

IMPACT

Improving Mental-health and Promoting Adjustment through College Transitions Lab

The Effect of Severity of Mental Health Problems, Perceived Public Stigma, and Confidence on Students' Willingness to Seek Treatment

Avery Pankratz, Amanda Ruggieri, B.S., & Colleen S. Conley, Ph.D.
Loyola University Chicago, Department of Psychology



Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives

Background

- The number of college students with psychological problems, as well as the number of students taking psychiatric medicine has increased, the most common problems being **anxiety** and **depression**.^{1, 2, 3}
- Several factors have been shown to negatively affect **help-seeking** including **public stigma** and one's **confidence** in handling their mental health problems without professional interference.^{4, 5}
- Higher **incomes** are associated with more public stigma towards people with mental health issues.⁶

Purpose: To understand how factors such as confidence in managing mental health symptoms, perceived stigma, income, and symptom severity affect willingness to seek mental health services.

Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of confidence in managing mental health symptoms will be associated with lower levels of willingness to seek help for mental health.

Hypothesis 2: The severity of mental health symptoms will influence the negative relationship between confidence in managing mental health symptoms and willingness to seek help.

Hypothesis 3: Higher level of perceived public stigma will be associated with less willingness to seek help.

Hypothesis 4: Greater household income will strengthen the negative relationship between perceived public stigma and willingness to seek help.

