

# STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF POST-SECONDARY INSTRUCTORS WHO DISCLOSE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF MENTAL ILLNESS: ATTITUDINAL AND BEHAVIOURAL IMPLICATIONS.

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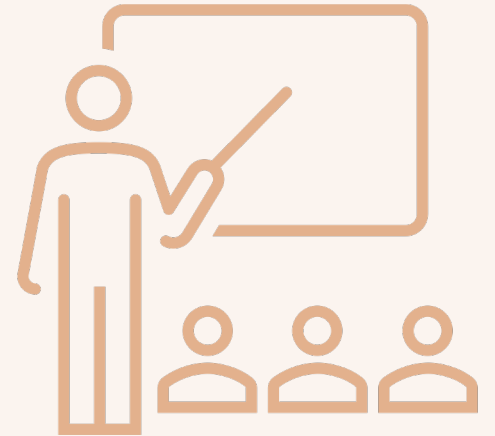
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# BACKGROUND

Mental illness among post-secondary instructors:

- Overall, there's a lack of research
- Nearly two-thirds of Canadian academics report mental health challenges (e.g., anxiety, depression, burnout; Mantler et al., 2021)
- Disclosing mental illness challenges is associated with an array of perceived risks and benefits for instructors (Bridgeman, 2020; England, 2016; White, 2008)
  - E.g., risks: stigma and discrimination
  - E.g., benefits: normalization, destigmatization



# BACKGROUND

What do students think?

- Most research on the impacts of instructor disclosures is from the instructor's perspective and/or comes from autoethnographic and case study reports (e.g., England, 2016; White, 2008)

## ***Purposes of present study:***

- Assess how disclosures in the classroom shape students' perceptions of their instructor and their attitudes toward mental illness
- Explore whether students believe instructors should disclose to students



# METHOD

**316  
STUDENTS**

Most students ( $M_{age} = 20.78$ ;  $SD = 3.98$ ) were White (71.9%), cisgender (97.7%), domestic (95.1%) students; 66.6% were women and 31.4% were men

**5  
INSTRUCTORS**

Instructors (all women) disclosed anxiety, depression, postpartum mental illness, ADHD, autism, dyslexia, bipolar disorder

**14  
COURSES**

9 undergraduate courses:  $n = 302$  (95.6%)  
2 graduate courses:  $n = 14$  (4.4%)

**5  
DISCIPLINES**

Kinesiology:  $n = 162$  (51.3%)      Education:  $n = 24$  (7.6%)  
History:  $n = 79$  (25.0%)              Engineering:  $n = 7$  (2.2%)  
Psychology:  $n = 44$  (13.9%)

# THE SURVEY

## PERCEPTIONS ABOUT INSTRUCTOR

Perceptions (e.g., *“My instructor is competent.”*)

Behavioural Intentions (e.g., *“How comfortable would you feel approaching this professor for academic assistance?”*)

Shifting Perceptions/Intentions (e.g., *“After learning that the instructor lives with mental illness, my sense of their competency:”*)

## MENTAL ILLNESS STIGMA, LITERACY, KNOWLEDGE

Mental Illness Stigma Questionnaire (Day et al., 2007)

Mental Health Literacy Scale (O’Connor & Casey 2015)

Mental Health Knowledge Schedule (Evans-Lacko et al., 2010)

## ADDITIONAL ITEMS

*“Do you think university instructors should disclose personal experiences with mental illness to their students, provided they feel comfortable doing so?”*

*“Did having an instructor with mental illness influence your attitudes toward people with mental illness?”*

# STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Well over half ( $n = 187$ ; 61.3%) had **personally experienced** mental illness, and 72.7% ( $n = 136$ ) of these individuals experienced multiple forms of mental illness.

MOST COMMONLY REPORTED MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS	
Anxiety disorder(s)	152 (49.8%)
Depressive disorder(s)	110 (36.1%)
Feeding/eating disorder(s)	57 (18.7%)
Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder	55 (18.0%)
Obsessive-compulsive disorder	29 (9.5%)
Post-traumatic stress disorder	28 (9.2%)

Most ( $n = 251$ ; 82.3%) also reported knowing **someone close to them** (e.g., family member) who had experienced mental illness.

# RESULTS

Measure	M(SD)	Midpoint
Perceptions	31.60(3.56)	21
Behavioural Intentions	17.30(2.55)	12
Shifting Perceptions/Intentions	37.08(5.96)	30

Overall, students indicated having positive attitudes and behavioural intentions and, on average, their perceptions and intentions *improved* following their instructors' disclosures.

Measure	M(SD)	Midpoint
Mental Illness Stigma	43.57(9.65)	64
Mental Illness Literacy	14.51(3.03)	12
Mental Illness Knowledge	37.83(3.95)	30

On average, students had positive attitudes toward mental illness and demonstrated mental illness literacy and knowledge.

