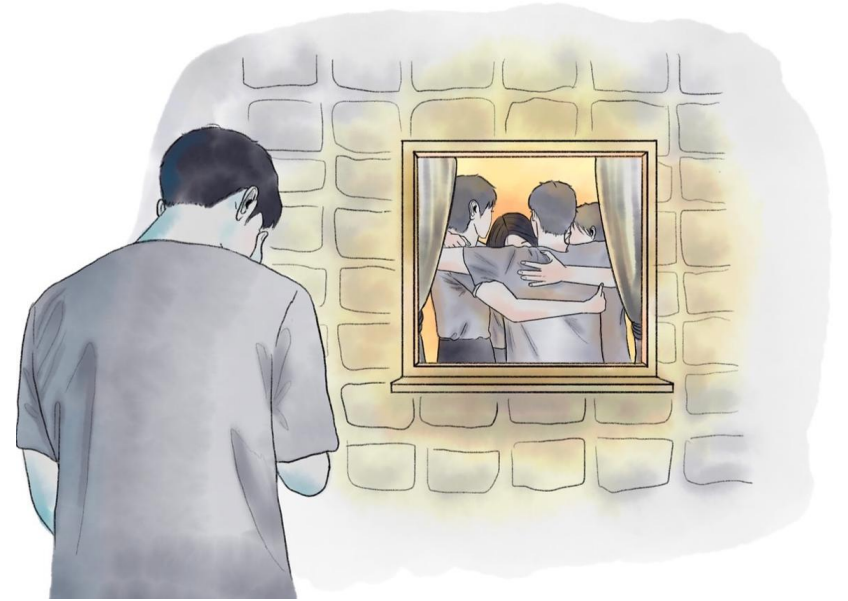


# **Successful Implementation of Community-Led Intervention to Address Internalized Stigma Among People Who Use Drugs in Thailand**

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## Internalized Stigma in Thailand

- Stigma and discrimination make it harder for people who use drugs to access healthcare, jobs, and support.
- Internalized stigma = shame, guilt, and feeling worthless.
- It's powerful but often invisible.
- Many people don't even ask for help, because they feel like a burden.
- They believe they don't deserve support, even when their rights are being violated.



# Partnership in Action: FAR, Chulalongkorn University, and TDN

- Review of relevant literature on reducing internalized stigma
- Program based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) by Hayes et al. (2006)
- 4 Focus Group sessions conducted with 46 participants (38 men, 8 women)
- The program was tested in 3 regions with different social, occupational, economic contexts, and types of substances used:
  - Northern region
  - Southern region
  - Central region



# Training Program: Internalized Stigma Reduction Program of Drug Users through Community-Based Approaches

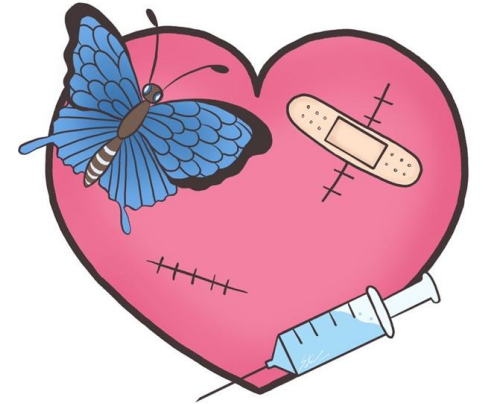
## Preparation Phase

- Learning and understanding stigma and discrimination, and their impacts.
- Learning about power and the dynamics of power.
- Installing 4 Lenses:
  - Diversity and Inclusion Lens
  - Gender and Sexuality Lens
  - Intersectionality Lens
  - Human Rights Lens



## Main Activities (60-90 minutes per activity)

1. Learning about desires and brain/body mechanisms.
2. Recognizing, understanding, and learning how to address self-stigma.
3. Creating distance from self-stigma.
4. Practicing mindfulness and awareness of thought changes.
5. Setting life direction and achieving goals.



