



ADDRESSING STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

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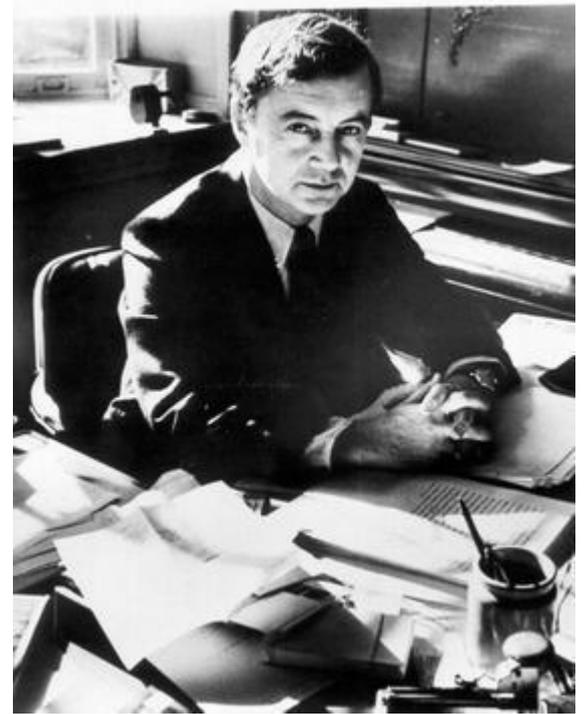
STIGMA

ETYMOLOGY

In ancient Greece, citizens would use a pointed instrument, to prick their slaves for the purpose of leaving a mark, both to demonstrate ownership and to signify that such individuals were unfit for citizenship. The ancient Greek word for prick is stig and the resulting mark, a stigma.

Erving Goffman

- A Canadian born sociologist and writer, described stigma as a phenomenon whereby an individual with an attribute which is deeply discredited by their society is rejected as a result of the attribute. Goffman saw stigma as a process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity.
- Goffman distinguishes three types of stigmatizing conditions: tribal identities (e.g., ethnicity, religion, nationality or gender), abominations of the body (e.g., physical disabilities or deformities) and blemishes of character (e.g., mental illness, addiction, or previous incarceration).
- The stigmatized are considered individuals with a “weak will”.



A CURRENT MEANING OF STIGMA

can be better understood as an invisible mark that signifies social disapproval and rejection. It can reflect a social attitude toward mental illness and addiction that is deeply discrediting and a position of social disgrace.

DISCRIMINATION

Refers to inequitable or unfair treatment of people with mental disorders which translates to the denial of the rights and responsibilities that accompany full citizenship. Discrimination is a natural outgrowth of stigma. Discrimination may also occur at an interpersonal level, reflecting a desire for social distance and exclusion. It may also occur at a structural level when people with mental disorders are overtly or covertly excluded from public life through a variety of legal, economic, social and institutional means

The majority of people experiencing mental-health problems do not seek help and the stigma of mental illness is considered a major barrier to seeking appropriate treatment.

“Work places can be like an army that shoots its wounded.”

“They encourage you to use the EAP program but then you become labelled and they use it against you.”

“They made it so hard for me at work, I think that they were trying to force me to quit.”

“When I don’t feel well, I need to feel secure that I can take the time I need and not loose my job.”

Barriers to Seeking Help

- For people with serious mental disorders, studies show profound consequences of stigma, including diminished employability, lack of career advancement and poor quality of working life.
- People with mental illnesses are more likely to be unemployed or to be under-employed in inferior positions that are incommensurate with their skills or training.
- If they return to work following an illness, they often face hostility and reduced responsibilities. The result may be self-stigma and increased disability.



AT CROSS PURPOSES

STIGMA

- Both a proximate and a distal cause of employment inequity for people with a mental disability who experience direct discrimination because of prejudicial attitudes from employers and workmates and indirect discrimination owing to historical patterns of disadvantage, structural disincentives against competitive employment and generalized policy neglect.

WORK

- A major determinant of mental health and a socially integrating force. To be excluded from the workforce creates material deprivation, erodes self-confidence, creates a sense of isolation and marginalization and is a key risk factor for mental disability.



Self-Stigma

Or embarrassment about having a mental illness, often keeps people from seeking treatment for what is often a very treatable illness.

Organizations that are committed to the mental health of their employees are pro-active in implementing policies and programs that promote the positive mental health of employees and support early identification, treatment and recovery of employees experiencing mental illness.

