

Why Mental Health and Peer Support Matters in Aviation and to Africa

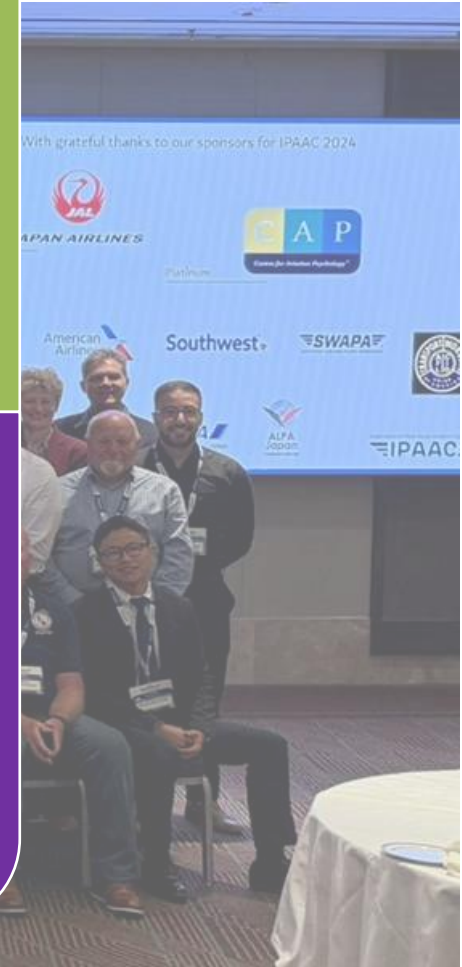
Captain Dave Fielding,
Chair, International Peer Assist Aviation Coalition
(IPAAC)



What is IPAAC?

Founded 2018

International Peer Assist Aviation Coalition
IPAAC



What Peer Support is Not





The critical thing to remember when addressing mental health issues in aviation:



The horses scare easily!

Scoping the problem



Aviation safety-critical personnel are:

- Mentally strong
- Decisive
- High-achieving
- Independent problem solvers
- Able to deal with stress
- Set high personal and professional standards



Until...



When life starts to unravel...

The popular idea that a flier must be a "superman" is utterly absurd

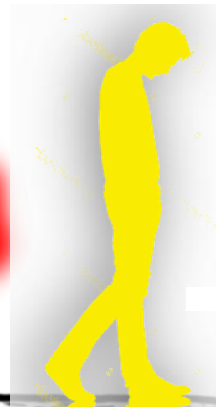
Air Service Medical 1919 (United States War Department, Division of Military Aeronautics)

20% of adults aged between 18 and 65 will suffer some form of mental trauma per year

