Stigma associated with schizophrenia: The importance of diagnostic label vs. negative symptom presentation

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Background

- Schizophrenia is one of the most highly stigmatized mental disorders\textsuperscript{1}. Stigma and social exclusion are significant barriers to functional recovery\textsuperscript{2,3}.
- Social exclusion results in individuals with schizophrenia having social networks nearly half the size of those found in healthy individuals\textsuperscript{4}.
- Limited social networks\textsuperscript{5} and negative symptoms\textsuperscript{6} are both associated with poorer functional outcomes. Thus, negative symptoms may be important to understand why individuals with schizophrenia are excluded.

Objective

- Investigate how the presence of negative symptoms and/or a diagnosis label of schizophrenia affects social exclusion expressed by healthy individuals.

Hypotheses

- No symptoms + No label \xrightarrow{\text{INCREASED desire for social distance}}
- Symptoms + Label \xrightarrow{\text{DECREASED desire for social distance}}

Methods

- 2 Symptoms: absent vs. present x 2 Label: absent vs. present
- Recorded confederate videos based on this design
- Inclusion criteria: PSYA01/02 students, 18+ years of age, English proficiency
- Exclusion criteria: Less than 4/8 on effort

Study Timeline

- “Record” own video
- View confederate videos
- Confederate-Specific Social Distance Scale
- Social Interaction Scale

Results

Fig. 1. Mean SIS scores by presence of label and symptoms based on Friedman test data. Higher rankings indicate more desire for social distance.

![Graph showing SIS scores](image)

**Fig. 2.** Mean confederate-specific Social Distance scores based on repeated measures ANOVA data. Higher scores indicate greater desire for social distance.

![Graph showing SDS scores](image)

Conclusion and Future Directions

- Negative symptom presentation was more closely related to stigmatizing attitudes expressed by healthy participants. These symptoms may represent a salient cluster of socially-relevant symptoms that affect an individual’s decision to interact with someone with schizophrenia.
- We must increase general awareness and acceptance towards symptoms. These factors influence a diagnosed individuals daily functioning\textsuperscript{7,8}.
- We must increase public acceptance of specific symptom presentations through mental health campaigns. The Coming Out Proud\textsuperscript{9} program works to reduce self-stigma through public disclosure of mental illness.

References


*Note: Variables in bold are significant.*