

## **New study tackles mental illness stigma**

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*(Wellington, New Zealand)* A unique Mental Health Foundation study into the effects of stigma on New Zealanders living with mental illness will be launched today by the Governor-General, the Hon Anand Satyanand.

*“Fighting Shadows: Self-Stigma And Mental Illness: Whawhai Atu te Whakamā Hihira”*

incorporates the experiences of 76 men and women from around the country; including Pakeha, Maori, Pasifika, Chinese, young people and refugees.

“This study shows that negative messages about mental illness in society shape and reinforce attitudes people hold toward themselves,” says Judi Clements, Chief Executive of the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand. “These attitudes hold people back from full participation in society, and create a cycle of internalised stigma, or ‘self-stigma’.”

One in five New Zealanders report being diagnosed with a mental illness in any one year, rising to two in five when reporting diagnosis at some point during their lives. \*

Participants in the study described experiences of isolation, self-doubt, rejection by family and peers, and pessimism about their prospects of recovery.

However, participants also identified actions or ‘circuit-breakers’ to counter discrimination and negative thought patterns. These included: more visibility of people with mental illness, building peer support networks, affirming human rights, challenging negative attitudes, and encouraging mental health services to focus on recovery.

“The problem of self-stigma in New Zealanders will be solved by celebrating and accepting difference in society, rather than rejecting it,” says Judi Clements. “People with experience of mental illness are in successful employment, having relationships and families, and acting as positive role-models.

“This needs to be recognised, and we hope this study will encourage families, employers, healthcare workers and the media to play a role in that.”

*“Fighting Shadows: Self-Stigma And Mental Illness: Whawhai Atu te Whakamā Hihira”* was funded as part of the Ministry of Health’s *Like Minds, Like Mine* programme, which aims to reduce

the stigma associated with mental illness. The study follows on from previous research reports on discrimination and discrimination in employment.

To download the *Fighting Shadows* research report (pdf 4MB) [click here](#).

## **ENDS**

\*Oakley Browne, M. A., Wells, J. E., & Scotts, K. M. (Eds). (2006). *Te Rau Hinengaro: The New Zealand Mental Health Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Health

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