

Development, implementation and evaluation of an intervention targeting mental illness stigma at work

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BACKGROUND

Despite the availability of effective mental health treatment, the majority of people experiencing mental health problems do not seek help. Globally, the number of people experiencing mental disorders who do not receive any health care treatment is estimated to reach up to 70% (Thornicroft, 2007). This figure is alarming, given the high prevalence of mental health problems among the general population (1 in 4 at some point during their lifetime) (WHO, 2001). Several factors have been identified that contribute to this treatment gap (the difference between true prevalence and treated prevalence), including a lack of knowledge of symptoms of mental illness, ignorance about how to access treatment as well as prejudice (stigmatizing attitudes) and anticipated or real acts of discrimination against people who suffer from mental health problems (Henderson et al., 2013; Dalky, 2012; Dua et al., 2011). Together, these factors have been conceptualized and defined as 'stigma' (for example, see Thornicroft et al., 2008) which, in turn, has been widely reported to be a major barrier to accessing mental health treatment (Stuart, 2004, Corrigan, 2004).

While mental illness stigma has mainly been researched amongst the general population, little is known about its prevalence and consequences in the workplace. However, some studies suggest that mental illness stigma at the workplace may be a major barrier to care as well. Kim et al. (2010) found that soldiers failed to get treatment for PTSD because they were concerned about being stigmatized by others for having mental health problems. Similar results have been obtained in studies on white-collar workers and the utilization of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Walton (2003) found that employees were worried that their managers would have a negative opinion about them if they were to become aware of their service use. This clearly illustrates that mental health-related stigma at work has a negative impact on treatment seeking and leads employees to wait until their symptoms severely interfere with their daily functioning instead of seeking support early (Goss & Mearns, 1997).

Consequently, effective strategies to reduce mental illness stigma in order to increase help-seeking, are needed. While mass-media interventions targeting the public have demonstrated limited effectiveness, more tailored workplace anti-stigma initiatives might prove more fruitful (Corrigan & Gelb, 2006; Evans-Lacko et al., 2010). However, so far, research on the effectiveness of workplace anti-stigma interventions is scarce, presenting inconclusive evidence in this field (Malachowski & Kirsh, 2013; Szeto & Dobson, 2010).

The purpose of the current study is to contribute in filling this gap by developing and evaluating an intervention that aims to address mental illness stigma in a defined unit of Siemens. Such investigation is likely to inform important stakeholders about potential benefits of current workplace anti-stigma interventions and provides guidance for the development and implementation of effective future interventions.

SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Title: The effectiveness of interventions targeting mental illness stigma in the workplace: A systematic review

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Abstract

Background: The majority of people experiencing mental health problems do not seek help and mental illness stigma is considered a major barrier to accessing appropriate treatment. More targeted interventions (e.g. in the workplace) seem to be a promising and necessary supplement to public campaigns, however, little is known about their effectiveness so far. Therefore, the aim of this systematic review is to provide a synthesis of the evidence on the effectiveness of interventions targeting mental illness stigma in the workplace.

Methods: 16 studies were included after the literature review. The effectiveness of workplace anti-stigma interventions was assessed by examining changes in: (1) knowledge of mental disorders and their treatment and recognition of signs/symptoms of mental ill health, (2) attitudes towards people with mental health problems and (3) help-related behaviours.

Results: The results indicate that workplace anti-stigma interventions can lead to improved employee knowledge and helping behavior towards people with mental health problems. However, the effects of interventions on employees' attitudes were mixed, but generally positive. The quality of evidence varied across studies.

Conclusions: This highlights the need for more rigorous, higher quality evaluations conducted with more diverse samples of the working population. Future research should explore to what extent changes in employees' knowledge, attitudes and helping behavior translate into increased and earlier help-seeking. Such investigation is likely to inform important stakeholders about potential benefits of current workplace anti-stigma interventions and provides guidance for the development and implementation of effective future interventions.

