

SANE AUSTRALIA

SANE Australia Online Peer Group

Date: 10/02/2022

Topic: Stigma

Description: Often stigma can be thought of as coming from others, but, it can also come from within. In this chat, we'll talk about stigma both from society and ourselves.

Tonight, peer support workers @TideisTurning and @LittleSteps will be facilitating a discussion around the topic of Stigma. Whether you have lived experience of complex mental health issues, you care for someone who does, or both, stigma can touch everyone. We'll be moving through a number of discussion questions tonight, and it's entirely up to you how much or how little you are comfortable with sharing. Some of the conversation may be heavy in nature as we talk about mental health struggles. @Luna, is working behind the scenes to ensure our safety. If you're having any technical difficulties, please see our FAQ (<https://www.sane.org/peer-support/peer-group-chat/chat-faqs#what-if-i-am-having-a-tough-time-and-need-immediate-support>) or message @Luna.

TideisTurning (PSW)

We're looking forward to creating a space where we can reflect and learn together and expand our ideas of stigma.

TideisTurning (PSW)

Welcome everyone!

TideisTurning (PSW)

We will be starting the discussion shortly, and will just allow a bit more time for people to log on and join 😊

LittleSteps (PSW)

TideisTurning (PSW)

In the meantime, feel free to introduce yourselves. I'm @TideisTurning :)

TideisTurning (PSW)

TideisTurning (PSW)

Welcome @flower

LittleSteps (PSW) I'm LittleSteps :)

LittleSteps (PSW) Welcome @Shaz51

Shaz51 Heyyy hello @LittleSteps (PSW) , @TideisTurning (PSW) xx

TideisTurning (PSW) Hi @Shaz51 :)

TideisTurning (PSW) **We'll get started now with our first question: What's your idea of stigma?**

LittleSteps (PSW) Hello @Snowie

LittleSteps (PSW) For me, stigma is linked to negativity, meaning negative thoughts and connotations. I think there is a lot of stigma surrounding complex mental health issues in our society – mainly in the form of stereotypes.

LittleSteps (PSW) Hello @J_J Welcome!

Naomi Hello all

J_J Hello @J_J

tyme (PSW) Hello :)

LittleSteps (PSW) Hello tyme!

J_J Ok.... fear

Snowie Stigma is when someone views you in a negative way because of our mental illness

TideisTurning (PSW) I feel like fear is a big one @J_J :)

TideisTurning (PSW) **Next question: stigma often comes from other people's negative viewpoints (externalised). What does this look like in your life?**

LittleSteps (PSW) Hello @chibam !

chibam Howdy! :D
Being treated in a negative and/or discriminatory way by others simply because those people know I suffer from mental illness and chronic pain. In my experience simply notifying somebody (and this includes organisations and agencies) that you are mentally unwell is literally automatically being stigmatised.

Naomi

Shaz51 Hello @chibam xxx

Venus Hey

J_J There is also a lot of red tape
Shaz51 Hey @Venus xxxx

Venus Being looked at differently because of my mental health disorder 🤔

tyme (PSW) To me, stigma feels like a 'stench' dragging behind me.... people smell/see the stench before they see ME

Snowie People judging me for having a mental illness. Thinking that I am not normal anymore

LittleSteps (PSW) I believe there is a huge amount of stigma surrounding what I have personally experienced with my mental health. This often, in my experience, doesn't look like blatant discrimination. It can be more subtle, like negative stereotypes and assumptions.

TideisTurning (PSW) Yes! I'm hearing a lot of being judged before being given a chance, which is absolutely horrible!
not just negative viewpoints but negative actions - when we are stigmatised by others then we are viewed as vulnerable with the hope that we will go away or not follow-up something. I have had this happen with complaints where I'm asked to complete something that I have difficulty with due to my illnesses.

Naomi Snide remarks and conspicuously avoided topics... like when you know that people want to say something judgemental about you, but are holding their tongue

chibam Or when people automatically have low expectations of you because you have a MI

Venus Yesssss chibam 🤔 spot on

LittleSteps (PSW) Hello the magician! :)
Like, one time people in my family indicated that the family name was dead (I'm the only male heir, so they basically saying that I've got no chance of marrying and procreating)

chibam

The Hams good evening

tyme (PSW) Hi @hams!

