

Hang Su [Ed.]

# Breaking the Silence

Confronting Stigma and Substance Use Disorder



Nomos

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# Introduction

*Hang Su, Yifan Xu*

In a world where the complexities of human experience are often oversimplified, the intertwined issues of stigma and substance use disorder (SUD) demand a more nuanced exploration. Stigma, a pervasive societal force, manifests as deeply ingrained negative attitudes and discrimination against individuals based on certain characteristics or behaviours. It is a powerful social construct that can diminish self-worth, restrict opportunities, and perpetuate exclusion, impacting the lives of many in profound ways.

Substance use disorder, commonly known as addiction, is a multifaceted medical condition characterised by the compulsive use of substances, despite adverse consequences. It affects millions globally, cutting across all demographics and socioeconomic statuses. SUD is not merely a failure of willpower or a moral failing; rather, it is a complex interplay of genetic predispositions, environmental influences, and psychological factors. Understanding this condition requires a compassionate and informed perspective, recognising it as a chronic disease that necessitates ongoing management and support.

In this book, both ‘substance use disorder’ (SUD) and ‘substance use disorders’ (SUDs) are used interchangeably to reflect the complexity of this condition. While ‘substance use disorder’ refers to the condition in general, ‘substance use disorders’ may be used to refer to various specific types of the disorder (e.g., alcohol use disorder, opioid use disorder). However, both terms are intended to describe the same overall condition related to problematic substance use.

The relationship between stigma and substance use disorder is deeply intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Stigma surrounding SUD not only exacerbates the struggles faced by those battling addiction but also serves as a significant barrier to seeking and receiving effective treatment. Individuals with SUD often internalise societal stigma, leading to feelings of shame, guilt, and unworthiness. This internalised stigma can hinder recovery efforts, fostering a sense of isolation and hopelessness. Additionally, public stigma—manifested through discriminatory policies, biased media

portrayals, and societal attitudes—perpetuates harmful stereotypes and myths about addiction, further marginalising those affected.

This book aims to unpack the complex dynamics between stigma and substance use disorder, exploring their interplay and the impact they have on individuals and society at large. Through a combination of personal narratives, scientific research, and critical analysis, we will delve into the origins of stigma, its manifestations, and its consequences for those living with SUD. Personal stories will provide a human face to the abstract concepts, highlighting the lived experiences of individuals who navigate the dual burdens of addiction and societal judgment.

By understanding the roots and impacts of stigma, we can begin to dismantle these harmful perceptions and replace them with empathy and knowledge. This book will highlight successful strategies for reducing stigma, including educational initiatives, media advocacy, and supportive community programmes. We will explore the importance of language in shaping attitudes, demonstrating how thoughtful communication can foster a more supportive environment for those with SUD.

Moreover, we will present actionable steps for individuals, families, and communities to combat stigma and support recovery. This includes advocating for policies that promote treatment over punishment, engaging in open and honest conversations about addiction, and creating inclusive spaces where people can share their experiences without fear of judgment.

In sharing these insights and stories, our goal is to inspire a shift in how society views and addresses substance use disorder. We aim to move from a paradigm of blame and exclusion to one of understanding and inclusion. By shedding light on the human side of addiction, we hope to foster a culture of compassion where every person affected by SUD can find the support and respect they deserve.

Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive definition of stigma and its various forms, including public stigma, self-stigma, and structural stigma. It explores the historical context of stigma related to mental illness and SUD, highlighting the deep-rooted prejudices that persist in society.

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth look at SUD, exploring their clinical definitions and diagnostic criteria. It explains the complexities of SUD, which encompass psychological, biological, and social dimensions. The chapter details the criteria used to diagnose SUD.

Chapter 3 examines the wide-ranging consequences of stigma on individuals with mental illness and SUD. It discusses how stigma leads to discrimination in healthcare, employment, and social interactions, exacer-



bating the struggles of affected individuals. The chapter also explores the impact of stigma on treatment outcomes and recovery.

Chapter 4 delves into the intricate relationship between stigma and SUD, highlighting how stigma affects the perception, treatment, and recovery of individuals with SUD.

Chapter 5 focuses on effective strategies and notable success stories in reducing stigma associated with mental health conditions and SUD. It presents a comprehensive overview of interventions and approaches that have proven successful in various settings and highlights real-life examples of stigma reduction efforts.

Chapter 6 explores the changing views on stigma associated with SUD and mental health conditions and outlines the future steps necessary to further reduce stigma. It looks at ongoing debates, new trends, and innovative strategies aimed at creating a more inclusive and supportive society.

Chapter 7 summarizes the issues of discrimination and stigmatization related to gaming addiction, provides a structured analysis of the stigma of behavioral addiction, and points out future research directions.

Chapter 8 introduces the issue of HIV related discrimination and stigma in Spain, including the epidemiological situation, severity, and sharing of measures and experiences on how to eliminate stigma.

This journey is about more than just changing minds; it's about changing lives. We invite you to join us in this endeavour, to listen, learn, and act. Together, we can build a future where stigma no longer stands in the way of recovery and where every individual is treated with dignity and care.



# List of Acronyms

## Introduction

substance use disorder (SUD)

substance use disorders (SUDs)

## Chapter 2

World Health Organization (WHO)

disability-adjusted life year (DALY)

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD )

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)

International Classification of Diseases, Eleventh Revision (ICD-11)

American Psychiatric Association (APA)

Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV)

phencyclidine (PCP)

methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA)

Methylenedioxymphetamine (MDA)

gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA)

selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)

## Chapter3

not in my backyard (NIMBY)

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale (CES-D)

## Chapter4

methadone maintenance treatment (MMT)

## Chapter 5

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

## *List of Acronyms*

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Veterans Affairs (VA)

a: World Health Organization. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

### Chapter 6

National Institutes of Health (NIH)

brain disease model of addiction (BDMA)

### Chapter 7

gaming disorder (GD)

the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)

animation, comics, and games (ACG)

### Chapter 8

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

gay men and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM)

antiretroviral therapy (ART)

people living with HIV (PLHIV)

pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)

sustainable development goals (SDG)

health-related quality of life (HRQoL)

Spanish Union of Insurance and Reinsurance Entities (UNESPA)

non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

the State AIDS Coordinator (CESIDA)

the scientific societies Spanish Interdisciplinary AIDS Society (SEISIDA)

High-Level Meeting (HLM)

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

European Commission (EC)

European Union (EU)

African Union (AU)

United Nations (UN)

Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)