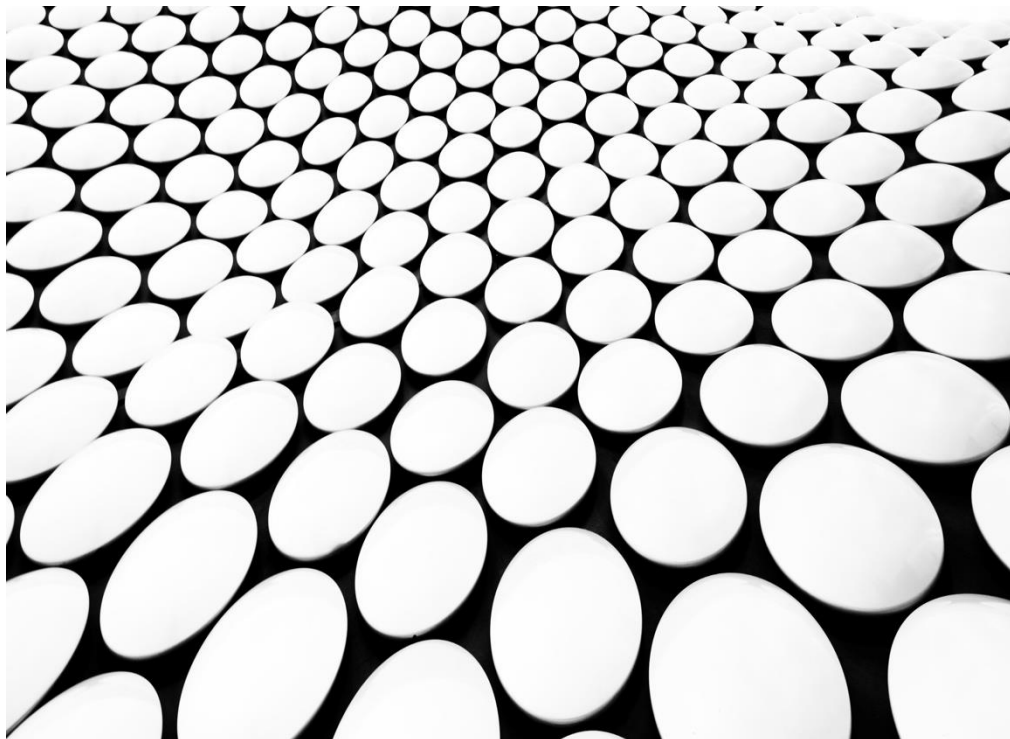# STIGMATIZATION IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: SETTING A STIGMA-FOCUSED AGENDA FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Aaida Mamuji, Ph.D.
Mac Osazuwa-Peters, Ph.D.
Jack Rozdilsky, Ph.D.

Disaster & Emergency Management
York University

liberal arts & professional studies | YORK UNIVERSITÉ UNIVERSITY

CIHR IRSC
Canadian Institutes Instituts de recherche
of Health Research en santé du Canada

AGENDA

1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

2. RESEARCH APPROACH
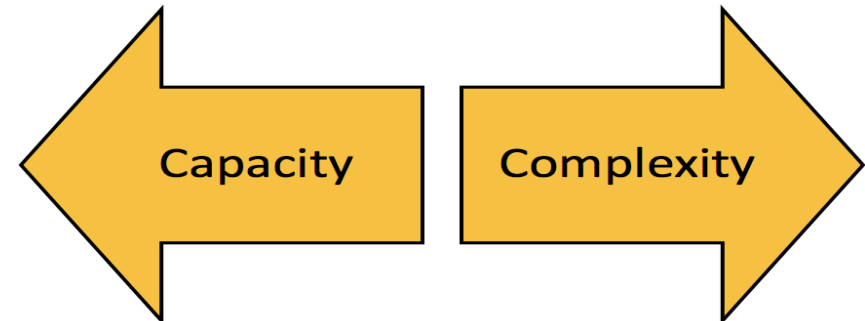
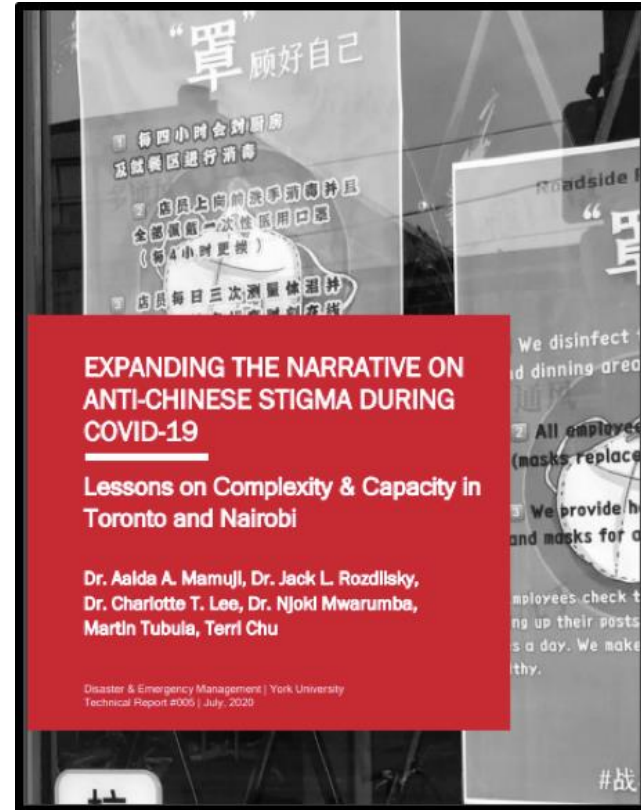## 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS & INSIGHTS

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

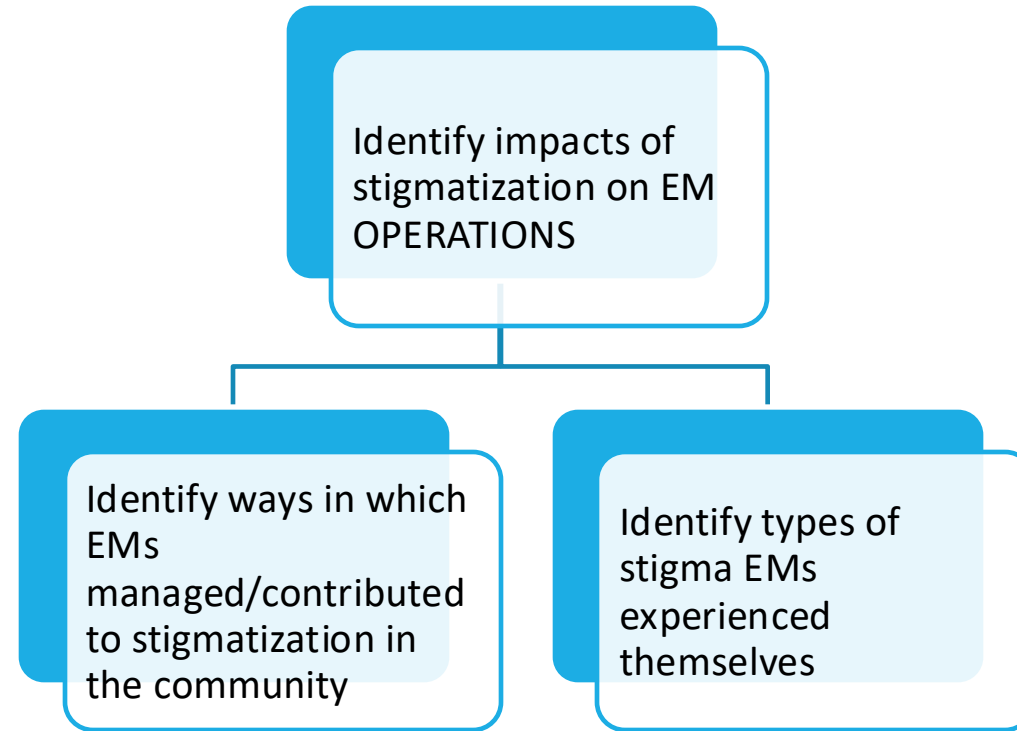## 5. Q&A

WHY STUDY STIGMA IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT?

