

Changing the Language:

*Ending Stigma Associated with Mental Health and Substance
Use Disorders*

Ben J. Wilson, PhD, LMHC, LCAC, NCC

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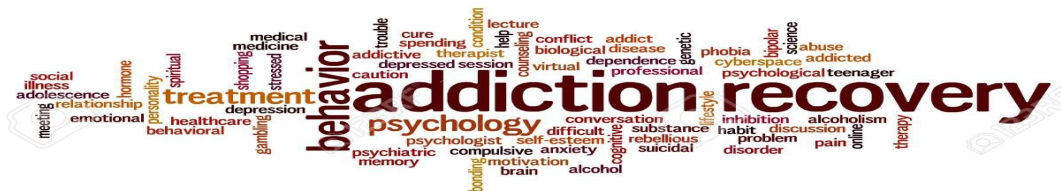
What is *mental illness*?

“Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities.”



What is *addiction*?

“Addiction is a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual’s life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences.”



Questions To Consider

What does an “*alcoholic*” or “*schizophrenic*” look like?

What thoughts or images come to mind when you hear these words?



Did any of the following come to mind?

- Dirty
- Dangerous
- Uneducated
- Intoxicated
- Homeless/Transient
- Scary
- Criminal
- Lacking morals
- Untreatable

If so, you're not alone!

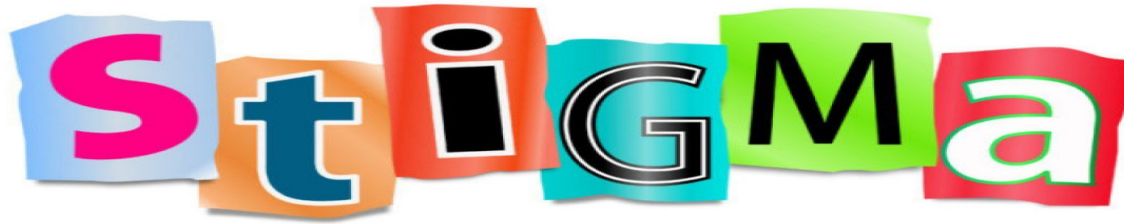


Public Perception

The U.S. has made considerable advances in treating and improving the lives of individuals with mental health and substance use disorders over the past 50 years, however the public perception, beliefs and attitudes toward those with mental health and substance use disorders has lagged behind. **Why?**



Stigma and Discrimination



Stigmas are terms used to describe a range of negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and are often socially discrediting. Stigmas are often viewed as a mark of disgrace or even a stain.

Discrimination

The American Psychological Association (2021) defines ***discrimination*** as the “unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation.” Dr. John Kelly of Harvard Medical School, maintains that individuals with stigmatized conditions often experience discrimination (Kelly 2018).



***Discrimination's Many Forms:**

- Health Care-Cost Coverage
- Health Care-Treatment
- Employment
- Criminal Justice
- Housing

*Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), (2021)



Two Main Factors Affect the Burden of Stigma:

1. Perceived control over one's condition
2. Perceived fault in acquiring the condition

Many people mistakenly believe that mental health conditions, including substance use disorder, are within a person's control and are responsible for their condition.

Stigma and Discrimination

Stigmas Are Often Perpetuated By:

- Lack of knowledge or misinformation
- Social norms concerning the attribution of cause or blame, for a disorder
- Rumors and gossip
- The media
- Unfounded fears
- A need to blame someone or something
- Common language (words)



Stigma and Discrimination

Harmful Effects of Stigma:

- People with stigmatized conditions often face rejection, bullying and discrimination
- They often internalize the stigma, which damages hope for recovery
- Many don't seek treatment out of fear of being judged
- Some who do seek treatment are then treated “*differently*” by health care providers
- Causes many individuals to drop out of treatment earlier
- As a result, their condition worsens, progresses and can be fatal



Remember: What **You** Say Matters!



We Can All Help By Changing the Language We Use

Words such as “**addict**,” “**drug abuser**,” and/or “**schizophrenic**” can evoke automatic negative thoughts and can perpetuate stigmas.



Person-First Language

This approach suggests that a person **has** a problem that can be addressed/treated (e.g. “person with substance use disorder”). Saying “**drug abuser**” could imply that the person **is** the problem.

Changing The Language

Common Words and Phrases That Perpetuate Stigmas

- Alcoholic
- Schizophrenic
- Committed suicide
- Psycho
- Dirty/Clean (toxicology results)
- Clean (not used)
- Dope sick
- Mentally ill person
- Junkie
- Drug

Common Words and Phrases That Reduce Stigmas

- Person with alcohol use disorder
- Person with schizophrenia
- Died by suicide
- Person with psychosis
- Positive (or negative) urine drug screen
- Sober
- Withdrawal
- Person with mental illness
- Person with opioid use disorder
- Prescription medication

The word “drug” is ambiguous, and can be misleading. The word “medication” should be used to describe a prescription medication.

What If I Hear Stigmatizing Words Being Used?

- Don't assume the use of stigmatizing language is intentional
- Ask questions, offer alternatives, and work collaboratively
- Engage in meaningful discussion about reducing/eliminating stigmas
- Remember, using **person-first language**, when possible, can help reduce stigmas.



Resources

Be Well Indiana

<https://bewellindiana.com/>

Faces and Voices of Recovery

<https://facesandvoicesofrecovery.org>

Indianapolis Colts: Kicking the Stigma

<https://www.colts.com/community/kicking-the-stigma>

Mental Health America of Indiana

<https://mhai.net/>

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

<https://www.nami.org/Home>

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/>

Next Level Recovery (Indiana)

<https://www.in.gov/recovery/know-the-facts/stigma/>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/>

The Addictionary

<https://www.recoveryanswers.org/addiction-ary/>





Any Questions?

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