ABSTRACT
PRIMARY AND FAMILY STIGMA OF MENTAL ILLNESS: COMPARING PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS AND EUROPEAN AMERICANS

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Research has shown that stigma is a significant barrier to mental health treatment seeking, and that African Americans tend to have significantly lower rates of treatment seeking compared to European Americans (Wang et al., 2005). Stigma affecting the individual directly is called primary stigma (Corrigan & Kleinlein, 2005), whereas stigma affecting the individual’s family members is referred to as family stigma. In the present study, a vignette was presented to 287 undergraduate students at Marquette University. The study examined attitudes of primary and family stigma toward a target based on race (European American or African American) and type of mental illness (drug dependence or schizophrenia). Participants completed the Attribution Questionnaire-27 (AQ-27), Family Questionnaire (FQ), Level of Familiarity Scale (LOF), Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS), Just World Scale (JWS), and Social Desirability Scale (SDS). MANOVAs were conducted to determine main effects and interaction effects of the target’s race and type of mental illness on the stigma ratings for primary and family stigma of the target. In the primary stigma condition, it was found that there were higher stigma ratings for the target with drug dependence compared to the target with schizophrenia. No significant differences were found in stigma ratings based on the target’s race or the interaction between race and mental illness. In the family stigma condition, the individual who had a family member with drug dependence yielded higher stigma ratings compared to the target whose family member had schizophrenia. No significant differences were found between stigma ratings based on the target’s race or the interaction between race and mental illness of the family member. This study was the first to examine the relationship between race, mental illness, and family stigma ratings. Future studies can examine differences that include additional mental illnesses and additional ethnicities than the ones examined in the current study. Future studies can also further examine the impact of the race of the perceiver on stigmatizing attitudes.