ONTARIO DEMCON — DISASTER AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE
OCTOBER 7-8, 2020 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

■ Anti-Asian Stigma can…

- ○ *Lead to a reduction in people seeking appropriate medical care or testing*

- ○ *Lead to people not reporting cases*

- ○ *Affect mental health, compounding negative impacts during an already difficult time*

- ○ *Impact adherence to public health interventions*

- ○ **Ultimately, stigma can exacerbate the spread of disease**

EXPANDING THE NARRATIVE ON ANTI-CHINESE STIGMA DURING COVID-19

Lessons on Complexity & Capacity in Toronto and Nairobi

Dr. Aaida A. Mamuji, Dr. Jack L. Rozdilsky,
Dr. Charlotte T. Lee, Dr. Njoki Mwarumba,
Martin Tubula, Terri Chu

Disaster & Emergency Management | York University
Technical Report #005 | July, 2020

Capacity ← → Complexity

PURPOSE

To enhance the capacity of emergency management officials during and after a disaster by having **stigma-management** at the centre.

Identify impacts of stigmatization on EM OPERATIONS

Identify ways in which EMs managed/contributed to stigmatization in the community

Identify types of stigma EMs experienced themselves

COVID-19

GEOGRAPHY

The Greater Toronto Area:
- ✓ Five Regions
- ✓ Twenty-five Municipalities (including Toronto)
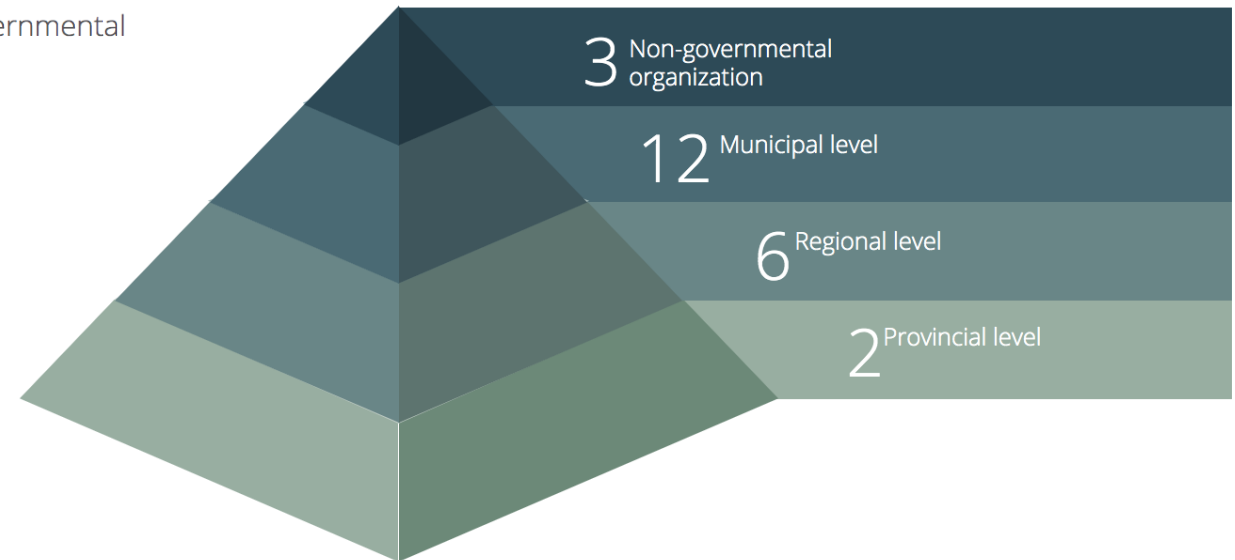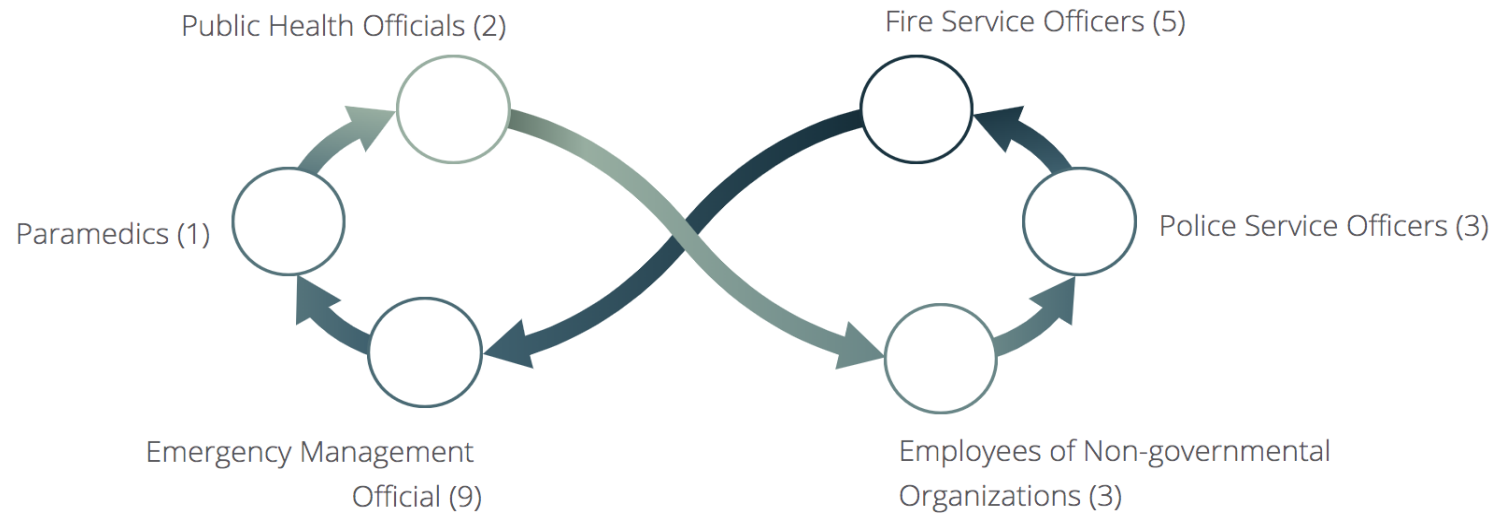

STAKEHOLDERS

The Greater Toronto Area:
- ✓ Emergency management officials (CEMC)
- ✓ Public health personnel
- ✓ Police
- ✓ Fire service
- ✓ Emergency medical services/Paramedics
- ✓ Employees of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

PROJECT METHODOLOGY: DATA COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEES (*n=23*)
JUNE-AUGUST, 2024

Public Health Officials (2)

Fire Service Officers (5)

Paramedics (1)

Police Service Officers (3)

Emergency Management Official (9)

Employees of Non-governmental Organizations (3)

