

The Scottish Mental Illness Stigma Study

See Me, Mental Health Foundation, Glasgow Caledonian University and VOX Scotland*

Overview

The Scottish Mental Illness Stigma Study (SMISS) is the first ever national survey designed to explore how people living with complex, severe and enduring mental illness in Scotland experience stigma and discrimination, and how this impacts them across different areas of their lives. The survey was enhanced by a programme of qualitative research that aimed to add depth to the evidence gathered through the survey and give people a platform to share their stories and experiences.



What we did

The online survey ran between November 2021 and March 2022 and was completed by 346 respondents.

An additional 70 people took part in one-to-one interviews and focus groups between May and August 2022.

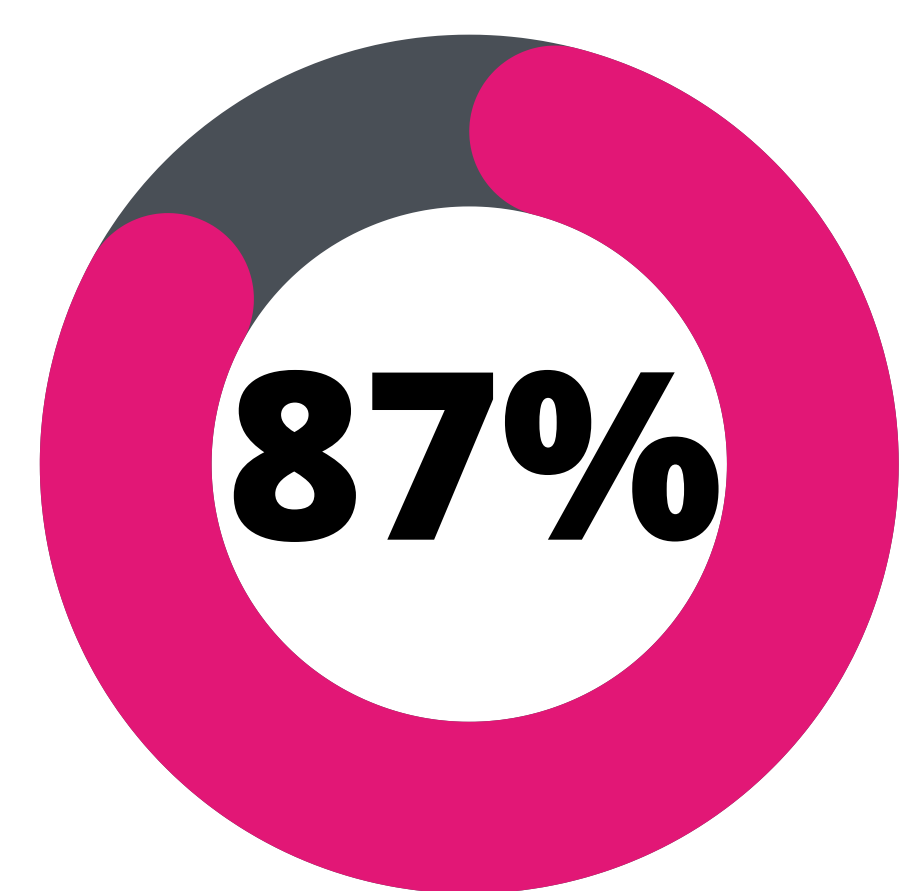
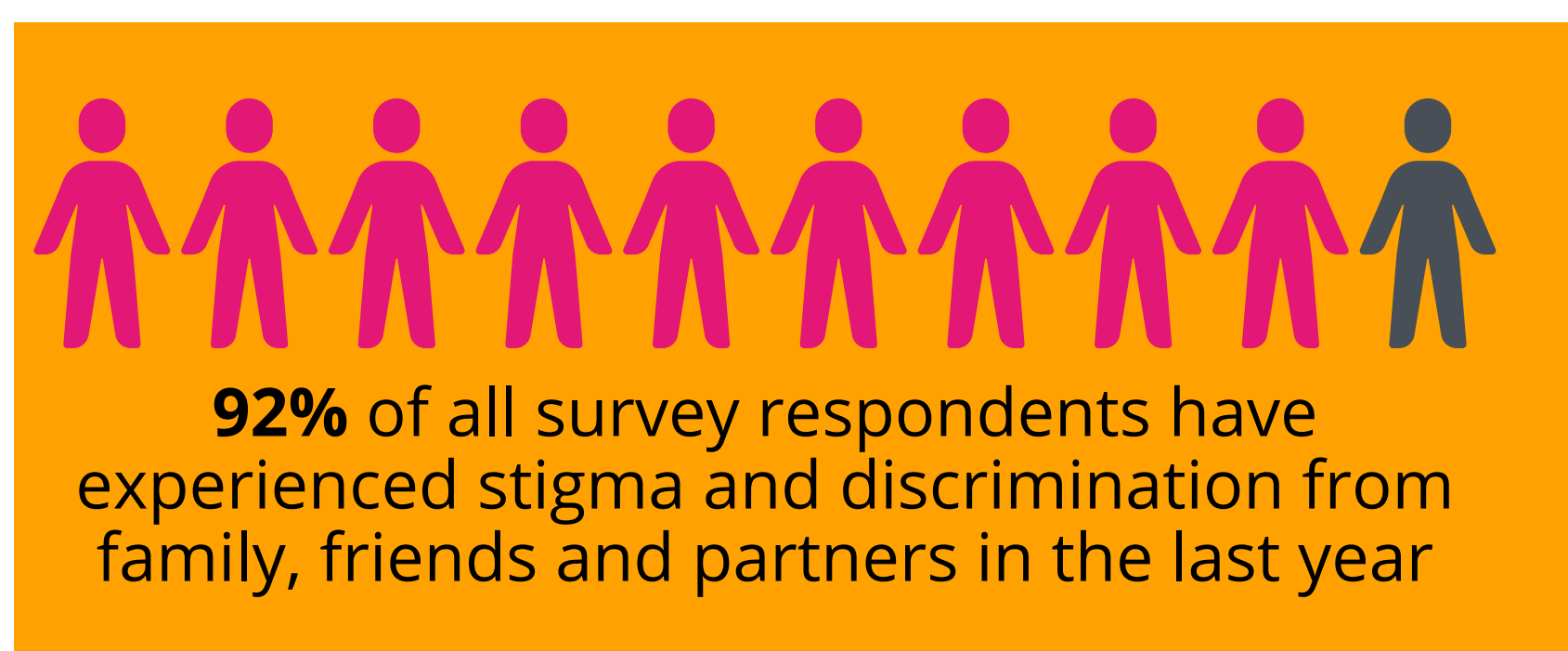
The data was analysed to explore participants' experiences of stigma and discrimination, including frequency and severity of impact of stigma across 14 life areas and exploring respondents relationship with self-stigma

