the systematic review and fifty-three articles ( $N = 7756$ ) were included in the meta-analysis. For the most studied clinical correlates, self-stigma had a moderate, positive correlation with depressive symptoms ( $r = .49$ ,  $p < .001$ ), a moderate, negative correlation with functioning ( $r = -.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and a positive, small correlation with severity of psychotic symptoms ( $r = .29$ ,  $p < .001$ ), negative symptoms ( $r = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and positive symptoms ( $r = .13$ ,  $p = .01$ ). For the most studied psychosocial correlates, self-stigma had a strong, negative correlation with quality of life ( $r = -.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and self-esteem ( $r = -.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The correlates of self-stigma were similar across cultures.

**Discussion:** Self-stigma shows strong to small correlations with clinical and psychosocial variables similarly across cultures. More research is needed to examine underlying mechanisms to develop effective interventions.

**Keywords:** internalized stigma; psychosis; quality of life; self-esteem; functioning; effect size

## 1. Introduction

Schizophrenia spectrum disorders (SSD) include schizophrenia, schizotypal personality disorder, and other psychotic disorders (APA, 2013). These disorders are characterized by abnormalities in one or more of the following domains: positive symptoms (e.g., delusions and hallucinations), disorganized thinking, disorganized motor behavior, and negative symptoms (affective flattening, avolition, asociality, alogia, and anhedonia). Moreover, individuals with SSD frequently experience cognitive impairments and various adverse outcomes, including negative psychosocial and occupational functioning, quality of life, and well-being (APA, 2013; Tandon et al., 2009; Yanos and Moos, 2007).

In addition to the burden of the illness, individuals with SSD face stigma, which results in adverse personal, social, and vocational outcomes (Mak and Wu, 2006; Siris, 2001). Stigma is an “attribute that is deeply discrediting” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3); “a mark of shame, disgrace, or disapproval that results in an individual being rejected, discriminated against, and excluded from participating in a number of different areas of society” (World Health Organization [WHO], 2001). Stigma encompasses interactions between the individual, public (e.g., negative stereotypes and prejudices), and structural levels (e.g., discriminatory rules and policies) (Corrigan et al., 2005; Herek et al., 2009). At the individual level, self-stigma or internalized stigma occurs when individuals are aware of the negative stereotypes associated with their illness, agree with them, and apply them to themselves (Corrigan et al., 2009). There is a high prevalence of self-stigma among people with SSD (e.g., Brohan et al., 2010; Gerlinger et al., 2013). Individuals with SSD are at heightened risk of experiencing higher and more intense levels of self-stigma and public stigma compared to individuals with other mental illnesses (Crisp et al., 2000; Dines et al., 2004; Holzinger et al., 2003; Karidi et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2014). These findings are problematic given that self-stigma was associated with adverse clinical and psychosocial outcomes such as lower self-esteem, quality of life, and hope, impaired recovery, poorer social/vocational function and treatment adherence, as well as greater symptom severity, distress, dysfunctional attitudes, depression, and avoidant coping style (Corrigan and Watson, 2002; Dubreucq et al., 2021; Livingston and Boyd, 2010; Lysaker et al., 2007a; Margetić et al., 2010; Park et al., 2013; Schrank et al., 2014; Yanos et al., 2008, 2010). Furthermore, Yanos et al. (2020) found support – across subpopulations, geographic location, and method – for various components of the “Illness Identity” model, which proposed that self-stigma impacts hope and self-esteem and subsequently leads to negative effects on recovery-related outcomes among people with mental illnesses. Specifically, the supported aspects of the model include the relationships between self-stigma and self-esteem, hope, psychiatric symptoms, and social relationships.

Nevertheless, there are differences in the manifestation and severity of public stigma across countries/cultures that could be due to differences in cultural values, beliefs about mental illnesses, and differences in normative behaviors (Thornicroft et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2007). For instance, one survey found that Chinese individuals were more likely than British individuals to report that people with schizophrenia are “*dangerous, uncontrollable, and act abnormally*” (Furnham and Chan, 2004). Also, some research has shown that patients with SSD had a better prognosis and more favorable outcomes in the “developing world,” which was attributed to lower stigma, more “supportive and tolerant” families, differences in individual responsibility for illness, and the value placed on autonomy in western cultures (Cooper and Sartorius, 1977; Littlewood, 1998; Warner, 1994).