3 Non-governmental organization

12 Municipal level

6 Regional level

2 Provincial level

PROJECT METHODOLOGY: DATA ANALYSIS

What is Stigma?
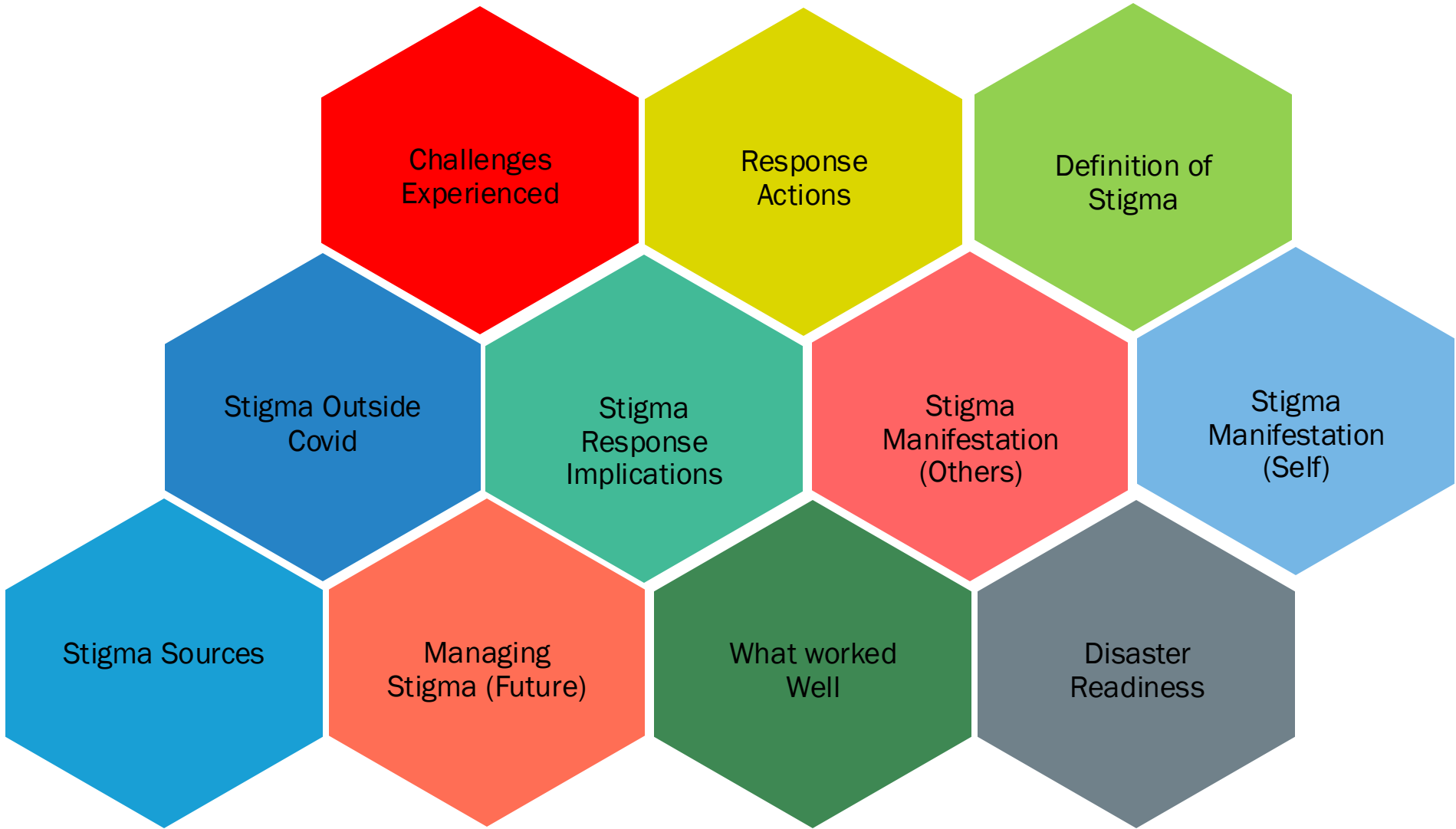
Not passive thoughts, but FORCES reflected in <u>concrete actions</u> …
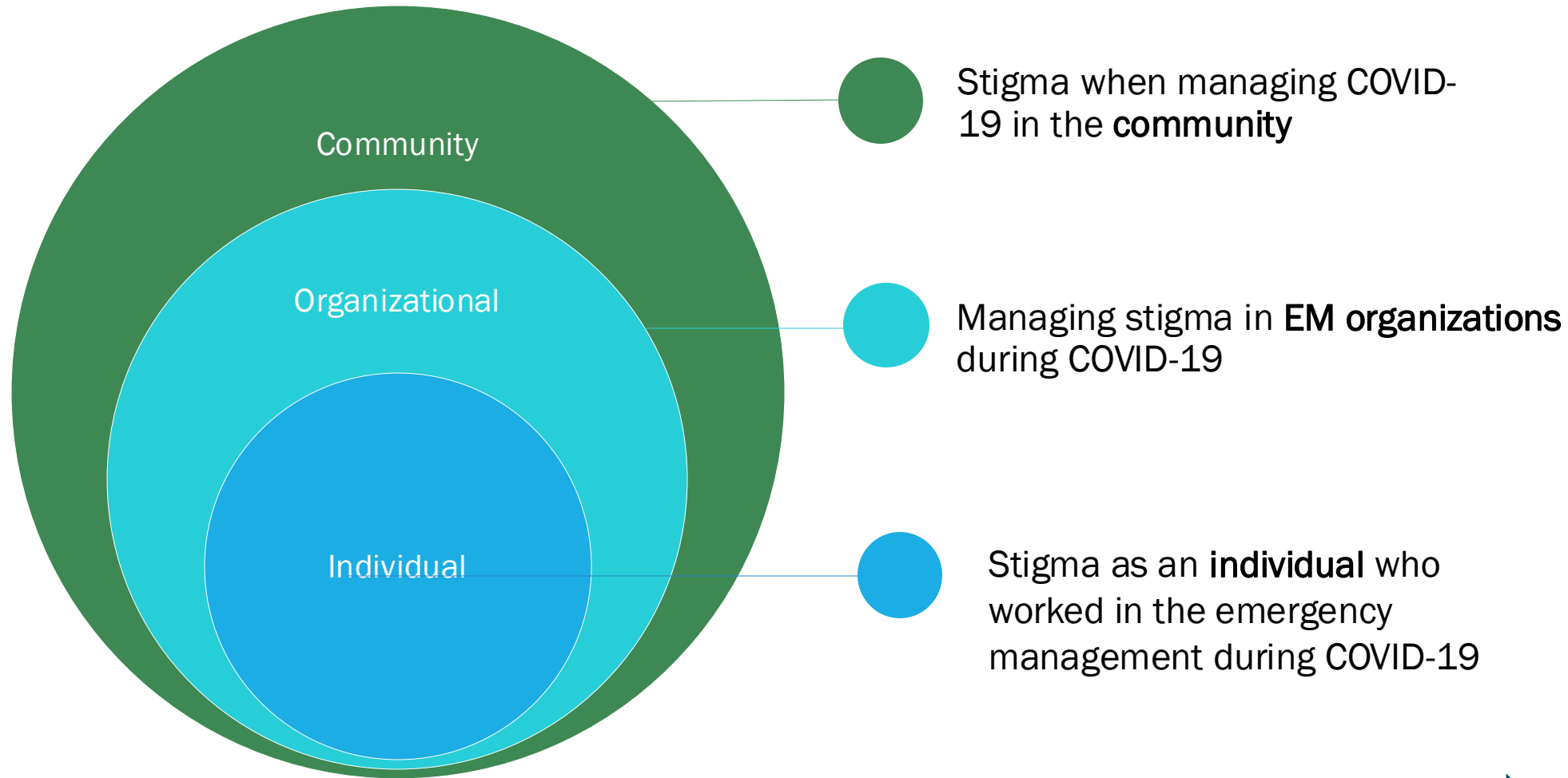
Not passive thoughts, but FORCES reflected in <u>concrete actions</u> ...

Stigmatizing Forces

A Stigmatizing Force is a causal action or phenomenon which results in a negative outcome for comprehensive emergency management efforts. In seeking to reduce the adverse effects of stigma in EM, efforts to counter stigmatizing forces should be made.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

Stigma when managing COVID-19 in the **community**

Managing stigma in **EM organizations** during COVID-19

Stigma as an **individual** who worked in the emergency management during COVID-19

Similar factors informed stigma in the general population and across the emergency management profession, but the manifestation of stigma differed somewhat
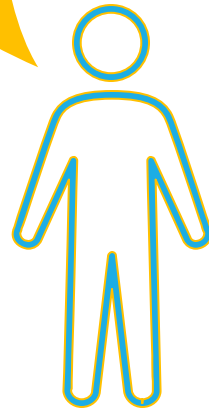
Expanding the narrative to include stigma in disaster & emergency management

Stigma in the community

"COVID-19 put a magnifying glass on our society's problems. They were already there – including the stigma, but they got more pronounced" – Interviewee 7

Stigmatizing Forces

- ✓ Misinformation
- ✓ Disinformation
- ✓ Politics
- ✓ ...

Race and ethnicity-based stigma	Stigma in emerging hot-spots
Class-based stigma	Faith-based stigma
Stigma faced by those infected	Stigma towards places/objects
Stigma against testing/vaccinations	Ageism

Stigma in the community

EM Decisions/Actions as a Stigmatizing Force →

- ✓ Masking requirements
- ✓ Physical distancing rules/'bubbles'
- ✓ Decisions around 'essential services'
- ✓ Methods for vaccine set-up
- ✓ Immunization requirements
- ✓ ...