The Consequences of Stigma

Stigma is deeply discrediting and isolating and causes feelings of guilt, shame, inferiority and a wish for concealment. Canadians acknowledge that they exhibit stigma towards people with serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia. Stigma and discrimination in the workplace can cause negative repercussions for individuals experiencing mental health problems as well as for the rest of the staff team.

Some of the negative repercussions include:

Delayed access to treatment that promotes disability and impedes recovery

Weakened social support

Hindered social integration

Prevention and obstruction of the performance of social roles

Reduced quality of life

Diminished self-esteem

Increased unemployment

Absenteeism

Presenteeism

Impact on Workplaces

Unwellness and Stigma

- Common mental disorders are the leading cause of **workplace absences**. While the reasons for this are multifarious, there is little doubt that stigma related to common mental disorder plays a large role in sickness, absence and in poor help-seeking. Frequently both managers and staff are unsure of how to approach and intervene with mental health related problems.
- According to research, the economic burden of mental illness is **\$51 Billion per year**, and on any given week, over 500,000 employed Canadians will be unable to work due to mental illness.

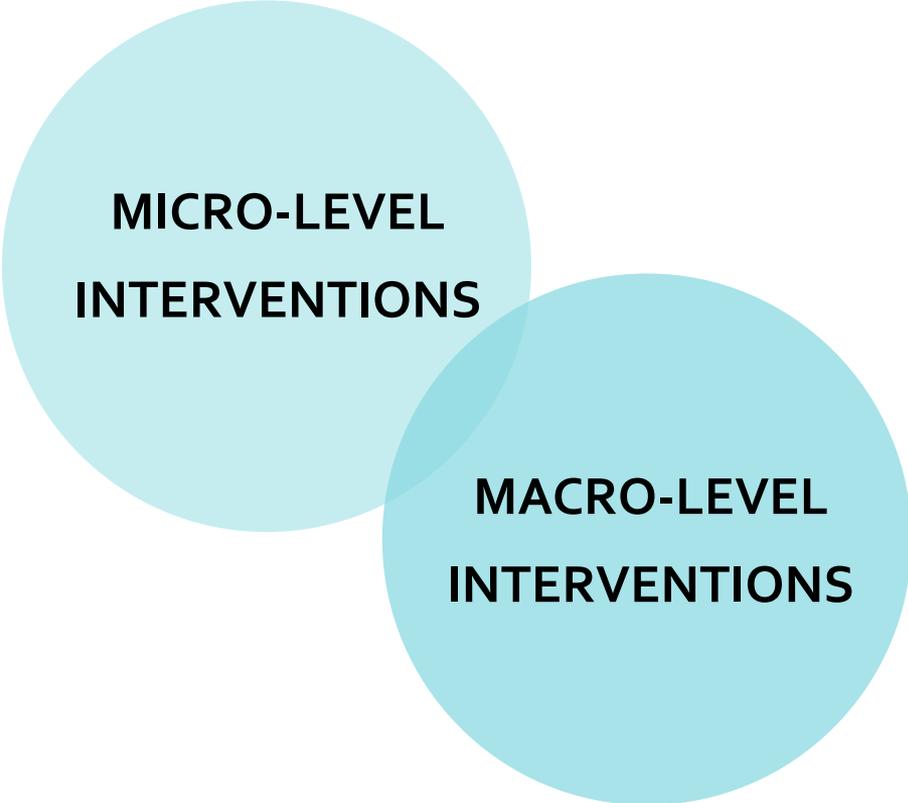
Overall, employers and employees benefit from fostering a psychologically healthy and inclusive work environment.

CHANGING WORKPLACE CULTURE

WITH ANTI-STIGMA INTERVENTIONS!

Anti-Stigma Interventions

- Workplace interventions specifically target the problem as it affects the person's ability to function in the workplace and involve the active involvement of the employee. However, such a process is likely to be challenging as the employee and employer may have different perspectives and aims.
- Anti-stigma interventions at the workplace can lead to improved employee knowledge and supportive behavior towards people with mental-health problems.



