

Lack of Mental Health Services Utilization: The Potential Impact of Stigma Towards Mental Illness

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INTRODUCTION

- College students are at heightened risk for developing mental health issues.
- 95% of the college counselors recognized a significant increase in both the severity and incidence of mental health conditions among college students.¹ However, only 31% utilized counseling services.²
- We predict stigma could explain the disparity between high prevalence of mental health issues and the low utilization of mental health services among college students.

OBJECTIVES

To determine whether stigma towards mental illness impacts perceptions regarding the utilization of mental health services among college students.

METHODOLOGY

- A cross-sectional online survey was posted on social media and sent via email to UCSD undergraduate public health students.
- Questionnaire items consisted of questions on demographics, stigma towards mental health, and attitudes towards seeking mental health services.
- A total of 90 UCSD students participated in the survey between April and May 2020.
- Pearson chi-square tests were conducted to examine the association between potential stigma and negative attitudes towards treatment.

RESULTS

		N (%)
College Year	Undergrad 1st	8 (8.9%)
	Undergrad 2nd	12 (13.3%)
	Undergrad 3rd	11 (12.2%)
	Undergrad 4th	34 (37.8%)
	Undergrad 5th or more	4 (4.4%)
Age	Graduate	21 (23.4%)
	18-25	87 (96.7%)
Gender	Over 25	3 (3.3%)
	Female	63 (70%)
	Male	26 (28.9%)
	Non-Binary	1 (1.1%)