"We're trying to influence individuals to do the right thing... There's multiple different ways to do it, right. You can nudge them, you can you can demonstrate leadership basically, but in some ways, what you're doing...even if you get as far as actually creating legislation... in essence, **what you're doing is stigmatizing one group over another.**" – Provincial Emergency Manager, Interviewee 1

"The people, the doctors and the medical health professionals in in these communities came to us and said, no, no, no, you're missing the point here... **you're thinking about this like a white, a white male Canadian, you need to think about this like anything but"**. – Incident Commander, Interviewee 5

Stigma at the organizational level

'Turf-wars' as a Stigmatizing Force

- Elected officials constantly challenging the authority of Incident Commanders under states of emergencies
- COVID-19 being seen as a 'Public Health' emergency, resulting in relegation of Emergency Management capabilities
- Working from home versus having to be in the office/community

Access to PPE as a Stigmatizing Force

- Fire-fighters questioning what EMS knew that they didn't
- Use of PAPRs (Positive Air Pressure Respirators) by paramedics deemed to denote privilege by PSWs without the same type/level of PPE

Knowledge Gaps as a Stigmatizing Force

- Paramedics deemed to be "dirty" given their increased access to PPE compared to fire-fighters
- Shaming those infected even in cases where those that tested positive had taken precautions
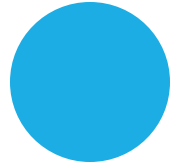
Stigma experienced within EM organizations **affected response efficiency**

- Created more work
- Morale busters
- Blaming, not learning

Stigma at the Indvidual Level

Rejection by family and friends

"There are definitely some people in my life who see me differently because I work for the government and did during the pandemic, and their views are, you did a bad job. You were the ones who took people's livelihoods away and for what? And now you're doing nothing…" – Interviewee 7

"I know that there are people who actually lost friends over that and friendships ended because, you know, one person didn't want to get vaccinated." – Interviewee 10

Heroes to zeros

"We are automatically hailed as heroes for the first wave of the pandemic… we were held up on a pedestal. And then that waned very quickly… there was a distinct like change in that summer… then it was like, the support's over…stop this stuff. There's no more support and good luck." - Interviewee 15

Threat to life and safety

"There was issues that moved from stigma to violence… the circumstances I was operating under was beyond anything I've ever seen. I ended up being sequestered for safety reasons." – Interviewee 5

"Oh, yeah, it's difficult. I mean, I've had death threats. I've had really nasty, nasty emails that get at race, that get at expletives that are only hurled at women…It is hard to focus on your work when you're also worrying about yourself and your family, right? I don't want my family to be at risk, you know." – Interviewee 21

Association as a Stigmatizing Force

EM personnel wear 'two hats' (individuals as well as professionals), and often are seen as 'an arm of the government'
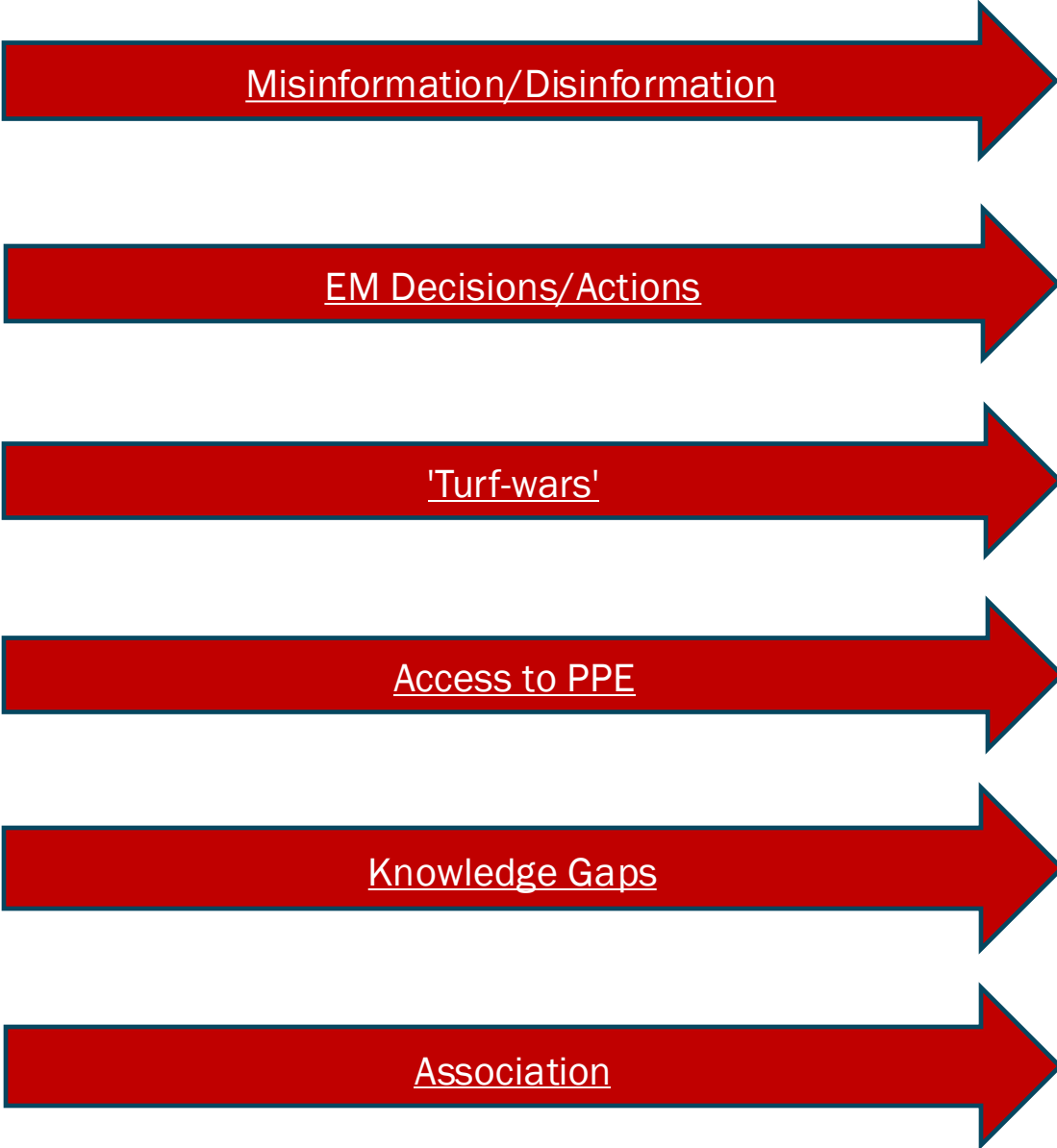
- Intersectional stigma
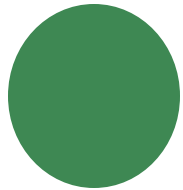- Hiding EM role
- Mental health impacts
- Affect response efficiency

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

Misinformation/Disinformation

EM Decisions/Actions

'Turf-wars'

Access to PPE

Knowledge Gaps
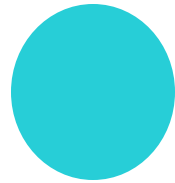
Association

Countering **Stigmatizing Forces**

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

Observed efforts to counter **Stigmatizing Forces** during COVID-19 response

Community

✓ **Coordination** with community partners
✓ **Collaboration** with non-traditional partners (e.g. epidemiologists)
✓ **Strategic research** and situational reports on emerging community stigma

Organizational

✓ Efforts to **improve communication/knowledge sharing** between collaborating entities
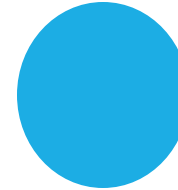
Individual

✓ **Extra security measures**, including not wearing identifying uniforms in public
✓ **Actively seeking supports** (therapy, spending time with loved ones, venting, etc.)

In the moment, stigma management involved reflexivity, flexibility, and situational awareness.

IMPACTS OF STIGMATIZATION ON EM OPERATIONS

BEYOND COVID . . .

