

Poster Session II

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Predictors of Mental Illness “Stigma” Perceptions and Attitudes Among College Students: A Descriptive Analysis

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Purpose: According to the Surgeon General of the United States, stigma for people with mental illness is a major impediment to successful treatment for these individuals. This article examines several factors which contribute to the stigmatization of the mentally ill.

Theoretical Framework: From the theoretical classics of Bogardus (1925) and Goffman (1963), the concepts of stigma suggest attributes of the mentally ill affect others’ discriminatory beliefs in contemporary concepts of stigma.

Methods: Three hundred nine college students participated in a web-based survey. It included a vignette about an adolescent girl with mental illness followed by an attribution questionnaire (Brown 2008), a social distance scale (adapted from Link, Cullen, Frank & Wozniak, 1987), and a familiarity scale based on level of contact (Holmes, Corrigan Williams, Canar & Kubiak, 1999), as well as a set of demographic questions.

Results: T-test findings indicated that level of familiarity with mental illness as well as demographic factors such as age, student status, and whether or not one has children had significant effects on attitudes toward the mentally ill and related social distancing from those with mental illness ($p < .05$). Regression analysis yielded predictors of several factors of stigma including fear and negative emotions.

Conclusions and Implications: Identifying factors that contribute to mental illness stigmatization is a first step toward minimizing it, thus increasing the probability that those with mental disorders will seek treatment.