Regardless of culture, not all individuals with SSD internalize the negative stereotypes and prejudices, suggesting that some factors may reduce or increase the risk of internalizing stigma (Camp et al., 2002; Rüsch et al., 2009a, 2009b). As such, identifying cross-cultural correlates of self-stigma may inform theoretical models of self-stigma and, in turn, allow for the development of targeted psychological and psychosocial interventions. Thus far, five reviews of self-stigma among people with mental illnesses (del Rosal et al., 2021; Dubreucq et al., 2021; Gerlinger et al., 2013; Livingston and Boyd, 2010; Yu et al., 2021), one of which focused on schizophrenia (Gerlinger et al., 2013), summarized the correlations of self-stigma with clinical and psychosocial factors. The reviews by del Rosal et al. (2021), Dubreucq et al. (2021), Gerlinger et al. (2013), and Livingston and Boyd (2010) found that clinical variables (e.g., depressive symptoms, functioning) and psychosocial variables (e.g., self-esteem, quality of life, hope, empowerment) were associated with self-stigma. However, del Rosal et al. (2021) and Gerlinger et al. (2013) found a lack of association between self-stigma and insight. Yu et al. (2021) further found that experienced and perceived stigma had direct effects on well-being and recovery variables, suggesting that both public stigma and self-stigma concurrently affect recovery and well-being among people with mental illness. Collectivism moderated the relationship between experienced/perceived stigma and self-stigma, indicating that the correlation between experienced/perceived stigma and self-stigma is stronger in more collectivistic cultures.

The current systematic review and meta-analysis aim to complement these reviews by summarizing the cross-cultural correlates of self-stigma, reporting mean effect sizes for these associations by focusing on SSD only, and reporting mean effect sizes by continent. The first purpose of this systematic review and meta-analysis is to provide a quantitative and statistical estimate of the association strength between self-stigma and clinical (e.g., the severity of psychotic and depressive symptoms, functioning) as well as psychosocial (e.g., quality of life, self-esteem) outcomes among individuals with SSD. The second purpose of this review is to examine the similarities and differences across cultures of these associations. It was hypothesized that self-stigma would be (1) positively correlated with main clinical outcomes (e.g., psychotic, positive, negative, and depressive symptoms), (2) negatively correlated with the clinical outcome functioning, and (3) negatively correlated with main psychosocial outcomes (e.g., quality of life, self-esteem). Further, it was hypothesized that the correlates of self-stigma would be similar across countries and cultures.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Literature Search Strategy**

The PRISMA guidelines were used for conducting and reporting systematic literature search and meta-analysis (Page et al., 2020; Moher et al., 2009). This review was registered on the Open Science Framework platform (<https://osf.io/jwbu7/>). Studies were identified through conducting searches in several electronic databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, PsycArticles, and Web of Science from June 1, 2021, to January 2, 2022. The main keywords used were schizophrenia OR shiz\* OR psychosis OR psychotic OR psychoses AND stig\* OR stigma OR self-stigma OR internalized stigma (see Supplementary Material). Retrieved papers were first screened based on the titles and abstracts. The full articles were examined when the titles and abstracts did not provide sufficient information. The search and selection process of articles is illustrated in Figure 1.

To be included for review, the article had to meet the following inclusion criteria: 1) primary research published in English or French in a peer-reviewed journal, 2) focused on the

experience of individuals diagnosed with SSD, and 3) included correlations about the relationships between self-stigma and at least one clinical or psychosocial outcome variable. An article was excluded for review if it: 1) did not examine self-stigma from the perspective of individuals with SSD, 2) focused on interventions only, and 3) was not correlational. There was no exclusion of articles based on the date of the study, the study design, measures of internalized or self-stigma, the context (e.g., inpatient, outpatient, or community settings), the sociodemographic background of participants, and the methods used to identify/recruit participants. To be included in the meta-analysis, two additional inclusion criteria had to be met: (1) at least two studies reported correlational results for each outcome variable, and (2) the measure of each outcome variable was based on the same operational definition. To be included in the meta-analyses that examined the correlates of self-stigma by continent, two additional inclusion criteria had to be met: (1) at least two continents and (2) at least two studies per continent for each outcome measure.

