What factors influence fairness perceptions of mental health accommodations in academia?

Background

- Previous research has shown that workplace reactions to accommodations are influenced by rationale for and the nature of the accommodation, the characteristics of the person being accommodated, and whether the accommodation is organization, employee or jointly initiated (Cleveland, Barnes-Farrell & Ratz, 1997).
- Previous research has also shown that circumstantial variables, such as outcome severity and counterfactual thinking influence one's fairness perception (Nicklin, Greenbaum, McNall et. al 2011).
- Students with mental health difficulties in higher education experience various challenges when receiving academic accommodations (Hartney, Denieffe, & Wells, 2017).
- Several ethnic groups have a higher internalized stigma towards mental illness, which is related to higher chronic trauma levels (Kira, Lewandowsky & Ashby, 2014).
- Past research has also shown that men report more negative attitudes towards mental health treatment than women (Gonzalez, Alegria & Prihoda, 2005).

Hypotheses

1. Caucasian/White participants think mental health accommodations are LESS fair than Non-White participants (Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Multi-race or other), especially when they have MORE prejudiced attitudes.
2. Women will perceive accommodations as MORE fair than men.
3. There will be a POSITIVE relationship between experience with mental illness and fairness perceptions of accommodations, mediated by social justice perceptions.

Methods

Participants

- 128 undergraduate students enrolled in a psychology course (128 female = 98), mean age = 19.39, sd = 2.27, 52.3% White/Caucasian, 23.4% Asian, 10.2% Black or African American, 7.8% multiracial or other, 6.3% Hispanic/Latinx)

Procedure

- Students completed a survey in which they filled out various questionnaires (e.g. prejudice towards mental illness, social justice attitudes) and read a series of vignettes describing classroom accommodations scenarios. After reading each vignette participants answered a series of questions about their fairness perceptions.

Measures

- Social Justice Attitudes Scale (α=0.85)
  - 12 statements relating to social justice, oppression, privilege, accommodations, etc
  - Likert scale points: student answer with how much they either agree or disagree with each statement (strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree/agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree)
- Prejudiced Attitudes Scale (α=0.85)
  - 5 statements relating to prejudice against people with mental illness
  - Likert scale points: students answer with how much they either agree or disagree with each statement (strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree/agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree)
- The survey consisted of ADHD and Depression scenarios of High and Low Harm.
- The harm level was determined by whether students had to cover accommodated individual's work they miss. Students then rated these accommodations using a 7-point Likert scale (1=extremely unfair, 7=extremely fair) to depict their reactions to the following questions:
  - "How fair is this accommodation?"
  - "How fair is this accommodation for you?"
  - "How fair is this accommodation for the individual receiving it?"

Results

Prejudice attitudes did not moderate the relationship between race and fairness perceptions (b = .41, p = .067), nor did gender have a main effect on fairness perceptions (b = -.17, p = .42). H1 and H2 were not supported.

"**However, race does have a moderately significant effect on fairness perceptions; White participants tended to have LESS fairness perception than their non-white counterparts (H = .35, p = .053).

H3 was partially supported: social justice attitudes do mediate the relationship between experience of the number of family & friends a participant has who are diagnosed with a mental illness and fairness perceptions, while no significance was found for experience of history working in mental health setting nor personal mental health diagnosis. (b =.01, 95% CI [.001, .023]).

Discussion & Future Directions

As previously predicted, social justice attitudes mediate the relationship between the number of family & friends with mental illnesses and fairness perceptions of accommodations.

Reasons for why someone has more fairness perceptions based on experiences may be due to having more knowledge of the detrimental effects of mental illness.

Non-white participants perceived accommodations to be more fair than white participants possibly due to prior experiences with untreated mental illnesses and difficulties receiving accommodations (Hartney, Denieffe, & Wells, 2017).

Current study focused on the responses of college aged participants; future research may study the working population.

This would give insight to the difference in fairness perceptions between students and those working for a salary.

Future testing may focus on the disparity between the rates at which mental health accommodations are granted to whites and nonwhites.

This would provide more information on the intersection of race and disability in terms of discrimination.

Future research may also study moderation of gender between relationship between experiences with mental illness and fairness perceptions, stemming from current research questions.

References


https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3318484