

LET'S START WITH NAMING STIGMAS
THAT WE WANT THE SOCIETY TO

CLIMB OVER

There are no doubts that the issue of juvenile offending is an important topic nowadays. For example, the May 2018 World Congress on Justice for Children at the UNESCO House in Paris, France, emphasized the need for identifying adequate measures for reducing juvenile crime and re-offending worldwide, as well as the creation of tools which would prevent at-risk youth from offending. The fact that experts worldwide are continually gathering to discuss ways to tackle the issue signifies that **there is no one recognized universal method of integrating at-risk youth and young offenders into society.**

Juvenile delinquency reveals not only a problem of those young people who have acted not in line with the law, but also a problem of the whole society. To be more precise, society tends to stigmatize (ex)offenders which put a number of barriers for (ex)offenders following their release from prison.

WHAT EXACTLY DO WE MEAN BY THE TERM, STIGMA, THOUGH?

Stigma is a degrading attitude of the society that discredits a person or a group because of an attribute (such as an illness, deformity, color, nationality, religion, etc). In this case, society stigmatizes young (ex)offenders for whatever criminal acts.

When we talk about stigmatizing (ex)offenders, we often cover 4 components of it, which are:

BLAME

holding juvenile offenders fully responsible for whatever they did without knowing the details of the event and backgrounds youngsters came from

ISOLATION

(ex)offenders are being treated as separated and apart from others as a result of their past

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

shame and other painful emotions felt about oneself, caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcomings or impropriety

LOSS OF STATUS

being viewed as “less than” or not as valued or as powerful, or not taken as seriously as others who haven’t got a criminal record

OK... BUT HOW DOES STIGMA ACTUALLY WORK?

Stigma and its effects are distinguished into two forms, public and self-stigma.

PUBLIC STIGMA

Public stigma has been described in terms of stereotypes, prejudice (e.g., “*That’s right; those (ex)offenders... they never change!*”), and discrimination accepted by the majority of the society.

SELF-STIGMA

To experience self-stigma, the person must be aware of the public stigma that describes a stigmatized group (e.g., *people with criminal record never change*) and agree with them (e.g., *that’s right, people with criminal never change*), finally, the person start applying stereotypes to oneself (e.g., *I have a criminal record so I will never change*)

HOW PUBLIC AND SELF-STIGMAS AFFECT YOUNG (EX)OFFENDERS?

Stronger public stigma towards juvenile (ex)offenders predicts poorer adjustment in the community after them being released. Thus, public stigma towards young criminals impacts offenders’ ability to function in the community via experiencing discrimination from community members. Even if released offenders have limited opportunities that are seen extremely essential to the re-entry of offenders, such as securing a job, finding stable accommodation and establishing supportive social networks. Even the most motivated young (ex)offenders start experiencing self-stigma and personally expect stigmatization to withdraw them from community activities that would not necessarily happen. This again leads to poor community functioning and lower employment as former inmates have less motivation/self-efficacy to attain employment and be involved in their communities. This may reflect the “**why try?**” effect, such that self-stigmatization discourages people from trying to integrate in society.

SO...

The stigma of remand prison time presents young (ex)offenders with particular challenges in their paths to reintegration because a criminal conviction acts as an institutional marker of a *'spoiled social status'* and communicates a message about trustworthiness and potential for criminality. This belief makes (ex)offenders think that they have no chance in 'normal' life and so this is how we push them back to dangerous environments and criminal activities. After released from the remand prison, young person is soon pushed away even with the biggest desire to makes things work. As finding a job, new place and friends becomes impossible, they are turning to potentially harmful family, friends, join criminal activities to sustain themselves or **commit crimes to go back behind bars among those who accept with the past.**

TASK FOR YOU:

Public stigma in your society:

Think of the most common stereotypes and prejudices on (ex)offenders.
Try to think why they exist and why they are (not) true.