- Applicability of similar concepts to a natural-hazard disaster

- Example of <u>Hurricane Katrina (2005)</u>

- The disaster is remembered for many things, including a failed response

- The reality and perception of the failed response stigmatized the EM profession for years

APPLICABILITY OF FINDINGS TO OTHER DISASTERS

HURRICANE KATRINA

Community

Organizational

Individual

Inequalities

Knowledge Gaps

'Turf-Wars'

Association*
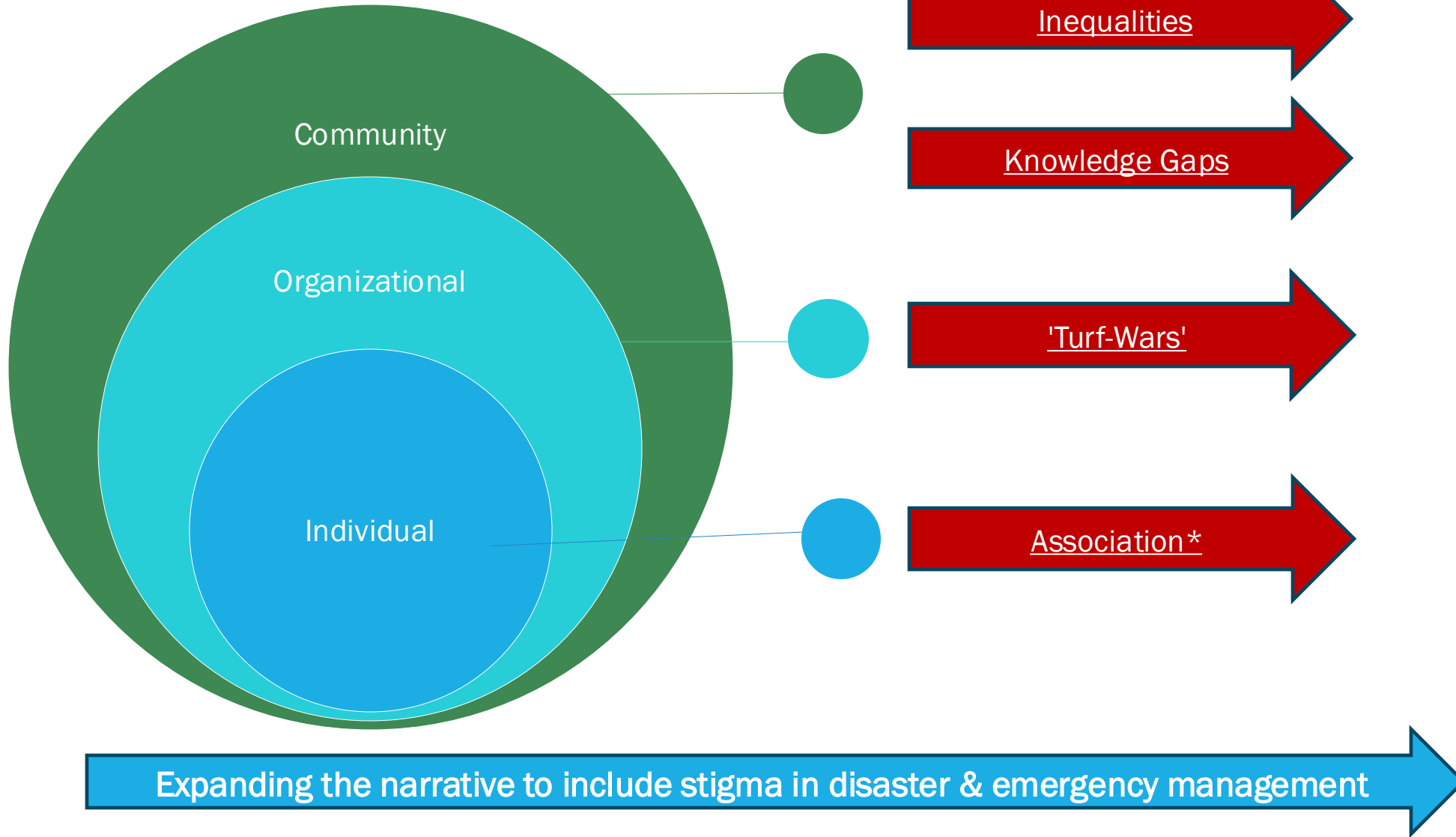
Stigma observations observed in COVID-19 in the GTA is also seen in other disasters and emergencies

Expanding the narrative to include stigma in disaster & emergency management

IHURRICANE KATRINA (2005)

- Facts
  - *Large Gulf Coast Hurricane in Late-Aug 2005, Cat. 3 at landfall*
  - *Hit vulnerable portions of coast near New Orleans*
  - *Deadly & devastating storm surge & levee failure*
  - *1392 fatalities*

- Widespread criticism of inadequate response

- Blame, rightly so in many cases, directed at FEMA for failing to recognize the scope of the response that was actually needed

Fact Source: https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/data/tcr/AL122005_Katrina.pdf

https://www.weather.gov/
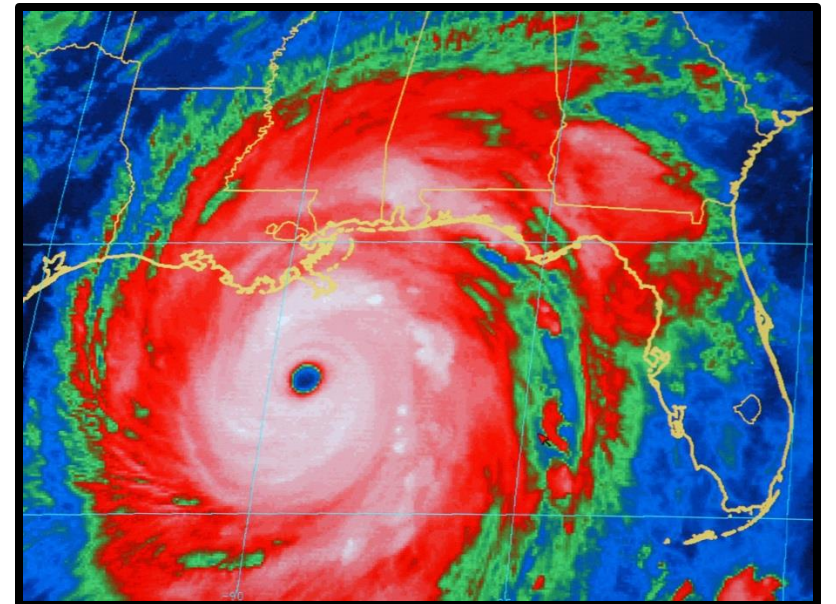
Stigma at the Indvidual Level

- Misplaced anger was directed at response workers

- Workers who were trying to do the best they could in a bad situation
  - *Disaster workers had nothing to do with bigger picture policy decisions*
  - *To those suffering, workers on-the-ground were the face of the government*

https://www.pritchettcartoons.com/fema.htm

Stigma at the Indvidual Level

https://www.newsweek.com/

https://www.nbcnews.com/

Hero →→→→ Zero

An example of **association as a stigmatizing force** . . . Hero to zero happens very quickly

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

Countering **Stigmatizing Forces during Hurricane Katrina**

Community   Organizational   Individual

- It took years for FEMA to regain trust
  - *Investigations*
  - *Legislative reforms*
  - *Changes in leadership*

More deliberate and targeted efforts are needed to counter stigmatizing forces in any disaster or emergency, at all three levels (community, organizational and individual)
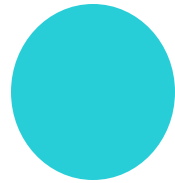
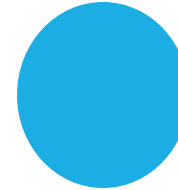# ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS & TOOLS
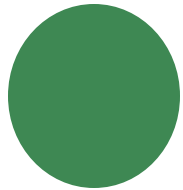
Countering Stigmatizing Forces

Community

✓ Recognizing community capacity
✓ Deliberate and comprehensive community engagement
✓ Co-develop communication approaches

Organizational

✓ Incorporate stigma-management in Emergency Planning
✓ Enhance EOC Structure
✓ Training and Setting EM Standards
✓ Improving coordination and communication within/across EM entities
✓ Efforts to improve recognition of EM contribution

