



Centring Young People in Research: Expanding a mental illness stigma measure for use with adolescent populations

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•BACKGROUND

- Much past research into mental illness stigma has utilised measures of stereotypes primarily developed with adult populations.
- However, it cannot be assumed that children and adolescents conceptualise mental illness in the same way that adults do. Therefore, existing stigma measures may not capture mental illness stereotypes that are unique to this population.
- This pilot study aimed to qualitatively examine stereotypes relating to a number of clinical anxiety disorders in an adolescent sample, in order to expand and improve on an existing stigma measure for use in a future study.

•METHOD

- The study utilised an exploratory qualitative design.



- Short vignettes were used to investigate adolescents perceptions of three clinical anxiety disorders (Panic Disorder, Generalised Anxiety Disorder and Social Anxiety Disorder) and a control scenario, situational stress.
- Responses were analysed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS

In addition to established anxiety stereotypes such as 'personal weakness', a number of unique stereotypes emerged:

Attention-Seeker

"A person who over-exaggerates"
"drama-queen"
"attention-seeker, dramatic"

Socially Abnormal

"Odd"
"Strange"
"Weirdo"

Not Good Company

"Bitchy, rude"
"Closed-off"
"Boring"

DISCUSSION

Stereotypes relating to the *negative social implications* of anxiety disorders were prominent among adolescents. This may reflect the central role of peer relationships in adolescents' lives. Social stereotypes are particularly significant given previous research showing that children and young people with mental health difficulties experience significant peer relationship difficulties including social rejection and discrimination.

This study illustrates the importance of ensuring that survey measures are appropriate to the age group being studied. By developing measures in collaboration with young people, it can be ensured that their unique perspectives are included in the research literature.