Witchen et al, 2011

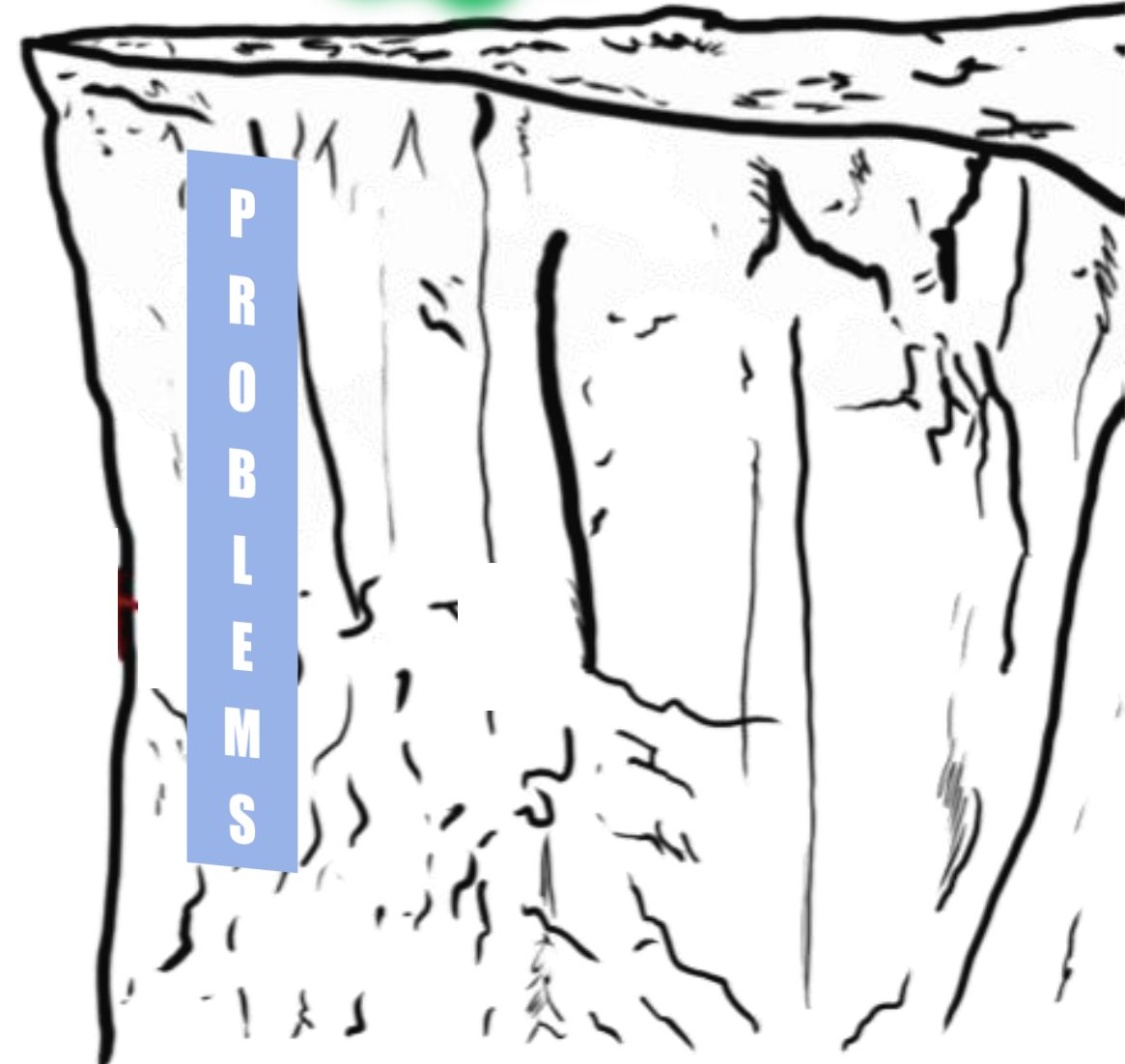


Fragility



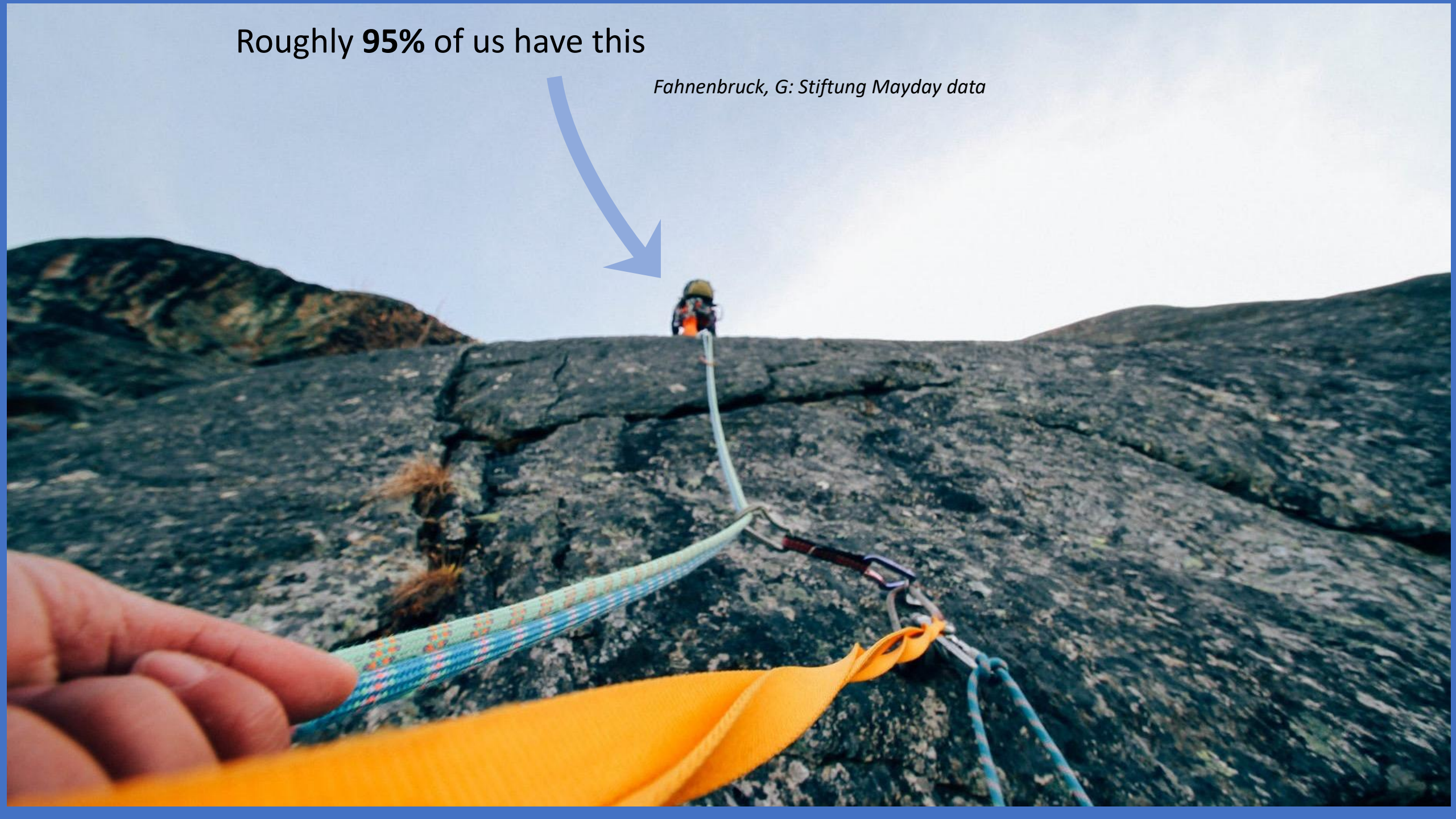
**Psychological
Safety**

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Roughly **95%** of us have this

Fahnenbruck, G: Stiftung Mayday data





Have a nice
day!

Welcome to
Psychological
Safety

What about the other 5%?