Individual

✓ Be prepared, etc.!
✓ Actively seek supports
✓ Focus on shared humanity

Deliberate and targeted efforts to counter stigmatizing forces in any disaster or emergency at all three levels (community, organization and individual)

COME TO OUR WORKSHOP

Integrating a Stigma-Focused Agenda into your Emergency Management Practice: Action Recommendations & Tools

- Date: TODAY, Tuesday October 22
- Time: 2:10pm - 2:55pm
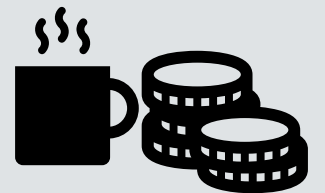
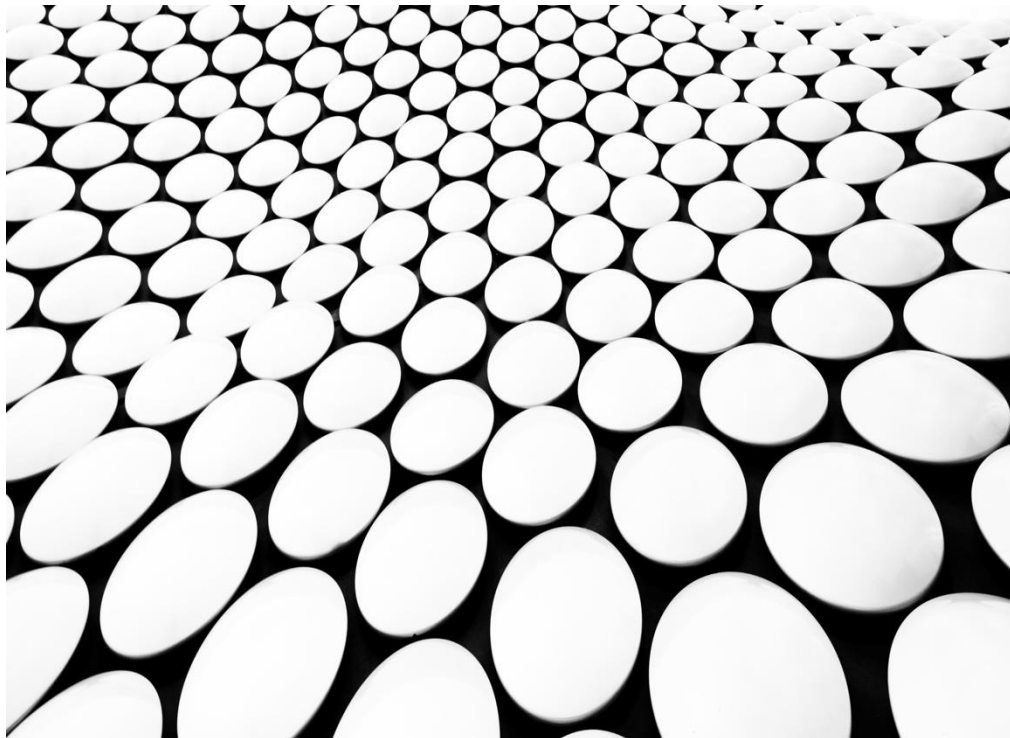Feel free to bring your friend. Refreshments will be served

QUESTIONS

Contact Us
EMforAll.com
amamuji@yorku.ca
mosazuwa@yorku.ca
rozdilsk@yorku.ca

INTEGRATING A STIGMA-FOCUSED AGENDA INTO YOUR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PRACTICE:
ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS & TOOLS

Aaida Mamuji, Ph.D.
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liberal arts & professional studies | YORK UNIVERSITÉ UNIVERSITY U

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Canadian Institutes Instituts de recherche
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AGENDA

1. PRESENTING OVERALL THEORY
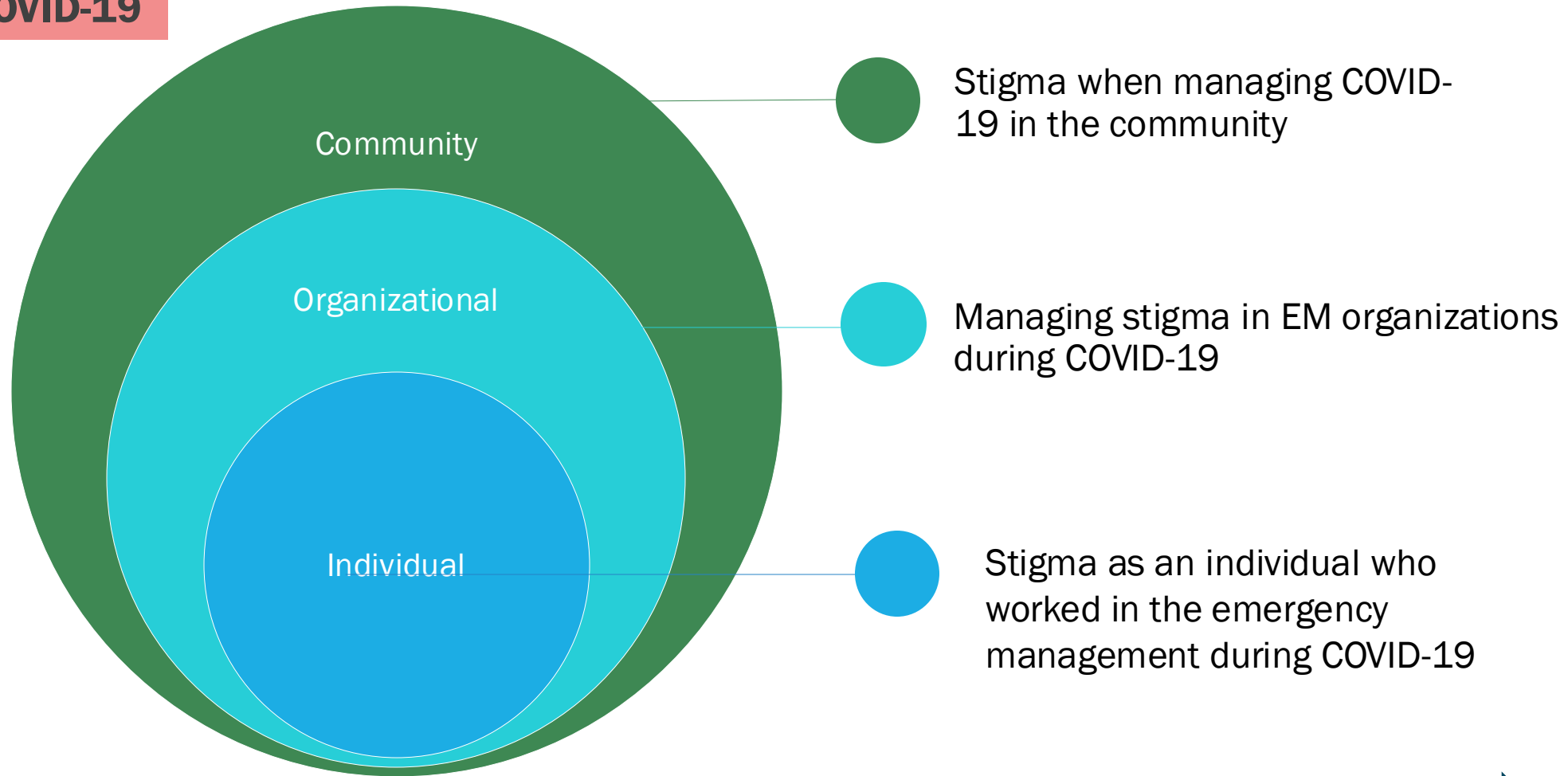
2. INTRODUCTIONS
   WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

