



UNIVERSITY *of* MARYLAND
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Veterans, Mental Health, and Stigma

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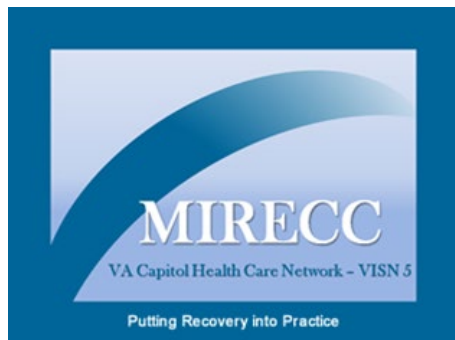
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Learning Objectives

This workshop is designed to help you

- Incorporate Veteran-specific details of mental illness stigmatization into your clinical work
- Utilize the concept of “internalized stigma” in working with Veterans
- Apply several stigma-dismantling strategies in your therapeutic work with Veterans

Stereotypes of Veterans

“I think the majority of [civilians] just don’t understand it so it frightens them.... They don’t know if you’re going to snap and hurt somebody.

They don’t know—I mean a lot of them have probably grown up with the exaggerated versions we used to see on TV of the Vietnam vet guys.” [Ref5]

Stigmatization

Bias = Beliefs → Prejudice = Emotion → Discrimination = Behavior

Mental Illness Stigma

Stigma around mental illness affect my life, Jesus...
[laughs ruefully] Just I feel like I can't do certain things
that regular people can do or non-mentally ill people.

Like...it's hard for me to date because I feel like...as
soon as they find out that I'm bipolar, then I'm
screwed. Like they're going to think I'm crazy or
something like that and stop wanting to date me. And
that just causes heartache and I don't handle rejection
well. [Lucksted Intv#1008]

Veterans & MH Stigma

- Stereotypes / fears of being or being seen as weak may be especially prominent
- Why did I get depressed or anxious or PTSD when others did not?

“I would rather talk to a civilian than an actual military person, because I thought the military person in their head was thinking, ‘Suck it up, get back to what to you got to do.’ ” [Ref 3]

Veterans & MH Stigma

- May feel they “should not complain” because they “knew what they faced” in joining
- Stereotypes about violence or “out of control” may hit home if have certain PTSD symptoms

“People treat drug addicts like freaking lepers. You don’t want them people around. They treat us the same way, because it’s kind of like we asked for it Yeah, they think we asked for it. Oh, you signed that piece of paper.” [5]

Drawing on Military Identity

“Basic training was hard I learned that I could do anything; if I survived that, I can deal with this depression that I am battling now.” [Ref2]

“[In the future I see] peace, a quiet mind, hopefully a happier life. Happier relationships. ‘Cause I know what to work on now...so I’m looking forward to getting better. You know, I might not get cured, but I can get better. [Ref2]

Military Identity as Impediment

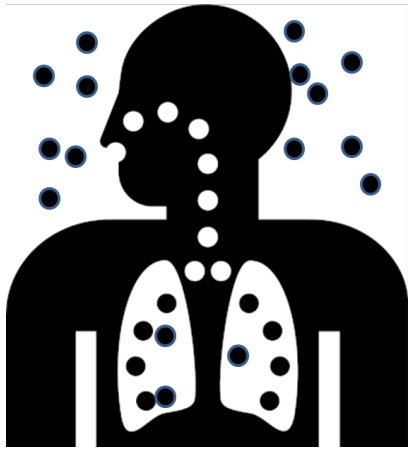
“After I lost that job I started drinking more. I started drugging more ... I was still in total denial, and fighting, not believing I was ill and not wanting to ask for no help.

I’m a Marine. I ain’t needing no help.” [Ref 2]

Therapeutic Opportunities

“[Being diagnosed] made me angry. I didn’t want to accept it. Then I finally accepted it, and I’m kind of sensitive about it to other people. I think people try to talk condescendingly to me and pamper me, humor me, and I don’t want that I have the ability to work on keeping it in control, but it takes a lot of mental energy and mental focus.” [Ref2]

Internalized Stigmatization aka Self Stigma



When a person comes to believe that negative stereotypes about people with mental health problems are true of him or herself.

One type of psychological harm caused by experiencing stigma from others.