Venus People not telling me things as they think I won't cope

LittleSteps (PSW) Good evening The Hams!

chibam Hi @TheHams! :relaxed:

Venus Hey 🙌

TideisTurning (PSW) For me, it's usually directed at me by someone else, usually out of ignorance (though that doesn't necessarily make it any less impactful). I like to think everyone has good intentions though, by which view, the other person most likely doesn't realise the stigma they've perpetuated. There are some cases though where stigma is on purpose, out of spite or malice.
like when people are joking around that I'm crazy auntie in family and funny. but that doesn't mean I can't be bright as well. it's just that the crazy whacky joking is all the time.

the magician

the magician or its not dinner time conversation- you get real weird looks of smugness.

chibam @the magician , for me, it's the exact opposite. It's like I'm not something they can laugh at and enjoy; it's like I'm something creepy that their obliged to feel uncomfortable about. I've always hated that. I've always wanted to be a joke that brightens up other peoples' lives.

The Hams test

J_J @the magician I have nieces and nephews dragged into the stereotypical mainstream but I really know inside that they are very clued up ❤️

The Hams hey @the magician - that is a good point. I have seen this play out in friendship groups. It's like people become tropes or stereotypes because of a certain feature. There is a point at which it can become damagin. I really detest stereotypes and the most important thing we can do to each other is to value the individual. People are different.

tyme (PSW) Totally agree @The Hames

TideisTurnin g (PSW) **I feel like some have started to touch a little on this already, but, how does externalised stigma impact you?**

The Hams what do you mean by externalised stigma?

the magician sometimes people don't realise they have a problem and distance themselves from anything about MI. its sad because if you tally the numbers its 55% population.

J_J Probably pretty much the same way it does for everone?!

tyme (PSW) For me, i think it forms unhealthy cliques....

LittleSteps (PSW) The hams, by "externalised" stigma, we are referring to stigma which comes from society and not from within.

LittleSteps (PSW) :)

J_J *every human

chibam @TideisTurning (PSW) , it destroys any hope of positive relationships with others, and destroys any hope of getting any help. It's like, if people have already decided that your gonna be a loser in their eyes, are they ever gonna try to help you? IME, they don't because they've decided your unworthy of happiness. Likewise, can you enjoy, benefit, or meaningfully contribute to a relationship that is built on disrespect? Once again, IME, the answer is "No" Regardless of where the stigma has come from, whether it's from someone who is aware, or someone who is unaware of what they're saying, it hurts! It can be incredibly painful to have someone pick at things that may be really sensitive and/or that you have little to no control over (such as living with mental health struggles). Also super frustrating! Often, I'll want to scream and cry at the same time.

TideisTurnin g (PSW)

LittleSteps (PSW) Stigma has manifested in the past into me being in denial of my mental ill-health for quite some time. This is something that was difficult to overcome and ended up being a big theme of my recovery.

chibam @LittleSteps (PSW) There's a whole gaslighting effect, too, isn't there? It's like once people start blaming you for behaving "wrong" in their eyes, you begin to lose clarity about what part of your actions/beliefs really are defective or unreasonable, and which parts are completely fair.

TideisTurnin g (PSW)

Sometimes, continual perpetuation of stigma can lead to us taking things on board more personally, or internalising stigma. Do you think this is something that affects you?

**LittleSteps
(PSW)**

very insightful point, chibam

**TideisTurnin
g (PSW)**

@chibam I feel like gaslighting might feed into this just a bit!

chibam

@TideisTurning (PSW) , yes it's a natural flow in the concepts, isn't it?

**LittleSteps
(PSW)**

Welcome, Zoe7!

I see - I think externalised stigma has actually prevented me from being myself. Like I have shut down and not bothered with things (social things etc) because i am worried people will judge me. I have had that experience before, but I think over time I have learned to stop caring too much what others think

The Hams

Zoe7

Hey @LittleSteps (PSW) Just going to read along for now until I find the flow.

J_J

I just don't like losing my shit

the magician

i once had 50 people chucked out of a nightclub for social stigma, that eventuated in discrimination. straight after an article in the paper about education on MI. these days just shake it off.

**LittleSteps
(PSW)**

Yes I do, but I've also come a long way. I think that negative stigma surrounding what I've experienced can sometimes seep into my brain and sense of self.

