

Using Strength-Based Language to Decrease Stigma Associated with Psychiatric Hospitalization

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Abstract

This study investigated if using “strength-based language” (recovery focused) instead of “deficit-based language” (illness focused) can mitigate stigmatization judgments. Undergraduates (n=84) read a strength-based or deficit-based description of a character that had been hospitalized and then were asked to express their willingness to interact with this person (e.g. “rent a room with person”). Participants reading the strength-based description were significantly more willing to interact with the character than those who read the deficit-based description, indicating that language choice can in fact mitigate stigmatization.

Background

The language used to describe people with mental illness can affect stigmatizing attitudes (Reali et al., 2015). The current study examined if stigma associated with hospitalization can be decreased using Strength-Based Language.

- **Strength-Based Language (SBL):** puts emphasis on recovery potential instead of problems associated with mental illness (Cuttler & Ryckman, 2018).

Example of Strength-Based Language: “*uses medication as a recovery tool,*” instead of “*is reliant on medication*”.

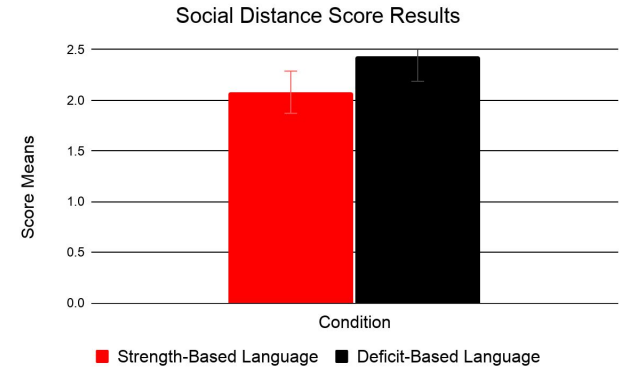
Experimental Design & Procedure

- Undergraduates (N=84) were randomly assigned to either the deficit-based language condition (n=40) or the strength-based language condition (n=44).
- Each participant read one description of a character that had been recently discharged from inpatient psychiatric treatment to the community.
- After this, they completed a questionnaire asking them to express their willingness to engage different activities with the character on a social distance scale (e.g “rent a room with this person”).

Results

- Participants in the **strength-based language condition** (M=2.08, SD=0.65) were **significantly more willing to engage in social activities** with the characters than participants in the deficit-based language condition (M=2.43, SD=0.64), $t(82) = 2.48, p = .01, d = 0.54$.

A higher score indicates more stigmatizing attitudes.



Conclusion

- Our Hypotheses were supported
- Strength-based language may be helpful in decreasing stigma associated with psychiatric hospitalization.
- Limitations of this study include having an undergraduate sample.
- This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may influence how people responded to social distance items.

Office Hour Session:

<https://meet.google.com/riv-nkqg-pyy>

References

- Cuttler, C., & Ryckman, M. (2019). Don't call me delusional: Stigmatizing effects of noun labels on people with mental disorders. *Stigma and Health, 4*(2), 118–125.
- Reali, F., Soriano, T., & Rodriguez, D. (2016). How we think about depression: The role of linguistic framing. *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicología, 48*(2), 127-136.

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