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Christina Crawley
Valparaiso University

Johannah Facer
Valparaiso University, johannah.facer@valpo.edu

Simone Ingram
Valparaiso University

Cara Odom
Valparaiso University

Sara Watts
Valparaiso University

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Mental Health Stigmas and Counseling Center Utilization

Christina Crawley, Johannah Facer, Simone Ingram, Cara Odom, Sara Watts

Departmental Affiliation: Social Work
College of Arts and Sciences

Persons with mental illness have been marginalized for generations. For many years, those with mental illness were institutionalized or incarcerated. This history of mental health and mental health treatment leaves behind stereotypes and stigmas that are still present today. There has been an increase in those who experience mental illness, particularly traditional-aged college students (18-24). Research shows that the number of students with severe psychological illness is steadily increasing on college campuses. Yet, on a yearly basis, only about one-third of persons with mental illness seek professional treatment (Bathje & Pryor, 2011). The aim for this study is to discover the relationship between self-stigmas of mental health and Valparaiso University students' use of counseling services. Approximately 200 students at Valparaiso University will be anonymously surveyed regarding their perception of mental health, utilization of counseling services, as well as age, gender, and ethnicity. While numerous studies have been done on the relationship between self-stigmas and public stigma and their implications for usage, little research has been done looking at self-stigma as a primary factor in the usage of counseling services. Based on the findings of our study, implications might include adapting and promoting education and mental health awareness at Valparaiso University.

Information about the Authors:

The five authors of this study are junior social work majors in SOCW 365: Introduction to Methods of Social Research. Mental health counseling is just one career route social work majors are educated about as a potential pursuit after graduation. After recognizing the effects of mental health stigmas on social work students' willingness to utilize counseling services, the research team wanted to examine the effects of mental health stigmas across campus. The authors of this project have an interest in mental health awareness, but recognize that mental health education and awareness can only be promoted with evidence of its necessity. Therefore, mental health stigmas became the focus of this study.

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Student Contact: johannah.facer@valpo.edu