

Bipolar and Stigma

Lived experience perspectives of navigating the world with a bipolar diagnosis



1

About Bipolar Scotland

- Scotland's national charity for people living with bipolar and their loved ones
- Peer-led, non-clinical support services
- Membership-based and shaped by lived experience
- Focus areas: Post-diagnosis peer support, self-management training, peer-led workplace support, peer support groups



2

About Bipolar

Affects 2-3% of the population

Increases suicide risk up to 20 times

Takes 10 years on average to be diagnosed



3

What does stigma look and feel like?

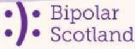


4



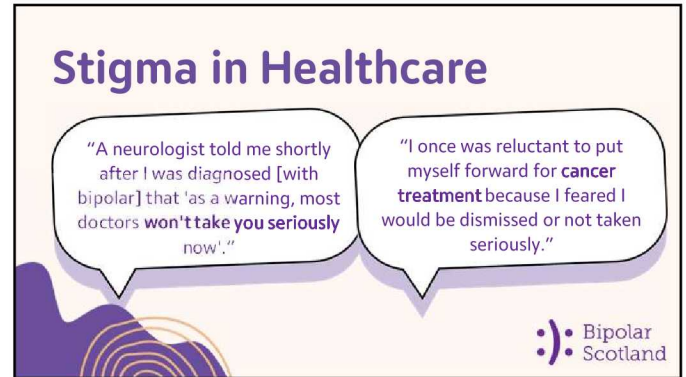
"She will often tell me I'm being **lazy** or need to '**get out more**' and there is a lack of understanding that these are symptoms of the condition rather than just a choice."

"A lady came for an interview and started working for me until she discovered I had bipolar. She quickly fabricated an excuse and left after 1 month."

 Bipolar Scotland

5

Stigma in Healthcare

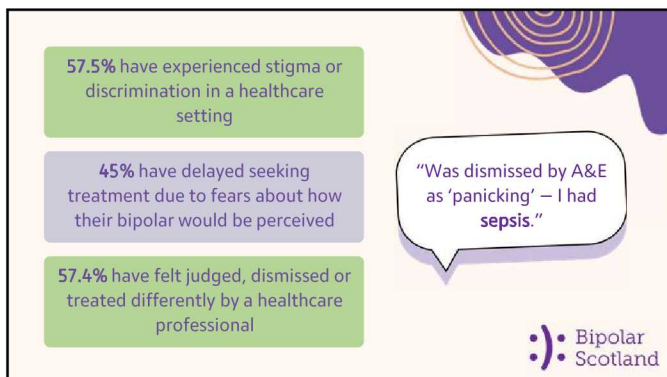


"A neurologist told me shortly after I was diagnosed [with bipolar] that 'as a warning, most doctors **won't take you seriously** now'."

"I once was reluctant to put myself forward for **cancer treatment** because I feared I would be dismissed or not taken seriously."

 Bipolar Scotland

6



57.5% have experienced stigma or discrimination in a healthcare setting

45% have delayed seeking treatment due to fears about how their bipolar would be perceived

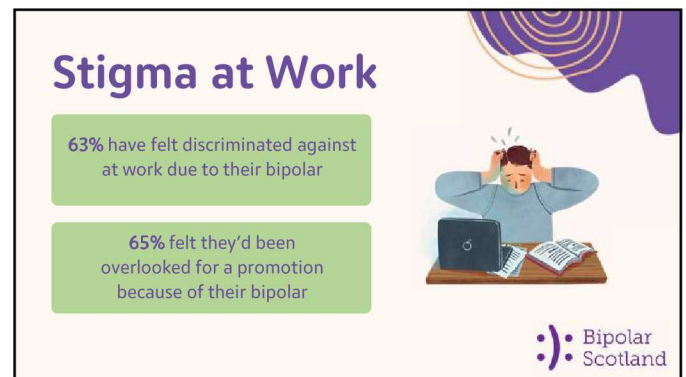
57.4% have felt judged, dismissed or treated differently by a healthcare professional

"Was dismissed by A&E as 'panicking' – I had **sepsis**."

 Bipolar Scotland

7

Stigma at Work



63% have felt discriminated against at work due to their bipolar

65% felt they'd been overlooked for a promotion because of their bipolar



 Bipolar Scotland

8



"[I was] previously **sacked** when my employer found out about my diagnosis. Have been in workplaces where I've felt unsupported and in turn, felt unable to take on additional duties or look for progression."

"Stigma and lack of understanding of the condition has played a role in my previous workplaces. I was taken off some duties and effectively demoted for being '**unreliable**' after three short absences in a year."

 Bipolar Scotland

9

What's the Impact?

- Fear of job loss or stalled career
- Poor mental health from hiding diagnosis
- Lost potential and economic cost



 Bipolar Scotland

10

The Power of Peer

"I had a tendency to isolate and suffer in silence... That thinking can still manifest itself but I can challenge this now with the knowledge that I can **speak openly and honestly without fear of judgement.**"

- Validates experiences
- Rebuilds confidence
- Emphasis on recovery
- Challenges self-stigma
- Shifts power



 Bipolar Scotland

11

What Needs to Change?

- Greater visibility of real bipolar experiences
- Embed lived experience into accessible training
- Investment in *peer-led* models of support
- Look beyond the label



 Bipolar Scotland

12



13



14