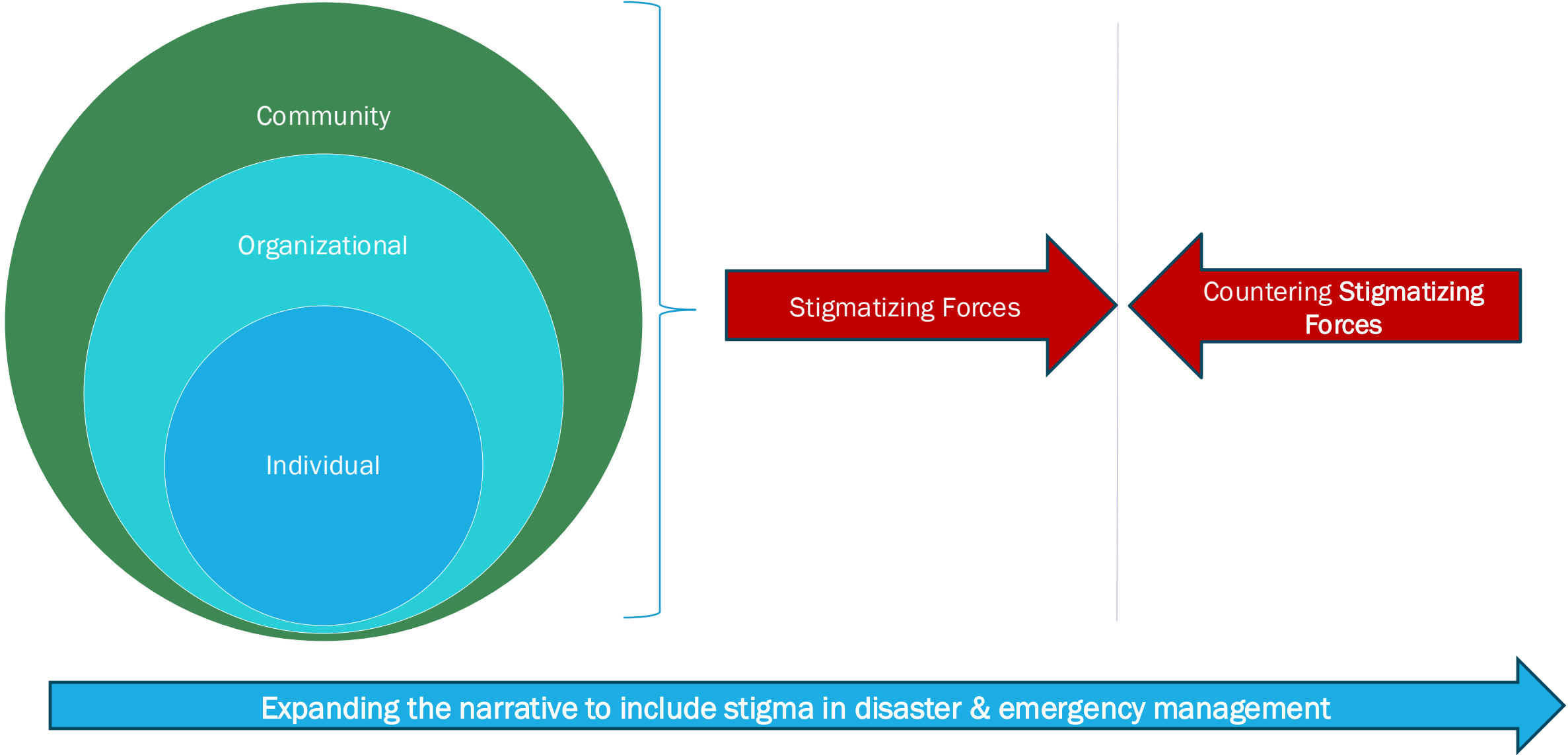4. ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS AND TOOLS

5. Q&A

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

COVID-19

Community

Organizational

Individual

Stigma when managing COVID-19 in the community

Managing stigma in EM organizations during COVID-19

Stigma as an individual who worked in the emergency management during COVID-19

Expanding the narrative to include stigma in disaster & emergency management

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

Community

Organizational

Individual

Stigmatizing Forces

Countering **Stigmatizing Forces**

Expanding the narrative to include stigma in disaster & emergency management

Not passive thoughts, but FORCES reflected in <u>concrete actions</u> ...
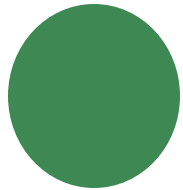
Stigmatizing Forces

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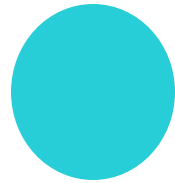
ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS & TOOLS
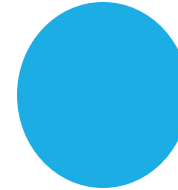
Countering Stigmatizing Forces

Community

- ✓ Recognizing community capacity
- ✓ Deliberate and comprehensive community engagement
- ✓ Co-develop communication approaches

Organizational

- ✓ Incorporate stigma-management in Emergency Planning
- ✓ Enhance EOC Structure
- ✓ Training and Setting EM Standards
- ✓ Improving coordination and communication within/across EM entities
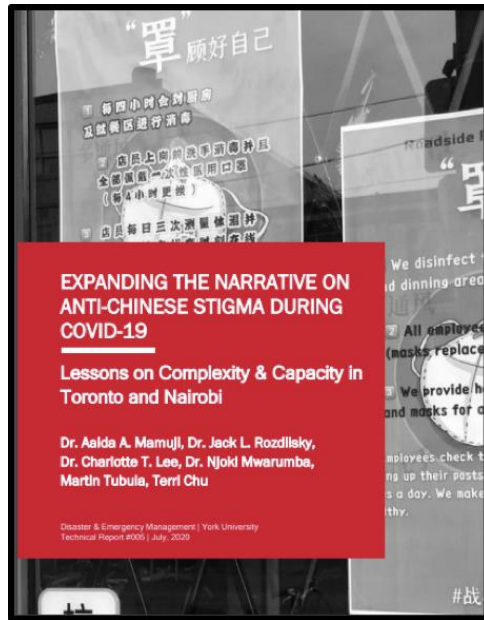- ✓ Efforts to improve recognition of EM contribution

Individual

- ✓ Be prepared, etc.!
- ✓ Actively seek supports
- ✓ Focus on shared humanity

Deliberate and targeted efforts to counter stigmatizing forces in any disaster or emergency at all three levels (community, organization and individual)

Countering Stigmatizing Forces in the Community

1 Recognize community capacity

EXPANDING THE NARRATIVE ON ANTI-CHINESE STIGMA DURING COVID-19

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Disaster & Emergency Management | York University
Technical Report #005 | July, 2020

Capacity ⟷ Complexity

2 Deliberate and comprehensive community engagement

✓ Community engagement should be a core **success measure** for emergency management (e.g. part of your KPIs)

✓ Engaging with your community in your EM capacity, in non-traditional forums, places and organizations
  - Use intersectionality/interests as an asset
  - Leverage your social capital/circles of influence

✓ Adopt a co-design approach to disaster planning that involves local community leaders who can provide useful ethical and situational insights
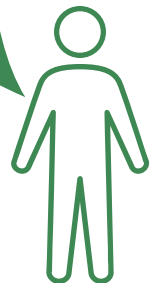
Countering Stigmatizing Forces in the Community

3 **Co-develop communication approaches**

✓ Disaster communications is critical to stigma management

✓ Dealing with stigma will involve going outside formal organizational communication protocols; meeting people where they are

✓ Disaster communication should not be for communication teams only

- Those that develop EM decisions/strategies/actions should be involved in drafting communications

✓ Consistent and frequent disaster communication

When stigma is caused by fear, anxiety and distrust, effective communication might be all that is needed to manage it

Disaster communication must balance the need to not create panic with the "need to communicate early, frequently and stay connected so that everybody knows what's coming down the loop." – Interviewee 11
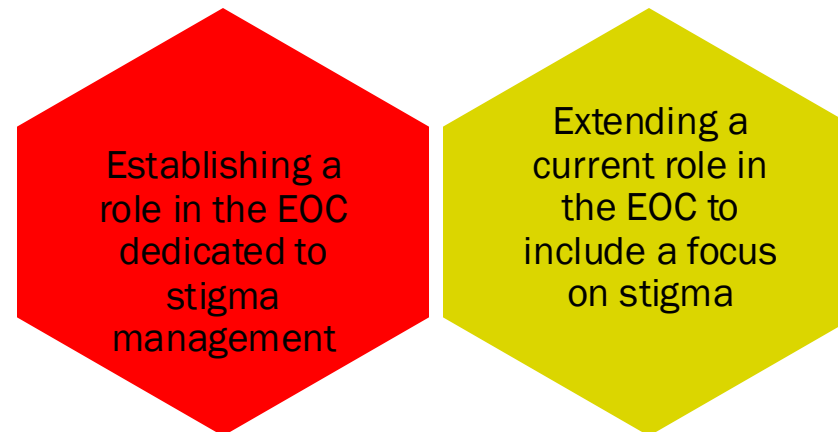
Countering Stigmatizing Forces at the Organizational Level

1 **Incorporate stigma-management in Emergency Planning**

- ✓ Identifying and responding to disaster related stigma will begin by situating stigma risks in emergency plans.

