

ADDRESSING STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

Stigma refers to a negative attitude toward people we think are not “like us”. For example, stigma can mean not valuing people who tested positive with Covid-19. To stigmatise someone means seeing a person as inferior or less than a human being because of something about him or her. A lot of times people stigmatize others because they do not have the right information or knowledge. Discrimination is an action that is typically fuelled by stigma. People are labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately, and/or experience loss of status because of a perceived link with the disease. Stigma arises when we change the question from **what** is to blame to **who** is to blame.

The consequence is that stigma can drive people to hide the illness to avoid discrimination, preventing them from seeking health care immediately, and thereby spreading infection to the wider community. Individually, stigmatised people may feel unwanted, rejected, suffer from loneliness, loss of hope, depression and more likely to be suicidal.

To combat stigma, we need to stop being judgemental, stop accusing some people of being responsible for spreading the disease because we are all at risk of Covid-19. Use of stigmatising words such as referring to people as “COVID-19 cases” or “victims”, should be avoided. It is also advisable that, on a continuous basis, we meaningfully engage at the community level to amplify the voices, stories and images of local people who have experienced the new coronavirus (COVID-19) and have recovered or who have supported a loved one through recovery to emphasise that most people do recover from COVID-19.