

Comparing Stigma Towards Symptoms of Psychological Disorders and Disorder Names

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Introduction

Stigma towards individuals with psychological disorders is characterized by prejudicial attitudes and discriminating behavior toward individuals with a psychological disorder (Davey, 2013). While there have been significant efforts to reduce stigma towards psychological disorders (e.g., through public service announcements), it is unclear if individuals may still hold stigma toward the symptoms of psychological disorders. There is a lack of research examining stigma towards the symptoms of psychological disorders. Within the same individuals, this study compared levels of stigma towards the DSM-V symptoms and the names of psychological disorders.

Methods and Materials

129 undergraduate students in a small, private university setting completed a researcher-developed online survey that assessed their levels of stigma towards the symptoms of a selection of psychological disorders and also the names of each disorder. The forty items on the inventory were rated on a 5-point Likert-type response format, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Sample Survey Questions

Stigma Towards DSM-V Symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder:

1. People who feel worthless are weak
2. I would not want to be friends with someone who has depressed mood most of the day
3. People who sleep excessively and feel fatigued could stop their problematic behavior if they put their mind to it
4. People who feel little interest or pleasure in everyday life should be ashamed of themselves

Stigma Towards Name of Major Depressive Disorder:

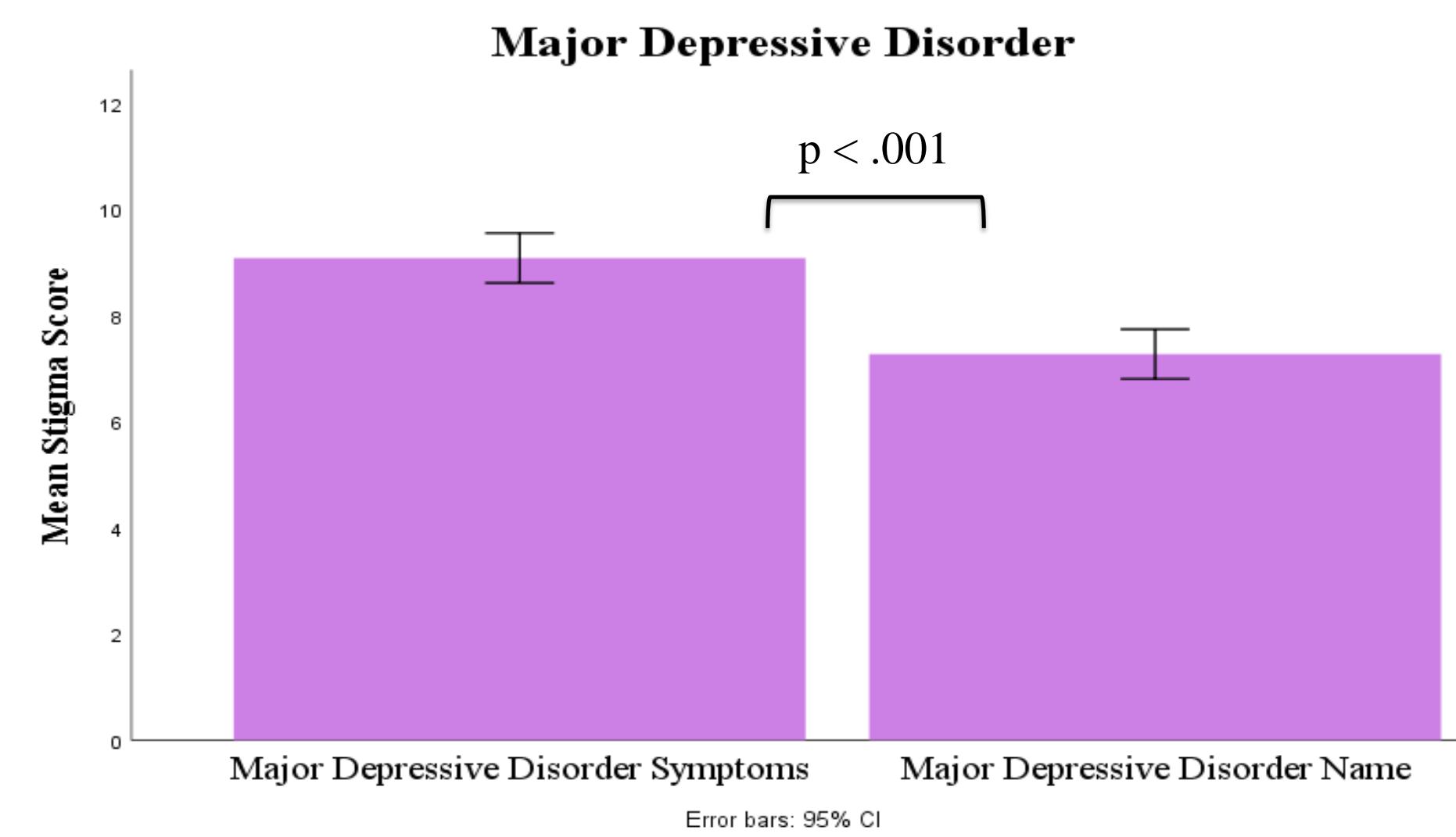
1. People with major depressive disorder are weak
2. I would not want to be friends with someone with major depressive disorder
3. People with major depressive disorder could stop their problematic behavior if they put their mind to it
4. People with major depressive disorder should be ashamed of themselves

