



A reflection on
stigma in the
mental health and
AOD sector

- Tuesdays with Nexus
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- Mirella Rao

It starts with me

- Imagine There Was No Stigma to Mental Illness
- Dr. Jeffrey Lieberman | Professor and Chair of Psychiatry at Columbia University and past President of the American Psychiatric Association
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrbTbB9tTtA&t=31s>

Stigma in thought and action

- Stigma is described in the Oxford Dictionary as a “*mark of disgrace*” and occurs when an individual or group of people are discredited in relation to **how they live, the actions they take, or for one or more of their behaviours**.
- **The Stereotype** “those people / people with a mental illness are not good employees”.
- **Prejudice** “agreeing with the stereotype, people with a dual diagnosis are always unreliable etc”.
- **Discrimination** “refusing to employ or provide a lease for a home etc or have different response of care when a person presents at ED”.

It's a Human Right

- Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities contains 20 basic rights that promote and protect the values of freedom, respect, equality and dignity.
- Discrimination could include:
 - Refusing to treat you or admit you
 - Offering different terms on which you may be treated or admitted
 - Being subjected to any other unfavourable treatment when at healthcare services
- <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au>

Stigma makes you sick

- The stress that stigma causes can be a central driver of morbidity and mortality, on par with other "*social determinants of health*" including socioeconomic status, education and social relationships.
- Especially notable with racial discrimination / impact of stress on the body/ shut out of opportunities i.e. education, good housing, employment, avoiding health services due to rejection, being turned away or not believed

Living with Stigma

- *“The campaigns made out all ice users are violent people, so I was met with violence and fear when using health services.”*
- *“All my health issues were seen as stemming from my drug use, rather than a lifetime of abuse and mental health concerns.”*
- *“Stigma creates a cycle of self-stigma, shame, and unworthiness. A loss of health, a loss of life.”*

Tackling stigma with hope and compassion

- Without compassion for our client group and for each other staff we can suffer from empathic distress, which can lead to a loss of hope then stigma can be used to blame the other for not 'getting better'

Tackling stigma with hope and compassion

- Empathic Distress *“the point when one becomes distressed by another’s suffering”*.
- All humans have a basic need and desire to avoid suffering
- We treat all others with respect and dignity by virtue of our common shared humanity .
- The human response is to try anything to relieve one’s own suffering and an effective way to do this is to diminish the other person as *‘other’* this is a form of stigmatization
- Pressures on health care workers can lead to the interruption of the compassion process

Tackling Stigma with Hope

- Patrick Corrigan Distinguished Professor of Psychology Illinois Institute of Technology
- National Consortium for Stigma and Empowerment and a mental health consumer
- **Honest, Open, Proud** series of anti-stigma programs.
- **Main finding:** Developing localised, credible and continuous relationships with people with lived experience is the best way to overcome stigma and work on instilling hope for recovery.
- Being *“in the closet is harmful”* for people's mental health and perpetuates stigma and discrimination. But *“coming out”* needs to be done in a thoughtful and measured manner.

Living and overcoming stigma

- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Toronto Canada
- LeahStory2_subtitled.mp4

References

- Imagine There Was No Stigma to Mental Illness | Dr. Jeffrey Lieberman | TEDx Charlottesville <https://youtu.be/WrbTbB9tTtA>
- <https://adf.org.au/insights/stigma-impact/>
- <https://www.nationalstigmareportcard.com.au>
- The Use of Common Humanity Scenarios to Promote Compassion in Healthcare Workers
<https://www.monash.edu/medicine/spahc/socialwork/about/staff/academic/debbie-ling>

- *The value of Lived experience / Mental health but not as you know it* | Louise Byrne <https://youtu.be/01rwdqqaE4g>
- <https://www.camh.ca>
- www.aodmediawatch.com.au
- <https://www.iit.edu/directory/people/patrick-corrigan>