

Preventing and Reducing Stigma: Criminal Justice



Why Does it Matter?

People with mental health and SUDs are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. More than half of all inmates in the U.S. have a mental illness. Individuals with mental illness are more likely to experience multiple arrests and incarcerations. In most states, jails or prisons house more people with mental illness than state-operated psychiatric facilities.

Perceived and structural stigma play a specific role in the criminal justice system. Structural stigma arises when policies reinforce public stigma and restrict the behavior of the stigmatized group. In contrast, perceived stigma refers to perceptions of the public's stigmatizing attitudes and negative stereotypes toward a group.

Both types of stigma are thought to affect self-esteem and self-efficacy, which, in turn, influence mental health, behavior, and coping.

What is the Impact?

- Overrepresentation of people with mental illness and SUD in the criminal justice system is both a source and a consequence of stigma.
- Structural stigma plays a role in the disproportionate representation of people with mental illness in the criminal justice system.
- Societal stereotypes, prejudice, and isolating people to control substance use promotes shame and structural stigmatization due to antidrug and harsh criminal sentences.
- SUDs are treated as a moral and criminal issue rather than a health condition, which may worsen the effects of incarceration.

What Can We Do?

- Increase trainings about mental health and SUDs for all personnel and professionals working across the criminal justice system.
- Examine the arrests of people with mental illness and SUDs.
- Establish county-level mental health programs and courts to address stigma, negative attitudes, and prejudice towards people with mental illness and substance use disorder.
- Engage community stakeholders in building mental health and SUD awareness, including landlords, employers, healthcare providers, and groups within the criminal justice system.
- Increase awareness of stereotypes within court systems, including negative attitudes towards people with mental health illness and SUD and the use of stigmatizing language.



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Resources

[Preventing and Reducing Stigma: Criminal Justice](#)



Online Learning: [Addressing Stigma and Substance Use Disorders: A HealthKnowledge Course](#)



Web page: Great Lakes PTTC, [Preventing and Reducing Stigma](#)



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