Participant Demographics

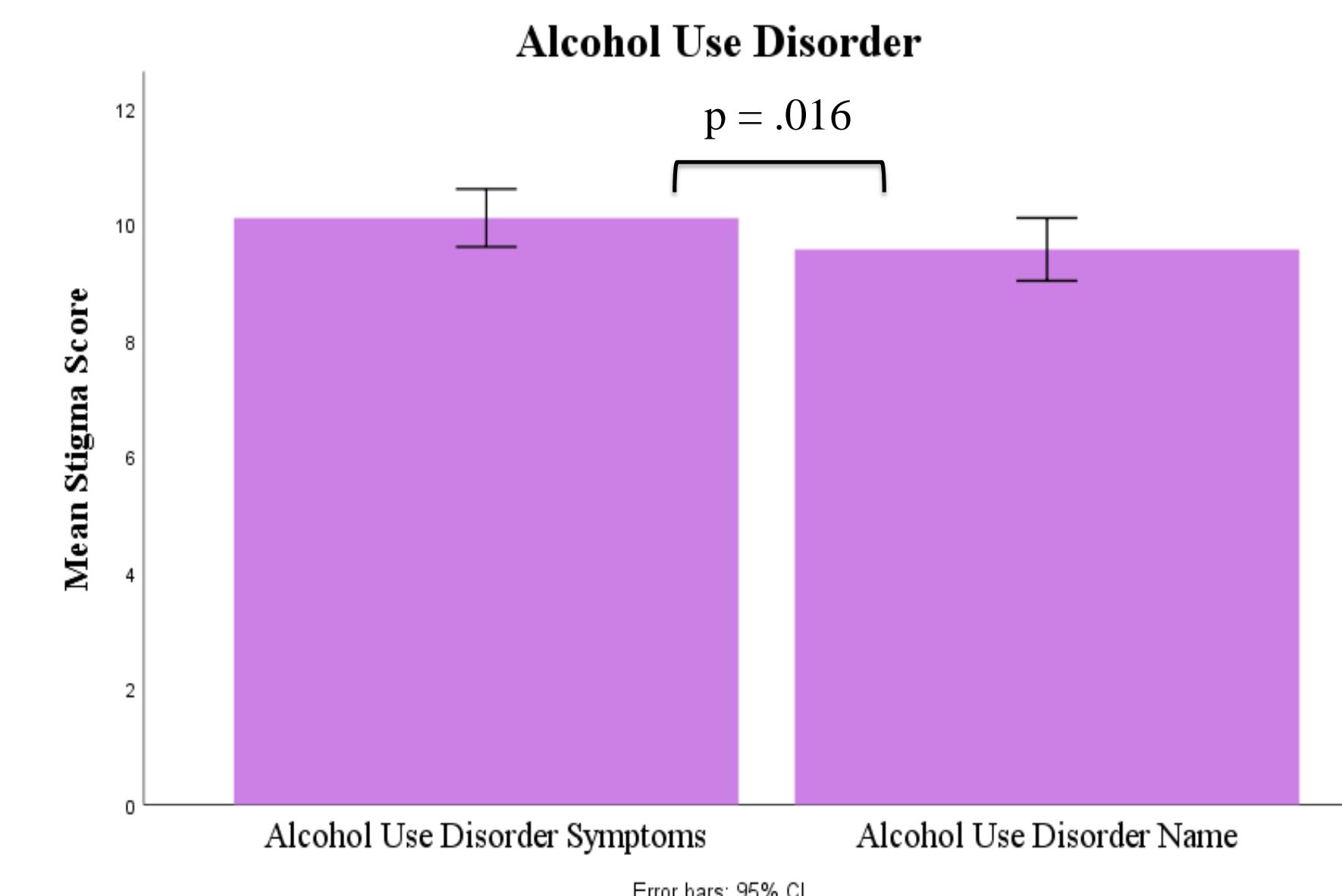
Gender N (%)	Male	37 (28.2)
	Female	92 (70.2)
College Year N (%)	Freshman	48 (36.6)
	Sophomore	49 (37.4)
	Junior	23 (17.6)
	Senior	10 (7.6)
Race N (%)	White	122 (93.1)
	Black or AA	3 (2.3)
	Hispanic or Latino	4 (3.1)
	Asian	0 (0)
	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0 (0)
	Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	0 (0)
	Other	1 (.8)