## **2.2. Data extraction**

For each study, data were extracted and coded in a predetermined form containing the following information: authors, publication date, country, sample size, the average age of participants, demographic characteristics, diagnosis, study design, measures, aims, main findings, and limitations. The following scales were used to categorize internalized or self-stigma: the Internalized Stigma of Mental Illness (ISMI; subscales: 1) alienation, 2) stereotype endorsement, 3) discrimination experience, 4) social withdrawal, and 5) stigma resistance; Ritsher et al., 2003), the Self-Stigma of Mental Illness Scale (SSMIS; Corrigan et al., 2006), the Self-Stigma Scale-Short Form (SSS-S; Mak and Cheung, 2010), and the Perceived Devaluation-Discrimination Scale (PDD; Link, 1987; Link et al., 1991). These measures are described in Supplementary Material.

The reported outcome measures were divided into clinical (e.g., the severity of psychotic symptoms, negative symptoms, positive symptoms, depressive symptoms, functioning) and psychosocial (e.g., quality of life, self-esteem) outcomes categories adapted from Livingston and Boyd (2010). The severity of psychotic symptoms refers to the severity of positive, negative, and general psychopathology symptoms.

## **2.3. Data Analysis**

Separate meta-analyses were conducted for each outcome measure using R programming (version 4.1.0), packages *metafor* and *shiny*. When there was more than one correlation for an outcome within a single study (e.g., depression assessed using two different scales), an aggregated effect for that study was estimated and included in the meta-analysis for that outcome. In addition, effect sizes for each study were transformed using Fisher's *r*-to-*Z*-transformation prior to mean effect sizes calculations. The inverse variance was used to account for sample size. Following Cohen's (1992) recommendations, correlations were considered small when  $r = .10-.29$ , moderate when  $r = .30-.49$ , and strong when  $r = .50$  and above. For each outcome, the following methods were used to assess the presence of a publication bias: visual inspection of the funnel plot (Egger et al., 1997), Egger's asymmetry test, and the fail-safe *N* of Rosenthal (Rosenthal, 1979). When there is no publication bias, the findings should be symmetrical above and below the mean effect size, indicating random sampling error (Borenstein et al., 2009). The fail-safe *N* of Rosenthal is an indicator of the number of articles needed to refute statistically significant meta-analytic means (Rosenthal, 1979). Publication bias is unlikely when Rosenthal's *N* exceeds the cutoff estimate of five times the number of studies plus 10 (Fragkos et al., 2014; Rosenthal, 1991). It was expected that there would be

heterogeneity between studies due to methodological differences (e.g., differences in measures and populations). As a result, a random-effects model was used to estimate the mean distribution of effect sizes since it accounts for variation in effect sizes across studies (Lipsey and Wilson, 2001) and, unlike the fixed effects model, allows for statistical inferences about the population of studies not included in the meta-analysis (Berkeljon and Baldwin, 2009; Hedges and Vevea, 1998). Cochran's Q-statistic (Cochran, 1954) and the  $I^2$  index (Higgins, 2003) were used to estimate the heterogeneity of effect sizes. A Q-statistic p-value below 0.1 indicates the presence of heterogeneity (Potvin, 2014).  $I^2$  values of 25, 50, and 75 respectively reflect low, moderate, and strong heterogeneity (Higgins, 2003).

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1. Systematic review by continent and country**

Sixty-three articles ( $N = 8925$ , 22 countries across six continents: Asia, Africa, Europe, Oceania, North America, and South America) were included in the systematic review. Table 1 summarizes the findings of the systematic review. Table 2 summarizes the similarities and dissimilarities across countries and continents, such that only outcomes assessed by at least two studies were included. The outcome variable insight was examined for each insight scale separately due to differences in operational definitions. Table A.1 (in Supplementary Material) summarizes the characteristics of all studies.

#### **3.2 Meta-analysis results**

In total, fifty-three articles ( $N = 7756$ ) were included in the meta-analysis, some of which reported more than one outcome variable and were therefore included in separate meta-analyses ( $N = 20$  countries: Austria, Australia, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Korea (South), Peru, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, United States). All meta-analyses results are summarized in Table 3. Table 4 summarizes the meta-analyses results by continent. The forest and funnel plots are shown in Supplementary Material. The meta-analyses results for the most studied outcomes are described below and illustrated in Figure 2.

