

“The Stories We Tell: Criminal Legal Professionals”

Episode Overview

In this episode, I talk about how criminal legal professionals influence how substance use and overdose are understood and addressed. Because these actors are often on the front lines, their everyday decisions and interactions can shape whether substance use disorder is framed as a health issue or a matter of punishment. I explore how stigma and organizational context influence these perspectives, responses to treatment, and harm reduction.



- Substance use and the criminal legal system are closely intertwined, with about 85% of justice-involved individuals having some connection to substance use.
- Police, courts, and correctional staff regularly respond to overdose, supervise recovery, and manage substance use across the system.
- Research suggests that stigma can shape how professionals view people who use drugs and whether they support responses like naloxone use or medication-based treatment.

TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Stigma influences how professionals view people who use drugs and their treatment options.
- ✓ These beliefs influence decisions about overdose response, sentencing, and treatment.
- ✓ Training and policy support can improve attitudes and use of evidence-based practices.

References & Future Reading

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