Help

Denial / Concealment

Fragility

Loss of licence /
qualifications

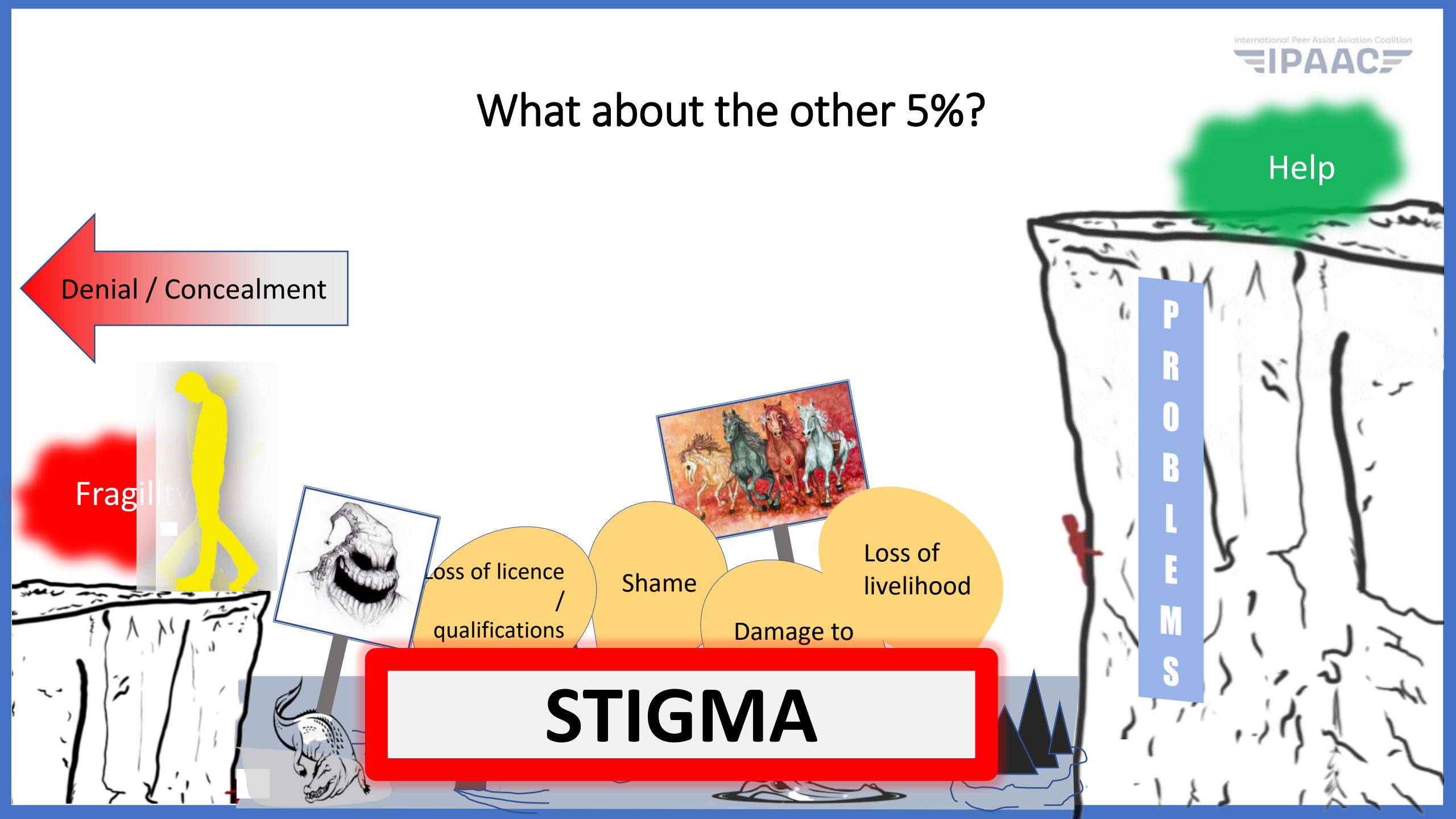
Shame

Loss of
livelihood

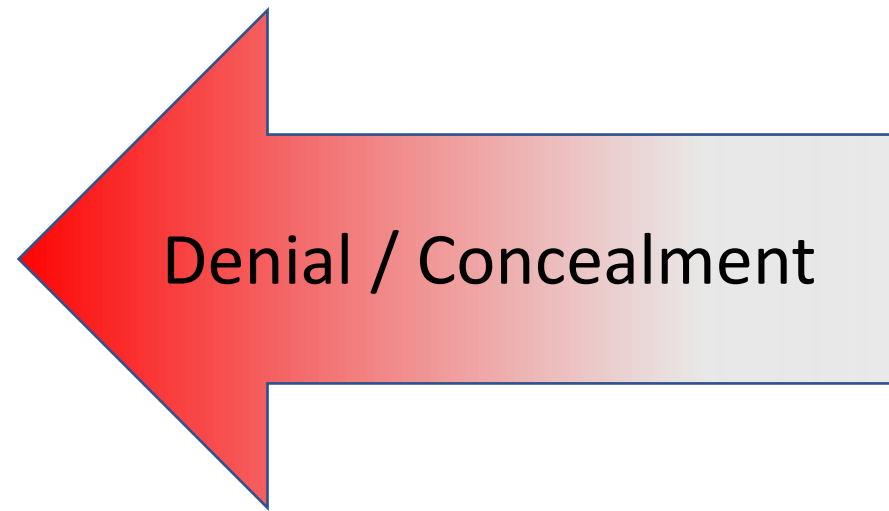
Damage to

