

P03-163

## THE INFLUENCE OF HEALTH BELIEFS AND SOCIAL STIGMA ON CHOICE OF INTERNET SUPPORT GROUPS OVER FORMAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

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**Introduction:** The relationship between health beliefs regarding formal mental health services, practical variables (time, affordability, transportation), stigma, and use of internet support groups in lieu of formal treatment has received little empirical attention.

**Objectives:** The study examines the relationship between health beliefs, practical variables, stigma, and engagement in internet support groups among adults.

**Aims.** The study addresses whether beliefs regarding formal mental health services, having the time, finances, and transportation to use them, and the social consequences of being identified as having a mental health problem influence the use of internet support groups.

**Methods:** Data were analyzed from 2,532 respondents who endorsed perceiving the need for but not receiving formal mental health treatment in the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2008). Binary logistic regression was used to examine the relationships between health beliefs, practical variables, stigma, and the use of internet support groups.

**Results:** The strongest positive predictors of internet support group use were fear of being hospitalized/taking medications (AOR=8.252, CI=8.170-8.334), lack of transportation (AOR=2.313, CI=2.271-2.357), and insufficient insurance coverage (AOR=2.640, CI=2.610-2.670). The strongest negative predictors of internet support group use were lack of belief in the efficacy of formal treatment (AOR=.629, CI=.618-.641), fearing that others would find out (AOR=.660, CI=.645-.675), and not thinking formal treatment was needed at the time (AOR=.681, CI=.665-.696).

**Conclusions:** Using the internet for relief from mental health symptoms has proliferated, yet has received little empirical attention. Research is needed to examine the implications of using internet technology rather than formal mental health treatment.