- ✓ Emergency plans have the critical function of outlining structures and resources available to managers when responding to emergencies/disasters.

- ✓ With stigma risks in emergency plans, adequate resources are devoted to stigma related issues.

- ✓ Disaster response planning should include consideration of ethics (ethics of response actions and decisions).
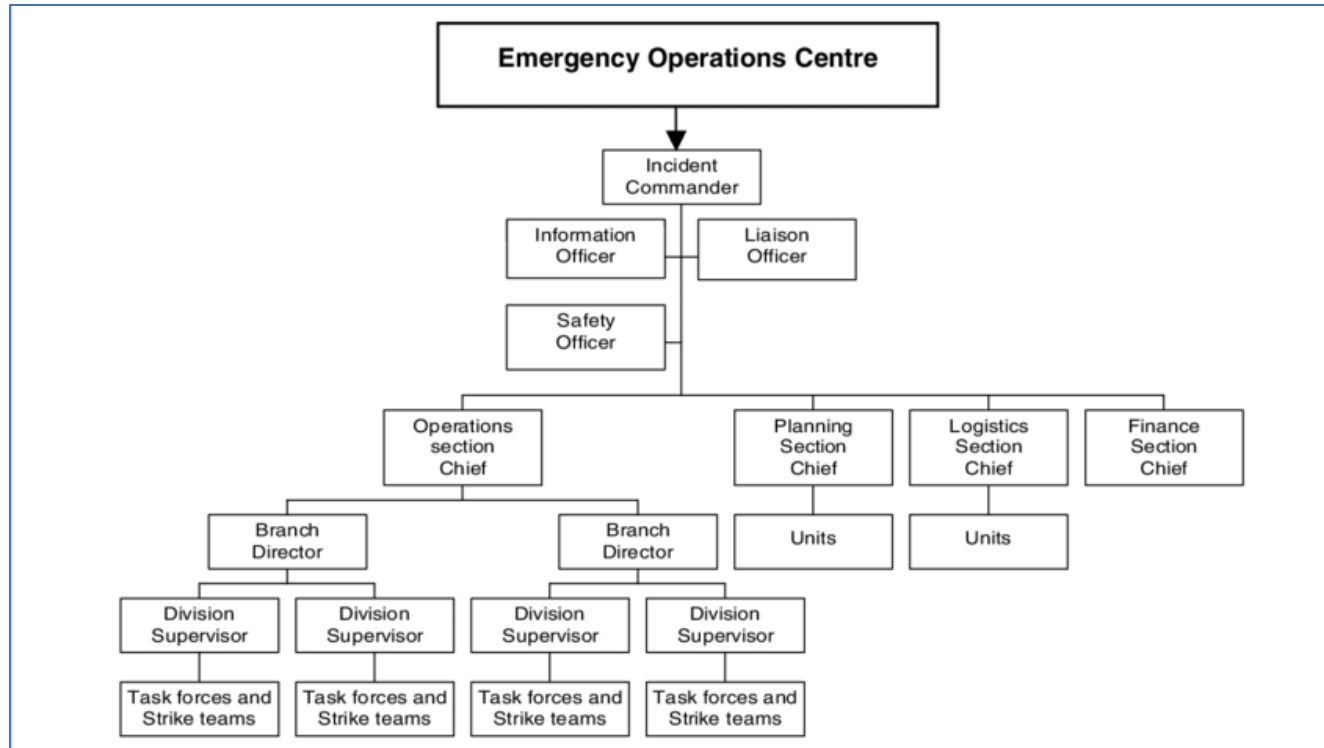
2 **Enhance EOC Structure**

Establishing a role in the EOC dedicated to stigma management

Extending a current role in the EOC to include a focus on stigma

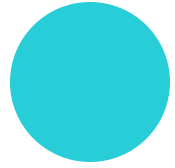## Countering Stigmatizing Forces at the Organizational Level

2 Enhance EOC Structure

Where could a stigma-focused agenda fit in the ICS/IMS structure?

Include stigma-related issues as part of situational intelligence during a disaster

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS & TOOLS

Countering Stigmatizing Forces at the Organizational Level

3 Training and Setting EM Standards

✓ The focus an emergency manager places on issues around stigma reflects their training (academic and/or on-the-job)

✓ Professional courses in emergency management must include stigma in their curriculum to ensure every manager has the same level of awareness about stigma in disasters

✓ Help leadership on strategic tables appreciate the need to be just as focused on stigma as they are on command and control

✓ Debates about EM training and standards should be less about the divide between academic and on-the-job training but on the value of both

4 Improving coordination and communication within/across EM entities

✓ Communication is not only about the community!
  • Communication is just as important **within** your teams, and with other EM stakeholders

✓ Following through with your Communication Plans is important
  • Adhering to best practices

✓ Access to briefing meetings/situational reports should be more accessible to EM stakeholders

✓ Resist the pressure of politics to influence communication access

Countering Stigmatizing Forces at the Organizational Level

5 **Efforts to improve recognition of EM contribution**

- ✓ Starts before the disaster happens!
  - Outreach to partners and other stakeholders about the capacity and function that EM possesses and brings to the table

- ✓ EM is buried in the bureaucracy and relegated in the organization chart
  - Elevation of the EM function through professionalization, legislation, and increased resources is necessary
  - Seek internal champions and advocates

Efforts to improve recognition of EM contribution also help to counter Stigmatizing Forces at the Individual Level

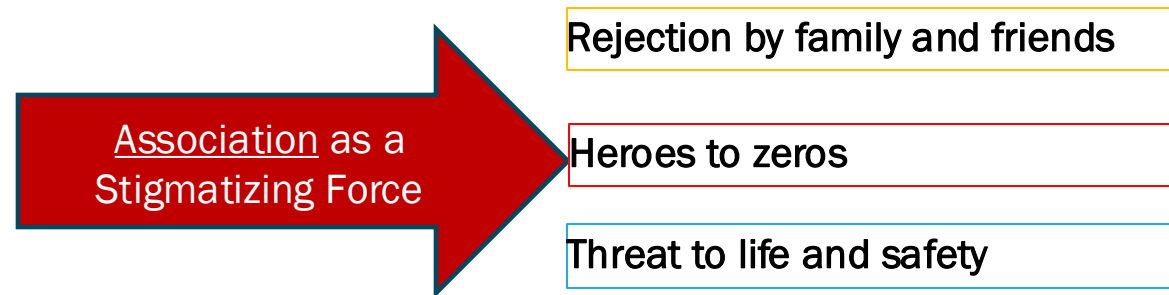*Do you feel recognized within your organization or bureaucratic context?*

How can this be improved?

Association

Countering Stigmatizing Forces at the Indvidual Level

Association as a Stigmatizing Force

Rejection by family and friends

Heroes to zeros

Threat to life and safety

How can the adverse effects of Association as a stigmatizing force be furthered countered?

1 Be Prepared, etc.!

✓ Manage your expectations

✓ Educate

- Assertively express your abilities, limitations, and roles & responsibilities (professionally and personally)

✓ Set your own boundaries and share with those in your circle of influence & care

Countering Stigmatizing Forces at the Indvidual Level

2 Actively Seek Supports

- ✓ Therapy
- ✓ Spending time with loved ones
- ✓ Venting
- ✓ 'Self-care' approaches

3 Focus on shared humanity

- ✓ Recognizing and acknowledging personal biases
- ✓ Self-reflection
- ✓ Modeling

Efforts to address stigmatizing forces as individuals help to counter stigma at all three levels

Community

Organizational

Individual

QUESTIONS

Contact Us
EMforAll.com
amamuji@yorku.ca
mosazuwa@yorku.ca
rozdilsk@yorku.ca