Internalized Stigma Effects

“The negative perception of one’s self really prevents any kind of success, basically [the thought that]...I’m not good enough, I’ll never be able to achieve this... it prevents pretty much any action whatsoever.”

[Lucksted Intv#10004]

“[With self stigma] you just, you just get tired and, you know, then you come to the doctor and they’re teaching you this, and they’ll teach you that, and they teach you this, and then you’re like what’s the use.

[Lucksted Intv#10011]

“Self-stigma? Well, not applying for certain jobs, not going to certain functions, not being more involved in activities, social activities, you know what I mean? It’s like... you got a rope on you, you can only go so far. So it really affects your life in a dramatic way.”

[Lucksted Intv#10032]

Self-stigma Intervention Principles

We can “EASE” Self-Stigma through:

Education

Awareness

Shift perspective

Empower

EASE = Education

“Learning about it I started to have more confidence in me, you know, and my ability to do things...The education about the mental illness. I would say that was the key factor...”

[Lucksted Intv#10008]

“...I was kind of self-fulfilling prophecy thing with my mental illness [and stigma]. Then when I started getting education, and learning about my mental illness, I said I’m not that. I’m not there. I can do this to change things.”

[Lucksted Intv#10027]

Example: Myths v Facts

FALSE MYTH	TRUE FACT
People with mental illness are dangerous.	People with mental illness are <u>much</u> more likely to be victims of violence rather than perpetrators. As in the general population, only a very small percentage of people with mental illness ever commit violent acts.
People who have a mental illness cannot get better.	People can and do recover from and manage mental illness, when they have the proper tools and support. Many people with mental illnesses are in recovery and leading active lives. Sometimes, people with mental illness completely recover.
Mental illness is a sign of personal weakness—people with mental illness could get better if they really wanted to.	Mental illness is <u>not</u> a character flaw, a weakness, or laziness, and is not the person's fault. Recovery from any illness is more successful when the person has the proper support.
People with mental illness are unpredictable and unreliable.	Like everybody, people with mental illness can sometimes behave in unpredictable ways. However, most of the time, people with mental illnesses present few surprises to those who know them. Once they know themselves, people with mental illness can be aware of what they can commit to and carry through. Most are very dedicated to their values and responsibilities.
Add other relevant ideas	And accurate information about them

EASE = Awareness

[My mom] said, "Don't tell nobody that you're mentally ill 'cause they won't accept you." back in the early days before I got my thoughts together, before I gained a little bit of wisdom, before I read up enough about the way things are, I might have been a little intimidated or fearful.

But...I began to realize that there's gonna be those who can accept you and those who can't and I stuck to the people who ... deal with me on a one-on-one basis of true friendship and sound relationships. [The others,] they haven't waken up. I woke up. I woke up and I realized that I am capable of doing just about anything I want to do. [Lucksted Intv#1072]

Example: ISMI Subscales

Alienation

“I am embarrassed or ashamed that I have a mental illness.”

**Stereotype
Endorsement**

“Mentally ill people tend to be violent.”

**Perceived
Discrimination**

“People discriminate against me because I have a mental illness.”

