**A Quantitative Investigation into the Gender Differences of Mental Health Stigma Between Peers in a University Environment.**

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The student population is particularly vulnerable to poor mental health. The Cibyl Mental Health Study surveys over 12,000 students from almost 150 universities in the UK each year, and in 2022 they found that as many as 80% of students were impacted by mental health difficulties, an increase from previous years (Cibyl, 2022). However, mental illness has a low reporting rate and fear of judgement or discrimination prevents seeking help. There are numerous factors that may influence attitudes surrounding mental health. In particular, there is evidence of gender having an impact on how individuals respond to those with a mental health condition. The pattern in the literature suggests that women generally demonstrate more positive and less negative views than males. For example, Brown et al. (2018) investigated the gender differences in self-disclosure in over 1000 students across five universities and found that males were less likely to disclose mental illness and more reluctant to reach out for support due to fear of receiving stigma from their peers. The majority of research on gender and stigma focuses primarily on how the gender of the perceiver alters the way in which they respond to someone with symptoms of mental illness. However, few studies look at how stigma attitudes differ both in terms of between genders and the gender of the target individual. This study explores how gender can impact stigmatising views of mental health between peers in a university environment, and hypothesise that males will both receive and give more stigma towards mental illness than women. This was investigated with a sample of 189 students, using a new stigma measure developed by Paterson et al. (2021) in which participants were randomly assigned to a set of specific gender vignettes depicting hypothetical students struggling with symptoms of mental illness. Participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire evaluating their stigma response towards the peer. Through a mixed design ANOVA, the results revealed a significant main effect of the gender of the participant and the condition of the vignette, but no significant main effect for the gender of the vignette. The findings provide partial support for the hypothesis as they confirm that males were less favourable than females towards their peer struggling with mental illness, but they do not reveal that participants were more stigmatising towards males than females. Overall, the present study does confirm that gender has an impact on mental health stigma and, therefore, emphasises the importance in gaining a deeper understanding of the subject to help better inform future interventions and improve treatment-seeking.

**References**

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