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Stigma of Mental Health on Campus:

A Research Study

Amelia Fowler⁵

It was examined if there are any stereotypes or stigma on the Lindenwood University campus by handing out fliers and emailing the link to both students and faculty and having them take an online survey through survey gizmo. Mental illness can be extremely difficult to live with, especially in school at in the work place, so my aim is to find out if any stigma exists on Lindenwood campus and how I can help make the lives of struggling students and faculty easier. When looking at the preliminary results, based on 80 out of a total of 100 participants, it was found that there is a low amount of stigma on campus, however students have a lot of great ideas of how to make the lives of students easier. Suggestions that were given involved making the student counseling center easier to find and advertising the center better so that more people are aware of it.

Keywords: stigma, stereotypes, mental health, survey, counseling, dangerous

Today, due to more helpful programming and more groups dedicating their time and effort to get rid of mental health stigma, many citizens are more accepting of people with a mental illness. A stigma is, according to the Gale Encyclopedia of Mental Health (2012), a weakness or defect of individual character. However, there are still people who have negative thoughts and beliefs about people suffering from a mental illness. There are many different types of bullying, and sometimes when negatives thoughts and beliefs exist about a group of people, it occurs whether it is intended or not. Bullying can come in the form of both physical and/or verbal aggression. An example of a stereotype that can cause bullying is that a person may think that people who has a mental illness is looking for attention. The purpose of this study is to

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This research paper and study was done for Psychology 404, Advanced Research Methods, taught by Professor Nohara-LeClair.

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examine if there are stigmas and how they are perceived by Lindenwood University students and faculty.

According to the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Survey, 24.5% of students in the counseling center take psychotropic medicine and 70% of directors report the number of students with severe psychological problems on campus has increased in the last year (“College student,” 2013). Mental illness exists all over college campuses, so it is important to watch what one says around other people because one may never know who they might be hurting. According to psychiatrists who have studied the social stigma associated with mental illness, there are two different kinds of stigma: self stigma and public stigma (Key, 2012). Self stigma is a person’s internalization of public discrimination and disapproval, while public stigma is defined as prejudice and discrimination on the part of the general population against those, in this case, diagnosed with mental disorders (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). Some impacts of public stigma include withholding help, avoidance, and segregated institutions (Corrigan & Watson, 2002).

Bullying is a problem when it comes to stigma and stereotypes. A study on bullying was done in eight colleges and universities in the Midwest that involved 2118 freshmen students. Out of these students, 43% experienced bullying at school, while 33% experienced it at work (Rospenda et al., 2014). Bullying causes a lot of problems such as low self-esteem and anger due to the prejudice that is happening to the individual (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). The effects of bullying cause the victim to suffer psychologically, physically, and academically (Perdew, 2015). Psychologically, victims suffer from low self esteem and depression. Physically, a person could stop eating and lose weight dramatically due to depression. All of this could cause a person to not be able to concentrate in school and their grades could drop.

In the student organization, Active Minds, our goal is to help get rid of the stereotypes and poor images of mental illness on campus and to give the students better access to resources that can help them when they are struggling. In this study, students and faculty were asked to participate in an online survey. The results on the surveys will show whether or not there is any stigmas or negative feelings toward those with a mental illness. Also, it will show how much students and faculty really know about mental illnesses and hopefully Active Minds can help educate our campus and help make the lives of struggling individuals on campus easier. Also, participants were given resources in the survey they took that can be used in case themselves or a friend needs help. According to Stone and Merlo (2011), there is a need for improved education regarding the nature of mental illness, the appropriate use of medication, and potential consequences associated with the abuse of drugs. After it is determined whether or not there really are stereotypes represented by the campus population, this information could be used for additional research to fight against these stereotypes if they are present. One of the questions in the survey asks participants if they have any ideas as to how we can make the lives of struggling students on campus easier. This information will give Active Minds ideas as to which direction we can go to assist our peers.

Method

Participants

101 adults were recruited with fliers on the Lindenwood University campus (see Appendix A), with the permission of the Lindenwood Student Government Association. Lindenwood University is a school located in the Midwest. Lindenwood University offers 600 degree programs to more than 16,000 students and has been going strong for nearly 200 years. Lindenwood also represents 1155 international students from 109 different countries.

All participants were either a staff or student of Lindenwood University and at least 18 years of age. Copies of the flier were handed to professors to share with their students and their colleagues, along with being posted inside of university facilities. Fliers were posted in Evans and Spellman outside of the cafeteria, along with a stack in each dorm for residents to pick up. The survey was also made available on Facebook. It was made clear that only Lindenwood students and staff were allowed to take the survey so results would not be compromised.