Figure 1: Students' current self-reported mental health status

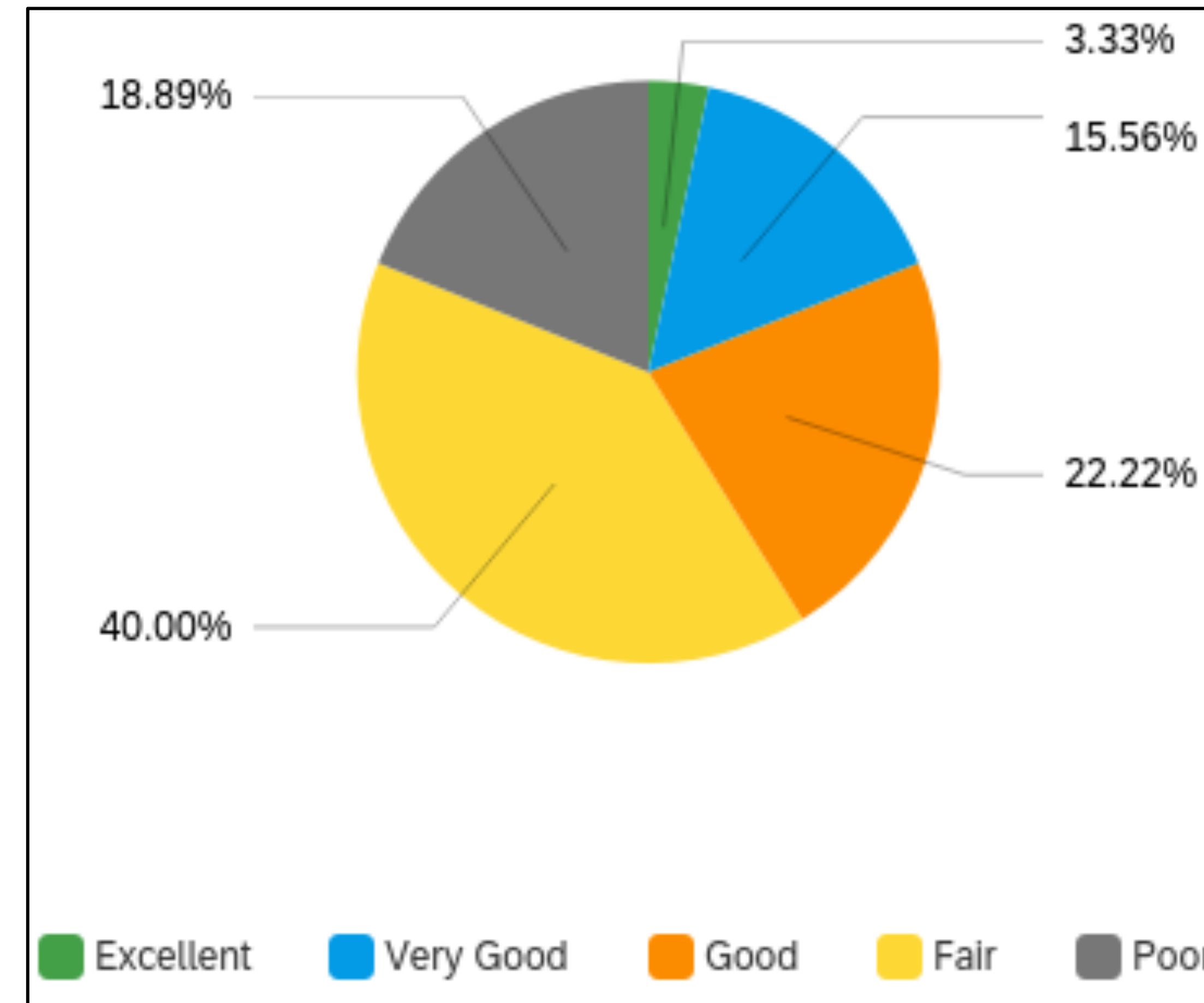
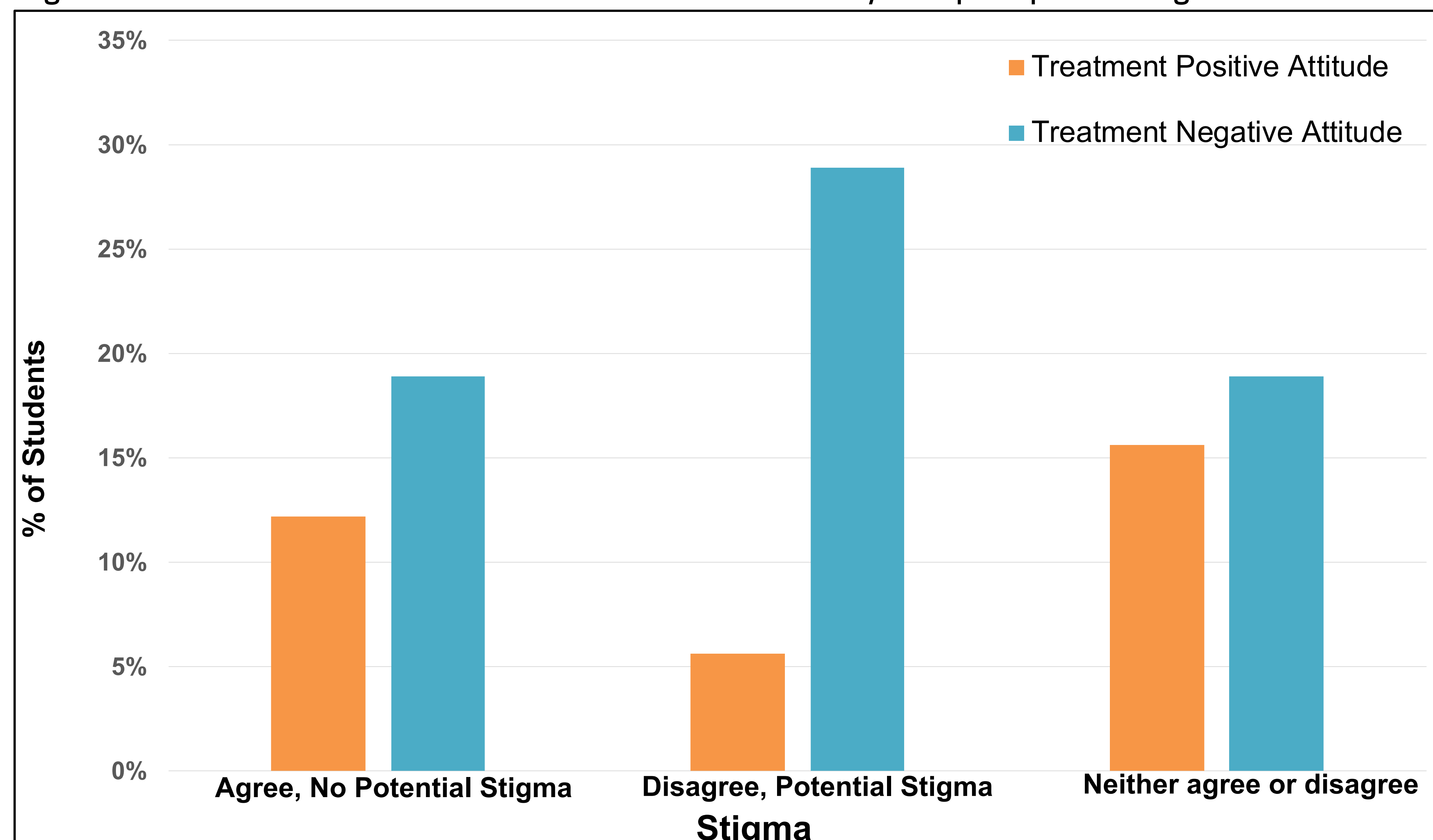


Figure 2: Student's attitude towards mental health treatment by their perception of stigma



A significant association was found between perceived stigma and negative attitudes towards mental health treatment ($p=0.038$).

CONCLUSIONS

- Students who have a perceived stigma towards mental illness may be more likely to have a perceived negative attitude towards mental health treatment.
- A negative attitude towards mental health services could explain the the low utilization of mental health services among college students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- More research needs to be done to examine the impact of stigma and mental health service utilization among college students.
- Policies need to address reducing negative attitudes towards mental health services, such as implementing mental health education in colleges.

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