##### **3.2.1. Severity of psychotic symptoms**

Seven studies were included in the meta-analysis examining the correlation between internalized stigma and the severity of the disorder or symptoms. Results of the meta-analysis suggest that internalized stigma had a statistically significant small, positive correlation with severity of the disorder or symptoms ( $r = .29$ , 95% CI = [.20; .37],  $z = 6.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The results suggest that the characteristics of the included studies were moderately heterogeneous ( $Q = 16.11$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p = .01$ ;  $I^2 = 62.8$ ). The funnel plot and Egger's asymmetry test ( $t = 0.93$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p = .40$ ) suggest no evidence of funnel plot asymmetry, indicating that a publication bias is unlikely. In addition, Rosenthal's fail-safe N was 254, which is higher than the cut-off of 45, indicating that the presence of a publication bias is unlikely.

##### **3.2.2. Positive Symptoms**

Fourteen studies were included in the meta-analysis examining the correlation between internalized stigma and positive symptoms. Results of the meta-analysis suggest that internalized stigma had a statistically significant small, positive correlation with positive symptoms ( $r = .13$ , 95% CI = [.03; .22],  $z = 2.53$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Results suggest that the characteristics of the included studies were strongly heterogeneous ( $Q = 63.20$ ,  $df = 13$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $I^2 = 79.4$ ). The funnel plot and the results of Egger's asymmetry test ( $t = 5.76$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .001$ ) suggest funnel plot asymmetry, indicating a potential publication bias. Moreover, Rosenthal's fail-safe N was 73, which is lower than the cut-off of 80, indicating that the presence of a publication bias is likely.

### 3.2.3. Negative Symptoms

Fifteen studies were included in the meta-analysis examining the correlation between internalized stigma and negative symptoms. Results of the meta-analysis suggest that internalized stigma had a statistically significant small, positive correlation with negative symptoms ( $r = .18$ , 95% CI = [.10; .26],  $z = 4.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Results suggest that the characteristics of the included studies were moderately heterogeneous ( $Q = 44.60$ ,  $df = 14$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $I^2 = 68.6$ ). The funnel plot and Egger's asymmetry test ( $t = 2.46$ ,  $df = 13$ ,  $p = .03$ ) suggest evidence of funnel plot asymmetry, indicating that a publication bias is likely. Moreover, Rosenthal's fail-safe N was 289, which is higher than the cut-off of 85, indicating that the presence of a publication bias is unlikely.

### 3.2.4. Depressive Symptoms

Fifteen studies were included in the meta-analysis examining the correlation between internalized stigma and depressive symptoms. Results of the meta-analysis suggest that internalized stigma had a statistically significant moderate, positive correlation with depressive symptoms ( $r = .49$ , 95% CI = [.40; .57],  $z = 9.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Results suggest that the characteristics of the included studies were strongly heterogeneous ( $Q = 109.17$ ,  $df = 14$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $I^2 = 87.2$ ). The funnel plot and Egger's asymmetry test ( $t = 1.84$ ,  $df = 13$ ,  $p = .09$ ) suggest no evidence of funnel plot asymmetry, indicating that a publication bias is unlikely. In addition, Rosenthal's fail-safe N was 3180, which is higher than the cut-off of 85, indicating that the presence of a publication bias is unlikely.

### 3.2.5. Functioning

Nine studies were included in the meta-analysis examining the correlation between internalized stigma and functioning (e.g., psychosocial, vocational, and general). Results of the meta-analysis suggest that internalized stigma had a statistically significant moderate, negative correlation with functioning ( $r = -0.39$ , 95% CI = [-.56; -.19],  $z = -3.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Results suggest that the characteristics of the included studies were strongly heterogeneous ( $Q = 100.07$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $I^2 = 92.0$ ). Although the funnel plot suggests the possibility of publication bias, Egger's asymmetry test ( $t = 0.72$ ,  $df = 7$ ,  $p = .49$ ) suggests no evidence of funnel plot asymmetry, indicating that a publication bias is unlikely. In addition, Rosenthal's fail-safe N was 607, which is higher than the cut-off of 55, indicating that the presence of a publication bias is unlikely.

### 3.2.6. Self-esteem

Thirteen studies were included in the meta-analysis examining the correlation between internalized stigma and self-esteem. Results of the meta-analysis suggest that internalized stigma had a statistically significant strong, negative correlation with self-esteem ( $r = -.55$ , 95% CI = [-.61; -.47],  $z = -12.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Results suggest that the characteristics of the included studies were strongly heterogeneous ( $Q = 52.69$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $I^2 = 77.2$ ). The funnel plot and Egger's asymmetry test ( $t = -0.85$ ,  $df = 11$ ,  $p = .41$ ) suggest no evidence of funnel plot asymmetry, indicating that a publication bias is unlikely. In addition, Rosenthal's fail-safe N was 2961, which is higher than the cut-off of 75, indicating that the presence of a publication bias is unlikely.

