

# Mental Health Stigma and Perception of Support Related to Academic Help Seeking in College Students



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## Background

- Mental health diagnoses and struggles in college students are increasing (Lipson, Lattie, & Eisenberg, 2019).
- Service utilization is increasing but does not meet service needs (Lipson, Lattie, & Eisenberg, 2019; Oswalt et al., 2020).
- There are multiple barriers to treatment including finances and lack of knowledge about services (Han et al., 2017).
- Minority racial and/or ethnic groups face additional obstacles due to cultural differences (Yu et al., 2022; Gary, 2005; Misra et al., 2021).
- Mental health stigma:** Connection between stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination towards people with psychological disorders (Corrigan & Watson, 2002).
  - Stereotypes:** generalizations about a group that people may or may not agree with.
  - Prejudice:** someone endorses a stereotype and has a negative emotional reaction.
  - Discrimination:** behavioral consequence of prejudice.
- College campuses provide unique opportunities to address mental health concerns, preventing negative conditions associated with early life struggle (Eisenberg et al., 2009).

## Research Question & Hypotheses

**Research question:** How does mental health stigma relate to the perception of support regarding academic help-seeking on college campuses?

### Hypothesis 1:

- Personal stigma and mental health climate will predict perception of support reported by students who previously sought academic help.

### Hypothesis 2:

- Race will predict perception of support reported by students who previously sought academic help.

### Hypothesis 3:

- Percent of white students moderates the relationship between race and degree of support such that:
  - At primarily white institutions, race relates to degree of support such that students of color report lower degrees of support.
  - This effect will not be present at more diverse institutions.

**Table 1**  
Sample Characteristics

Study Variable	Percent
Academic help (yes)	59.2%
Any mental health problem	59.3%
Any mental health treatment	41.8%
Sexual orientation (not straight)	24.8%
International status (international)	5.9%
Resident status (off campus)	73.1%
Current socioeconomic status	
Always stressful	13.2%
Often stressful	22.9%
Sometimes stressful	35.5%
Rarely stressful	21.1%
Never stressful	7.3%
First generation	33.4%
Race	
Black/African American	9.0%
American Indian/Native American/Alaskan Native	0.3%
Asian	10.3%
Latinx/Hispanic	6.3%
Pacific Islander	0.1%
Middle Eastern	1.3%
Multiple Race	9.5%
Other	1.4%
White	61.9%
Sex assigned at birth	
Female	73.0%
Intersex	0.0%
Male	27.0%
Degree of support for participants seeking academic help	
Very Unsupportive	2.3%
Not Supportive	7.1%
Supportive	40.6%
Very Supportive	50.0%

## Results

**Table 3**  
Multilevel regression analysis with perception of support as outcome

Model Term	Coefficient t	SE	t	p-value	Odds Ratio	Lower CI	Upper CI
<b>Academic degree of support- very unsupportive (vs. very supportive)</b>	<b>-4.16</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>-23.21</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.01</b>	<b>0.02</b>
<b>Academic degree of support- not supportive (vs. very supportive)</b>	<b>-2.63</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>-16.26</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>0.07</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.10</b>
Academic degree of support- supportive (vs. very supportive)	-0.15	0.17	-0.93	.350	0.86	0.62	1.18
Size of university = 1 (vs. 5)	0.20	0.11	1.87	.062	1.22	0.99	1.50
Size of university = 2 (vs. 5)	0.09	0.09	0.97	.335	1.10	0.91	1.32
Size of university = 3 (vs. 5)	-0.02	0.09	-0.17	.868	0.99	0.82	1.18
Size of university = 4 (vs. 5)	-0.02	0.12	-0.20	.850	0.98	0.08	1.23
Private (vs. public)	0.07	0.08	0.93	.348	1.07	0.93	1.24
Female (vs. male)	0.04	0.07	0.52	.603	1.04	0.90	1.20
Intersex (vs. male)	1.72	1.16	1.47	.141	5.55	0.57	54.32
International (vs. domestic)	-0.22	0.12	-1.78	.075	0.80	0.63	1.02
First generation (vs. non)	0.03	0.07	0.37	.710	1.03	0.90	1.17
Sexual orientation (not straight vs. straight)	-0.06	0.06	-1.02	.307	0.94	0.84	1.06
Current SES – always stressful (vs. never)	-0.27	0.13	-2.01	.045	0.77	0.59	0.99
Current SES – often stressful (vs. never)	-0.26	0.12	-2.26	.024	0.77	0.61	0.97
Current SES – sometimes stressful (vs. never)	-0.27	0.12	-2.17	.030	0.77	0.60	0.98
Current SES – rarely stressful (vs. never)	-0.19	0.12	-1.50	.133	0.83	0.65	1.06
Off-campus (vs. on-campus)	0.13	0.07	1.92	.055	1.14	1.00	1.31
Black/African American (vs. White)	-0.03	0.10	-0.32	.750	0.97	0.79	1.18
American Indian/Native American (vs. White)	-0.44	0.37	-1.18	.237	0.64	0.31	1.34
Asian (vs. White)	-0.06	0.10	-0.60	.551	0.94	0.78	1.14
Latino (vs. White)	0.01	0.13	0.05	.961	1.01	0.78	1.31
Pacific Islander (vs. White)	0.79	0.91	0.86	.390	2.19	0.37	13.09
Middle Eastern (vs. White)	-0.16	0.23	-0.71	.479	0.85	0.55	1.33
Multiple Race (vs. White)	0.18	0.09	1.99	.047	1.19	1.00	1.42
Other Race (vs. White)	-0.27	0.21	-1.31	.189	0.76	0.51	1.14
Perceived Stigma	-0.04	0.02	-1.82	.068	0.96	0.91	1.00
<b>Personal Stigma</b>	<b>-0.19</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>-5.84</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>0.88</b>
<b>Campus Climate</b>	<b>-0.64</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>-20.83</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.56</b>

