

Understanding stigma towards substance use among migrant and ethnic minority groups: A qualitative systematic review

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Introduction and Aims: Although stigma is commonly identified as a barrier to accessing substance use support among people from migrant and ethnic minority (MEM) backgrounds, responses are hampered by limited understanding of how stigma unfolds. We aimed to generate a deeper understanding of the drivers, markers and manifestations of substance use stigma experienced by MEM communities.

Method / Approach: We conducted a qualitative systematic review to identify studies examining stigma towards substance use or mental health, and deductively coded findings to the Health Stigma and Discrimination Framework, which examines how stigma unfolds across socio-ecological environments.

Key Findings: Of 4789 studies identified, 460 studies underwent full-text review (ongoing) and 10 studies were included in this preliminary analysis. Studies were conducted in treatment, community and prison settings with heterogenous populations including refugees, young African migrants, Latinx and Hispanic communities. Findings suggest that people from MEM backgrounds who used substances were perceived as weak, untrustworthy and irresponsible. Stigma manifested in people's lives through family exclusion, avoidance by friends and community gossip. Substance use stigma intersected with citizenship and gender, with refugees and women viewed particularly unfavourably. Self-stigma occurred when participants internalised negative labels and experienced shame. The anticipation of stigma, fear of being outed as an 'addict' and a desire to protect their families led many to hide their substance use and avoid formal support services.

Discussions and Conclusions: Our findings indicate a need for anti-stigma interventions which act on internalised stigma and the manifestations of stigma that occur within families and communities.

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