



COVID-19 DESTIGMATIZATION

Social stigma in the context of health is the negative association between a person or a group of people who share certain characteristics and specific diseases. In an outbreak, this may mean people are labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately or experience loss of status because of a perceived link with the disease.

Such treatment can negatively affect those with the disease, as well as their caregivers, family, friends and communities. People who do not have the disease but share other characteristics with this group may also suffer from stigma.

The current COVID-19 outbreak has provoked social stigma and discriminatory behaviours against people of certain ethnic backgrounds as well as anyone perceived to have been in contact with the virus.

The below points if applied, may assist in reducing stigma & discrimination:

- **Don't be judgemental.**

Calling COVID-19 a foreign virus and accusing certain groups of being responsible for spreading it can be detrimental. It increases stigma for some groups and it makes others complacent as they begin to think of it as someone else's problem.

Let's be clear: we are all at risk of COVID-19.

- **Develop a rights-based response.**

Protecting human rights as a pillar is important as prevention and treatment in a public health response. The COVID-19 response needs to be conscious of this and ensure that measures are taken to protect human rights, including labour rights of everyone.

- **Mind your language.**

Instead of referring to "COVID-19 cases" or "victims", say people who have COVID-19. Stay away from saying people transmitting COVID-19 or infecting others.

- **Share positive stories and give COVID-19 a human face.**

Behind all the numbers are human beings. It is uplifting to see the photos of hospital staff clapping as fully recovered COVID-19 patients are being discharged from hospitals. Such positive stories do go a long way in developing a COVID-19 response free from stigma & discrimination.

- **Spread the facts.**

Stigma can be heightened by insufficient knowledge about how the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is transmitted and treated and how to prevent infection. In response, prioritise the collection, consolidation and dissemination of accurate country and community-specific information about affected areas, individual and group vulnerability to COVID-19, treatment options and where to access health care and information. Use simple language and avoid clinical terms.

References:

<https://www.who.int/docs>; <https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5>