

# Stigma and Accessing Mental Health Resources Amongst College Students: An Exploratory Study

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## Introduction

This study is seeking to address the relationship between stigma and the influence on accessing mental health resources. The purpose of this research is to further understand the relationship between levels of stigma, stress, and awareness of mental health resources in Eastern Connecticut State University students.

On the campuses of many universities it has been shown that stigma and access to mental health resources have largely impacted students' use of mental health resources (Chen et al., 2016). In particular it personally impacts more than 50 percent of all American college students (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Recent research has found a need for more mental health resources on college campuses; however, the continued stigma surrounding mental health has acted as a barrier. Additional research discovered the impacts of perceived stigma, access to resources, and how the use of resources influence the correlation between mental health conditions and academic success (Eisenberg et al., 2013),(Chen et al., 2016),(Smith & Applegate, 2018).

## Methodology

Our sample size included 100 student participants at Eastern Connecticut State University. Our efforts attempted to mimic the campus commuter population (56% of university students) and residential population (44% of university students).

### Measures:

The dependent variable for this study is college students accessing mental health resources on campus. Access is defined as engaging with mental health resources. For the purpose of this study, mental health resources are generalized mental health resources

The independent variable of this study is stigma relating to mental health. Stigma is defined as a set of negative or unfair beliefs that society, college communities, and one's self place on mental illness.

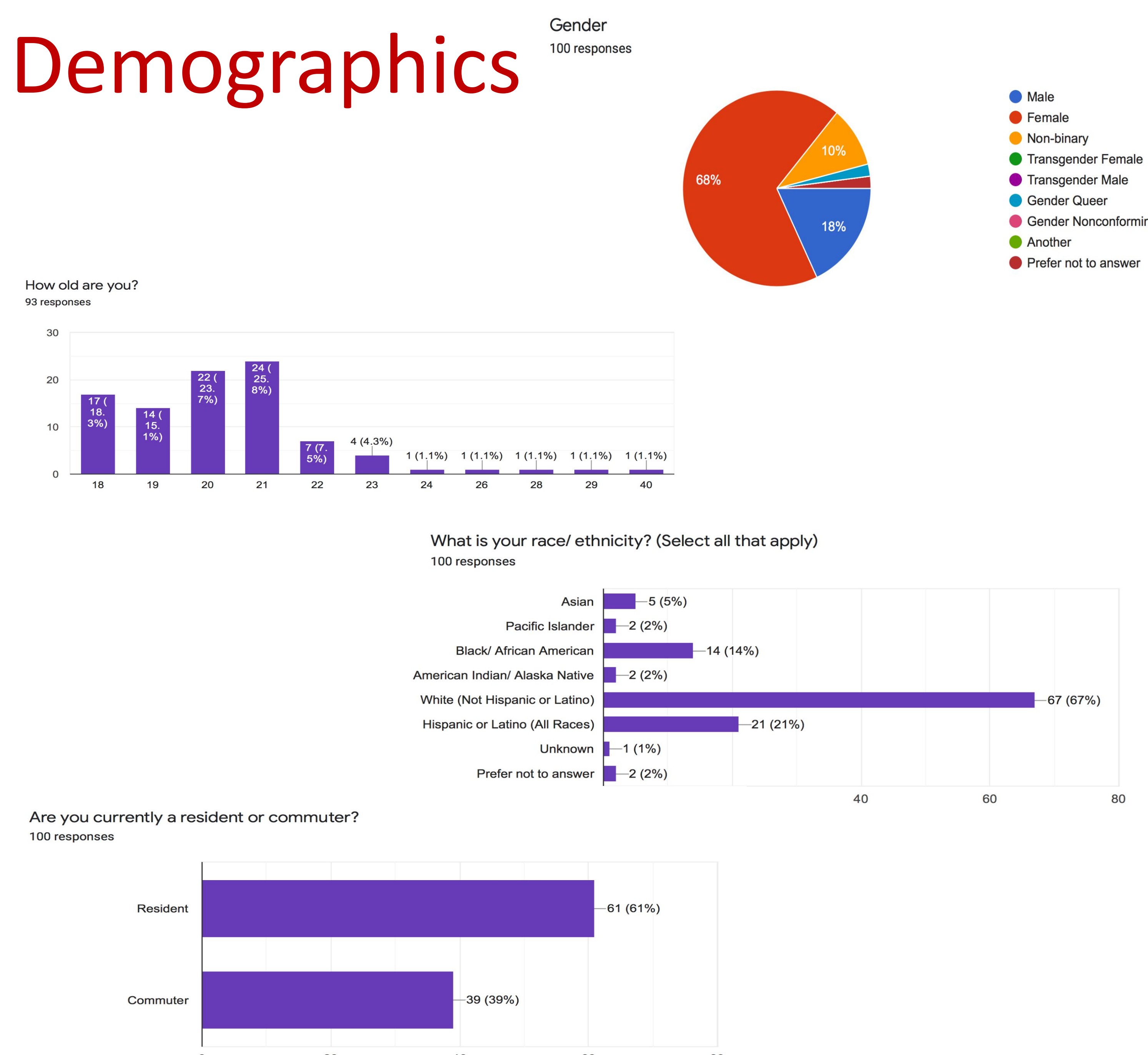
### Data Collection:

We conducted a quantitative self-report online survey from February to March 2022. We tabled a total of 5 hours over three days at the student center, distributed QR codes, and emailed the survey link to ECSU sociology students.

## Results

- The level of perceived stigma has a minimum score of 9 and a maximum of 28. On average, participants had a score of 26.8 on the stigma scale. This indicates that there is a moderate level of perceived stigma regarding mental health.
- Of the 100 participants, 61.6% (n = 61) attempted to seek out mental health resources. Of those who sought out services, 87% (n = 54) were successful.
- To test our hypotheses, we calculated T-Tests between various groups of data collected from our survey. A T-test compares the means of two groups.
  - Hypothesis 1: Stigma is associated with students accessing mental health resources
    - Through analyzing our data using t-tests, our results do not support this hypothesis. There was no significant difference on stigma scores for those who did access mental health resources (M=27.25, SD = 5.12) and those who did not (M = 26.16, SD = 5.02);  $t(96) = -1.04, p = .30$ , two tailed)
  - Hypothesis 2: The higher an individual's level of stress, the more likely a student is to access mental health resources
    - Through analyzing our data using t-tests, our results support this hypothesis. There was a significant difference on levels of stress for those who did access mental health resources (M=7.28, SD = 1.78) and those who did not (M = 6.13, SD = 2.26);  $t(97) = -2.80, p = .01$ , two tailed)
  - Hypothesis 3: Students with more perceived stigma are more worried about what their peers may think of them
    - Through analyzing our data using t-tests, our results support this hypothesis. There was a significant difference on stigma scores for those who expressed worry or concern towards what their peers may think of them (M=27.85, SD = 4.74) and those who did not (M = 25.67, SD = 5.32);  $t(95) = -2.13, p = .035$ , two tailed)

## Demographics



## Conclusion

Our research allowed us to collect and examine self reported data regarding ECSU students' perception of stigma and their experiences around mental health. The results suggest that there is a rather moderate level of stigma regarding mental health. However, it does not appear to be affecting how students access resources.

Our findings suggest there is not a relationship between stigma and accessing resources. However, it does suggest that the higher stigma score, the higher the level of worry what peers may think of students.

The study's limitations are focused on the sample and method. Convenience sampling restricts or ability to generalize our findings. Additionally, our attempt to reflect on the current student demographics was not successful. Our sample size was relatively small and had a majority or resident students. That being said, there is still room to further our research. Qualitative responses can be analyzed and used to improve the conditions of stigma on college campus to potentially observe a change in overall mental health among ECSU students.