The research report was launched at a knowledge exchange event on 27 September 2022.

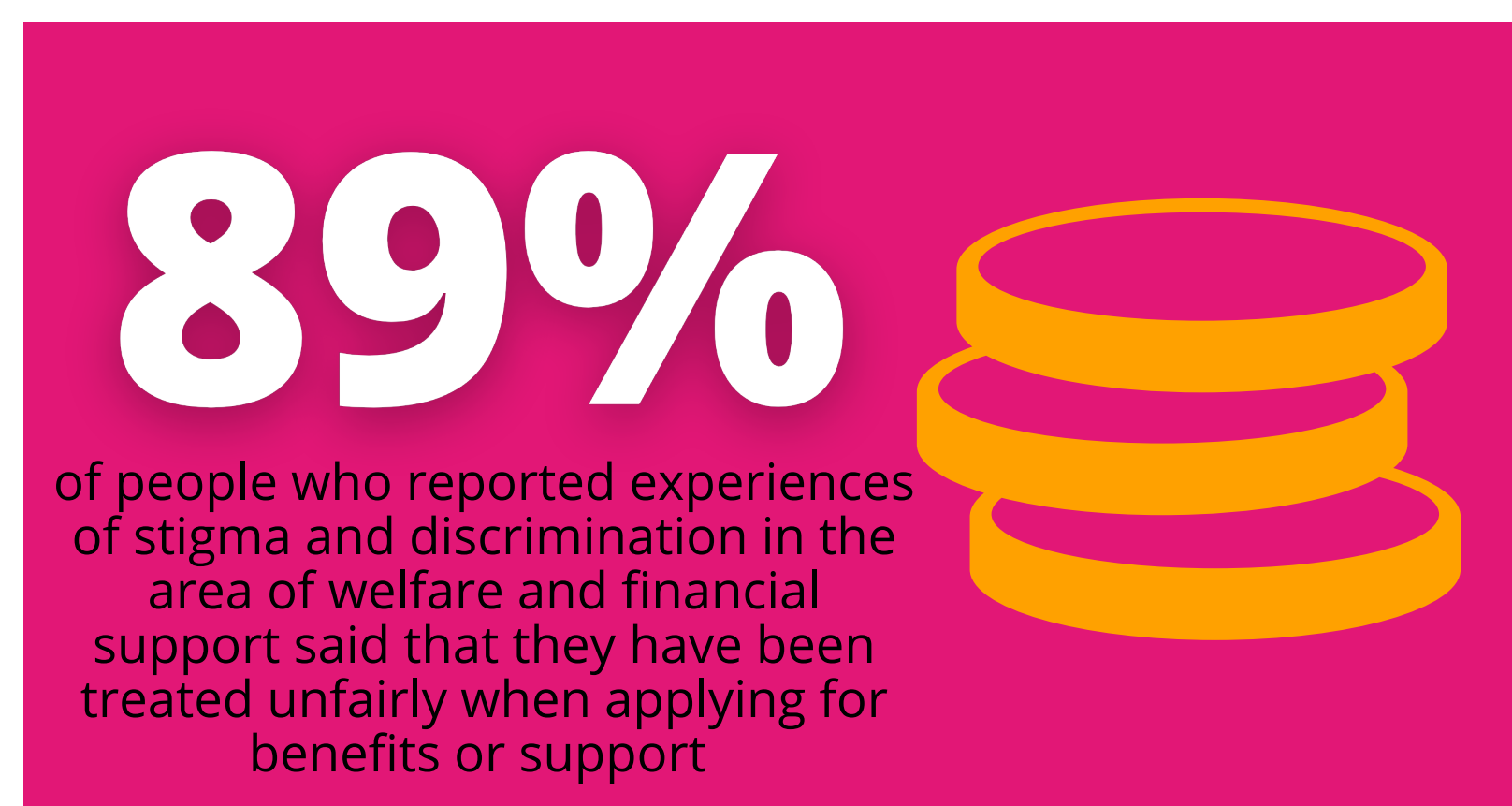
What we found

Survey findings revealed the devastating impact that mental health stigma and discrimination have on people across different areas of their lives – including **employment, relationships, health and social care, mental healthcare, housing and media**.

Key findings revealed that stigma and discrimination can lead to difficulty accessing or engaging with services, such as work, healthcare, education and more. Stigma and discrimination also contributed towards a lack of enjoyment with respondents describing withdrawal from or being less able to experience everyday fulfilling life events, such as engaging with relationships, friends and family.



of those who chose the employment life area reported being treated unfairly at work because of their mental illness



What people told us...

Participants reported experiencing stigma and discrimination because of their mental illness across many areas of their lives, most notably in **relationships, employment and mental healthcare services**.

The research found that these experiences affect how people **cope, live and view themselves**, resulting in self-stigmatising thoughts and behaviours.

"I had a friend who didn't want me around her children any more as I was **'probably dangerous'** because I have a mental illness diagnosis."

"I didn't really have parents who were able to care for me, so I guess I just learned how they see me. And as a child, I learned that I'm worthless and that's what I brought here into my adulthood."

"I am not heard. I am simply mentally ill, incapable, deranged."

"The end result was that I lost my **job, confidence and self-respect** - went into a downwards spiral."

"...because it took so long to [get help], I think my brain is unlikely to be able to rewire itself ... there were how many years where we could have prevented this? But it doesn't seem like prevention is important."

"I do think we're much kinder to other people, then we are to ourselves, and we're much more likely to say, oh, yeah, they're having a hard time and make allowances. And we never make allowances for ourselves, even when we're having a hard time."

Discussion

We often hear about how the job of tackling stigma is done, and how conversations about mental health have become more widespread. We know however that mental health stigma is still pervasive in our society and that more complex and long-term mental illnesses continue to be much less understood and misrepresented in all areas of life.

SMISS study findings demonstrate that stigma has led to people living with mental illness being denied opportunities to participate in aspects of day-to-day life that many of us take for granted, made to feel shame for their illnesses, and to withdraw from activities, services and society for fear of further discrimination.

Participants' accounts of the pervasive and harmful nature of the stigma and discrimination they have experienced reinforce the importance of continuing to battle against such attitudes and behaviour, particularly for those living with complex, severe and enduring mental illness.

What's next?

We want to make sure that everyone in Scotland lives a life free from stigma and enjoys their human rights to the full. Our aim is to use this data to influence policy and to guide further action to improve systems and services in Scotland, led by the voices of lived experience.

Join us in the journey to eliminate mental health stigma and discrimination. We invite you to get involved in further research and interventions based on these research findings and to support us by acting to stop the stigma affecting people living with mental illness, to ensure they are treated fairly and feel included in all society.

To find out more about getting involved, get in touch with:

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