

Stigma as a Barrier to Help-Seeking Among College Students

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It is estimated that over one-third of college students experience a mental illness at some point during their college career. However, many do not seek help due to fear of stigmatization. The present study investigated the relationship between attributions, implicit stigma, explicit stigma and help-seeking among college students. It was hypothesized that attributing more personal control over mental illness, as compared with physical illness, would predict higher levels of implicit and explicit stigma and be associated with a decreased likelihood of college students seeking professional help. In addition, it was hypothesized that implicit and explicit stigma would mediate the relationship between attributions and help-seeking. Seventy-four college students from the University of Vermont, between the ages of 18 and 22, participated in the one-hour single-session study. The study utilized questionnaires to assess attributions, explicit stigma and help seeking. In addition, the Mental Illness Implicit Association Test was used to assess implicit stigma. Preliminary analyses suggest that significant positive relationships exist between attributions of causality and explicit stigma ($r = .345, p < .01$), attributions of causality and peer group stigma ($r = .227, p < .05$), attributions of personal control and explicit stigma ($r = .238, p < .05$), and implicit stigma and help seeking ($r = .274, p < .01$). Results did not support the mediating relationship between attributions, explicit stigma, implicit stigma and help-seeking. Additional results to be presented will explore why the mediating relationship between attributions, explicit stigma, implicit stigma, and help-seeking was not upheld. Results suggest that attributions may influence college students' explicit stigmatization of mental illness, but not their decision to seek professional help. In turn, implicit stigma may be a better predictor of college students' likelihood to professional help. The relationship between implicit stigma and

help-seeking has not been examined previously in the literature, and should be explored in future research.