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I am a psycho if I need to take pills: Stigma experience in Russian youth with affective disorders

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Background:
Living with an affective disorder is often a cause for stigma and self-stigma. Mental health problems among adolescents and young adults is a problem in Russia but little is known on young Russian adolescents’ perceptions and attitudes living with affective disorders.

Methods:
This study is based on online observations of 11 Russian social media communities combined with semi-structured telephone or Skype interviews. Finally, 16 Russian-speaking men and women aged 17-25 who live with affective disorder were recruited. The data were coded into two overall themes of ‘self-stigma’ and ‘enacted stigma’ with sub-themes such as ‘relationship with doctor’, ‘relationship and support from friends’, ‘relationship and support from family’, ‘attitudes towards medicines’, ‘side effects’, and ‘coping with the illness’.

Results:
The fear of negative reactions and labelling from the social surrounding where seen as a factor that both stopped informants from seeking out timely help or forced them to leave the treatment regime when finally diagnosed. The fear of stigma where often related to the psychiatric diagnosis, and although symptoms of mental illness often had been prevalent years before the informants got their diagnosis, it was a shocking event to be diagnosed with a mental health condition such as bipolar disorder.

Conclusions:
By exploring in-depth the perceptions that Russian-speaking young people have on the stigma and self-stigma when living with an affective disorder, we have been able to better understand how stigma affects their everyday lives.