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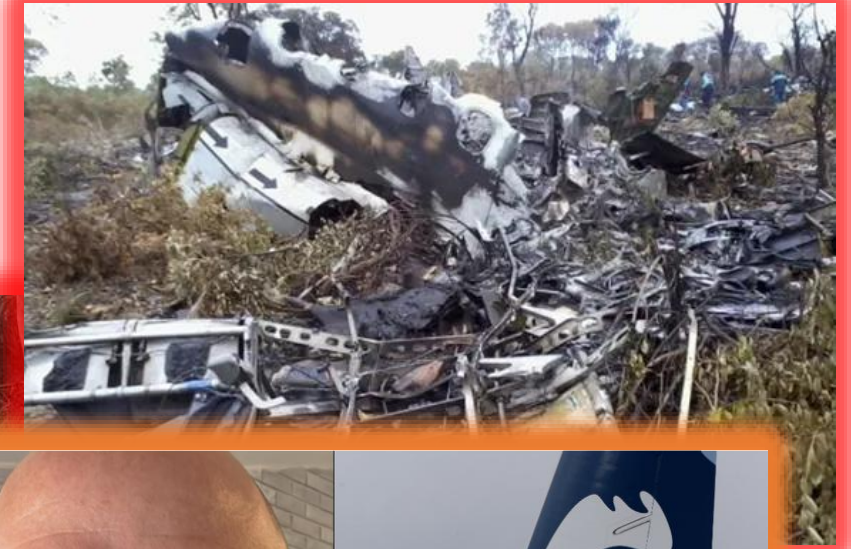
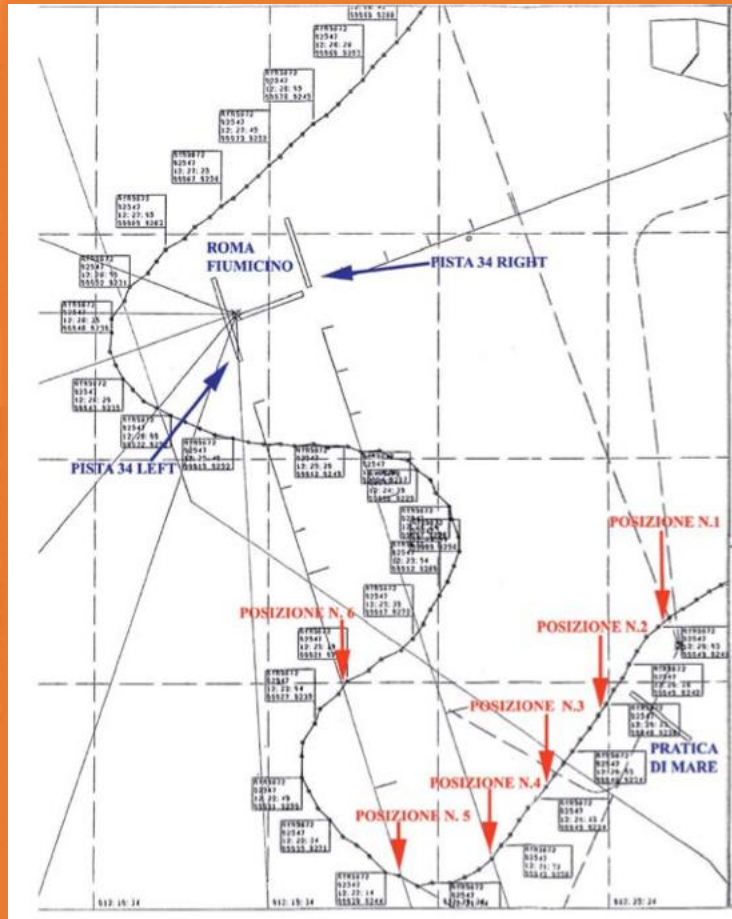
STIGMA



Why does this matter?



Black Swan Events?

