



Associations Between Self-Stigma and Help-Seeking Behavior

Iahmena Benton, Lawren Norton, Mya Olivarez, Linnea Stahl, Deisy Gonzalez Zapata, Camilo Ruggero, & Nicholas Brewster

Intro

Stigma is a negative response to human differences via stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). Those with mental illness self-stigma “will internalize these ideas and believe that they are less valued because of their psychiatric disorder.” (Holmes, et al., 2006). Self-stigma is associated with more negative attitudes toward seeking mental healthcare. (Yu et al., 2023). However, it is unclear how self-stigma may relate to help-seeking behaviors. We investigated self-stigma’s relation to past year help-seeking.

Hypothesis: Participants who sought help would have less self-stigma than those who did not.

Participants

A subsample of 267 Latino participants was recruited from Prolific. The sample majority female and young adult (female $n = 153$; 57.3%, male $n = 114$; 42.7%, mean age = 26.57). Participants were required to be fluent in Spanish. Subsample participants identified a mental health concern within the past year.

Measures

Self-Stigma – Participants completed a modified Self Stigma of Depression Scale (SSDS; Barney et al., 2010). Higher scores indicate greater self-stigma. The scale was modified to assess self-stigma of general mental illness.

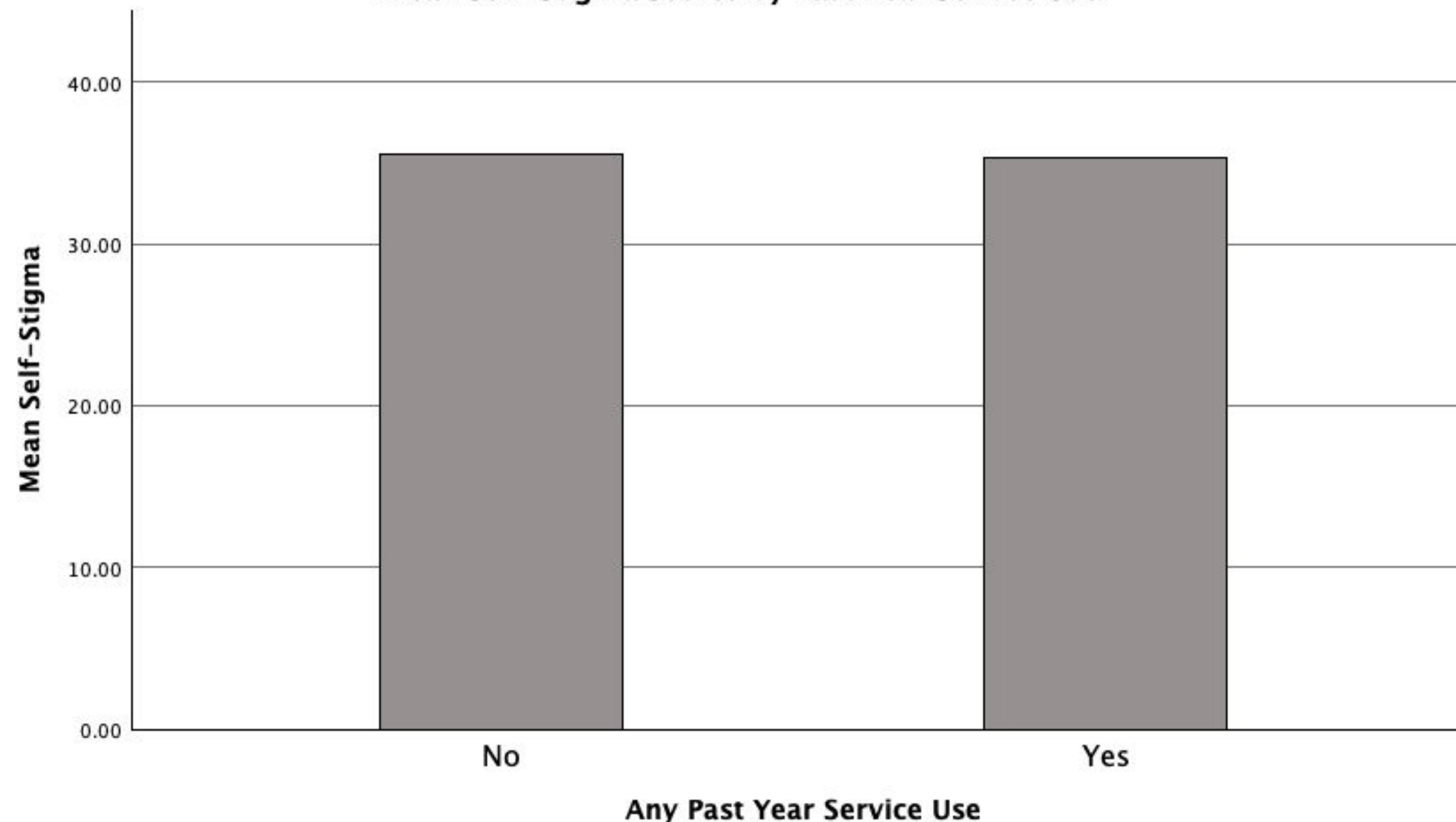
Help-Seeking Behavior – Participants answered either “yes” or “no” to the question: “Have you received mental health treatment or counseling in the past 12 months?”

Procedure

Questions were delivered in Spanish in a larger online survey on help-seeking and psychopathology (median completion time = 1 hr). Participants were compensated \$20 USD.

Methods

Mean Self-Stigma Scores by Past Year Service Use



Results

A independent samples t-test indicated no significant difference in mean self-stigma scores between participants who sought services in the past year ($M = 35.32$; $SD = 11.25$) and participants who did not ($M = 35.56$; $SD = 10.20$), $t(265) = 0.18$, $p = .858$.

Discussion

Contrary to our hypothesis, self-stigma scores did not differ by past year help-seeking. This may be due to sample characteristics such as sample size or Latino only composition. Greater ethnic diversity may have lead to different results given varying cultural perception of mental health. These findings suggest that simply seeking mental health services is not necessarily associated with less self-stigma, challenging the assumption that service use will always correlate with less negative self-perceptions. Future research should investigate what aspects of help-seeking may actually relate to stigma.

Strengths of this study include use of a gender-diverse community sample. However, these findings may not generalize to non-Latino groups; further research is needed to replicate these findings in other populations. Additionally, we did not account for other factors that may influence self-stigma, such as service quality or symptom severity.

Acknowledgements:

Work supported by NIMH grant 3R01MH122537-02S1

