Stigma Around Substance Misuse: What Are the Consequences and How Do We Educate the Different Audiences In Our Communities to Combat It?

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1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

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Presenters

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What is Stigma?

• A social process which can reinforce relations of power and control.

• Leads to status loss and discrimination for the stigmatized.

- Link and Phelan

(From “Understanding Drug-Related Stigma: Tools for Better Practice and Social Change,” developed by the Harm Reduction Coalition for the New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute)
How is stigma imposed?

Examples outside of substance use:

• Stigma based on race/ethnicity
• Mental health-related stigma
• Weight-related stigma
• HIV/AIDS-related stigma
Forms of Stigma

- Stigma from individuals
- Institutional stigma
- Self-stigma (internalized)
- Stigma by association
December 1914
Harrison Act
Passed
Anti Opium Laws
Demonization of Drug Use

• April 1915
• Hearings include testimony by experts:
  • Dr. Hamilton Wright; “Wright alleged that drugs made blacks uncontrollable, gave them superhuman powers and caused them to rebel against white authority”.
  • Dr. Christopher Koch of the State Pharmacy Board of Pennsylvania testified that "Most of the attacks upon the white women of the South are the direct result of a cocaine-crazed Negro brain".
Before the Act was passed, on February 8, 1914, The New York Times published an article entitled "Negro Cocaine 'Fiends' Are New Southern Menace: Murder and Insanity Increasing Among Lower-Class Blacks" by Edward Huntington Williams, which reported that Southern sheriffs had increased the caliber of their weapons from .32 to .38 to bring down Negroes under the effect of cocaine.
Post Harrison Act

• New York Medical Journal report on May 15, 1915:
  Sporadic crimes of violence were reported, due usually to desperate efforts by addicts to obtain drugs, but occasionally to a delirious state induced by sudden withdrawal....

• The really serious results of this legislation, however, will only appear gradually and will not always be recognized as such
  1. the failures of promising careers
  2. disruption of happy families
  3. the influx into hospitals to the mentally disordered of many who would otherwise live socially competent lives
Post Harrison Act

American Medicine reported:

- Instead of improving conditions the laws recently passed have made the problem more complex
- Honest medical men have found such handicaps and dangers to themselves and their reputations in these laws (between 1915-1938 5000 doctors were convicted, fined and/or jailed)
- [The addict] is denied the medical care he urgently needs, open, above-board sources from which he formerly obtained his drug supply are closed to him, and he is driven to the underworld where he can get his drug, but of course, surreptitiously and in violation of the law
Political Hysteria

D.A.R.E.

TO RESIST DRUGS AND VIOLENCE.

DRUG ABUSE RESISTANCE EDUCATION
Lifetime Likelihood of Imprisonment

All Men: 1 in 9
White Men: 1 in 17
Black Men: 1 in 3
Latino Men: 1 in 6

All Women: 1 in 56
White Women: 1 in 111
Black Women: 1 in 18
Latina Women: 1 in 45

STIGMA... AND A WORD ON TERMINOLOGY

• SUDs most stigmatized of all social/health problems
• National surveys show stigma one of main reasons people with SUD do not seek specialty care (SAMHSA, 2009)
• WHO examined 18 most stigmatized conditions (eg. criminal, HIV, homeless) across 14 different countries (Room et al 2001)
  – Drug addiction- #1 - most stigmatized
  – Alcohol addiction- 4th most stigmatized
• Ambivalence driven by stigma why only 10% seek specialty care
How we talk and write about these conditions and individuals suffering them does matter

**Does Our Choice of Substance-Related Terms Influence Perceptions of Treatment Need? An Empirical Investigation with Two Commonly Used Terms**

**John F. Kelly, Sarah J. Dow, Cara Westerhoff**

Substance-related terminology is often a contentious topic because certain terms may convey meanings that have stigmatizing consequences and present a barrier to treatment. Chief among these are the labels, “abuse” and “abuser.” While intense rhetoric has persisted on this topic, little empirical information exists to inform this debate. We tested whether referring to an individual as “a substance abuser (SA)” versus “having a substance use disorder” (SUD) evokes different judgments about treatment need, punishment, social threat, problem etiology, and self-regulation. Participants (N = 314, 76% female, 81% White, M age 38) from an urban setting completed an online 35-item assessment comparing two individuals labeled with these terms. Dependent t-tests were used to examine subscale differences. Compared to the SUD individual, the SA was perceived as engaging in willful misconduct, a greater social threat, and more deserving of punishment. The “abuser” label may perpetuate stigmatizing attitudes and serve as a barrier to help-seeking.
TWO COMMONLY USED TERMS

Referring to someone as...
-a substance abuser
-having a substance use disorder
Mr. Williams is a substance abuser and is attending a treatment program through the court. As part of the program Mr. Williams is required to remain abstinent from alcohol and other drugs. He has been doing extremely well, until one month ago, when he was found to have two positive urine toxicology screens which revealed drug use and a breathalyzer reading which revealed alcohol consumption. Within the past month there was a further urine toxicology screen revealing drug use. Mr. Williams has been a substance abuser for the past six years. He now awaits his appointment with the judge to determine his status.

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IMPLICATIONS

• Even without being consciously aware of it, well trained doctoral level clinicians judged the same individual differently and more punitively depending on which term they were exposed to.
• Use of the “abuser” term may activate a negative cognitive schema that perpetuates stigmatizing attitudes – these could have broad stroke societal ramifications for treatment/funding.
• Individuals with “eating related problems” are uniformly described as having an “eating disorder” NOT as “food abusers”.
• Referring to individuals as suffering from “substance use disorders” is likely to diminish stigma and may enhance treatment and recovery.
Past / Present Terms
The Re-Focus

PAST
• Junkie
• Addict / Abuser
• Overdose
• Arrest

PRESENT
• Family Member / Person
• Substance Disorder
• Poisoning
• Treatment – Narcan - ?
Recovery
Stigma and Language

The words we use matter.
Strategies to Combat Stigma

LEARN to COPE
A peer-led support network for families dealing with addiction and recovery

THE ANONYMOUS PEOPLE
RECOVERY IS OUT – TO CHANGE THE ADDICTION CONVERSATION FROM PROBLEMS TO SOLUTIONS

KEEP CALM AND EDUCATE