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The Cognitive Content and Habitual Process of Self-stigma: Effects On Self-esteem and Recovery

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Introduction: While many people with mental illness endorse and internalize cultural stereotypes of mental illness at some point, they may have different degrees of habitual recurrence of such self-stigmatizing thoughts, which could exacerbate the experience of self-stigma and perpetuate its adverse effects on mental well-being and help-seeking. To date, studies have shown the adverse effects of the cognitive content of self-stigma (a.k.a. stereotype self-concurrence) on self-esteem and recovery among people with mental illness. However, no study has taken into account the effects of the habitual process of self-stigma (a.k.a. habitual self-stigma). The present study aims to investigate whether habitual self-stigma incrementally predicts self-esteem and recovery above and beyond stereotype self-concurrence.

Methods: Ninety seven people with mental illness completed measures of stereotype self-concurrence, habitual self-stigma, self-esteem, and recovery. The Self-Stigma Scale—Short Form (SSS-SF) was used to assess stereotype self-concurrence. The Self-stigmatizing Thinking's Automaticity and Repetition (STAR) scale was used to assess habitual self-stigma. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was used to assess self-esteem. The Maryland Assessment of Recovery in People with Serious Mental Illness (MARS) was used to assess recovery.

Results: Multivariate linear regressions showed that habitual self-stigma had an incremental value over and above stereotype self-concurrence in predicting self-esteem and recovery.

Conclusions: Future research on self-stigma should simultaneously consider both its cognitive content and habitual process so that the effects of self-stigma on people with mental illness can be more fully captured.