Stigma as a Predictor of Parental Willingness to Seek Mental Health Services for Their Children in Rural America

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**Background**

- Stigma: labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination (Link & Phelan, 2001)

- Stigma exists in some capacity towards mental illness (Hinshaw, 2005)

- This stigma is a barrier to mental health services for some people (Boydell et al., 2006; Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christensen, 2010)
Rural Stigma

• Rural communities have more mental illness stigma than their urban counterparts (Hammer et al., 2013; Stewart et al., 2015)

• Rural value system

• Lack of anonymity

• Other barriers to services: Lack of access, awareness of services, and financial difficulties
Rural Parental Stigma

- Parents of children with mental health disorders often feel as if though they are not good parents (Eaton, Ohan, Stritzke, & Corrigan, 2016)

- 2015 study on low-income, urban, African-Americans found self-stigma as a predictor of help seeking (Dempster, Davis, Jones, Keating, & Wildman, 2015)
Rural Parental Stigma

- First study focusing on parental stigma of seeking mental health services for their children in rural America done in 2015 (Polaha & Williams, 2015)
  - Low perception of public stigma (inconsistent with previous research)
  - Negative correlation between stigma and willingness to seek help for children
Methods

- Amazon Mechanical Turk

- Parents’ Perceived Stigma of Service Seeking (PPSSS) (Williams, & Polaha, 2014)

- Safeguards

- 2-tailed t-test
• If I were to take my child to a mental health professional for them to receive services...

• Self-stigma: “It would make me feel strange,” “It would make me feel embarrassed,” “It would make me feel like a bad parent”

• Public stigma: “Some people might say bad things behind my back,” “Some people would treat me with less respect,” “Some people would avoid me”
Demographics

- n=81
- Gender: 50/50
- 72% White
- Age
  - 21-29: 31 participants
  - 30-39: 36 participants
- Relationship status
  - Married: 55 participants
- Education
  - Less than high school degree: 2 participants
  - High school degree or equivalent: 8 participants
Results

- Cronbach’s alpha showed high consistency for self and public stigma (.95 and .94 respectively)

- Average self-stigma score: 15.1 (Possible 6-30)

- Average public stigma score: 31.3 (Possible 11-55)
Results

- Significant positive correlation between self and public stigma ($p=.000$, $r=.784$)
Results

- Significant negative correlation between self-stigma and age ($p=0.013$, $r=-.281$)
Results

• Significant negative correlation between self-stigma and expressed willingness to seek help from a mental health professional for children ($p = .042$, $r = -.231$)

![Self-stigma vs Expressed Willingness to Seek Mental Health Services for Child](image-url)
Discussion

• Supports findings of:
  o Dempster, Davis, Jones, Keating, & Wildman, 2015
    o Polaha & Williams, 2015

• Public vs Self

• Limitations

• Future?
  o Cause and effect
  o Intervention