Cohorts & Perceived Social Stigma of Mental Illness by Education

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Research Questions

- Do younger cohorts perceive less mental illness stigma than older cohorts?

- Does this relationship lose significance when exposure to a college education is accounted for?
Significance

- Studies show that higher perceived amounts of stigma reduce willingness to seek treatment (Crisp, 2000; Link, 1987).
  - There was a higher resistance towards formal treatment and seeking social support.

- Measuring whether or not there is a cohort shift in perceived mental illness stigma could show whether or not this stigma has been reduced.
Background


- There were many reforms on mental illness legislation throughout the 1970s and 1980s (National Institute of Mental Health, 2013; Scull, 2015)

- Literature is inconsistent
  - Younger people have less personal prejudice (Leaf, 1987)
  - Age has no effect on personal prejudice (Gonzalez, 2005)

- Educated Individuals tend to have more accurate perceptions of prejudice (Gonzalez et al., 2007)
Hypothesis

- Younger cohorts will perceive less mental illness stigma in the world than older cohorts.

- Exposure to a college education will negate the cohort effect on perceived stigma.
Data

- Data comes from the General Social Survey (GSS) from 2006.
  - Conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.
  - Topical Module on Mental Health.
  - Total N=4510; Actual N=934.

- Adults (18 and over) from the United States (not including: those currently enlisted in the military, those abroad, or those institutionalized).
Variables

Dependent: Mental Illness Stigma
- Perceive Stigma: 35.5%
- Do Not Perceive Stigma: 64.5%

Independent: Cohort
- Youngest (18-29 year olds): 15.9%
- Middle (30-54 year olds): 54.7%
- Oldest (55+ year olds): 29.5%

Control: College Education
- Yes: 52.6%
- No: 47.4%
Perceived Social Stigma in Cohorts

- Emerging Adults: 25.70%
- Middle Adults: 35.80%
- Late Adults: 40.30%

\(\chi^2: p \leq 0.01\)
Perceived Social Stigma Differences in Cohorts by College Education

χ²: College Educated: p > 0.05 (ns); Non-College Educated: p < 0.05
Summary of Findings

- Hypothesis was supported:
  - younger cohorts perceived less stigma towards mental illness than older cohorts.
  - exposure to a college education made cohorts insignificant.
Implications of Findings

- Policies and awareness efforts seem to be reducing perceived stigma towards the mentally ill.

- However, 25.9% of the youngest cohort still perceived stigma to “coming out” as mentally ill.
  - This is likely to be an underestimation
  - There is still work to be done!