Materials and Procedure

The flier, survey, consent statement, and feedback letter were made online on Microsoft Word. The survey (see Appendix B), consent statement (see Appendix C), and feedback letter (see Appendix D) were all uploaded onto SurveyGizmo, and the URL was shared with the Lindenwood University community on the flier that was given out to everyone on campus. SurveyGizmo is a website that allows people to make surveys with ease online and distribute it to many people at once. After all the data were collected on survey gizmo, the data was put on an excel sheet and kept on a personal laptop.

Results

101 participants consisting of students and faculty took the survey on survey gizmo (See Appendix E). Out of the 101 participants, 82.2% said yes to knowing someone who was diagnosed with a mental illness, while 15.8 percent said no (See Appendix F). For the question asking how participants would feel if someone in their residential area was undergoing psychiatric treatment, the mean for how comfortable the participants felt was 5.24 out of 10, while the mode was 5. About 83.2% of participants know that Lindenwood offered free counseling services, while 11.9% did not (See Appendix F). When asked how participants felt about allowing someone undergoing psychiatric treatment to babysit their children, the average

comfort participants felt was 4.92, with a mode of 5. For the question asking if it is dangerous to forget a person is mentally ill, the average participant ranked their disagreement with that statement is 3.86 and the mode as a 5. For the statement that said that former mental patients should not have a hunting license, the average was 4.77 out of 10, while the mode was 5 out of 10. With the statement that one would not trust someone with a mental illness, the average participants chose was 2.39 for disagreeing, with a mode of 0. The final statement was that it is difficult to tell how someone with a mental illness will act 1 min to the next. The average rating was 4.05 out of 10, with a mode of 5 out of 10.

Discussion

When looking at the results, one can tell that there is very little stigma surrounding mental illness on campus. Overall, most people on campus feel comfortable with people with a mental illness. I found it interesting how people know that people with a mental illness are not all dangerous and participants have rated that they will trust something with a mental illness, however nobody wishes to live near someone with a mental illness. Due to the small sample size, I do not know how accurate the data is. I believe there is a response bias due to the fact that whether or not people feel comfortable with a person who has been diagnosed depends on the severity of the illness and how recent the diagnosis is. With a lot of disorders, it takes a while to get the right medicine and treatment so that the individual can start improving. Due to this, a struggling individual would have less of a possibility of being hired to teach or even babysit until they are more stable. This project is not very complex; however this factor represents a limitation in my survey.

The results so far also show that there are a few people that do not know that Lindenwood offers free counseling services. As a part of the student organization Active Minds,

it is important to make sure people are aware of the services that are offered to students. When looking at the different suggestions participants had to decrease the stigma of mental illness on campus, most students talked about making the counseling center more advertised and easier to find. Other students talked about having a guest speaker at the Lindenwood University First-Year Experience classes, having support groups and workshops, and making the hotlines better known to students and faculty. I believe that the information that the participants gave is valuable to making our school a better place to be for everyone and helping this community be more accepting of people with a mental illness.

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Appendix A

Flier

ATTENTION STUDENTS AND STAFF

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR A DESCRIPTIVE SURVEY ABOUT THE
STIGMA OF MENTAL ILLNESS

ARE YOU...

- ✓ 18 YEARS OLD OR OLDER?
- ✓ A STUDENT OR STAFF AT LINDENWOOD?

PLEASE VISIT <https://www.surveymzmo.com/s3/2008958/Stigma-of-Mental-Health>
AND TAKE THIS SHORT 10 QUESTION SURVEY

QUESTIONS? ASK AMELIA FOWLER
AFF326@LIONMAIL.LINDENWOOD.EDU

This project has been approved by Lindenwood University's Institutional Review
Board (Case Number. TBD*)

Appendix B

Survey

1. Has someone you know been diagnosed with a mental illness?

Yes No I do not know

2. How likely would you be to hire a person for a teaching position in a grade school if you knew the candidate had a mental illness?

Very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very likely

3. How would you feel if someone in your dorm or residential area was undergoing psychiatric treatment?

Very uncomfortable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very comfortable

4. Are you aware LU has a free counseling service?

Yes No

5. If someone you knew was receiving treatment for a mental illness, how likely would you be to allow the person to babysit your children?

Very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very likely

6. Can you think of anything we can do at Lindenwood to make it easier for people who struggle with a mental illness? Feel free to write any suggestion you can think of.

7. Although some psychiatric patients may seem alright, it is dangerous to forget that they are mentally ill even for a second.

