

Social stigma and substance use patterns: A review

SARAH KRECHEL

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Terms

Substance addiction- “a chronic disease characterized by drug seeking that is compulsive, or difficult to control, despite harmful consequences” (NIH)

Substance use- “the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances” (WHO)

Stigma- attribute of an individual that is deeply discrediting (Goffman)

Background

History of substance use from a “war” to “public health emergency”

- Nixon’s “War on Drugs”
- Anti Drug Abuse Act (1986)- mandatory minimums for drug use
- Surgeon General designates as a mental health concern
- Trumps “public health emergency” declaration

Background- Women and opioid use

Women experience opioid use and addiction differently

- Risk factors include
 - Adverse childhood experiences
 - Greater health care use
 - Menstrual cycles
 - Mental illness
 - Painful chronic conditions

From 1999-2010 there has been a 400% increase in women who have overdosed on prescription opioids

Background- Stigma and opioid use

Ahern, Stuber, & Galea, 2007

- Stigmatization leads to poor health outcomes

Kulesza, et al., 2017

- Stigma is the strongest predictor of substance use

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to draw on Goffman's theory of stigma to examine how stigmatization frames social perceptions of substance abuse, addiction and treatment in scientific literature and mainstream media.

Based on the analysis, potential policy recommendations will be proposed to assist in removing stigmatization to foster positive health behavior change.

Methods

PEER-REVIEWED SEARCH TERMS

- Social stigma
- Labeling theory
- Opioid use
- Substance use disorders
- Women

INCLUSION CRITERIA

- Discussed stigma assignment
- Compared gendered experiences
- Perspective from women experiencing stigma

Methods- Magazine criteria

- Top distributed magazines as identified by 'top seller' lists
 - One magazine to focus on health
 - Female audience
- *One top-seller magazine with a general audience for comparison

Methods

- I. Sixteen (16) peer-reviewed articles analyzed
- II. Thirty (30) magazine publications analyzed
- III. Articles were assessed for opportunities to apply Goffman's theory of stigma
- IV. Peer-reviewed articles and magazine publications were compared and contrasted

Literature review- Stigma

Goffman, 1986

- Stigma is “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance”
- Stigma is attributed during social exchanges through: appearance, vocabulary, speech patterns (e.g., conversational consequences)
- Conversational consequences add up over time; leading to stigmatization
- Group cultivation through media publications – advocacy for stigmatized

Literature review- Stigma and addiction

Internalization of stigma leads to negative health outcomes

- Produces chronic stress, devaluation, and shame

Ahern, et al., 2007

- 1008 “drug users” surveyed
- 85 percent think people believe them to be unreliable/dangerous
- 75 percent avoid people and situations to avoid feelings of inferiority

Literature review- Stigma and treatment

Fear of the negative label and subsequent consequences from stigma can halt people from seeking appropriate treatment

Kulezsa, et al., 2017

- Fear of punishment for drug use versus support through treatment therapies
- Moral component of stigmatization of drug users results in blame/character flaws- creating perceived barriers to care

Literature review- Stigma and treatment

Intersectionality of identity creates unique barriers for women seeking treatment

Stinger & Baker, 2015

- “Female attribute” creates two-fold risk for women who are stigmatized for drug use
- Identities of caretaker and mother are at risk when stigmatized
- Perceived risk of stigmatization is loss of custody of children
- Therefore, women are less likely to seek treatment for their substance use

Literature review- Stigma and criminal justice system

Pregnant women within the criminal justice system tend not to be referred to appropriate treatment for substance use

Angelotta et al., 2016

- Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) is current standard of care for pregnant women needing substance use treatment
- 75 percent of drug courts did not prescribe MAT for pregnant women
- States with prenatal child abuse laws have statistically significant fewer referrals to MAT for incarcerated women

Literature review- Magazine publications

Number of articles published per magazine

Magazine title	Number of articles published
Women's Health Magazine	7
Woman's Day Magazine	14
Time Magazine	11

Literature review- Magazine publications

Type of articles published

Type of article	Description	Number of articles published
Profile	Describes a person	15
Informational/service	Offers information into a specific field of study	8
Expose	Alters the public and moves them to action	5
Inspirational	Includes moral message, works to inspire reader	2
Research shorts	Reports scientific information	2

Discussion of peer-reviewed literature

- Literature shows the negative health outcomes of stigma on an individual who uses
- Criminal justice system emerges as location of harsh stigmatization
- Internalized stigma and shame result in reduction of self-efficacy
- Health Belief Model suggests poor perceptions create barriers to health change
 - Internalization of stigma fosters poor perceptions

Discussion – Magazine publications

- Magazine publications offer an accepting view of substance use behaviors
- Language fosters understanding of substance addiction as a mental health concern
- Use of profile articles illicit empathy from the reader
- Multiple iterations of similar circumstances help shape a systematic understanding of substance use/addiction

Comparison of literature sources

Peer-reviewed literature explains the “current state” of stigma and substance use

- Articles present the data for how stigma is experienced

Magazine publications act as an advocate for women who use opioids

- Voice for women who are otherwise discounted in social interactions
- Offer a space for women to feel accepted- reducing effects of isolation

Limitations

- Review was only able to look at three top distributed magazines
- Magazines are not representative samples – future studies should look at magazines with different cultural audiences (e.g., religious)
- Review only focused on the stigmatized- future studies should examine first-hand perspectives of why individuals pass stigma

Conclusion

- Stigma is among the most pervasive barriers for women accessing treatment for opioid use
- Stigma fosters isolation, which has associated negative health outcomes
- Criminal justice system protocols and policies should seek to ensure pregnant women are referred to appropriate treatment options
- Magazines are in a position to create social change
 - Continuing to share the stories of women facing substance use addiction can build greater awareness and understanding

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