# Thai Internalized-stigma Scale

**Instructions:** Mark **X** in the box that best represents your thoughts and feelings.

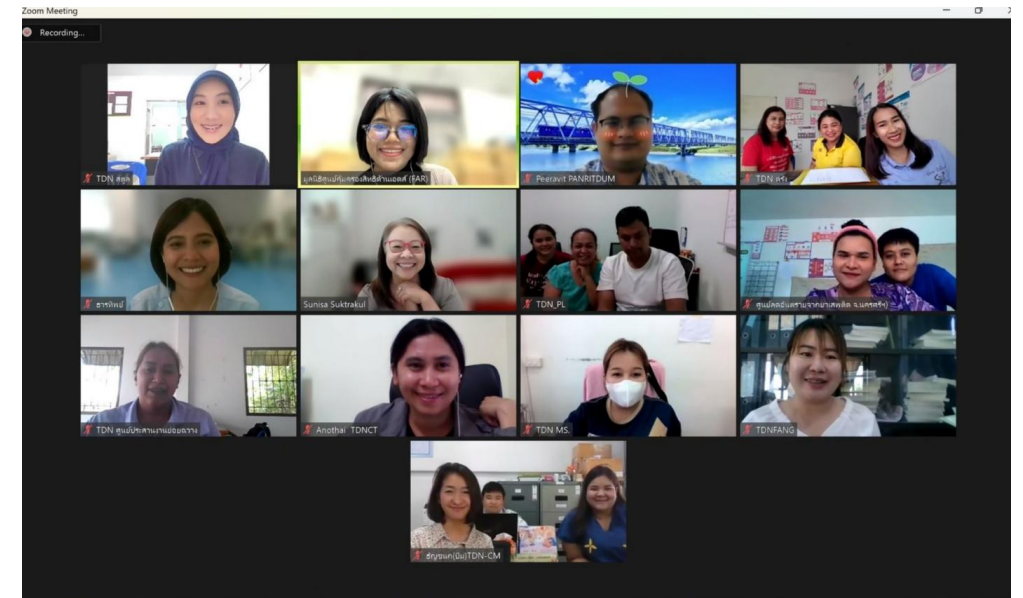
Question		Thought			
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Other people would stop being friends with me if they knew I use drugs.				
2	Others would stop talking to me if they knew I use drugs.				
3	I feel ashamed of myself because I use drugs.				
4	I feel like I am a drug user.				
5	I feel disgusted with myself for using drugs.				
6	I think I have no future because I use drugs.				
7	I have brought shame to my family because I use drugs.				
8	I don't want to seek healthcare services because I'm afraid others will know that I use drugs.				

If the score is  $\geq 16$ , it indicates the presence of internalized stigma. The higher the score, the more severe the internalized stigma.



# Results and Changes

- 24 staff and community leaders from 6 harm reduction centers in the southern and northern regions received training and learned how to use the Internalized stigma screening tool.
- The tool was implemented to screen 96 individuals through outreach activities and group sessions.
- The tool and activities were applied to 32 individuals in the target group.
- Continuous follow-up and support were provided during the process.



# Lessons Learned

## Application of Techniques

- From the Internalized stigma screening of 96 individuals, 32 were found to have Internalized stigma scores of  $\geq 16$ .
- After participating in the activities, these individuals were able to apply the technique of "creating distance from negative thoughts" to help manage Internalized stigma in real-life situations.

## Signaling Tool

- 5 individuals with very high Internalized stigma scores ( $\geq 20$ ) were referred to medical services due to mental health issues that posed a risk of self-harm.

## Positive Changes

- 12 individuals reported improved mental wellbeing and felt more at ease.
- 2 individuals set positive goals, including:
  - 1 individual aiming to rebuild family relationships.
  - 1 individual focusing on improving health behaviors.

## Conclusions

- Over 3 months, 32 individuals with high Internalized stigma participated in the process.
- 14 participants showed positive changes in mental health, relationships, and healthcare access.
- All 32 participants managed their substance use: some reduced usage, and a few stopped altogether.
- The pilot project highlights the key role of communities and civil society in understanding and providing services tailored to the context of people who use drugs.





Ending stigma and discrimination  
begins with *US*.

Thank you