Results

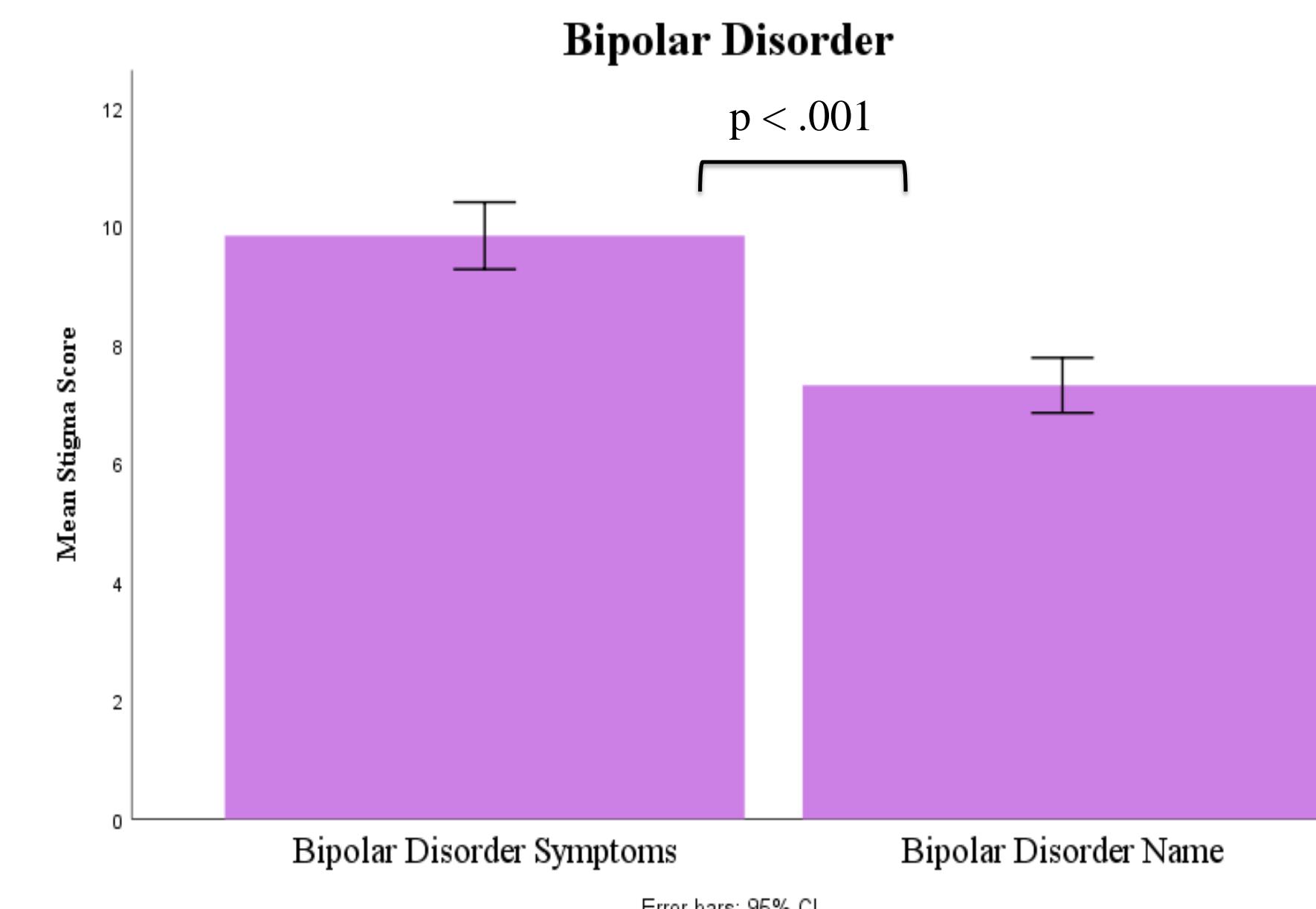
Results from a paired samples t-test showed significantly more stigma towards the symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder ($M=9.08$, $SD=2.71$) than the name Major Depressive Disorder ($M=7.27$, $SD=2.70$); $t (131)= 9.01, p<.001$.