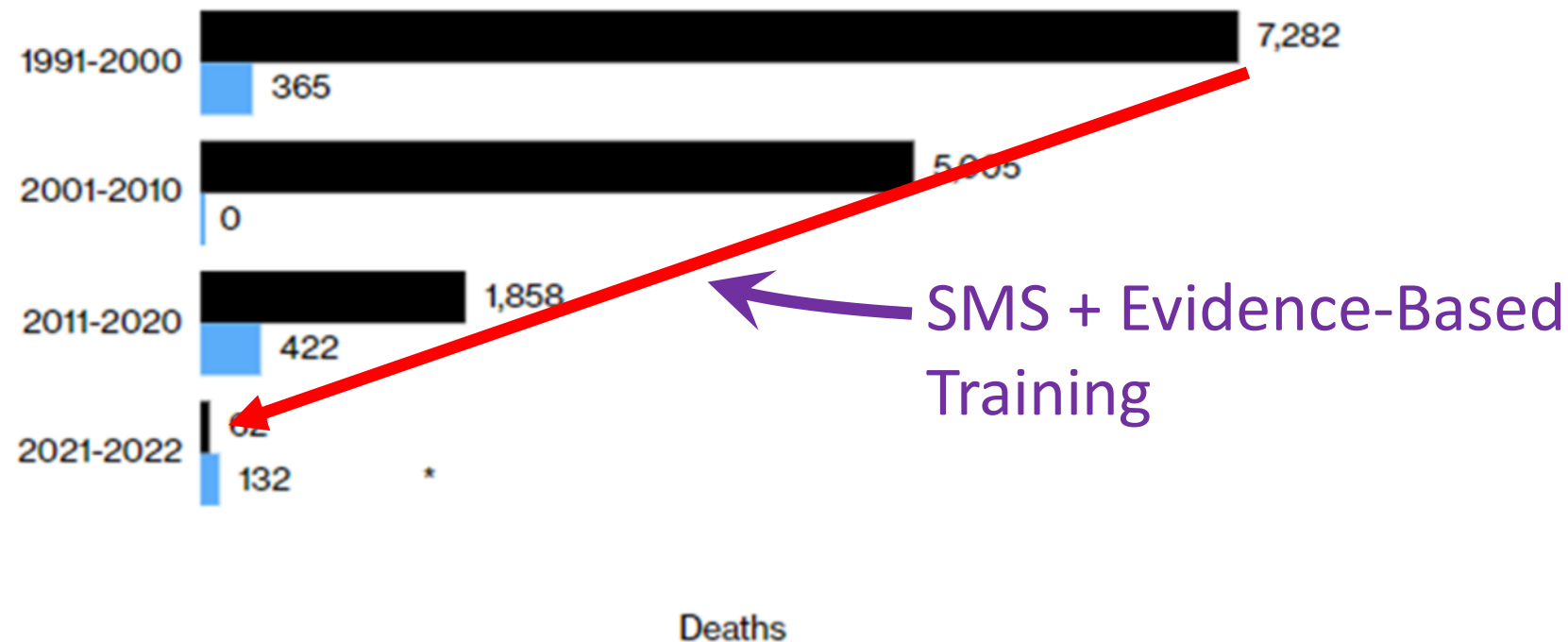


Dramatic Improvements in Flight Safety in past 30 years

Pilot Suicide Deaths

As accidents decrease, the death toll from intentional acts has grown

■ Traditional Crashes ■ Intentional Acts



Source: Boeing, AviationSafetyNetwork, accident reports

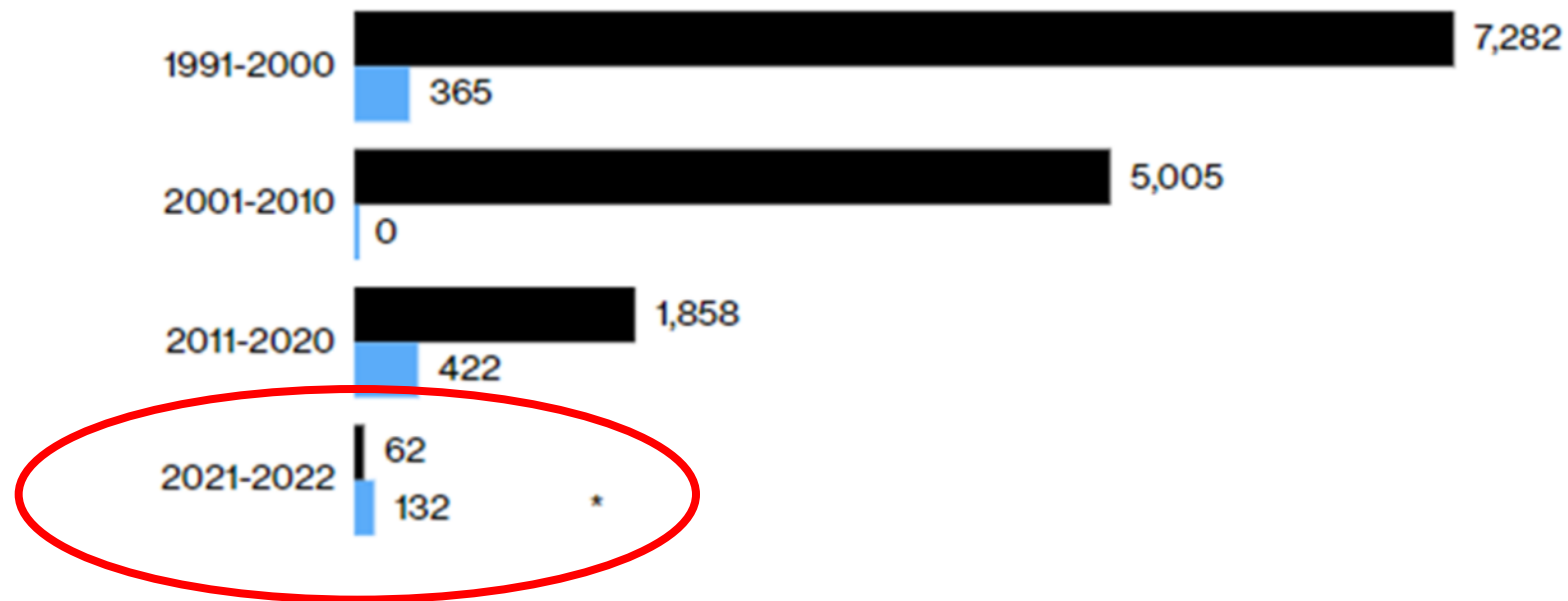
Note: Accidents include Western-built jets; * March 2022 China Eastern Crash is likely intentional, but unconfirmed

... but what about now?

