

Stigma: A Hidden Women's Health Determinant

Wednesday, November 8, 2006



Workshop Program

Arrival: 12:45 – 1:00

Introduction: 1:00 – 1:10

Olena Hankivsky, Co-Leader, WHRN

■ Welcome to SFU Harbour Center; Recognition of MSFHR; Introduction of Workshop Chair

Cecilia Benoit, Co-Leader, WHRN

■ Benefits & limits of a health determinants perspective; Stigma – a hidden women's health determinant; Introduction of guest panelists

Concurrent Interactive Sessions: 1:10 – 2:35

■ 1:10 – 1:25 [Annette Browne](#)

Title: “Culture as a Potentially Stigmatizing Concept in Health Care: Health Care Involving First Nations Women as a Case in Point”

Abstract: Culture is not a benign concept: how it is interpreted and applied in health care contexts has serious implications, both at the level of clinical practice and in policy (Dorazio-Migliore et al., 2005). Drawing on research findings from several studies conducted with First Nations women, I discuss how the concept of “culture” can inadvertently perpetuate stigmatizing discourses in health care and can negatively impact women's health care experiences. Stigmatizing interpretations of “culture” do not operate in isolation. Rather, as I discuss, they are part and parcel of wider social discourses in Canada that continue to portray First Nations people – and women in particular – in negative ways. The implications of these research findings point to a need for heightened critical awareness of how these wider discourses about culture, Aboriginal peoples and women, can contribute to marginalizing practices in health care.

■ 1:25 – 1:40 [Lauren Casey](#)

Title: “Women, Crack Cocaine Addiction and the Sex Trade Industry: A Standpoint Analysis”

Abstract: This presentation addresses the use of crack cocaine among women working in the sex industry. Stigma experienced by these women creates a barrier to safer working conditions, accessing health services and/or addictions treatment. The identity and social role imposed on sex workers has historically-defined them as intrinsically unworthy and a threat to moral, public and social order, labeling them as sinners, criminals, and/or victims. Many sex workers absorb the societal stigma of shame and unworthiness, living in fear of being exposed. The social exclusion that results from the stigmatization of sex workers leads to denial of access to health, housing, and/or alternative work options.

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1:40 – 1:55 [Kirsten Bell](#)

Title: “The Social Denormalization of Tobacco Use, Stigma and the Construction of the Abusive Mother”

Abstract: The tobacco control strategy of 'denormalizing' tobacco use gained momentum in the early 1990s, following a groundswell of literature on the health-related harms connected with environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). At the heart of the denormalization strategy is an active attempt to stigmatize smoking. Although tobacco control advocates stress that they are 'anti-smoking' not 'anti-smoker', the work of Erving Goffman has powerfully shown that stigma, by definition, attaches not only to individual behaviour but social identity itself, breaking the claim of other attributes and revealing the stigmatized person as "not quite human". Given the shifts in the class composition of smoking over the last few decades, the campaign of stigmatizing smokers by implication focuses on the most socially vulnerable: "the poor who continue to smoke" (Bayer & Stuber 2006: 49). This presentation will focus on the effects of the denormalization strategy on young mothers, who have been demonized in this new policy environment as abusive parents whose mothering requires both surveillance and, increasingly, intervention.

1:55 – 2:10 [Amy Salmon](#)

Title: “Exploring the Impact of Stigma, Marginalization, and Criminalization on the Health of Mothers Who Use Drugs”

Abstract: Substance use among pregnant and parenting women has become of increasing interest and concern to policy makers, health care and social service providers, and communities. However, public discourse and policies surrounding pregnant women who use licit and illicit drugs, including alcohol and tobacco, has remained fundamentally judgmental, blaming, and unsympathetic. This is particularly true for Aboriginal women, who have been over-represented and pathologized in studies of “problem” alcohol use and risk for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). Moreover, while recent shifts have occurred in Canadian public policy to embrace harm reduction approaches to substance use and addictions, the unique harm reduction needs of pregnant women and new mothers are frequently neglected in health care settings. Together, these conditions mediate the extent to which women report their substance use patterns and concerns during pregnancy and while mothering. In order to provide effective, compassionate, and respectful care to women whose lives include substance use, it is necessary to understand social context in which these experiences emerge.

2:10 – 2:25 [Deborah Rutman](#)

Title: “Stigma as a Barrier to Support and Health for Mothers with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder”

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Abstract: This presentation will focus on issues associated with parenting with FASD, including stigma, scrutiny and experiences with the child welfare system. The relationship between stigma and self-esteem for parents with FASD will be explored. Also highlighted will be parents' hopes and goals, and a variety of supports and strategies that adults with FASD and their support people have identified as effective, as well as recommendations for positive policy and practice-related change. The presentation is based on a larger research and video production project that has aimed: to examine the accomplishments, challenges and support needs of adults with FASD, particularly in relation to parenting, employment, and the legal system; and to identify alternative policies, programs and practices that better address needs and improve the quality of day to day living for adults with FASD.

Question and Answer Period: 2:25 – 2:55

- Opportunity for members of the audience to ask questions and offer feedback to any of the five panelists

Closing Remarks: 2:55 – 3:00

Cecilia Benoit, Co-Leader of the WHRN

- Short wrap-up and thank you to panelists and guests

Workshop Details

Background:

The Women's Health Research Network (WHRN) is a catalyst for bringing together innovative groupings of gender and women's health researchers and research collaborations drawn from academic, health service, policy and community settings. It fosters the generation, application and mainstreaming of new knowledge and is specifically dedicated to women's health research that will increase the understanding of and capacity for sex and gender-based analyses and for integrating women's health concerns into other areas of health research. With an inclusive, multisectoral and multidisciplinary approach to research, the WHRN encourages the brokerage of knowledge regarding the health of girls and women in BC.

Key Objectives:

- Bring together academics, community researchers and students from around the province interested in a health determinants perspective;
- Reveal how stigma is linked to social exclusion, prevailing gendered discourses, untimely use of health care and other services, lack of access to health care, poor self-esteem and lower overall health status;
- Provide an opportunity for networking, team building and collaborations among individuals from diverse regions, disciplines and research expertise

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Date and Venue:

The interactive stigma panel will be held in room 1700 (Labatt hall) at Simon Fraser University, Harbour Center which is located at 515 West Hasting Street. See map for more details. The event will be held from 1:00 to 3:00 with registration starting at 12:45.

Directions:

Driving from the Vancouver International Airport:

From the airport, proceed north along the Arthur Laing Bridge to Granville St. Head north on Granville St. into downtown Vancouver. After crossing the Granville St. bridge, take the Seymour St. exit and continue north on Seymour to Hastings St.

Transit:

Major public transit lines, the SeaBus, SkyTrain and West Coast Express terminate at Waterfront Station, located in the CP Tail Station on Cordova St., opposite Simon Fraser University at Harbour Centre. Transit schedules can be found at www.translink.bc.ca.

Parking:

Public parking is available at many locations near the Harbour Centre campus. The closest parking lot is at 400 West Cordova Street.

Travel Stipend

The WHRN will provide a modest stipend (to a maximum of \$300) for travel and/or accommodation expenses for out-of-town participants. Please contact Leah Shumka at lshumka@uvic.ca for more details.