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## Effects of Opinions on Personal Mental Illness Perception

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# A Proposal for Effects of Opinions on Personal Mental Illness Perception

PSY - 4370 Psychology of Aging Capstone (Spring 2020)

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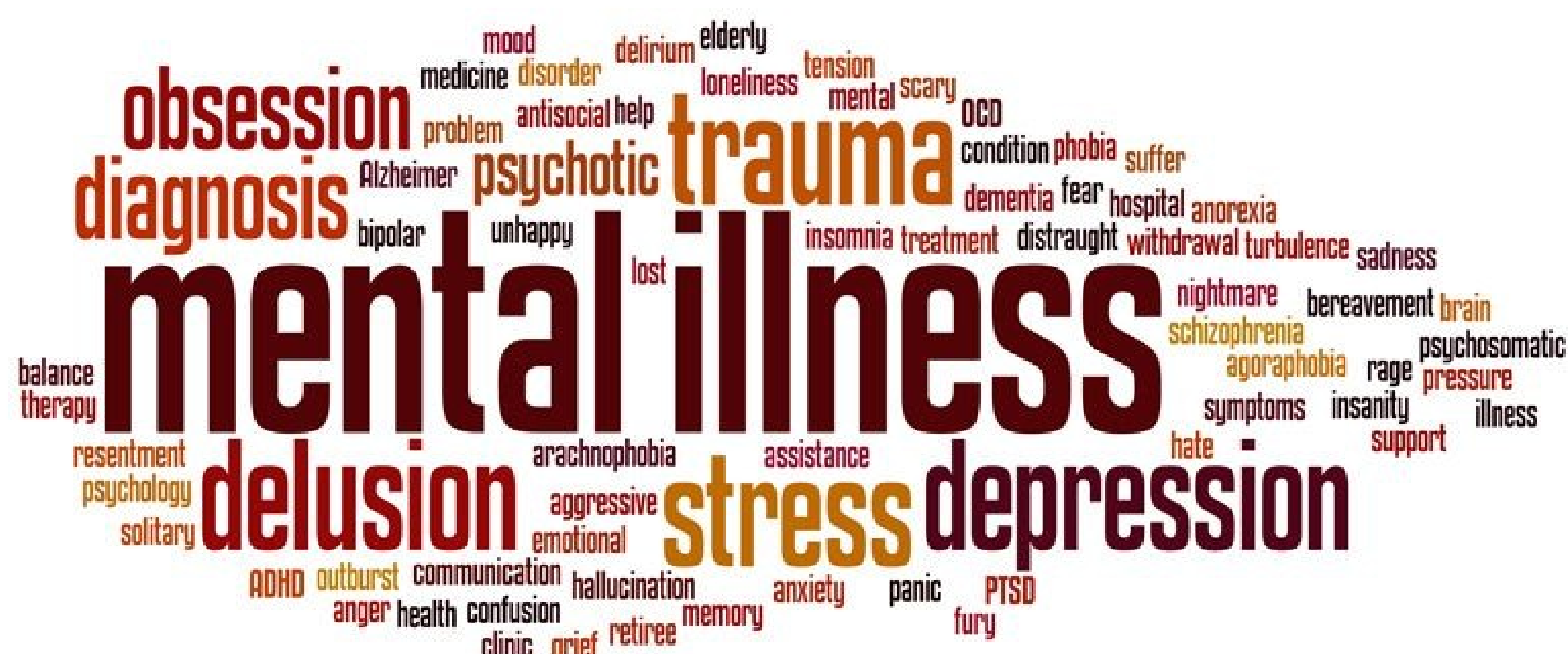
## Abstract

The purpose of this proposed study is to evaluate the effect of outsiders' opinions on individual perceptions of personal mental illness. How treatment is addressed is affected by the individual's perception of the diagnosis, which can be affected by outside opinions. Thirty clients of a mental health clinic will be interviewed before their first and second therapy sessions; before the second session, each participant will be exposed to either a positive, neutral, or negative opinion regarding mental illness. The change in their interview answers will determine how influential they perceived the opinions to be. The survey will identify the participants' feelings of acceptance, resentment, and denial in terms of their mental illness, thereby measuring their general perception of their mental illness. The results are expected to show that exposure to positive opinions lead to acceptance of the condition, while negative opinions lead to resentment or denial of the condition.

## Introduction

The purpose of the proposed study is to investigate the specific effects of negative outside opinions on individuals just beginning therapy. Previous studies surrounding the perception of mental illness fail to provide a focus on the specific effects that a negative stigma can have on a person's perception of mental illness. There is also a lack of research for perception of a person's own mental illness and the variables that affect that perception. The proposed study will aim to identify specific changes in perception of personal mental illness due to direct exposure to various outside opinions surrounding mental illness in general. It will likely find that negative outside opinions positively correlate with an increase in self-stigma and resentment towards the participants' own mental illnesses. This type of pilot study would provide this field of research a good starting point of knowing if opinions do have an impact at all, and how significant that impact is.

