



## Stigma in Asthma Patients: A Barrier to Effective Management

Uzma Hidayat 

Peshawar Medical College, Peshawar – Pakistan

### Corresponding Author:

**Uzma Hidayat**

Peshawar Medical College,  
Riphah International University,  
Peshawar - Pakistan  
E-mail: [uzmahidayat4466@gmail.com](mailto:uzmahidayat4466@gmail.com)

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Asthma is among the world's most prevalent chronic respiratory diseases, affecting more than 260 million people; it accounts for a substantial morbidity burden and healthcare costs.<sup>1</sup> Although there has been a lot of improvement in treatment and management strategies, asthma patients are still confronted by one of the greatest and often overlooked challenges, known as stigma.<sup>2</sup> It has also been known that stigma is associated with perceiving asthma as a mild or exaggerated condition, thereby delaying treatment, contributing to poor adherence to prescribed medications, and causing psychological disturbances in the patients.<sup>2</sup> Tackling stigma, therefore, becomes imperative in improving asthma outcomes and ensuring optimal disease management.

Various types of stigma can affect asthma patients. A situation may arise whereby patients are treated with social discrimination by acquaintances, who consider the asthma symptoms a weakness or overreaction.<sup>3</sup> Inhaler use in public is generally avoided by asthmatic teens who would otherwise be under their control; hence, most symptoms remain untreated and poorly managed, making it likelier for exacerbation to occur. Employees may also be discriminated against in their workplaces and, therefore, not disclose any state of their condition or what kind of accommodations they need.<sup>4</sup> Experiencing discrimination in this way would only increase the suffering of these patients, adding to the burden of anxiety and depressive disorders, which in turn complicates the management of the condition.<sup>5</sup> This could mean various things for different people regarding stigma and all possible diversities that asthmatics can face. For example, patients will experience social acquaintances having forms of discrimination wherein their peers or colleagues view symptoms of the disease as a sign of weakness or overreaction. For instance, asthmatic adolescents are unlikely to use an inhaler in public because using one might draw unwanted attention, resulting in uncontrolled symptoms and raised incidence of exacerbation.<sup>4</sup> House disadvantages can also deny employees disclosing their illness, meaning that they cannot ask for reasonable accommodations. All this added up emotionally can enhance the state of anxiety and depression, which includes treatment problems with disease management as well.<sup>5</sup>

Considering the constraints mentioned above, stigma in asthma has been a subject that has not received much attention from researchers. However, public awareness campaigns and educational activities can play a crucial role in changing societal thoughts about asthma. Encouraging open dialogues about asthma, promoting the integration of patient advocacy into health policies, and training healthcare staff to work more sensitively with stigma-related issues can all contribute to reducing stigma. Implementing digital health interventions, such as AI-operated chat systems and support groups, can provide patients with safe avenues to communicate experiences and seek advice without judgment, empowering them in their disease

management journey.

False beliefs about asthma also create stigma.<sup>6</sup> There is still widespread belief that asthma is primarily a disease of childhood, with some considering it a manifestation of emotional weakness rather than the consequence of biological and environmental factors. Such myths can foster extreme environments where peers, teachers, or even family members lack empathy and support, restricting the possibilities for the patient to solicit their help. Addressing these myths via proper health education in schools, workplaces, and communities is the key to alleviating stigma and fostering more active participation in asthma management.<sup>7,8</sup>

Healthcare professionals play a crucial role in reducing asthma stigma. Stigmas may be reinforced by clinicians who dismiss or downplay patient concerns, leading patients to avoid seeking medical attention or adhering to their prescribed treatments. Therefore, the training curriculum for healthcare professionals must focus on understanding the psychological and social issues related to stigma and the importance of patient-centered communication. Reassurance and validation of patient experiences, accompanied by discussions regarding treatment options in a nonjudgmental atmosphere, can dramatically affect asthma management and increase patient confidence. This emphasis on the role of healthcare professionals makes them feel valued and integral to the solution.

Policymakers and public health initiatives must address asthma stigma: the government and health organizations should work towards ensuring affordable access to asthmatic medication and provision of workplace policies that consider individuals with asthma.<sup>9,10</sup> On this note, lifting the weight of research funding for asthma-related stigma and its effects would strengthen understanding and make way for evidence-based interventions. However, creating a more inclusive and supportive community environment is equally important. A supportive community can help reduce the impact of stigma on asthma patients and ensure that they receive the treatment and respect they deserve. This, in turn, can significantly improve the physical and psychological well-being of asthma patients.

There is a great need for further research to identify the most effective interventions to combat asthma-related stigma. Future studies should investigate how cultural influences, socioeconomic factors, and healthcare policies influence asthma perceptions. In addition, specific interventions related to certain target groups, such as children, adolescents, and workers in high-risk occupational environments, would produce better stigma-reduction strategies. This stress on the need for further research should make the audience feel hopeful and optimistic about the future of asthma management.

As we go ahead in advancing the care for people with asthma, it is high time that we start understanding and internalizing the stigma as it is part and parcel of the whole disease management intervention program. Awareness, enhancing patient-centered care knowledge, and creating supportive environments shall go a long way in counteracting the negativity of stigma and improving, at least, asthma patients' physical and psychological well-being. More inclusive and informative therapy would improve patient welfare and provide a coming together to the public health response to such chronic disease.

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