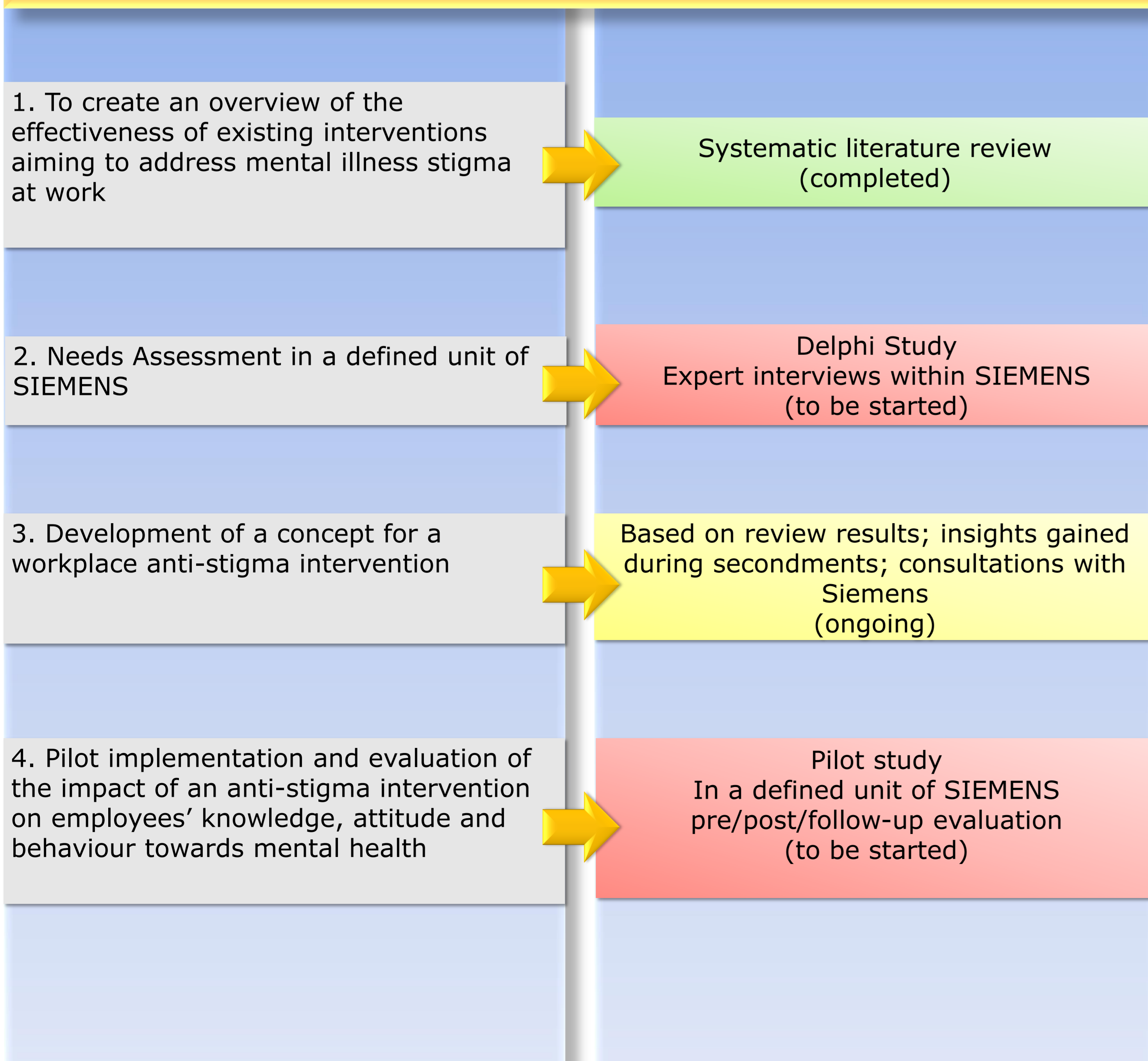
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RESEARCH PLAN

Overall objective

To promote Siemens employees' knowledge, their attitude and behaviour regarding mental health at work via an anti-stigma intervention



RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT

For Siemens:

So far, mental health at work has remained somewhat a taboo topic within the company. However, in October 2013 a law has been released that requires all organisations in Germany to assess psychosocial risks at work and derive measures from it. However, those measures can only prove fruitful if Siemens employees become aware of the importance of mental health at work and a culture is promoted where employees can speak openly about this topic.

Within the scope of MARATONE:

This project contributes to the development of strategies for the social and private sector responses to mental ill health in the form of health promotion and prevention programs specifically tailored to the workplace - and thus - helps to meet the challenge of the 2009 EU Resolution on Mental Health.