Pilot Suicide Deaths

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Deaths

Source: Boeing, AviationSafetyNetwork, accident reports

Note: Accidents include Western-built jets; * March 2022 China Eastern Crash is likely intentional, but unconfirmed

“If the second highest cause of fatalities in western-built aircraft since 2011 was a technical issue, they would have fixed it by now”

Capt Dave Fielding, Chair IPPAC

Difficult truths about mental health in aviation

- There is no empirical test available to measure the mental health of an individual
- An individual can never be forced to disclose a mental health issue – “I’m fine”
- Harsh / punitive regulatory regimes do not work with mental health
- The normal *modus operandi* to fix a safety issue in aviation **does not work** with mental health
- The barriers to self-disclosure are real
- Mental health issues and addiction are inexorably linked



Peer Support Programmes

Psychological Safety

Help

Still a gap!

PEER SUPPORT

Co-operation

Monitoring Group

Pathways to Help

Contact

MHP

Peers

SAFE ZONE

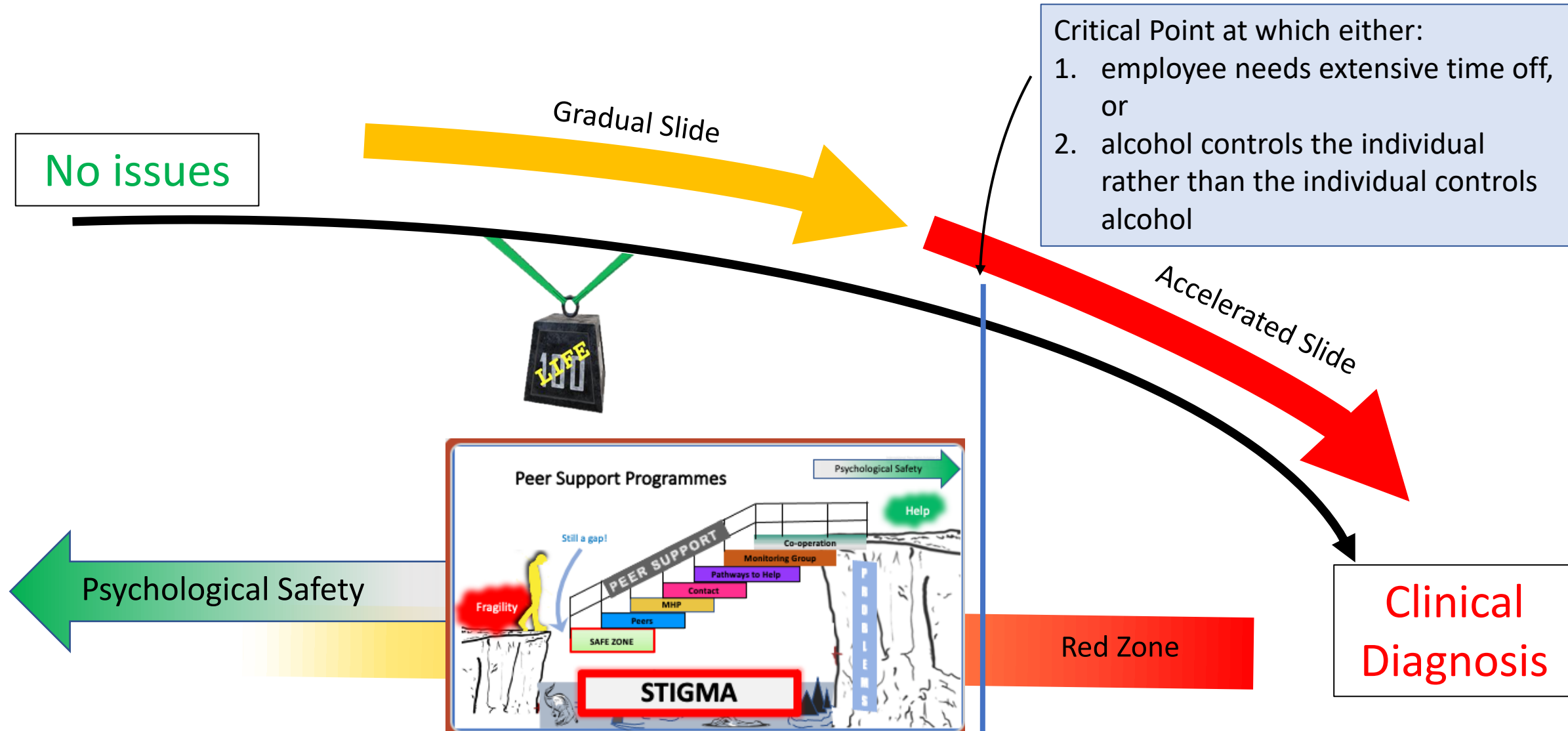
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STIGMA

