Background

- Individuals diagnosed with depression tend to endorse negative attitudes about themselves due to their mental illness diagnosis (Boyd et al., 2014).
- Levels of empowerment, perceived lack of control, and illness severity have been associated with more depression stigmatization (Brohan et al., 2011).
- Few studies have looked at the effects related to psychotropic medication, which may play a role in mental illness stigma (Boyd et al., 2015).

Research questions

- How does depression diagnosis and being prescribed antidepressant medications impact:
  - Self attitudes
  - Levels of empowerment
  - Optimism/Control over the future
  - Self Esteem/Self-Efficacy

Method

- 425 undergraduate students, on average 19 years of age (SD=2.91), and 78% Caucasian, were recruited from undergraduate psychology classes at a Northeastern University.
- Participants completed the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (McMullen, & Resnick, 2013) and then were exposed to one of three vignettes
  - Control – Participants were told everything was normal in their life
  - Diagnosed – Participants were told they had been diagnosed with depression
  - Diagnosed with medication – Participants were told they had been diagnosed with depression and prescribed antidepressants
- Participants then completed a modified version of the Attitudes Towards Mental Illness Questionnaire (Fekadu et al., 2006).
- Lower scores indicating more negative attitudes towards themselves
  - Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), with two reverse scored questions.
- Finally, an Empowerment Scale (Chamberlin et al., 1997) containing self-esteem/self-efficacy and optimism/control over the future subscales.
- Higher scores indicating more of a particular trait.
- Likert scale from 2 (strongly agree) to +2 (strongly disagree), with two reverse scored questions.
- In addition, an Empowerment Scale (Chamberlin et al., 1997) containing self-esteem/self-efficacy and optimism/control over the future subscales.
- There were no significant differences between groups in overall empowerment or optimism/control over the future (Table 1).

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Results

- Post-vignette exposure, the control group, M=5.20, SD=3.41, had significantly more positive attitudes about themselves compared to the experimental groups (Figure 2 & Table 1).
  - Diagnosed without medication, M=6.70, SD=3.21, and diagnosed with medication groups, M=1.52, SD=3.24, did not significantly differ.
  - In addition, the diagnosed with medication group reported significantly lower self-esteem/self-efficacy, M=2.77, SD=0.77 (Figure 2 & Table 1).
  - No significant differences in self-esteem were exhibited between groups before vignette exposure.
- There were no significant differences between groups in overall empowerment or optimism/control over the future (Table 1).

Discussion

- According to these findings, a depression diagnosis is indicative of negative attitudes about oneself; antidepressants do not have an additive effect.
- A depression diagnosis, paired with an antidepressant prescription, has a negative effect on self-esteem/self-efficacy.
- Lower self-esteem/self-efficacy levels may be explained by perceived lack of control or severity of illness (Juth et al., 2008).
- This knowledge may contribute to guiding future research on antidepressant medications role in mental illness stigma.

References

Hashemi, F., Coughlin, J., Bentley, N., & Hornsby, S. (2013). Validation of a brief instrument to measure stigmatization: The internalized stigma of mental illness简短版本。Psychiatric Services, 38, 1.046-1.047.