Stigmas and Myths

- Discussion: What are some common stigmas you have seen surrounding mental health?
   - look @ myth/fact article ryan and i wrote for retrospect
- How are stigmas harmful? How do they become ingrained in us? How do they affect the mentally ill?
   - Media, history of mental health awareness (eg asylums in the 1900s that were insane)
- How can we dispel stigmas and replace them with facts? How do we stop these myths from spreading and becoming normalized? (maybe do an activity where we pretend like its a convo and you hear someone spreading these myths - have the students say what they would do to dispel myth etc)
   - Stop using mental illnesses as adjectives(!!!!!)
   - Advocate when you hear someone perpetrating myths
   - Examples: "i'm so ocd, my closet has to be organized" - what can you say in this situation?

Materials: - Examples of things people say and then how to dispel them

1. What are some common stigmas or myths you have seen surrounding mental health?
   a. Stigma: getting treatment!
      i. Medication, therapy
   b. Stigma: talking about your mental health issues openly
   c. Three main misconceptions a study found caused by the stigma:
      i. fear and exclusion: persons with severe mental illness should be feared and, therefore, be kept out of most communities;
      ii. authoritarianism: persons with severe mental illness are irresponsible, so life decisions should be made by others;
      iii. benevolence: persons with severe mental illness are childlike and need to be cared for.
   d. Myth: all Mentally ill people should be taken to institutions to get help.
      i. Fact: While psych wards can be helpful to someone suffering from mental illness, this is not the only option. Many people who struggle with mental illness take medication, see a therapist, attend group therapy, in addition to many other methods. Many people also do a combination of these things. Psych wards are not the only treatment option.
   e. Myth: Mental illness is fake to get attention.
      i. Fact: Mental illness is a real problem that affects 20% of adults and 45% of the global population experiences at least one mental illness throughout the course of their lifetime. There are over 3 million cases of

GAD and depression every year. People who are diagnosed with mental illness are seriously struggling. Some disorders can even cause people to not want attention at all.

 f. Myth: Having anxiety equates being nervous

  i. Fact: An anxiety disorder is different than being nervous before a test or a big event. Many people who suffer from anxiety disorders feel "invisible, different, ostracized, alone," (Jodi Aman, psychologist and author of *You 1, Anxiety 0*). Nerves disappear with the stressor, while anxiety stays with a person. Anxiety occurs for no reason at all, and is usually out of one's control. Anxiety disorders result in panic or anxiety attacks, which often involve physical symptoms such as shaking, nausea, fatigue, muscle tension etc. Scientifically, anxiety and nervousness are both caused by the same hormone, but anxiety takes over the amygdala of the brain, creating a "fight or flight" response.

 g. Myth: All mentally ill people are dangerous or unstable and want to hurt someone.

  i. Fact: after the Texas shooting, the CIC deemed it as a mental health issue. This perpetuated the myth that those with mental illness are dangerous/want to hurt others, while this is false. Usually, mentally ill people do not pose a threat to others around them, but rather, are struggling internally with oneself. In fact, only 3%-5% of violent acts are due to mental illness. People with mental illness are 10 times *more* likely to be the victim of a violent attack.

 h. Myth: It's okay to joke about mental illness or suicide

  i. Fact: Depression is a real mental illness, and it's frustrating to those who struggle with it when neurotypical people say things like "the brown bag is closed; I'm so depressed," or "wow, you're so OCD". By making a joke of mental illness, people are feeding into the idea that mental illness is fake or made up, and it hurts mentally ill people to feel that their struggles are illegitimized. Jokes just increase the stigma around mental illness and perpetrate the idea that it's not a real problem. Would you ever joke about having cancer? Like "haha my hair's falling out guess i have cancer!" NO. so don't do the same with mental illness.

2. How are stigmas harmful? How do they become ingrained in us? How do they affect the mentally ill?

 a. Stigmas are harmful b/c they spread false information about large groups of people who need attention/awareness & support. Stigmas essentially deny them this aid. Stigma causes discrimination & prejudice which in turn can make it

difficult for the targeted group to find work, be in a long-term relationship, be socially included, live in decent housing (https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stigma-and-discrimination)

b. Stigmas become ingrained in us through media; shows, ads, and movies that provide bad examples or stereotypical portrayals of mental health. History of mental health awareness has contributed greatly to the stigma surrounding mental illness. Reference background to mental health class - very little activism and even when stuff was done it was very segregated/sterile. Asylums in the 1900s that created the idea of violence/ppl being crazy.

    i. Asylums
1. Almost like prison
2. Served not to cure but to segregate
3. Patient quote: "For crying the nurses beat me with a broom-handle and jumped on me. Then they tied my hands and feet, and throwing a sheet over my head, twisted it tightly around my throat, so I could not scream, and thus put me in a bathtub filled with cold water. They held me under until I gave up every hope and became senseless."
4. Restraints: straight jackets, manacles, waistcoats, and leather wristlets, sometimes for hours or days at a time. To "keep people safe"

c. Affect the mentally ill by illegitimizing their struggles and also just treating them horribly??!?!?!

3. How can we dispel stigmas and replace them with facts? How do we stop these myths from spreading and becoming normalized?

a. Stop using mental illnesses as adjectives(!!!!!)
b. Advocate when you hear someone perpetrating myths
c. Activity for dispelling myths
    i. Examples: "i'm so ocd, my closet has to be organized" - what can you say in this situation?

MYTHS TO DISPEL

- "I'm so OCD; I love color-coding my closet"
- "Man I'm like having a panic attack I'm kinda nervous for this test"
- "All mentally ill people are violent"
- "They can't be depressed, they're always smiling!"
- "They can't have a mental illness; their life is so great!"

- Combat myths they came up with in discussion
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