

Abandoning 'Schizophrenia'

Terminology change internationally point to decreasing faith in the validity and reliability of the 'schizophrenia' diagnosis.

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In February, members of the International Society for the Psychological Treatments of the Schizophrenias and Other Psychoses voted, by an overwhelming majority, to change its name to the International Society for Psychological and Social Approaches to Psychosis (ISPS). The change comes at a time when the scientific validity of the term schizophrenia is being hotly debated in the lead up to the publication of the latest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*.

Unscientific

ISPS promotes psychological treatments for people who experience psychosis (e.g. hallucinations and delusions), and greater understanding of the psychological and social causes of psychosis. Founded in Europe in 1956, ISPS now has branches in 19 countries, has published 13 books in the last decade and has its own scientific journal, *Psychosis*. Its 1400 members include psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, occupational therapists, family therapists and researchers, as well as users of mental health services and family members.

In debates preceding the vote the two primary reasons put forward in favour of the change were that the term 'schizophrenia' is unscientific

and stigmatizing. The construct has little or no reliability (the extent to which experts can agree on who meets criteria for a diagnosis) or validity (the construct's ability to predict things like outcome or response to treatments). Research has also repeatedly found that 'schizophrenia' is one of the most stigmatizing of all psychiatric labels, and promotes unwarranted pessimism about recovery because of the implication that people with this diagnosis suffer from an irreversible 'brain disease'.

Social causes

Proponents of the change valued the replacement of 'treatments' with 'approaches' and the inclusion of the term 'social' because of the importance of broader issues such as the social causes of psychosis, primary prevention, and self-help like voice-hearers' peer support groups such as Intervoice.

In the ISPS media release following the vote, Chairperson of ISPS International, Dr Brian Martindale (a UK psychiatrist and psychotherapist), commented:

"We need to move on from the stigmatising and false idea that schizophrenia is a single identifiable biologically determined 'disease'."

Re-defining

ISPS is not the first to take this important step in recent years.

ISPS THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY
FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL
AND SOCIAL APPROACHES TO PSYCHOSIS

Schizophrenia Fellowship changed its name to Rethink Mental Illness in the UK and to Supporting Families in New Zealand for similar reasons. In 2002, the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology abandoned their equivalent of 'schizophrenia' *Seishin Bunretsu Byo* ('mind-split-disease') to encompass recent advances in psychosis research and to reduce the stigma associated with the old schizophrenia diagnosis. The advocacy group Schizophrenia Ireland has changed its name to Shine – Supporting People Affected by Mental Ill-Health.

On 2nd and 3rd October, ISPS UK will be holding a two-day residential conference in Birmingham titled, "Changing realities: new developments in psychological approaches to psychosis" to explore these issues further.

Find out more

- www.isps.org
- **Psychosis journal:** www.tandf.co.uk/journals/rpsy
- **Intervoice:** www.intervoiceline.org
- **Information about the conference:** www.isps.uk