

Welcome to Kafé MIRELLE, a podcast series exploring stigma, discrimination, recognition and dignity through conversations with researchers, practitioners, people with lived experience and advocates from different disciplines and cultures.

The podcast takes its name from Mirelle, a woman who died at the age of just 34.

Mirelle lived with substance use challenges that impacted many dimensions of her life, including her mental health.

Her life story reveals a powerful and often painful account of discrimination.

The experiences remind us that stigma and discrimination are not abstract concepts.

They shape access to care, relationships, opportunities and life chances.

Mirelle's story is not an isolated one.

It reflects the experiences of many people whose needs remain poorly understood or inadequately met.

We chose her name because her story provides a focal point for the conversations you want to have.

Conversations that place humanity, recognition, dignity, and shared decision-making at the center of research and practice.

In this series, we bring together people from different backgrounds who share a common aspiration to create a world where people are recognised for their full humanity rather than reduced to a diagnosis, label or social category.

But before we explore possible solutions, we first need to ask some fundamental questions.

What exactly do we mean by stigma and discrimination?

Are these the same thing or are these concepts different?

Is stigma simply a negative attitude that becomes discrimination when it is acted upon?

Or is stigma itself something we actively do throughout our everyday interactions, language, institutions and practices?

Where do concepts such as judgment, prejudice, stereotyping and exclusion fit in within this big picture?

As our guests will discuss throughout the series, these questions do not always have simple answers.

The literature can be complex and at times overwhelming.

Even the concept of discrimination itself is understood in different ways.

While it is often used to describe harmful and unequal treatment, some scholars have noted that difference can also be reclaimed positively by groups who refuse to be defined by dominant norms and instead embrace identities that have historically been stigmatised.

Our conversations will therefore not seek a single definition.

Instead, we will explore how these concepts are understood across different disciplines, cultures and lived experiences.

A recurring theme throughout the series will be the many layers of stigma and discrimination.

Participants will speak about discrimination that becomes internalised, influencing how people see themselves and what they believe they deserve.

They will discuss the effects on families, friends and those who provide support and prevalence of compassion fatigue.

They will also draw attention to forms of discrimination that are not always visible in face-to-face interactions, but are embedded within organisational structures, policies and systems.

These forms can be particularly difficult to identify because they are often taken for granted, yet their effects may be profound and long-lasting.

Another theme will be intersectionality.

Experiences of stigma and discrimination are really shaped by a single factor.

Culture, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic position, age, diagnosis and the perceived seriousness of a condition can all influence how discrimination is experienced and how effective particular interventions may be.

Throughout the series, our guests will highlight both what we know and what we still have much to learn about, what works for whom and in what circumstances.

Discrimination is not unique to mental health and substance use.

It is a widespread human phenomenon.

We see it in racial conflicts, religious divisions, workplace inequalities and countless distinctions between those considered part of an in-group and those seen as outsiders.

While many of our discussions will focus specifically on the experience of people living with mental health and substance use challenges, the insights we explore have relevance far beyond these contexts.

Alongside examining stigma and discrimination, we also want to focus on what promotes well-being, inclusion and recovery.

Many of our guests will introduce salutogenic perspectives, approaches that focus not only on what causes harm, but also on what enables people to thrive.

We will discuss recognition, belonging, participation, and the conditions that allow people to live meaningful lives.

Importantly, this is not only a podcast about problems.

It is also a podcast about possibilities.

Several of our guests acknowledge that the field can seem daunting.

The literature on stigma and discrimination is extensive and the challenges are significant.

Yet they also remind us that change does not always begin with large-scale reforms.

Small actions matter.

Small shifts in practice matter.

Building relationships matter.

Creating space for dialogue matters.

Through collective efforts, networks of people can make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

For listeners who would like to explore these themes further, we also recommend our sister podcast series, Better Together, Kafé Social and Kafé Student, especially episodes relating to feeling judged, which examines many related issues from contemporary perspectives.

In Kafé MIRELLE, we will explore theoretical understandings of stigma, discrimination and related concepts.

We will examine their impacts on individuals, families, services and communities.

We will discuss interventions designed to reduce discrimination and increase recognition.

We will hear from interdisciplinary and intercultural contributors who bring a rich range of perspectives to these conversations.

We are particularly interested in decision making, how decisions are made about people, with people, and sometimes for people.

But we recognize that this is only one part of a much larger landscape of interventions and approaches aimed at reducing discrimination and promoting social inclusion.

Finally, we hope the series will be especially valuable for early stage researchers and others who wish to contribute to this field in the future.

We want to highlight the substantial body of research that already exists and acknowledge the remarkable scholars, research programs, international consortia whose work has laid the foundations on what we hope to build.

We stand in their shadow with some humility and trepidation.

At the same time, we hope Kafé MIRELLE represents a small but meaningful contribution to building capacity, fostering dialogue and supporting action in this important area.

Thank you for joining us.

We hope these conversations will challenge, inspire and encourage all of us to think more deeply about stigma, discrimination, recognition and what it means to create a more humane and inclusive society.