

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: The Effect of Self-Stigma on Mental Health Help-Seeking and the Mediating Role of Health Beliefs.

STUDENT: Derek M. Gosman

DEGREE: Doctor of Philosophy

COLLEGE: College of Health

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Mental health stigma is a widespread deterrent of decisions to seek treatment for mental illness, yet little is known about how its discouraging effects compare to other treatment obstacles (e.g., external barriers) or its relationship with other mental health-related beliefs and attitudes. The current study used a predictive model of health behavior, known as the Health Belief Model (HBM), to test the relationship between internalized stigma and psychological help-seeking intentions. Self-report measures of internalized stigma, counseling experience, help-seeking intentions, and HBM components (i.e., perceived severity of mental illness, self-efficacy for help-seeking, perceived external barriers, and perceived benefits) were completed by 465 U.S. adults. Of the three models compared, the model specifying a partially mediated relationship between internalized stigma and help-seeking intentions via the HBM components was the best fit. Counseling history and all HBM components except perceived severity were significantly related to help-seeking intentions. The researcher concluded the relationship between internalized stigma and help-seeking intentions is partially explained by beliefs about the availability and personal benefit of help-seeking.