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

8. Former mental patients should not have a hunting license.

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

9. I would not trust someone who has a mental illness

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

10. One important thing about a person with a mental illness is it is difficult to tell how they will act one minute to the next.

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

Appendix C

Consent Statement

This survey is about the possible existence of any stigma or stereotype related to mental illness on Lindenwood campus created by Amelia Fowler as part of a research project in the department of psychology at Lindenwood University. This survey contains questions regarding your own personal opinion toward people with a mental illness.

A stigma is, according to the Gale Encyclopedia of Mental Health (2012), a weakness or defect of individual character. According to psychiatrists who have studied the social stigma associated with mental illness, there are two different kinds of stigma: self stigma and public stigma. Self stigma is a person's internalization of public discrimination and disapproval, while public stigma is defined as prejudice and discrimination on the part of the general population against those diagnosed with mental disorders. A stereotype, according to Fichner-Rathus (2014), is a fixed, conventional idea about a group of people.

This survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Although your participation may not result in direct benefits to you, information from this study may help provide insight into any stereotypes or stigma that may exist on campus. This information may be used in the future to help eliminate any negative feelings or actions. Please read the information below before deciding whether or not to participate.

Your responses will be anonymous. No information that identifies you personally will be collected. The primary investigator will not be able to identify your answers as belonging to you; data will be examined at the group level only.

- Your participation is completely voluntary. You may discontinue taking the survey at any time. If you choose not to participate or stop participating before the end of the survey, you will not be penalized in any way.
- The results of this survey will be used for scholarly purposes only. If you have any questions about the survey itself, please contact the primary investigator, Amelia Fowler, at 636-233-2692.
- When responding to these questions, some participants may become uncomfortable or upset, but these feelings are not expected to exceed what one experiences in everyday life. If you find taking the survey causes you significant discomfort and you would like assistance, please stop participating and contact the Lindenwood Student Counseling and Resource Center at [636-949-4889](tel:636-949-4889). If you are not a Lindenwood student, contact the P.I., Amelia Fowler, for information on how to contact persons in a position to refer you to counseling services.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.
Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- You have read the above information.
- You voluntarily agree to participate.
- You are at least 18 years of age
- You are a student or staff member at Lindenwood University

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, or are not at least 18 years old, please decline participation by clicking on the "I choose not to participate" button.

- I choose to participate in this survey
 I do not choose to participate in this survey

Appendix D

Feedback Letter

Thank you for participating in my study. This study was conducted in order to tell if any stigma surrounding mental illness are on this campus and what students think we should do here at Lindenwood to help erase this stigma.

Active Minds is an organization on campus dedicated to erasing the stigma of mental illness and helping students become aware of resources such as the counseling center that will help them through their college career. As Vice President of this organization on campus, the overall data found through this study is greatly appreciated. If you are interested in joining Active Minds, feel free to email me and I will give you the date, time, and location of our meetings.

Please note that I am not interested in your individual results; rather, I am only interested in the overall findings based on aggregate data. No identifying information about you will be associated with any of the findings, nor will it be possible for us to trace your responses on an individual basis.

If you are interested in obtaining the final results of this study based on aggregate data, or if you have any questions or concerns regarding any portion of this study, please do not hesitate to let me know now or in the future. Also, I plan to publish an article in *The Legacy* based on the results of this study once they are available. My contact information is found at the bottom of this letter.

Thank you again for your valuable contribution to this study.

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Dr. Nohara-LeClair
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Interested in fighting the stigma of mental health on campus? Active Minds meets Thursdays at 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. in Spellmann 4105. Feel free to like us on Facebook, and visit www.activeminds.org for more information on our organization! For any questions regarding this survey or Active Minds, contact Amelia Fowler at aff326@lionmail.lindenwood.edu.

Need Help? Contact the Lindenwood University Counseling and Resource center at 6369494525, SCRC@lindenwood.edu, or contact Dr. Joseph Cusumano at JCusumano@lindenwood.edu

Appendix E

Table 1

	Teaching	Dorm	Babysit	Dangerous	Hunting	Trust	Act
Mean	5.24	7.25	4.92	3.86	4.77	2.39	4.05
Median	5.00	8.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	2.00	4.00
Mode	5	10	5	5	5	0	5
Std. Deviation	2.474	2.376	2.820	2.838	2.942	2.361	2.903
Variance	6.120	5.646	7.951	8.056	8.655	5.575	8.429

Appendix F

Table 2

	Do you know someone who was diagnosed?	Are you aware LU has free Counseling Services?
Percent Yes	82.2	83.2
Percent No	15.8	11.9