

Attitudes Toward Bipolar Disorder

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Bipolar disorder is characterized by alternating episodes of low and high moods. Previous research has shown that stigmatization of mental illness can reduce the likelihood of seeking treatment (Kashihara, 2015), leading to lack of mental health resources, social withdrawal (Stier, & Hinshaw, 2007), and discrimination (Stip et al., 2006).

This study used an online survey to examine explicit (verbal, self-reported) versus implicit (measured indirectly with reaction time on an implicit association task) attitudes toward bipolar disorders within a university student sample. Participants were randomized into two groups: high and low definition of bipolar disorder. It was hypothesized that implicit and explicit biases would be correlated, but that implicit bias would be present even when self-reported explicit bias was not. Increased experience with bipolar disorder (e.g., personal, friends, family) and increased knowledge of bipolar disorder (reading a detailed definition of the condition) are expected to reduce both implicit and explicit stigma. Results showed that participants held bipolar disorder more positively than physical illness within the implicit measures, and for the explicit measures, bipolar disorder was perceived less negatively than physical illness. No significant difference was found between two of the group memberships (Psychology majors vs non-majors; Low versus High information on bipolar disorder), for either the implicit or explicit measures. However, students with close personal experience with mental illness were more likely to rate physical illness and bipolar disorder as equally negative. Finally, across the entire sample there was a significant correlation between implicit and explicit bias, indicating that unspoken attitudes tended to match overt behaviour toward bipolar disorder and physical illness.

If you have any questions regarding the study you can reach the faculty supervisor through email at patrick.carolan@smu.ca.