

Not All OCD Is Viewed the Same: How Symptom Subtypes Shape Stigma



PRESENTER

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Background

- Lifetime prevalence of OCD is 4.1%
- Help-seeking and diagnosis of OCD is often delayed by more than 5 years from symptom onset (Bey et al., 2025)
- One reason for this delay is stigma. Therefore, it is important to understand the qualities of the stigma to help with this issue.
- One such quality may be symptom presentation. There are different subtypes of OCD symptoms based on the thematic content of their obsessions (i.e., symmetry, harm, and scrupulosity).
- The current study aims to examine whether undergraduates' attitudes towards individuals with OCD differ based on OCD symptom subtype

Method

Participants

- Eighty-seven undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory psychology course

Measures

- **Attribution Questionnaire Short Form (AQ-27)** - Assesses public attitudes toward mental illnesses.
 - Contains 6 factors: Fear/dangerousness, help/interact, responsibility, forcing treatment, empathy, and negative emotions
 - High scores indicate greater endorsement of a given factor

Procedure

- Participants filled out surveys online via Qualtrics
- Participants were randomly assigned to read one of three vignettes depicting different OCD symptom subtypes (i.e., symmetry, harm, and religiosity)
- Participants completed the Attribution Questionnaire, assessing attitudes toward the vignette character

Results

- A statistically significant MANOVA effect was obtained, Wilks' Lambda = 0.62, $F(12, 150) = 3.35, p < .001$
- On the forced treatment subscale of the AQ-27, participants in the harming OCD condition scored significantly higher than those in the symmetry condition.
- Regarding the fear subscale, participants in the harming OCD condition scored higher than those in the symmetry and scrupulosity conditions.

Discussion

- Significant differences in attitudes were found between OCD subtypes, consistent with prior research.
- Harming OCD scored significantly higher on the Forced Treatment and Fear subscales of the AQ-27 compared to scrupulosity or symmetry OCD
- Future studies should explore the impact of autogenous, mixed, and reactive categorizations on stigma.
- A major limitation of this study is the limited sample size.
- Future research should use a larger sample size from multiple regions/institutions.

In a vignette study, the individual with the **harming OCD subtype** was **viewed as more dangerous** than individuals with the symmetry and scrupulosity OCD subtypes and **more in need of forced treatment** than the individual with symmetry OCD.