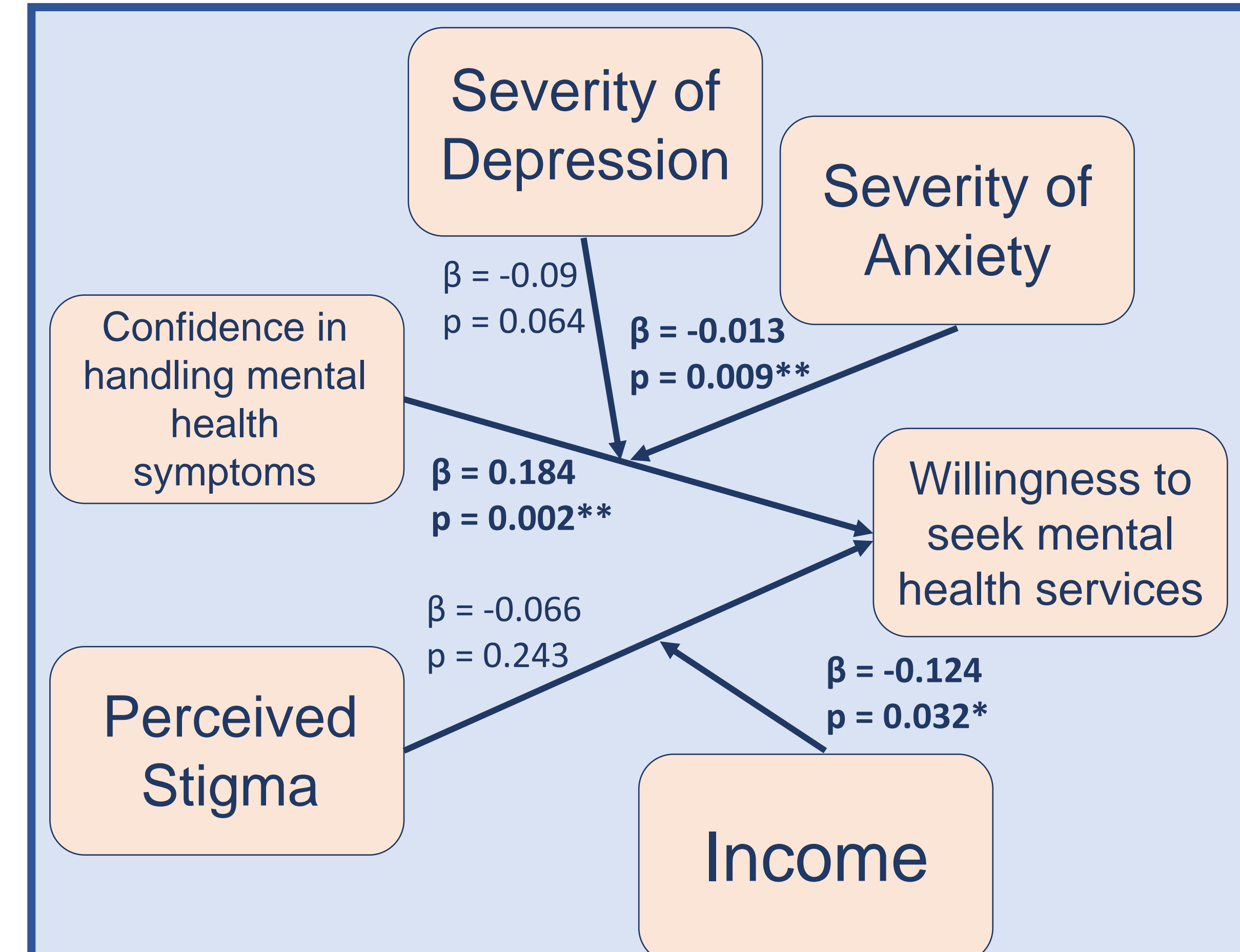
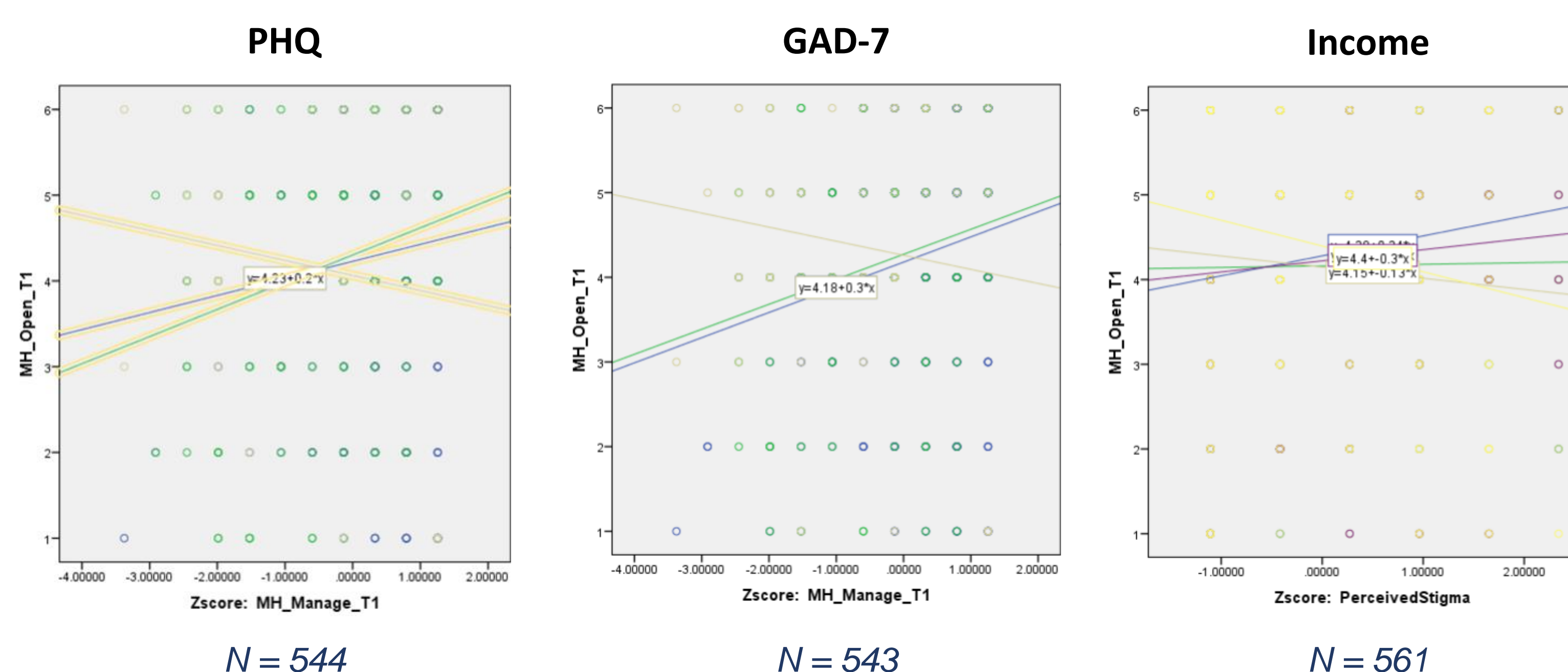
Methods

