

Perceived Impact of Storytelling on Substance Use Self-Stigma

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Conceptualizing Stigma

Stigma is a societal process that occurs when “labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination within a context wherein power is exercised”¹

Three types of stigma:

- Social – stigmatized attitudes and beliefs a society holds towards individuals with the stigmatized attribute ²
- Structural or Systemic – policy, laws, institutional practices, or negative attitudinal social contexts that negatively affect stigmatized groups ³
- Self – “negative feelings about one’s self, maladaptive behavior, identity transformation or stereotype endorsement resulting from experiences, perceptions or anticipation of negative social reactions’ on the basis of stigma” ⁴

Story Telling: Narrative as a Method for Disrupting Stigma

- The use of narrative has shown to decrease self-stigma for several conditions^{5,6}
- Narrative Enhancement Cognitive Therapy (NECT) participants displayed reductions in self-stigma as well as improvements in self-esteem, hope, and subjective quality of life.⁷
- Interventions using narrative noted outcomes including reductions in stress and secrecy⁸, as well as stigma coping and personal growth and recovery⁴

Study Aim

Understand the self-identified impacts of sharing one's story of experience with substance use.

Methods

Sampling

- Purposive sample of 88 people who have shared their experience publicly regarding substance use disorder
 - 22 key informant interviews

Analysis

- Theming analysis with a modified grounded theory approach⁹

Sample Characteristics

- 68% female, 32% male
- 86% White/Caucasian, 9% Black/African American, 5% Latino/Hispanic
- Ages ranged 22-71, 36% of participants in their 50s
- 77% of participants supported a loved one with SUD
- 45% identified as a person in recovery from SUD

Categories of Responses

Personal Impacts

Hopes and Motivations

Negative Experiences



Agency to Positively Impact Others

“So I started working at that halfway house, and it was like my life came full circle or something. All the help and all the things that all of the techs there and the counselors and everybody had given me, maybe now I can give some of that back to all these new clients coming in and all of these people who were just starting recovery.”



Purpose

“The good to that is that [the negative experiences] made me hungry. It’s given me a purpose in life because I have a gift to communicate. It’s made me never want to quit. I feel like when I get up every day, you couldn’t pay me enough. There’s nothing else I’d rather be doing but to be speaking and uplifting people.”



Increased & Strengthened Connection to Others

“And one time I spoke and my brother and my niece showed up. My niece was 16 at the time. And they never said they watched my video. We never really talked about it. They know all the details, because my brother is my brother, I tell him things. And he came and he listened to me speak and he saw everything that was going on. And he came up to me and he's like, ‘I just never really knew any of that.’”



Improved View of Self

“So slowly, slowly when I would start sharing my story and just start talking in meetings or just one-on-one with people or things like that, I slowly started to get more self-confidence, I started to believe more in my ability to make better decisions, to try to really be a better person, and not just because I wanted you to think that, but because I started to not hate myself anymore.”

Relief

“And the more I was able to talk about it, the less weight it had, the less power it had. And then seeing how it helps other people almost give themselves permission to talk about things that they were never going to mention, as well. And you see them get relieved of the weight and the communal aspect of it.”

Moving forward from Trauma

“Sharing my story allowed me to grieve. We’re just not allowed to grieve. I should’ve been over it. I should’ve gotten on with it and why do I do such sad things by speaking and sharing my story? Because it was the only place I was allowed to talk and not be interrupted. It’s the only place I’m allowed to cry and not be shut down. So for me, sharing my story and speaking to people was where I could grieve.”

Increased Hope

“Well, personally, I'm really glad that I was able to put this story out there and it gave me almost a drive or reason to... It gave me hope. Even though my son's time has passed, but it gave me hope to keep going on day to day and keep progressing.”

Power Reclamation

“Because I decided to tell my story, because I decided to share my story, I literally broke a cycle of generational stigma, of generational single parent homes, of generational drug abuse. I have stopped a lot of mess that I grew up in. Now, I don't know what's going to happen in the next generation, but I know as right now with me, that I have been able to put to rest just for the day a lot of garbage. Sharing my story, I took the power back.”

Implications

- More research needed on story telling and self-stigma reduction for substance use
- Possible use as an intervention to reduce self-stigma for substance use
- Implications for the network around an individual who uses substances

QUESTIONS?

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