Fragility



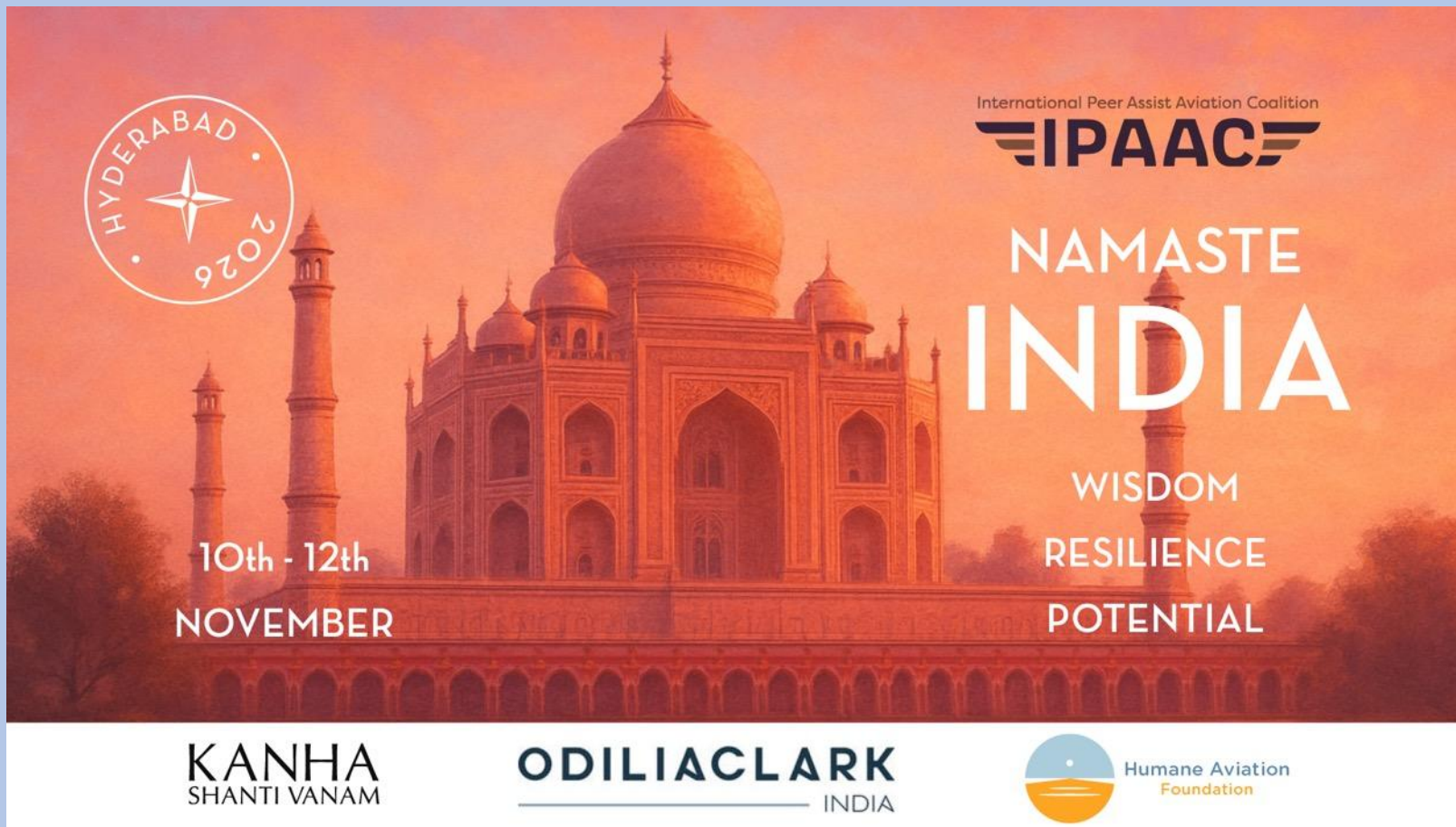
Mental Health as a deteriorating continuum





The ROI of Peer Support





Working with:



**IPAAC Annual Conference November 9-12th, 2026,
Kanha Wellness Institute, Hyderabad**

Africa and Peer Support

- Massively exciting possibilities for the whole continent
- Opportunity to make real change
- Africa has made great strides in improving technical flight safety – time do the same with mental health and addiction
- IPAAC can help by bringing expertise from around the world
- ...but principles need to be adapted to local cultures





www.ipaac.com



IPAAC Annual Conference November 2026

Cape Town