**TideisTurnin
g (PSW)**

Ooft! That's tough @The Hams I've felt that :)

chibam

@J_J Sometimes we get pushed to our limit, don't we? I think there's an old Bugs Bunny cartoon where one of the characters (I forget who) starts fuming, "That's all I can stand; I can't stand no more!" I often hear Mel Blanc's voice scowling that line.

J_J

Theres some famous quote somewhere... the biggest sin one can have is losing ones poise in society.. something like that

the magician

I'm older now and less sensitive. but sometimes i need to be reminded its not me its the other person.

TideisTurning
(PSW)

Yes @the magician! I feel like it's always good to have that reassurance every once in a while, no matter what age you are!

TideisTurning
(PSW)

Next question; what are the impacts of internalised stigma for you?

the magician

also to not be frightened to tell people to mind their own business.

J_J

Haha @the magician

J_J

Or tell the what you think ;)

**LittleSteps
(PSW)**

I used to have feelings of shame or guilt towards what I have experienced, as a result of stigma. It took some time, but I have learnt that my experiences of mental ill-health are in no way a moral failing. I sometimes still struggle with the effects of stigma and self-stigma.

The Hams
TideisTurning (PSW)
the magician
Naomi
chibam
TideisTurning (PSW)
the magician
Naomi
J_J
Naomi
The Hams
Naomi
J_J
TideisTurning (PSW)
J_J
the magician
chibam
TideisTurning (PSW)

@TideisTurning (PSW) I think an overall decrease in quality of life tbh. By internalising stigma I have started to not like myself, feel weird, feel out of the ordinary etc. This impacts your quality of life greatly I feel. Though again, similar to before, I think that over time I have started to realise that it is no way to live your life. But it's a balance hey

Definitely a balance, and a challenge @The Hams being someone's 'little friend" or other friend. based on MI. not the same as the rest of group. makes you wonder if you're the lowest common denominator

When I internalise stigma it can make me feel worse, which can make my illnesses more of a challenge (than they already are).

@TideisTurning (PSW) , If we consider "internalised stigma" to be *unfair* self-criticism, then to be honest, I'm not impacted by that much at all. I know my limitations, and I live within them, but I don't believe I'm being unreasonable in those appraisals. I'm incapable of making others happy, but that's not me being harsh on myself, it's a thoroughly demonstrated fact. I just don't understand what they want, and thus am unable to adequately tend to their needs.

How might we be able to become more aware of stigma affecting us to bring it out into the light?

an illness which is persecutory in nature but then to be socially ostracised as a result.

I think it is important to be vocal when we are stigmatised - to say 'hey, I don't accept how you are treating me, stop it !'

@the magician , absolutely not true

call out stigma when we see it

@the magician - i remember in year 6 a teacher said that to me - not MI related - but it was the weirdest thing.... even this long i remember it

I do accept that there are people out there that need education about stigma, and genuinely don't fully understand that what they are doing are detrimental to people with mental illness. Sometimes a conversation or an email or letter can serve to educate them.

I have grappled with this for years and I do truly am starting to realise that I hold back my emotions but my emotions are the same/similar to everyone (sic) elses

@J_J can we just clarify what you're thinking isn't true?

Sorry, i don't understand the question

me? i was talking about my experience of not asserting how i was being treated in highschool.

@Naomi but there's a fine line there, too, isn't there? Like I think people need the freedom to speak out if they are being unfairly put upon trying to cater to the needs of someone else with "mental illness". I think a lot of people are afraid of that - that "stigma reduction" policies will go too far and leave the "normal" population carrying an undue burden trying to cater to the "mentally ill".

@J_J all good- just in terms of your response to The Magician's point about ostracism & persecution :)

J_J @TideisTurning (PSW) I was talking in a general sense

TideisTurning (PSW) Cool. Thanks so much for clarifying! :)

LittleSteps (PSW) For me, a big part of tackling external and self-stigma has been through education. Whenever I feel the effects of stigma now, I try to remind myself that my complex mental health issues are the results of things happening in my brain, and not my whole being. In thinking of this, I remind myself that what's going on in my brain is in no way linked to the things that make me who I am – like my values and beliefs.

The Hams I think sometimes the stigma around mental illness can still be present despite the societal push to start openly talking about mental illness.

TideisTurning (PSW) 100% @The Hams

The Hams agreed @LittleSteps (PSW) - We are NOT our illness

TideisTurning (PSW) Yes! Brilliant @LittleSteps (PSW)

the magician its in catering for the mentally ill also about treating normal people generally, when theres no such thing as normal, normality.

