# Methods of Changing Attitudes about Mental Illness

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## Abstract

- This study looked at the methods of reducing the public's stigmatized views of mental illnesses, especially in perceptions of dangerousness that result in a desire for social distance. Research indicates videos may be effective means of reducing stigma.

## Introduction

- Studies show the public holds stigmatized views of people with mental illnesses, especially in perceptions of dangerousness that result in a desire for social distance (Link, Phelan, Bresnahan, Stueve, & Pescosolido, 1999), but research into methods of reducing this stigma is fairly limited.
- The use of empathy has been shown to lead to more positive attitudes towards stigmatized groups (Batson et al., 1997).
- In terms of mental illness, targeting a specific mental illness is more effective than targeting mental illness as a whole (Parcesepe & Cabassa, 2013).
- This study looked at methods of reducing stigmatized views towards schizophrenia.

## Method

### Present Study/Hypotheses

- In this study, I wished to apply previous research on mental illness stigma to find a practical, effective method of reducing stigmatized views of schizophrenia.
- It was hypothesized that being presented with information through video would have a more positive effect on attitudes towards schizophrenia than information presented in transcripts.
- It was hypothesized that information presented with an emotional message would have a more positive effect on attitudes towards schizophrenia than information presented with a purely educational message.
- It was also hypothesized that there would be an interaction between the way in which the message is presented, video or transcript, and the appeal of the message, emotional or educational, where videos with emotional appeal will have a more positive effect on attitudes towards schizophrenia.

### Materials:

- Attitudes about Schizophrenia Questionnaire
- Community Attitudes Toward Mentally Ill (Taylor & Dear, 1981): Included the “Authoritarianism”, “Benevolence”, and “Social Restrictiveness” sections to measure attitudes towards schizophrenia
- Attribution Questionnaire (Corrigan, Markowitz, Watson, Rowan, & Kubik, 2003): Included the “Familiarity with Mental Illness”, “Pity”, “Anger”, and “Fear” sections to measure familiarity and emotional responses towards people with schizophrenia.
- Videos/Transcripts
  - Informational (Howcast): An educational video describing the symptoms and diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder in the DSM-5
  - Emotional (NAMIvideo): A video of a woman describing her delusions, hallucinations, and other experiences before diagnosis with schizophrenia and eventually schizoaffective disorder.

### Design and Procedure:

- A 2 (presentation: video vs. transcript) x 2 (message: emotional vs. informational) between subjects design was used.
- Participants filled out a demographics questionnaire and the Attitudes about Schizophrenia Questionnaire.
- They then either watched one of the videos or read one of the transcripts which either presented information or an emotional message about schizophrenia.
- They then filled out the Attitudes about Schizophrenia Questionnaire again.

## Results

- Analyses tested changes in variables using a two-way ANOVA
- Results showed an emotional message caused an increase in authoritarian views than informational messages (F(1, 47) = 19.68, p = .000).
- The emotional message also resulted in participants feeling more pity towards people with schizophrenia (F(1, 47) = 8.85, p = .005), but also more fear (F(1, 47) = 6.14, p = .017) than the informational message.
- Results also showed videos increased views of social restrictiveness (F(1, 47) = 3.33, p = .075).
- No interaction between presentation and message was present.

## Discussion

- Videos and Emotional messages did have significant effects on attitudes towards schizophrenia; however, those effects were not always as positive as expected.
- It was expected that emotional empathy inducing messages would have a positive effect on attitudes because research has shown empathy to lead to more positive attitudes about stigmatized groups, but emotional messages lead to more authoritarian views and fear and only lead to a positive change in pity.
- My results may be due to the video chosen for the emotional message. The woman in the video was extremely transparent in her descriptions of the thoughts and emotions accompanying her delusions and subsequent suicide attempts. Though that detail did have an intended effect, increasing pity, it also may have resulted in more fear and authoritarian attitudes.
- It is also possible that these changes are due to the sample used in this study, which had little experience with people with schizophrenia. This inexperience may have led to a fear response and it is possible that further exposure could reduce that response and eventually lead to positive attitude change.
- It was expected that videos would have a large effect on attitudes because research suggests exposure is the most effective method of reducing stigma (Matteo & You, 2012), but videos had very little effect on attitudes, and if it did have an effect, it increased stigmatized views. This could indicate that videos are not enough exposure to induce positive change. 47 “exposure” is limited to actual face-to-face interaction with a person with the disorder.