# RESULTS

## Correlations

\*\*  $p = .01$ , \*  $p = .05$

	Stigma	Literacy	Knowledge
Perceptions	-.187**	.191**	.330**
Behaviour	-.119*	.216**	.145**
Shifting Perceptions	-.023	.064	.228**

Students' perceptions of their instructor were associated with mental illness stigma, literacy, and knowledge.

## Comparison Tests: Personal Experiences of Mental Illness

Measure	Yes <i>M(SD)</i>	No <i>M(SD)</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Perceptions	32.14(3.02)	30.87(4.03)	199.58	-2.92	.002	.37
Intentions	17.56(2.26)	16.96(2.92)	203.74	-1.92	.028	.24
Shifting Perceptions	38.22(6.17)	35.14(4.96)	179.66	-3.89	<.001	.53

On average, students with personal experience of mental illness rated their instructor more favorably than those without experiences of mental illness.



# RESULTS

## Question

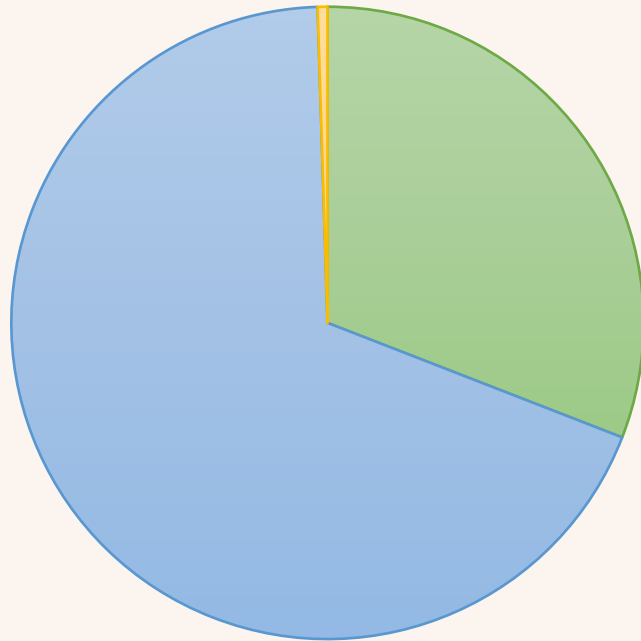
Did having an instructor with a mental illness influence your attitudes toward people with mental illness?

$M = 2.30, SD = .47$       **Midpoint = 2**

## Example Responses

No change: *“I don’t define my attitude towards someone else on whether or not they struggle with mental illness.”*

More positive: *“I did not think people with a PhD and a mental illness was common or even seen at all.”*



■ More positive   ■ No change   ■ Less positive

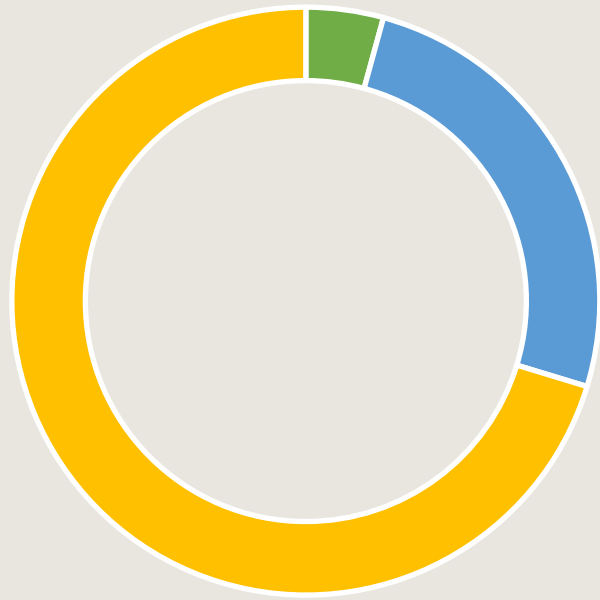
## Response Frequencies $n(\%)$

Less positive attitudes = 1(0.5%)

No change = 142(68.6%)

More positive attitudes = 64(30.9%)

# RESULTS



■ No ■ Unsure ■ Yes

## Response Frequencies $n(\%)$

No = 8(3.9%)

Unsure = 48(23.3%)

Yes = 150(72.8%)

## Question

Do you think university instructors should disclose personal experiences with mental illness to their students, provided they feel comfortable doing so?

$M = 2.69, SD = .54$       **Midpoint = 2**

## Example Responses

No: *“Unless a student specifically needs help, I don’t think it’s anyone else’s business to know.”*

Unsure: *“It depends on the context. Class. Reason for disclosure. What the instructor feels about disclosure.”*

Yes: *“I think it would help students like me have positive role models who struggle with similar issues and disrupts narratives about the abilities of people with mental illness.”*

# DISCUSSION

- Overall, students had positive perceptions of their professors with mental illness and this was especially true for those with:
  - Positive attitudes toward and knowledge about mental illness
  - Personal experiences of mental illness
- Post-secondary instructors who disclose may help destigmatize mental illness
- Students had positive attitudes toward instructors disclosing in the classroom
  - This was particularly true for those with personal experiences of mental illness

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