

Associated Stigma: is the stigma that people experience projected on to them because they associate with members of a stigmatized group. For example, people working with justice-involved Veterans may be stigmatized by others due to that association, as may family members of such Veterans. Like all stigmatization, this is variable – some who work closely with justice-involved Veterans have not experienced any of this while others describe it as an ongoing problem that adds stress and obstacles to their job.

Associated Stigma can present itself in various ways.

Below are three categories we noticed in VJP Specialist examples

From 2021 Veterans Justice Programs Specialist Interviews	
Excluding or devaluing the associated person and their work or role	“VA staff don’t want to talk to me because they see me as bringing them problems.”
	“There were some problems with the coordinator of that court not wanting VJO presence. I feel like the court coordinator resents me. They don’t want me present in court.”
	“I’m slowly being cut away from the mobile veteran’s court because of my efforts to destigmatize thinking. I’m not being told about things anymore, I feel the judge is passive aggressive towards me, and I feel like the court gangs up on me. I love this job, but the stress is making me consider leaving for another position.”
Assuming the associated person has an inappropriate alliance with the stigmatized group	“They think I can get the Veteran out of anything.”
	“For us, our [VJP Specialists’] relationship with court personnel makes Veterans reluctant to share much because they assume we are aligned with the court and tell them everything.”
	“My name is now synonymous with incarceration or legal involvement so there are always follow up questions asking for details [that are inappropriate for me to share or even to know].”
Marginalizing the program regarding resources & status	“I think that the [local VA] leadership and that original, negative, thinking never got us to where we should be. Our program has suffered since the beginning.”
	“I just think that the way they looked at us from the start, that was a stigmatization about the program and who we were bringing in.”
	“Homelessness is a big, stigmatized group, not just justice-involved. People leave ‘prevention’ out of our name, the physical environment we’re allocated is in poor condition, no signs, lousy furniture, no receptionist.”

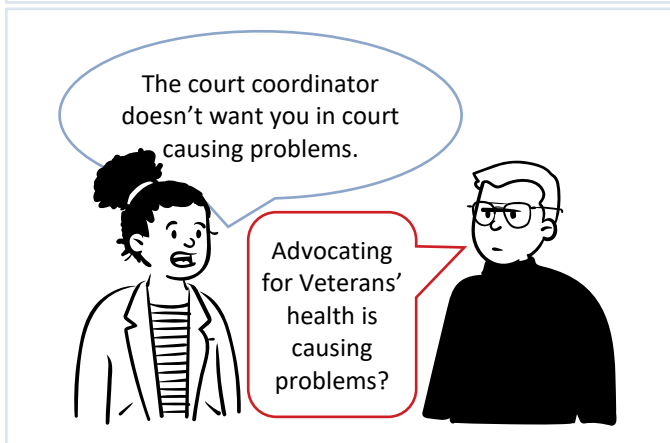
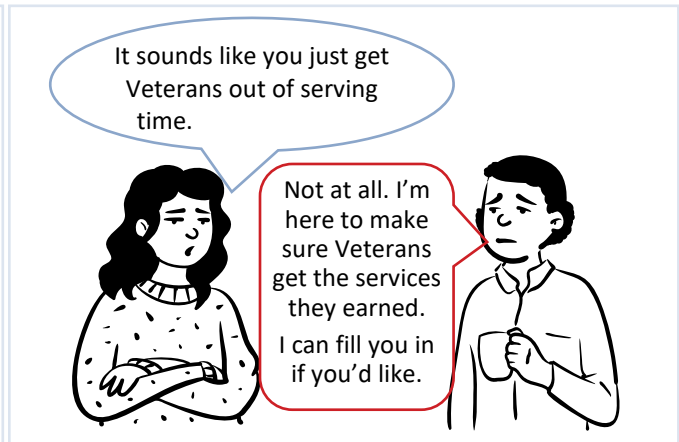
“Other providers ask how can you work with those people... as if there is a major difference between what the VJP specialist is doing vs the provider.”

– VJP Specialist

How do you want to respond when you encounter Associated Stigma?

Others stigmatizing your work is less demoralizing when you have a ready response that deflates it, although it's still unfair and frustrating. Below are real-life examples with possible responses that might help.

Feel free to think of others that are even better!



Your work with justice-involved Veterans is VALUABLE!

Being confident in your skills and the worth of your role, and being professional, factual, friendly, and assertive can both help to blunt the negative effects of stigmatizing messages. This can benefit yourself, Veterans you work with, and sometimes even the people perpetuating the negative stereotypes. At the same time, some stigmatization reflects obstruction or discrimination that requires higher intervention.

See other related anti-stigma resources at: <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/education/VJP.asp>