The Hams we are so much more than it - it reminds me of the time i was in the ward and i met some people who were having trouble as well. Initially i was unsure about them, but very soon you start to bond and have banter about it. The funniest story was when the nurse said i needed to take my medication earlier than normal and i said that i do it before bed and its only 8pm and i hadn't been to bed at 8pm since i was 4. You should have heard them laughing haha

LittleSteps (PSW) I agree the magician!

chibam @The Hams It's because we all want differant things; and there's no getting around the fact that a passenger aspiring to turn your cruise ship away from your intended destination is a handicap to your ambitions.

Naomi more policies in place about stigma

The Hams @chibam - in that metaphor i would tell the passenger to leave the vessel lol

chibam @The Hams I'd be the man jumping overboard. :smile:

TideisTurning (PSW) **How could we combat or challenge experiences of stigma, either external or internal, when they arise?**

the magician MI is a physical problem. one that affects the brain just another organ of body. its a biological point.

LittleSteps (PSW) Hello Appleblossom!

The Hams internal - employ CBT or similar ways of combating unhealthy thinking styles. external - challenge the person if you feel confident to, or ignore it, or take the piss ?

J_J

TideisTurning (PSW) I feel like talking about it, as scary as that can feel, can be a really good place to start because I feel like a common accompaniment of stigma is shame, which thrives with silence, so talking about it will, theoretically, help reduce or prevent that shame. It is a very brave thing to do though, because stigma,

especially internalised, can often be really personal and sensitive, so I'd encourage sharing with someone you deeply trust, especially to start off with.
@the magician But that's where things get really confusing for a lot of people (especially those outside the "MI realm"). because there's a lot of people who don't have a physical/biological "mental illness", but who get roped into the "mentally ill" category because they are depressed/anxious/suicidal/etc . due to the state of their lives.

chibam

**LittleSteps
(PSW)**

I feel like opening a dialogue about mental health is a good place to start to tackle stigma in ourselves and in society. depression and anxiety are included in physical illnesses. suicide is often untreated depression. a biological reaction.. not believing so can delay seeking help.

the magician

J_J

But you also must not be afraid to be yourself

the magician

you still own your emotions. but healthily.

Zoe7

@the magician SI is not always untreated depression - that does not take into account environmental and social circumstances

chibam

@the magician the problem there, though, is that when people believe someone's depression is a physical problem, it naturally leads them to try to remedy the person's "defective" body/brain, instead of remedying the true problem - their defective life. So a lot of people, including myself, believe it's important that we start making distinctions about "mental illnesses" that originate from within the body, and those that originate from the wider world. I'm really amazed at people who refuse to accept my valid feeling of being stigmatised. When you say 'I feel stigmatised' and they will respond with 'no'. Like how on earth would you know and how dare you invalidate how I feel ! Ignorance, denial ... etc etc etc.

Naomi

**TideisTurning
g (PSW)**

@J_J What an awesome and courageous way to challenge preconceived ideas: this is me!

Naomi

**TideisTurning
g (PSW)**

* invalidate

@Naomi That sounds SO invalidating!

chibam

**TideisTurning
g (PSW)**

@TideisTurning (PSW) Trouble with stigma is that it often leads into a spiral of social isolation, meaning you end up with nobody you really trust to begin those conversations with.

the magician

That's a really good point @chibam. I wonder if people like support professionals might be a starting point too? :) sometimes the depressions are a reflection of what's happening in our lives yes but what's going on in the brain is physical. it can influence your thoughts o situation. you cant just snap out of it. depressed is not depression.

Naomi

I think stigma can and does lead to avoidance, and this cannot be good to avoid people for fear of being stigmatised.

chibam

**TideisTurning
g (PSW)**

@TideisTurning (PSW) Lol. Worst stigma I ever got was from the mental health "professionals":rolling_eyes:

That's awful @chibam! I'm so sorry to hear you've had those experiences, though I know they're unfortunately, not all that uncommon

the magician

i had the worst experience of stigma in mental health workplace. to not be given a job because accepted psychiatric pharmaceuticals. who also told me smoking would lessen my stress.