**MICRO-LEVEL
INTERVENTIONS**

**MACRO-LEVEL
INTERVENTIONS**

MICRO LEVEL

ANTI-STIGMA INTERVENTIONS

If an employer is worried about an employee:



Employer to engage in some preliminary documentation noting some work-performance based behaviours that have been observed as evidence of concern as it pertains to work function



Meet with the employee and at the beginning of the discussion, note that the meeting is a touch point to engage in curious inquiry not punitive or disciplinary



Employer to express curiosity and concern with the employee in relation to how they are doing



Employer to share their concern in relation to noticed, function oriented, workplace behaviours



Employer to not pressure the employee to disclose specific details about their personal struggles should the employee not appear comfortable



For the employer to encourage the employee to reach out to the Human Resources Department of the agency to access confidential support available to attend to their needs

If an employee is coming forward with presenting needs:



Employer to create time to meet with employee and listen to the employee



Employer to demonstrate care and empathy for the employee's presenting needs



Employer to not pressure the employee to disclose specific details about their personal struggles should the employee not appear comfortable



For the employer to encourage the employee to reach out to the Human Resources Department of the agency to access confidential support available to attend to their needs

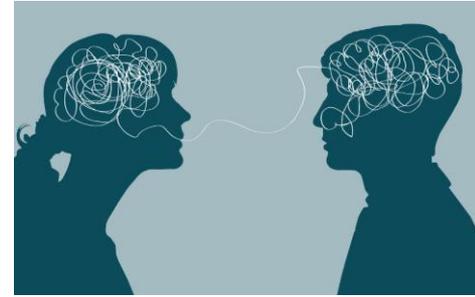
For the employer to remain mindful of how they are engaging the employee during communication:

Tone, cadence & volume of voice carry impact

Body language

Care, concern & curiosity

Purposefully fostering a safe climate during the discussion



It is important to feel comfortable with a supportive manager or supervisor, to speak with to say, “I haven’t been doing well over the past few weeks and I need some time off as I am suffering from anxiety.” Even starting the conversation with a trusted individual at work helps. But not all workplaces are created equal, and if there is already a sense that no one talks about mental illness because it is looked down upon this conversation will be that much harder.

MACRO LEVEL

ANTI-STIGMA INTERVENTIONS

Give thought to how to destigmatize the accessing of Employee Assistance Services within your organization.

- During staff wide communication opportunities, showcase what is available to staff in relation to EAP resources (email communication, meetings)
- When staff are returning from having been off work for a period of time, to have them welcomed back respectfully
- For returning staff to be encouraged to have agency, in the personal decision as to whether or not to disclose why they were off work and what they did during that time to healthily attend to themselves
- For the efficacy of EAP services to be celebrated informally amongst staff as valuable and effective
- For time away from work that is spent focused on well-being initiatives to seep into the work culture as safe discussion pieces amongst staff

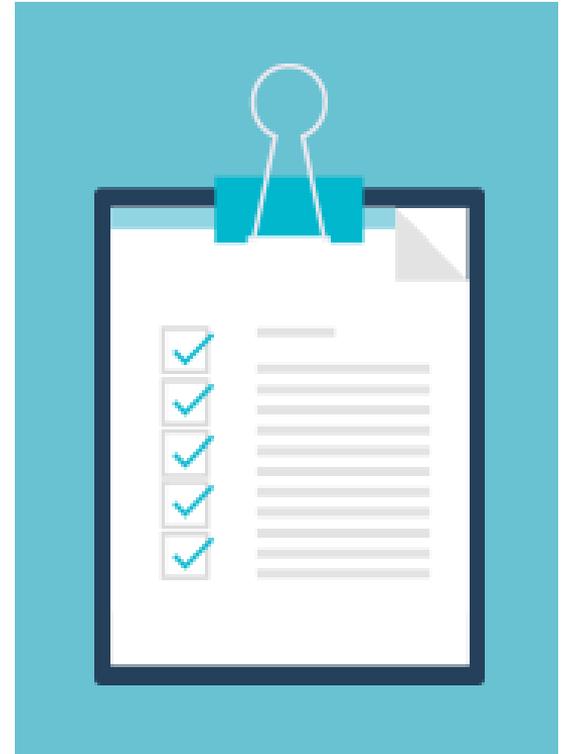
Changing the workplace climate by ...

- Creating congruence between Macro level messaging and Micro level interpersonal exchanges between staff
- Infusing the workplace with language that normalizes the use of mental health & addiction supports and wellness activities
- Mental health literacy in the workplace is critical to combating stigma
- For leadership to set the tone on the above

The increase of staff disclosing the method of support one uses to cope with their own mental health issues could reduce the mental health stigma within the workplace.

Guidelines and Policies

- Creating and implementing a strategy for the workplace that includes guidelines and policies that help to create a healthy workplace is vital. Guidelines exist in the form of the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.
- Ensuring that managers and employees are aware of these standards is key in changing corporate culture for the better.



Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace is a voluntary standard that specifies requirements for a documented and systematic approach to develop and sustain a psychologically healthy & safe workplace.





THANK YOU!

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CAMH

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