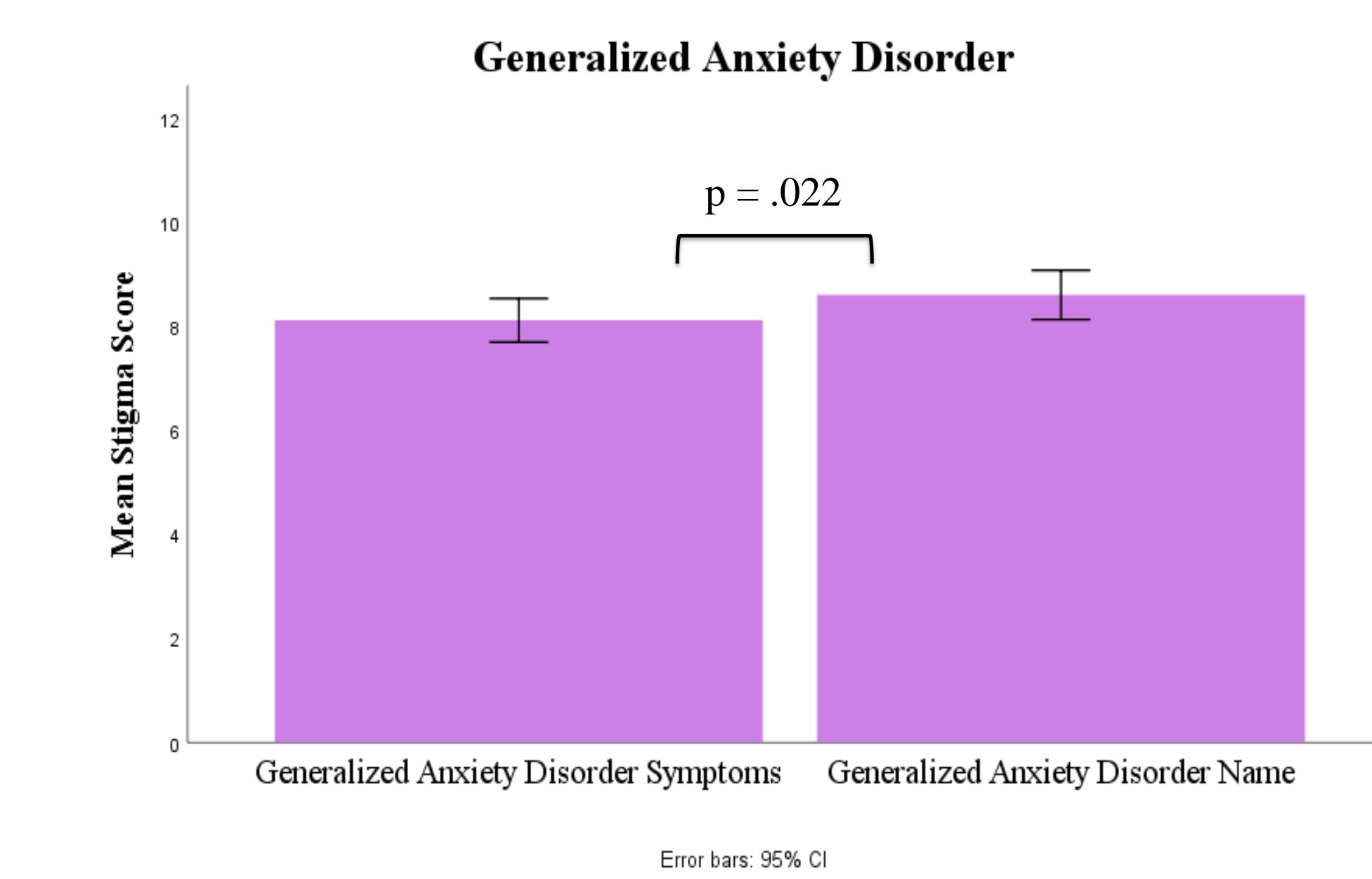
There was significantly more stigma towards the symptoms of Alcohol Use Disorder ($M=10.11$, $SD=2.88$) than the name Alcohol Use Disorder ($M=9.56$, $SD=3.13$); $t (131)= 2.45, p=.016$.