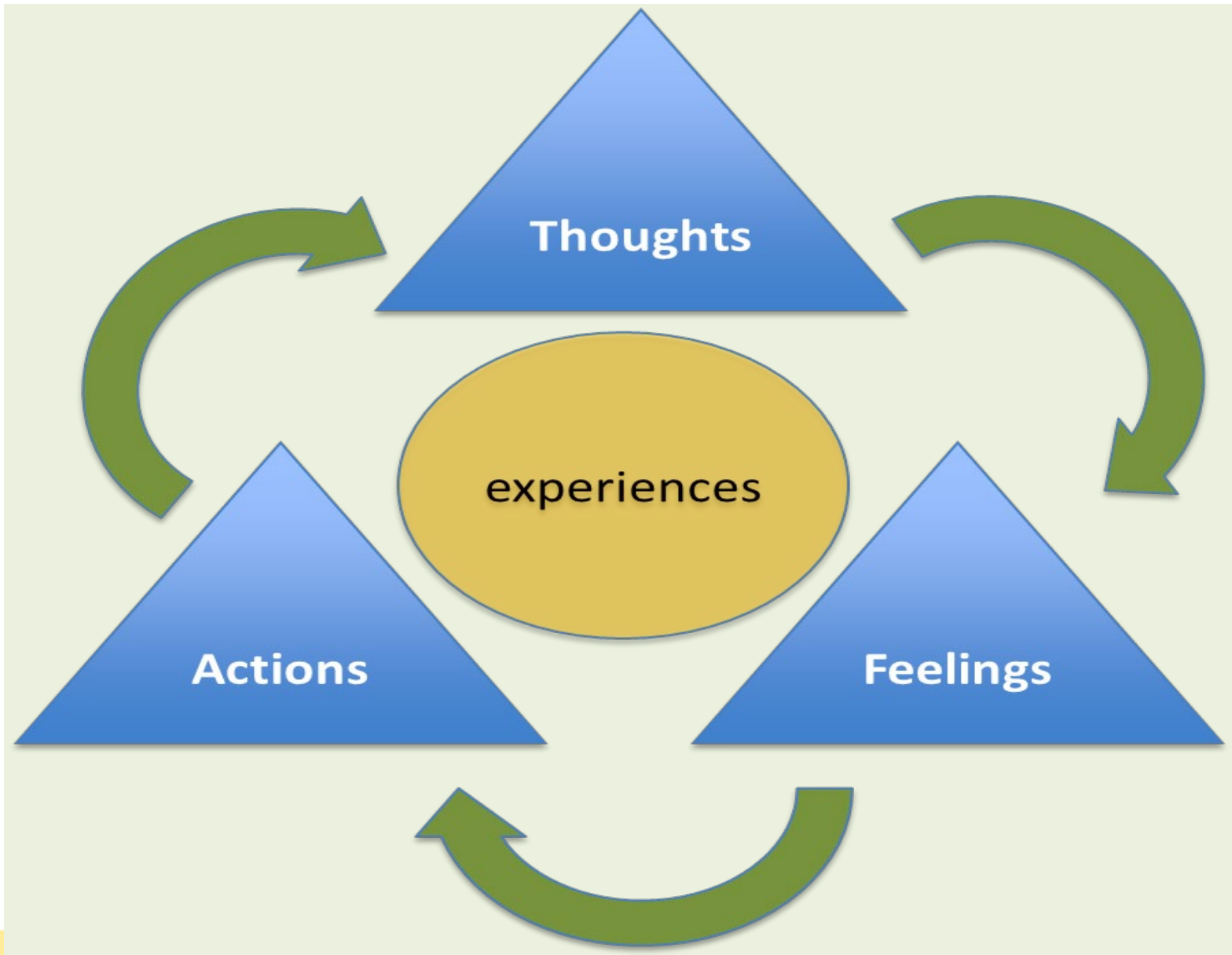
Social Withdrawal

“I avoid getting close to people who don’t have a mental illness to avoid rejection.”

Stigma Resistance

“Living with mental illness has made me a tough survivor.”

EASE = Shift Perspective



Example: 3Cs for Stigma

Event	Feeling	Catch it	Check it	Change it	New feeling
On my way to therapy	I feel shame. What is the thought that leads to this feeling?	All I am is a mental patient.	This thought makes me feel bad and is not true. Its not a useful thought	I am more than my diagnosis. Therapy helps me reach my goals	Hopeful

EASE = Empowerment

Letting go of expectations that others would understand my MI made me more aware that it's my responsibility. And I'm responsible for all of my actions. And, you know, despite the fact that I have a mental illness, it doesn't alleviate any responsibility.

[Lucksted Intv#0004]

[There's] a lot in the past that I don't want to go back to. I can't forget it, but I don't have to entertain it. And when it comes up, my stigma, I push it back. I look at what I've done, what I've accomplished. And I push it back. [Lucksted Intv#0012]



Example: Facets of Myself

What are some positive personal qualities you like about yourself?

What are some things you are proud of yourself for?

What are some things you enjoy doing? now or as a child, alone or with others

What are some values you try to live by?

What are some additional positive ways you could finish these sentences:

I am

I am

I am

In closing...

Education

Awareness

Shift perspective

Empower

think outside the



stigma

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7. [Lucksted Intv##] quotes are from qualitative interviews with Veterans with mental health problems, not yet published.