### Perceived Stigma

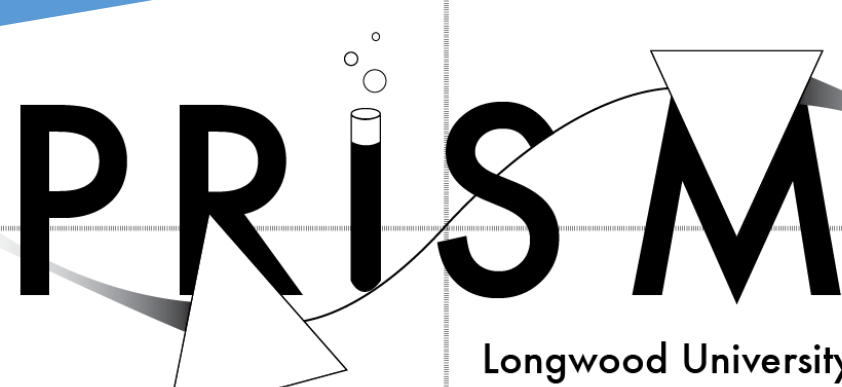
- The extent to which an individual believes the public to stereotype and discriminate against people with psychological disorders.
- E.g., "Other people believe that mentally ill people are violent and are afraid of them."

### Personal Stigma

- The extent to which an individual stereotypes and discriminates against people with psychological disorders.
- E.g., "I believe that mentally ill people are violent. I am afraid they will become violent towards me."

### Campus Climate

- The extent to which people at a college institution have negative attitudes and behaviors towards those with psychological disorders.
- E.g., "Professors believe that mental illnesses are not as valid of an excuse for an absence as physical illnesses, such as the flu."



## Method

- HMS**
- Since 2005, over 200,000 of participants from more than 150 colleges and universities worldwide
- Our data from 2020-2021 has included 87 universities with about 37,000 participants

Key Predictors		
<b>Perceived Stigma (3 items)</b>	"How much do you agree with the following statement? I would willingly accept someone who has received mental health treatment as a close friend."	1 = Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = Somewhat agree 4 = Somewhat disagree 5 = Disagree 6 = Strongly disagree
<b>Personal stigma (3 items)</b>	"How much do you agree with the following statement? I would willingly accept someone who has received mental health treatment as a close friend."	1 = Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = Somewhat agree 4 = Somewhat disagree 5 = Disagree 6 = Strongly disagree
<b>Campus climate (5 items)</b>	"How much do you agree with the following statement? At my school, I feel that students' mental and emotional well-being is a priority."	1 = Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = Somewhat agree 4 = Somewhat disagree 5 = Disagree 6 = Strongly disagree
Outcomes		
<b>Perception of support (1 item)</b>	"Overall, how supportive was the response of the academic personnel with whom you talked?"	1 = Very supportive 2 = Supportive 3 = Not supportive 4 = Very unsupportive

## Discussion

- For every 1 point students scored higher on the **personal stigma** scale, they were 1.2x more likely to be in a lower category for perceived support.
- For every 1 point students scored higher on **campus climate**, students were 1.5x more likely to report perception of support as being 1 category lower, such that a more positive campus climate is associated with a more positive perception of support.
- Mental health climate on campus is important for predicting whether people seek help and whether they perceive that help as helpful. This has a moderate effect size.
- The effect of **race** on perception of support was not significant. This could have occurred because individual level factors, such as experiences of discrimination, may be more important in determining the relationship between help-seeking and stigma. Further research is required.
- For academic degree of **support**, we found significant differences in the number of students responding different answer choices. Most students who sought help perceived support as at least "supportive." This suggests that seeking help is beneficial for many students.
- Since this is a **cross sectional study**, we do not know the direction of the relationship, which should be explored in future research.

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