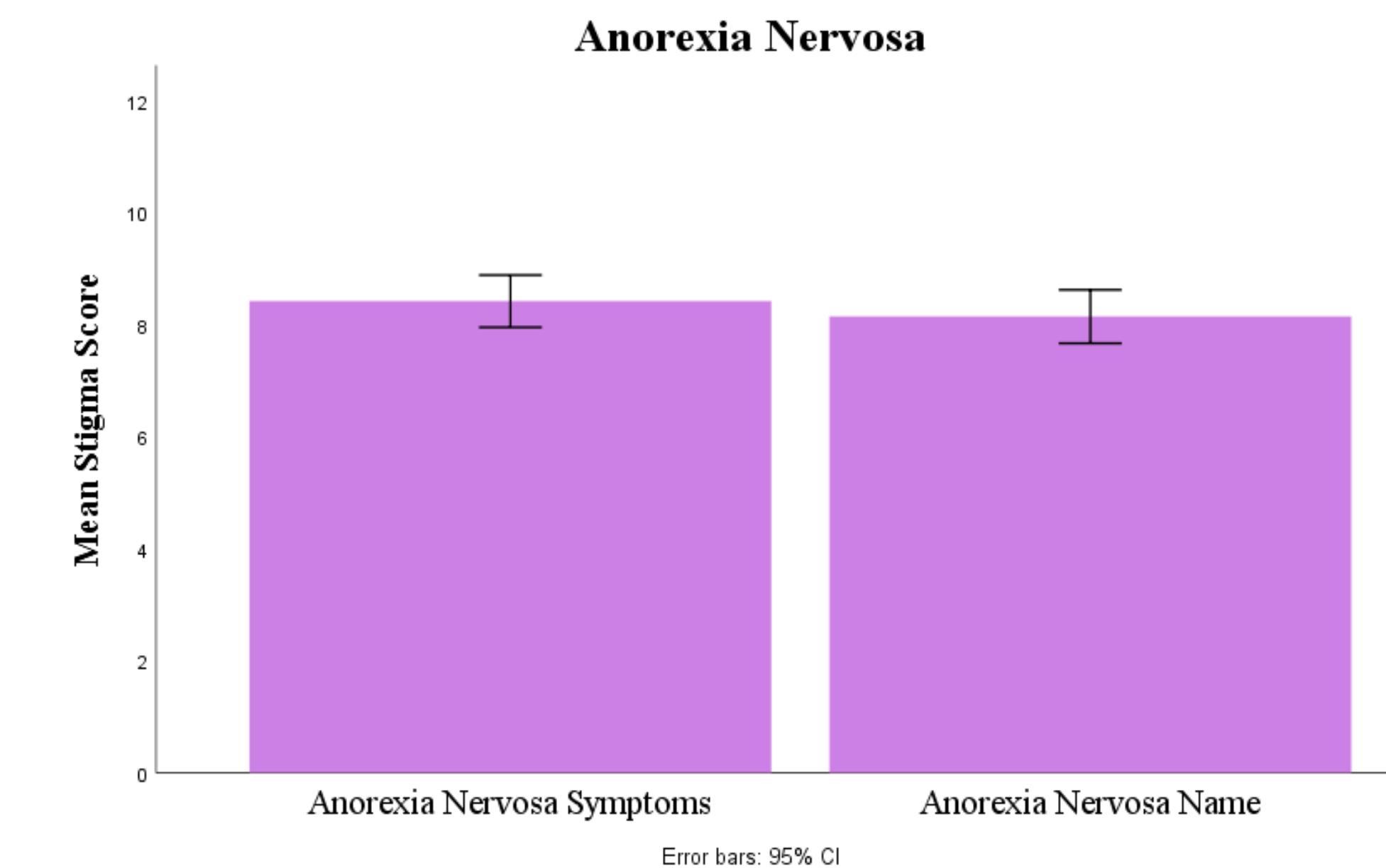
There was significantly more stigma associated with symptoms of Bipolar Disorder ($M=9.84$, $SD=3.26$) than the name Bipolar Disorder ($M=7.32$, $SD=2.68$); $t (130)=9.43, p<.001$.



There was significantly more stigma towards the name Generalized Anxiety Disorder ($M = 8.60$, $SD = 2.75$) than the symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder ($M = 8.11$, $SD = 2.43$); $t (131)= -2.32, p = .022$.



There was no significant difference between the stigma towards the symptoms of Anorexia Nervosa ($M=8.42$, $SD=2.61$) and the name Anorexia Nervosa ($M=8.15$, $SD=2.77$); $t (131)= 1.48, p=.140$.



Conclusions

- In general, for three disorders (major depressive disorder, alcohol use disorder, and bipolar disorder) there was significantly more stigma towards the symptoms of the disorders than the name of the disorders.
- It is possible that even people who report low levels of stigma towards the name of a disorder may still have a lack of knowledge about the symptoms that are associated with some psychological disorders.
- A limitation of this study is the lack of diversity and the small sample size.
- Future studies should examine whether participant education related to physiological disorders is associated with reduced stigma towards the *symptoms* of those disorders. If so, intervention programs on college campuses could focus on educating students about the symptoms of psychological disorders, in hopes of further decreasing psychological stigma toward others.

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References

Davey, G. C. (2013, August 20). Mental health and stigma. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/why-we-worry/201308/mental-health-stigma>