Stigma and the (Mis)understanding of Depression: Research on Mental Health Literacy

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Outline

Overview of a research study that addresses:

1. Can people identify depression?

2. How prevalent is stigma against people with depression in the workplace?

3. Who has most/least depression stigma?

4. What are the most promising kinds of potential intervention strategies?

What is Stigma? Marcia Purse's Story

"….. after suffering two serious traumas in about 18 months, I began to come apart at the seams. My job performance was suffering. An assistant supervisor, I was having trouble making decisions. Finally I was diagnosed with clinical depression and put on medication."

http://bipolar.about.com/cs/myths/a/9812_myths.htm?nl=1

Marcia Purse's Story - continued

"Anyone who knew me should have been able to see that my behavior was abnormal - but my boss chose to scream at me (literally) that all I needed to do was pull myself together. Naturally, this only increased my panic. By the time the Prozac started to work, I was on probation and in serious danger of losing my job."

Negative Impacts of Stigma

- Impedes or delays seeking of treatment, which then postpones clinical improvement

- Discrimination at work and other areas

- Reduces job security

- Reduces chances for promotion at work
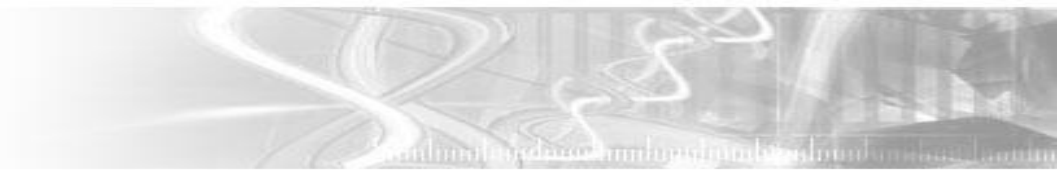
The Alberta Depression Literacy Study

- Representative random sample selected from communities across the Alberta province
- Telephone interviews
- Validated interview question instruments

- Feb. to June, 2006
- Response rate = 75% (very high!)
- Total sample = 3084
- Sub-sample of workers = 2162
- Thus, very large and representative sample

Stigma Measured Using Case Vignette

John (or Mary) is 30 years old. He has been feeling unusually sad and miserable for the last few weeks. Even though he is tired all the time, he has trouble sleeping nearly every night. John also doesn't feel like eating and has lost weight. He cannot keep his mind on his work and puts off making any decision. Even day-to-day tasks seem too much for him. This has come to the attention of John's boss who is concerned about his lowered productivity.
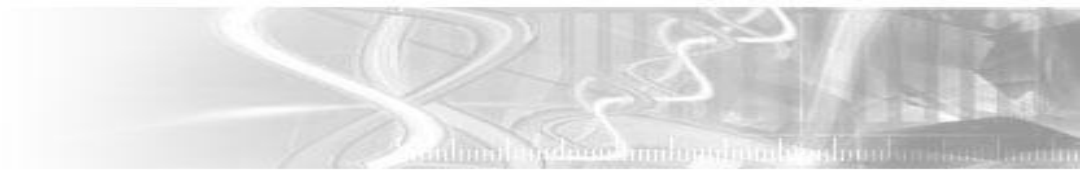
Reaction to the Case Vignette:

What would you say, if anything, is wrong with John/Mary?
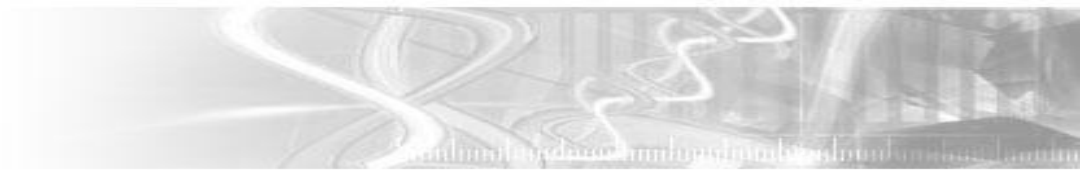
Results – 75% Correctly ID Depression

Answers	Weighted %	
Depression	75.8	correct
Mental Illness	0.7	
Psychological Problems	0.3	
Mental Problems	---	
Emotional Problems	0.3	
Stress	6.8	
Cancer	0.4	
Nothing	0.3	
Other	16.5	
Don't know	7.0	

Results – Who is Better at Correctly Identifying Depression?