- Participants ($N = 585$) were first-year undergraduate students from Loyola University Chicago enrolled in the required first-year seminar, UNIV 101.
 - 68.9% female, 30.1% male, 1% trans/genderqueer/gender non-conforming.
 - 55.4% Caucasian, 7.2% African American, 17.6% Hispanic, 16.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.4%
 - Participants were compensated with class credit and a gift card drawing.
- All students completed a battery assessing depression and anxiety symptoms, confidence in managing mental health symptoms, perceived stigma toward mental health concerns, household income, and willingness to seek mental health services. See measures below:
 - Measured on a 1 (not at all) to 4 (nearly everyday) scale
 - Depression:** Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)
 - Anxiety:** General Anxiety Disorder Survey (GAD-7)
 - Measured on a 0 (not confident) to 10 (very confident) scale
 - Confidence:** "How confident are you in your ability to manage your mental health?"
 - Measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) scale
 - Perceived Stigma:** "Most people think less of a person who has received mental health treatment."
 - Willingness:** "I am willing to seek services (counseling, therapy, medication) for concerns related to my emotional or mental health."
 - Increment options ranging from under \$15,000 to \$500,000 or more
 - Income:** "What is your best estimate of your parents' or guardians' total income last year?"

Results

Linear regressions were used to test the relationship between confidence and willingness to seek help, the relationship between perceived public stigma and willingness to seek help, and the effects of depression, anxiety, and income as moderators of these relationships

Table 1	β	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
PHQ	-0.09	0.049	-0.086	-1.857	0.064
GAD	-0.13	0.049	-0.119	-2.619	0.009*
Income	-0.124	0.058	-0.091	-2.155	0.032*



Discussion

Anxiety - Among those with clinical levels of anxiety, the higher their confidence to handle their mental health problems, the less likely they are to seek mental health services.

- Individuals with high anxiety may already have learned how to cope effectively with their symptoms through experience.

Income - Among those with high household incomes (> \$188,001), the more perceived stigma they endorse, the less willing they are to seek mental health services. Among those with low household incomes (< \$31,000), the more perceived stigma they endorse, the more willing they are to seek mental health services.

- Perceived stigma may threaten societal status, which may more greatly affect individuals of high-income backgrounds.

References

- Gallagher, R. P. (2011). National survey of counseling center directors.
- Kadison, R.D. (2004). The mental health crisis: What colleges must do. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 51, B20.
- Collins, M. E., & Mowbray, C. T. (2005). Higher education and psychiatric disabilities: National survey of campus disability services. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 75(2), 304-315.
- Rickwood, D. J., Deane, F. P., & Wilson, C. J. (2007). When and how do young people seek professional help for mental health problems?. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 187(7), S35.
- Eisenberg, D., Downs, M. F., Golberstein, E., & Zivin, K. (2009). Stigma and help seeking for mental health among college students. *Medical Care Research and Review*, 66(5), 522-541.
- Girma, E., Tesfaye, M., Froeschl, G., Möller-Leimkühler, A. M., Müller, N., & Dehning, S. (2013). Public stigma against people with mental illness in the Gilgel Gibe Field Research Center (GGFRC) in Southwest Ethiopia. *PLoS One*, 8(12), e82116.