Previous research done by Angermeyer and Matschinger (1996) suggested that there is public support for treatment through therapy, but not for drug treatments; this directly goes against what professionals recommend—since many professionals recommend medicinal treatment—suggesting a disconnect between professional opinion and public perception. Further research done by Rossetto, Potts, Reavley, and Henderson (2020) found that education and exposure—being around individual(s) with some form of mental illness—have a significant impact on treatment of those with mental illness, meaning that more education and more exposure leads to better treatment and opinions. In terms of stigmas, Schibalski et al. (2017) found that an increased perception of social stigma lead to people practicing avoidant coping mechanisms such as not talking about their condition and not seeking professional help; this means that if a person with mental illness thinks that people around them judge them for having a mental illness they will not seek treatment. Barr, Davis, Diguiseppi, Keeling, and Castro (2019) found that self-stigma significantly decreases the likelihood of veterans seeking treatment; this means that veterans oftentimes view their mental illness as a “personal problem” that must be dealt with on their own. If they have that opinion, they also practice avoidant coping mechanisms which can lead to a lack of proper care.



## Mental Health: *Issues and Opportunities.*

## Methods

### Participants

The proposed study would consist of at least 30 participants from a single mental health clinic. It could use more if the location had that level of incoming clients. The participants would be the facility's first 30+ new clients that agreed to participate in the study. However, the study would not be able to use clients with a previous diagnosis of a condition that does not handle criticism rationally. This would include things such as borderline personality disorder because individuals that suffer from those kinds of diagnoses can take critique out of context and become a danger to themselves or others.

### Procedure

During the scheduling of their first appointment, the clients would be given the option to participate in the study. If they agree to participate, they would be informed that they would simply answer a few questions before their first two sessions begin. They would be told that the experiment was a survey to see how people view therapy and their mental illness. Prior to the start of the experiment, the participants would have been randomly assigned to one of three opinions groups: positive, neutral, and negative. The positive group would be exposed to strangers discussing how they think therapy is nothing to be ashamed of, and that mental illness does not mean that there is something wrong, simply that they are different, and that mental illnesses should be accepted just like any other part of a person. The neutral group would be exposed to strangers discussing how they don't have an opinion regarding mental illness and going to therapy, and how they wish people would just do whatever they think is best for themselves. The negative group would be exposed to strangers discussing how mental illness is not real, and how they think people are either normal, or they are “crazy.” They will mention that they believe therapy is a waste of time and money. When the participants came in for their first appointment, they would answer questions about their perception of their condition and their views on therapy. They would be given questions such as “How detrimental to your life do you view your own diagnosis?” and then answer by selecting a number 1-10, 1 being extremely detrimental, 10 being not detrimental at all. The questions would all be either a scale of effect—as described previously—or a scale of agreeing or disagreeing. Prior to the second session, the participants would be exposed to strangers discussing their views on mental illness for no more than five minutes in the lobby or waiting area. The questions would be administered at the beginning of the therapy session to limit the time lapse between exposure and testing. The change in the answers would be measured. The participants would be put through debriefing at the end of the session to inform them of the true nature of the study. This would ensure that they understood that whatever opinion they heard was not real or directed at them specifically.

## Predicted Results

The proposed study will use a one-way ANOVA to test the hypotheses that outside opinions have a significant impact on the perception of a person's own mental illness, and—more specifically—that outsider's negative opinions have a significant impact on a person's perception of their own mental illness. This statistical test will allow the researchers to compare the relationships between the different groups potentially caused or influenced by the independent variable. This type of analysis is very realistic for this type of data and would require minimal data manipulation due to the nature of the dependent variable measurement. Likert scales allow the data to be presented quantitatively from the beginning, therefore limiting the required data manipulation. Average differences for each participant group—positive, neutral, and negative—will be obtained by calculating the average difference for each of the participants (from first to second session) in each group. The results would be expected to show that there is a significant difference between average change scores for each group of participants, and that the greatest difference would be between the negative group and the neutral group. This is because the negative and positive groups will likely have similar amounts of change, while the neutral group will likely have less change. However, the results may show that there are no significant differences at all. This could be due to the participants not being affected by the opinion in the expected way. The results would also show that there is a significant difference between some groups, but not all. The most likely instance of that form of results would be that the positive and neutral opinion group were not significantly different, while the negative and the neutral opinion group were significantly different. Resilience of the participants may have a significant impact on the data; this means that the participants with higher levels of resiliency would be less likely to be affected by the independent variable. If the study consisted of a majority of participants with high resiliency, that could potentially make the data fail to reject the null hypothesis; this would not be representative of the portion of the population that does not have a high level of resilience.

## Discussion

Overall, the proposed study would help not only professionals, but also the average person understand how much of an impact outsiders' opinions affect people struggling with mental illness. This is essential to understand because it could help people understand how to create positive environments for those suffering from mental illness. The proposed study would ultimately add to the understanding of mental illness, which is a complex and potentially ever-changing topic. Accessing information that would allow a variety of people to not just understand mental illness better, but also understand their impact on those with mental illness, is critical to providing the most positive atmosphere for those living with mental illness. A healthy, positive atmosphere is important for those suffering from mental illness because that is what allows them to learn to manage their condition in the best way. This type of research is beneficial not only to professionals, but also to individuals suffering from mental illness and those individuals' support systems. This research will tell professionals how significant of an impact outside opinions have on those suffering from mental illness. It will also inform those suffering from mental illness of the potential dangers of taking outside opinions into consideration when determining their own thoughts on their own mental illness. This research could also help people surrounding those with mental illness understand the consequences of them having certain opinions about the individual and their condition. Overall, this research would provide a variety of people with essential information regarding the perception of mental illness.

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