### 3.2.7. Quality of life

Thirteen studies were included in the meta-analysis examining the correlation between internalized stigma and quality of life. Results of the meta-analysis suggest that internalized stigma had a statistically significant strong, negative correlation with quality of life ( $r = -.52$ , 95% CI = [-.63; -.38],  $z = -6.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Results suggest that the characteristics of the included studies were strongly heterogeneous ( $Q = 156.58$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $I^2 = 92.3$ ). The funnel plot

and Egger's asymmetry test ( $t = -2.04$ ,  $df = 11$ ,  $p = .07$ ) suggest no evidence of funnel plot asymmetry, indicating that a publication bias is unlikely. In addition, Rosenthal's fail-safe N was 2287, which is higher than the cut-off of 75, indicating that the presence of a publication bias is unlikely.

#### 4. Discussion

The current systematic review highlights clinical and psychosocial outcomes related to self-stigma in various countries among people with SSD. Although the prevalence and severity of self-stigma differ across countries and geographical regions (Dubreucq et al., 2021), the current findings suggest that the nature of clinical and psychosocial correlates of self-stigma are similar across the countries and continents, indicating that the correlates of self-stigma may be universal. Specifically, for clinical outcomes, the findings revealed that self-stigma had a moderate, positive correlation with depressive symptoms, a moderate, negative correlation with functioning, and a positive, small correlation with severity of psychotic symptoms, negative symptoms, and positive symptoms. In addition, self-stigma had a moderate, positive correlation with negative attitude towards medication and anxiety and a strong, positive correlation with suicide risk. For psychosocial correlates, self-stigma had a strong, negative correlation with quality of life and self-esteem. Moreover, self-stigma had a moderate, positive association with maladaptive coping and a moderate, negative correlation with hope, resilience, and self-efficacy. However, the results were mixed for positive symptoms, negative symptoms, insight, general psychopathology, treatment duration, and treatment participation. Although these mixed findings did not show a specific pattern across cultures, some outcomes (e.g., positive symptoms) appeared to differ between countries but not continents. This could suggest that some within-countries characteristics such as public stigma and the cultural model of mental illness may moderate the relationship between self-stigma and these outcomes.

The current findings further build on the results reported by Dubreucq et al. (2021), Gerlinger et al. (2013), Livingston and Boyd (2010), del Rosal et al. (2021), and Yu et al. (2021). These reviews similarly found that self-stigma was positively correlated with depressive symptoms (del Rosal et al., 2021; Dubreucq et al., 2021), anxiety, maladaptive coping strategies (Dubreucq et al., 2021; Gerlinger et al., 2013), suicidal ideation (Dubreucq et al., 2021), positive symptoms (Gerlinger et al., 2013), and symptom severity (Livingston and Boyd, 2010). On the other hand, self-stigma was negatively correlated with quality of life (del Rosal et al., 2021; Dubreucq et al., 2021; Gerlinger et al., 2013; Livingston and Boyd, 2010), functioning (del Rosal et al., 2021; Dubreucq et al., 2021; Gerlinger et al., 2013), hope, self-esteem (del Rosal et al., 2021; Dubreucq et al., 2021; Livingston and Boyd, 2010), self-efficacy (Dubreucq et al., 2021; Livingston and Boyd, 2010), well-being (Dubreucq et al., 2021), and social support (Livingston and Boyd, 2010). The current results are also in line with Yu et al. (2021), who found that perceived stigma was negatively correlated with well-being, distress, and recovery variables. Similar to Yanos et al. (2020), we found support for various components of the "Illness Identity" model, which proposed that self-stigma impacts hope and self-esteem and subsequently leads to adverse effects on recovery-related outcomes among people with mental illnesses. However, unlike del Rosal et al. (2021) and Gerlinger et al. (2013), this review found an association between self-stigma and insight, although the results were mixed (Yanos et al., 2020). Moreover, our review adds new insights to the findings by Dubreucq et al. (2021) by reporting mean effect sizes for the associations between self-stigma and various outcomes. Moreover, our review adds new insights to those by Dubreucq et al. (2021), Livingston and Boyd (2010), del Rosal et al. (2021), and Yu et al. (2021) by focusing on SSD only from a cross-cultural perspective.



