Mental Health Stigma in Rural China
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Over the summer I worked as a PURM research student for Dr. Irene Wong, an associate professor at the School of Social Policy and Practice. This research focused on mental health stigma, particularly how stigma manifests itself differently in non-Western countries and how to effectively reduce stigma in China. The long-term goal of the project is to develop an effective method to reduce public stigma in rural areas of China. The goal over the summer was to create a research presentation that could be used at the Beijing workshop in September and could be used to help graduate students learn about the issue of discrimination.

During my research period of around ten weeks, I researched different mental health stigma reducing campaigns from a variety of (mostly) Western countries and the differences in stigma around the world due to culture. Finally, I looked into research on the effectiveness of different methods of reducing stigma.

As I continued my research, I discovered five different types of stigma, with stigma towards friends and family of people with MI being the most important due to how differently this stigma happens in Western versus Eastern countries. I also discovered various methods to reduce stigma, such as education which can be effective at getting a broad but low impact message out, and contact with people with mental illness, which can be greatly impactful but is difficult to distribute.

Over the course of my research, I also helped Dr. Wong organize and plan a Beijing workshop at the Penn Wharton China Center on mental illness stigma. I’ve learned to effectively research articles and create spreadsheets to organize all of my information, while also learning great deals about what stigma is and how to end it.
I plan to continue working on this project during the school year, mainly by compiling a database of websites for mental health campaigns that can be analyzed to see what methods would be most effective in China.