

OC21: Impact of the contact strategy on a program for the reduction of stigma in adolescents in a school context: an exploratory study

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Introduction: Stigma is a barrier in adolescents' mental health treatment. The best known strategies to reduce adolescents' stigmatizing attitudes are education and contact. However, the latter's effectiveness in adolescents isn't consensual yet.

Objectives: Evaluate the influence of a greater number of moments of contact of people with mental illness, who entered the program "Porta Aberta à Saúde Mental", on the stigma of adolescents.

Materials and Methods: In this quasi-experimental study, 91 students, aged between 14-17, who attend three schools from Porto (Portugal), were divided into two experimental groups. The adolescents' stigma was assessed through the AQ-27 Attribution Questionnaire with pre and post-tests (significance level of 0.05).

Results and Discussion: Both groups showed significant reduction in stigma in the Dangerousness, Fear, Help and Coercion domains, after intervention. The group with a greater number of contact moments showed both a significant decrease in stigma in the Fear domain ($p < 0.05$), and a significant increase in the mean of the Segregation domain ($p < 0.05$). Fear is known to be a central feature of stigma towards mental illness. After intervention, there weren't significant differences between groups ($p = 0.24$).

Conclusion: The combination of education and contact strategies in reducing adolescents' stigma, in a school context, is effective, although a greater number of contact moments doesn't show a significant impact in that reduction. Future research is needed to perceive how/where the contact strategy could be more successful in changing adolescents' stigma.

References

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