

Challenging Our Paradigms and Practices: Standing Up to Stigma

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“Every act of learning requires an injury to our self-esteem.”

- Thomas Szasz, Hungarian-American academic, writer, psychiatrist

“We are born innocent and ignorant, but to remedy the second of these conditions, we inevitably surrender the first.”

- Martha Beck, author of *Expecting Adam*

Why Address Stigma

- ▶ When it comes to recovering from addiction, we have made great progress. Recent studies indicate that there are somewhere in the range of 21-22 million Americans suffering from addiction. There are also somewhere in the range of 23-25 million Americans in recovery from addiction.
- ▶ In regards to those of us who still suffer, the number one reason they do not seek help is stigma. Recent studies also show that somewhere between 80-90% of those presently with a SUD or gambling addiction will not seek help.
- ▶ The main reason for that is stigma.

Defining Stigma

- ▶ A mark of shame or discredit: stain
Merriam Webster Dictionary
- ▶ A mark of disgrace that sets a person apart from others.
Department of Health, Government of Western Australia
- ▶ Guilt says I've done something wrong, shame says there is something wrong with me.
Arthur H. Woodard, Jr.

Stigma brings experiences and feelings of:

- ▶ Shame
- ▶ Blame
- ▶ Hopelessness
- ▶ Distress
- ▶ Secrecy
- ▶ Loneliness, isolation, exclusion
- ▶ Stereotyping and derogatory labels
- ▶ Misrepresentation in the media
- ▶ Being treated differently than the rest of society
- ▶ Reluctance to seek and/or accept needed help

Stigma and Blame

- ▶ Stigma of people with substance use and/or gambling disorders results largely from blame.
- ▶ That blame comes from a belief that the disorder is a result of the person's own behavior and choices.

Stigma in SUD and Gambling Disorders

- ▶ Global studies show the general public thinks people with an addiction disorder are . . .
 - ▶ Violent
 - ▶ Unpredictable
 - ▶ Immoral
 - ▶ Unfit for roles with responsibility (parenting, public office)
 - ▶ Unable to make decisions for themselves
 - ▶ Unable to control themselves, yet
 - ▶ Able to “pull themselves together”
 - ▶ Yang, L.H., et al, 2017
- ▶ Studies show social stigma influences
 - ▶ A person’s view of themselves
 - ▶ Their ability to recover
 - ▶ Poorer recovery outcomes.
 - ▶ Crapanzano K.A., et al, 2018

Getting Personal

- ▶ Challenging our own paradigms.
 - ▶ What are they?
 - ▶ Where did they come from?
 - ▶ How do they influence how I do my work?
- ▶ What about our language?
- ▶ Examining policies, procedures and practices.
- ▶ Making it a priority to ask ourselves weekly, if not daily, “What have I done to reduce stigma?”

Closing Thoughts

- ▶ I can't write these in advance because I don't know what they are going to be!

Gratitude and Thanks

- ▶ I offer my heartfelt thanks for all the work you do in the service to others as well as my thanks for letting me be part of this conversation!