J_J

@chibam - mental health professional have demons too :) not @TideisTurning (PSW) btw

chibam I was told, by TWO different therapists that there was no hope for me. That I'd never find love; never have a family; never have a meaningful career. It's horrible to be told that sort of stuff from random assholes, but to have your future diagnosed like that by a "professional"... It's as gutting as can be. I had an experience where a psychologist told me that anxiety would ruin my life if I didn't get control of it - she was a fool. NOT even good at her psychologist job

The Hams **TideisTurning (PSW)** **Starting to wrap up now: have you learned anything helpful from others' experiences here tonight that you might be able to apply in your own life? If yes, what did you learn?**

chibam @J_J Oh, I don't doubt that. My first therapist as much as told me he was having a crap day, on the day he made that awful prognosis about my future. I think, to some extent, he just needed to blow off some steam during that session, and unfortunately I copped it.

The Hams so I told her I was seeing a new psych and goodbye lol

the magician I agree it's important to accept a diagnosis and treatment but not necessarily the life that goes with it - carrying it with you.

J_J Also @the magician I understand what you are saying

LittleSteps (PSW) In this group chat, I have spent time reflecting on the sometimes-subconscious impacts of societal stigma on my sense and conceptualisation of myself. We have together talked about ways to combat stigma and self-stigma, and this has been a helpful reminder to check in with myself when I feel the effects of stigma. This chat has also given me some tricks on how to tackle stigma and self-stigma.

Naomi There are many of us that are stigmatised, so not feeling alone is so very important. Thank you everyone! MAYBE the thing I learned is that we all have stories of bad experiences so at least we can relate and remember that we are not alone in that regard.

The Hams

J_J Ok... it's good to talk to like-minded friends ;)

TideisTurning (PSW) Similarly Naomi, I think my biggest takeaway is that stigma affects many of us, in different ways

the magician thank you for hearing my opinions!

The Hams it is what it is hey

Naomi the more conversations, the better

The Hams good night all - I am gonna head off. Thanks again

TideisTurning (PSW) Tonight's topic may have brought up some heavy feelings as we talked about struggles with stigma. Would some self-care be helpful for you after we finish? If so, what might you do? 😊

The Hams see you on the forum

J_J Be kind to yourself

the magician course currently doing on mental health 1st aid. some insights and a cuppa.

Naomi music, time with hubby, my pets, reading, or fav movie

chibam @TideisTurning (PSW) There's a Faulty Towers marathon on soon. I'm gonna go off and unwind with some good chuckles.

**TideisTurnin
g (PSW)**

Sounds awesome @chibam :)

**LittleSteps
(PSW)**

I think I might do some journaling! It's one thing I do to reflect on the day and its events and thoughts which pop up.

chibam

*marathon?:thinking: Well, three episodes back-to-back, anyway.

**TideisTurnin
g (PSW)**

[We'd like to invite you to complete a survey reflecting on your experience in this Peer Group Chat. As we're trialling this service, we'd love to hear any feedback you may have. It will only take a few minutes to complete. Please click this link: https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW](https://www.sane.org/peer-support/online-mental-health-meet-up)

**LittleSteps
(PSW)**

Hello Vampire09! We're just wrapping up :)

the magician

see you.....

**TideisTurnin
g (PSW)**

Here are some further resources we recommend having a look at: <https://www.changeyourmindni.org/challenging-stigma> <https://www.onedoor.org.au/events-media/blog/living-with-internalised-stigma> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVv21d8Z4e8>

* Trigger Warning with this- some language used may be upsetting to some

Naomi

Thank you ... and good night. :-)

**TideisTurnin
g (PSW)**

Thanks for joining and for your contributions @the magician & @Naomi :)

**TideisTurnin
g (PSW)**

[Thank you for joining, and we hope you enjoyed the discussion 😊 If you'd like to be informed when our next Peer Group Chat will be taking place, you can sign up to our list here https://www.sane.org/peer-support/online-mental-health-meet-up. You can also ask questions for us to discuss in future peer chats!](https://www.sane.org/peer-support/online-mental-health-meet-up)

J_J

@chilbam are you still online?

chibam

Yep! :)

J_J

Oh good, I get so worried that I'm going to be ghosted haha

chibam

I'm probably gonna go now, though. I think this chat is finished.

J_J

Ok cool

**TideisTurnin
g (PSW)**

We will close the room soon @J_J, but you're more than welcome to continue the discussion on SANE Forums or join us for the next Online Peer Group Chat if you'd like to :)

chibam

See you around! :)