This systematic review and meta-analysis offered a needed contribution to research on SSD by qualitatively and quantitatively synthesizing the more recent relationship between self-stigma and clinical and psychosocial outcomes across various countries and cultures. Moreover, this review identified important gaps in the literature. Notably, some outcome variables were less examined, and there were few studies from Africa and South America. It remains to be explored whether these results generalize to other countries not included in this review. It could be that other factors that vary across countries (e.g., the degree of structural stigma, access to treatment, access to interventions that target self-stigma, GDP) are more important in explaining differences in self-stigma than culture itself.

#### **4.1 Theoretical and Clinical Implications**

The current findings highlight that self-stigma is a factor that negatively impacts recovery, well-being, and psychosocial functioning. Nevertheless, the synthesized studies used correlational and mostly cross-sectional designs, limiting claims about causal and long-term relationships among variables. More research is needed to examine the various moderators and mechanisms that explain the relationship between self-stigma and psychosocial and clinical outcomes. For instance, it could be that self-esteem moderates the relationship between self-stigma and functioning. These moderators and mediators would, in turn, inform theoretical models of self-stigma (e.g., the progressive model of self-stigma, which involves four stages of internalizing stigma leading to reduced self-esteem: stereotype awareness, personal agreement, self-concurrence, and self-esteem reduction; see Corrigan et al., 2011) and allow for more targeted and tailored interventions aimed at improving the functioning, mental health, and well-being of individuals with SSD.

These future findings are essential given that the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions on self-stigma among people with SSD has been mixed across studies (e.g., Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), group therapy, psychoeducation, and social skills training; see Wood et al., 2016). On the one hand, some studies suggest that these interventions are effective. For instance, Best et al. (2018) used a group intervention to reduce self-stigma (Be Outspoken and Overcome Stigmatizing Thoughts [BOOST]) which combines CBT, communication skills, and peer support among people experiencing first-episode psychosis. Although the sample size was small and the design was not a randomized controlled trial, participants who completed the BOOST intervention reported improved self-stigma, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. In addition, Roe et al. (2014), who used the Narrative Enhancement Cognitive Therapy (NECT) adapted from CBT, found that self-stigma was reduced after the treatment, while self-esteem, quality of life, and hope/agency increased. Still, a meta-analysis found that interventions that target self-stigma did not lead to improvements in self-stigma that were statistically significant across various studies, although some studies reported statistically significant effects (Wood et al., 2016). These small effects may be the result of small samples and a lack of understanding of key mechanisms underlying self-stigma. Therefore, randomized controlled trials with large sample sizes that target underlying mechanisms are needed to determine the effectiveness of self-stigma interventions.

#### **4.2 Limitations & Future Directions**

Despite its contributions, this review has several limitations that deserve mention. First, although a random-effects model was used, self-stigma and its associated outcomes were measured using different instruments, which may have influenced the results. Second, the synthesized studies used correlational and mostly cross-sectional designs, which limits claims

about causal and long-term relationships among variables. There may be third variables and confounds (e.g., population: inpatient, outpatient) that impacted the correlational results. For instance, although some studies calculated the correlations separately for inpatients and outpatients, other studies have not adjusted for subpopulations and confound variables. Third, this study only included peer-reviewed and published studies. This raises the problem known as the “file drawer problem” since many statistically non-significant results are not published, producing publication bias (Rosenthal, 1979). In addition, Rosenthal’s fail-safe test suggests the possibility of publication bias for outcomes such as positive symptoms, anxiety, insight into treatment, insight into illness, treatment duration, and treatment participation, and Egger’s test suggests the possibility of publication bias for outcomes such as positive symptoms, negative symptoms, and general psychopathology. Fourth, the meta-analysis results indicate that the characteristics of the included studies were heterogeneous since many meta-analyses for specific outcomes showed at least 75 in  $I^2$ , which is considered strong heterogeneity. Nevertheless, this heterogeneity was partly accounted for by using a random-effects model.

#### **4.3 Conclusion**

In summary, people with SSD are at increased risk of internalizing the negative stereotypes and discrimination associated with their illness, which may result in adverse outcomes and increased mental health problems. Overall, self-stigma was associated with various clinical and psychosocial outcomes, including reduced functioning, quality of life, and self-esteem, as well as greater severity of psychotic symptoms and depressive symptoms. Future research should examine moderating and mediating variables using longitudinal designs. These findings would strengthen theoretical models of self-stigma and allow for more targeted and tailored intervention strategies to reduce self-stigma.

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