

The stigma of migraine

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Stigma is the severe disapproval or rejection of a person due to a trait or group membership perceived to indicate her or his deviance from social norms. We sought to measure stigma towards persons with migraine (PwMs) relative to persons with other disorders, and to define factors that influence stigmatizing attitudes towards PwMs. We employed a contrastive vignette technique in which participants (recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk) answered an identical set of survey questions after being assigned to read one (and only one) of several vignettes describing individuals differing only by an independent variable. Independent variables in vignettes included the disorder of the person described (migraine vs. epilepsy vs. asthma vs. panic disorder) and/or that person's workplace reliability (zero vs. two vs. ten lost workdays per year). We found that the magnitude of the stigma towards PwMs approximated that for epilepsy or panic disorder, but exceeded that for asthma. We also found that stigma towards PwMs did not differ based on the sex of the PwM, but that male persons without migraine stigmatized PwMs more than did female persons without migraine. Stigma towards PwMs correlated with PwMs' workplace unreliability. We also found an individual's stigmatizing attitudes towards PwMs increased with the stigmatizing person's minority race, younger age, status of not having migraine, increased fear of pain, reduced expressed empathy, reduced fear of migraine, and lower income status. These findings further our understanding of the basis for stigma towards PwMs and may help to focus future efforts towards mitigating this stigma.