Gender: Women better (87% vs. 67%)

Education: Higher education better (University 81% vs. High School 76% vs. Less 70%)

Profession: Health Professionals better than Others (86% vs. 75%)

Common Personal Stigma Attitudes About Depression

- 46% People with depression are unpredictable
- 40% Not vote for politician with depression
- 22% Not employ someone with depression
- 22% People with depression are dangerous
- 10% Depression is a sign of personal weakness

A New Measure of Personal Attitudes of Depression Stigma

- 9 questions about stigmatizing personal attitudes

- Good psychometric reliability of combined items into a scale

- Scale scores split into four groups, from low to high level of stigma

Results – Four Levels of Depression Stigma in Working Population
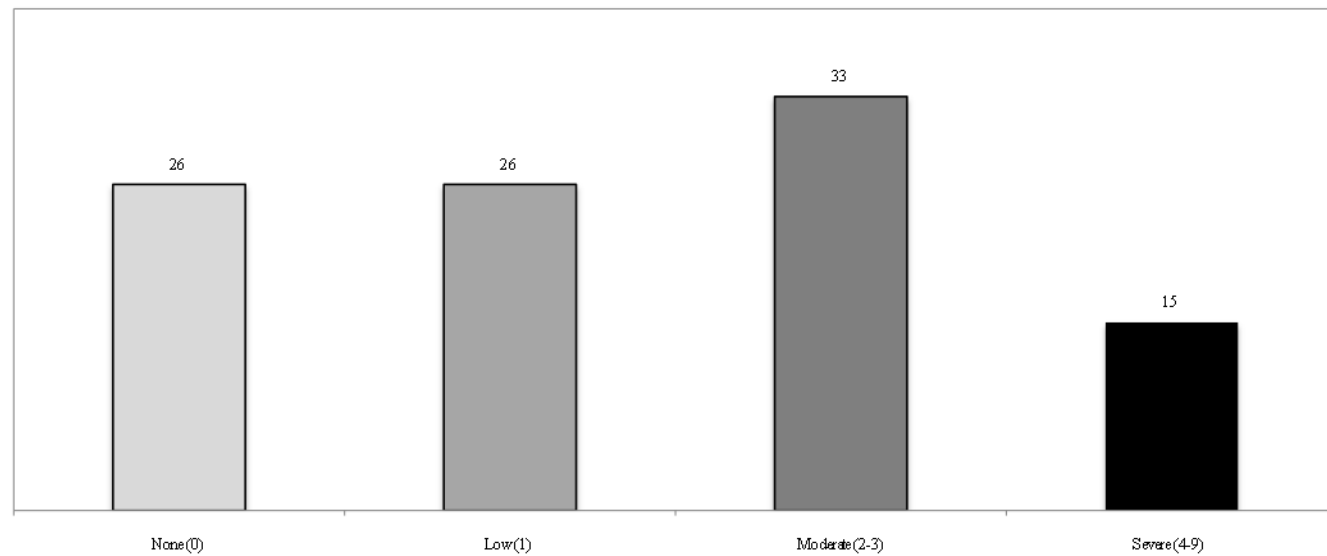
# Results – Who has Higher Levels of Depression Stigma Attitudes?

Highest level of severe stigma in working population by **Job Grade:**

Managers	17%
Supervisors	11%
Others	14%

- **Gender** (males more)

- **Age** (older age more)

- **Citizen Status** (immigrant more)

Results – Lower Depression Stigma Associated with:

- Being able to correctly recognize someone with symptoms of depression

- Agreement with health professionals about proper treatment for depression

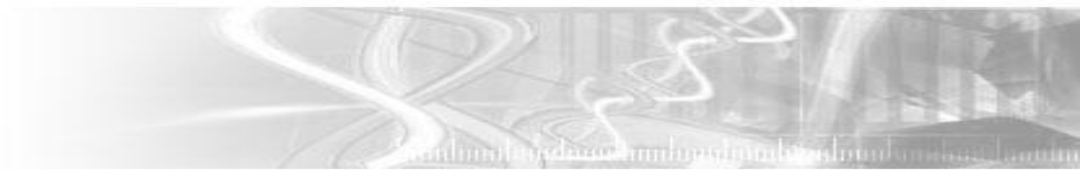- In women (but not men), having a family member/close friend with depression
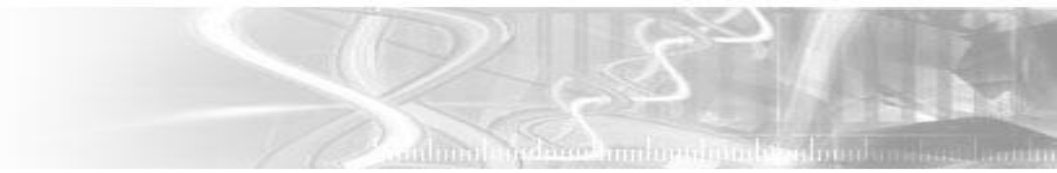
Implications of Results:
Fighting Against Depression Stigma

- Changing the attitudes – start at the top
- Education - improving people's knowledge about depression
- Contact-based interventions – does it work for men?

References

- Wang JL, et al. Depression literacy in Alberta: Findings from a general population sample. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry.* 2007 July; 52: 442-449.

- Wang JL, et al. Gender specific correlates of stigma associated with depression in a Canadian general population sample. *Journal of Affective Disorders.* 2007; 103(1-3): 91-97.

- Wang JL & Lai DWL. The relationship between mental health literacy, personal contact and personal stigma against depression. *Journal of Affective Disorders.* 2008 Sep; 110(1-2):191-196.

Questions?

Thank You