

Social Distance, Psychotropic Medication, & Mental Illness Exposure

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Background

- Social distance is defined as how willing someone is to associate with another individual (Link et al., 1987).
- Personal depression stigma is an individually held attitude that identifies depression as a blemish or detriment (Griffiths et al., 2004).
- Individuals have high levels of social distance towards individuals with depressed (Amarasuriya et al., 2015).
- Although antidepressants are common treatment for depression (Pratt et al., 2011), research has not explored the association between social distance and antidepressant use.
- We measured desired social distance from a vignette character who was diagnosed with depression, diagnosed and taking antidepressants, or an acquaintance. Depression stigma was measured secondarily.
 - We predicted antidepressant medication would elicit social distance additive to that associated with a depression diagnosis.
 - We also expected depression stigma to be positively associated with desired social distance.

Method

- 425 participants recruited from undergraduate psychology classes.
- 19 years of age ($SD=2.91$) and 78% Caucasian
- Participants were randomly assigned to read one of three vignettes.
 - Control** – The participant meets an acquaintance, Sam, and discovers they share similar hobbies.
 - Diagnosed** - The participant meets an acquaintance, Sam, and discovers they share similar hobbies. Sam discloses a depression diagnosis.
 - Diagnosed with Medication** - The participant meets an acquaintance, Sam, and discovers they share similar hobbies. Sam discloses a depression diagnosis and antidepressant prescription.
- Participants completed the Social Distance Scale (Link et al., 1987) specific to Sam.
 - Higher scores indicate less willingness to associate with Sam.
- Participants completed the Depression Stigma Scale (Griffiths et al., 2004)
 - Higher scores indicate more stigmatizing attitudes about individuals diagnosed with depression.

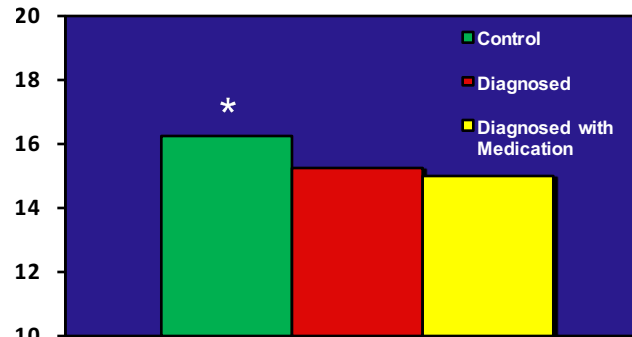


Figure 1. Differences in mean reported social distance comparing vignette groups.
* $p < .05$.

Results

- Participants desired significantly more social distance ($F_{(2,412)} = 5.60, p = .004$) from the individual in the control vignette, $M = 16.24, SD = 3.24$, than in the experimental conditions (diagnosed, $M = 15.25, SD = 3.20$; diagnosed with medication, $M = 14.98, SD = 3.39$; Figure 1).
- Greater social distance was associated with greater depression stigma, $r = .44, p < .001$. Greater depression stigma was associated with being younger, $r = -.15, p = .13$, and male (0 = male, 1 = female), $r = -.16, p = .007$ (see Table 1).
- Personal depression stigma accounted for 19% of variance in social distance scores, $F_{(4,267)} = 16.34, p < .001$ (see Table 2).

Variable	1	2	3	4
Age	–			
Gender	.08	–		
Social Distance	-.03	-.08	–	
Personal Depression Stigma	-.15*	-.16**	.44***	–

Table 1. Correlations between demographic variables, social distance, and personal depression stigma.
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Variable	B	SE B	β
Gender	.15	.38	.02
Age	.05	.06	.05
Experimental Group	.18	.36	.03
Personal Depression Stigma	.27	.03	.45***
R ²	.19		
F	16.34***		

Table 2. Stepwise multiple regression predicting social distance by personal depression stigma while controlling for demographic variables.
*** $p < .001$.

Discussion

- We found that greater social distance was not associated with depression diagnosis or psychotropic medication.
- Greater desired social distance may instead be the result of personally held stigmatizing attitudes regarding depression.
 - Highlights potential effectiveness of interventions that reduce stigmatizing attitudes towards individuals with depression.
- **Limitations:**
 - This study was conducted with a relatively homogeneous sample.
 - The vignette portrayed someone distant or unknown to the participant.
- **Future Research:**
 - Utilize representative sample to identify any cohort or ethnic effects.
 - Portray a person close to the participant (parent or sibling) since participant's attitudes may vary based on familiarity.

References

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