

# Exploring Stigma, Communication Patterns, and Disclosure among Romantic Partners of Military Personnel

Authors: Eja Hamid, Julia Gillotti, and Maya Verghese  
Faculty Supervisor: Alexis May, Ph.D

WESLEYAN  
UNIVERSITY

## Introduction

- Disclosure facilitates access to psychological treatment and other resources. Lower stigma around mental health is associated with greater rates of disclosure of suicidal thoughts and behaviors (STB). People may experience negative judgments about themselves (self stigma) or others (public stigma) seeking psychological help. Despite established nuances between self stigma and public stigma, few studies compare their individual relationships to disclosure.
- Patients are more likely to disclose to romantic partners than friends or healthcare professionals, therefore partners may be critical resources in STB support. However, distress in romantic relationships is also associated with greater suicide risk. Communication skills have been linked with relationship satisfaction and therefore can be a potential target for STB interventions for couples.
- Due to a lack of research on the relationship between dyadic communication patterns in the context of STB, there is a need to understand barriers to disclosure and responsive care in romantic relationships

### Research Questions

- How are three dimensions of dyadic communication related to patient willingness to discuss suicide history with their partner?
- Is the relationship between the three dyadic communication patterns and disclosure with their partner moderated by patients' self stigma and/or stigma related to others seeking psychological help?

## Demographics + Measures

### Participants

- N = 87 romantic partners of psychiatrically hospitalized patients
- 72.4% were married + living together
  - 9.2% were married but geographically separated
  - 8% were not married
  - 10.3% were not married but living together
  - 70.1% female
  - 75.9% Caucasian, 10.3% African American
  - Median age = 32 years old

### Measures

- **Degree of Patient's Public Stigma:** 5 items from the Stigma Scale for Receiving Psychological Help (SSRPH) (Komiya et al., 2000); E.g., *Seeing a psychologist for emotional or interpersonal problems carries a social stigma*
- **Degree of Patient's Self Stigma:** 10 items from the Self Stigma of Seeking Help Scale (Vogel et al., 2006); *I would feel inadequate if I went to a therapist for psychological help.*
- **Partner's Perception of Communication Patterns:** 23 item Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ-23) (Christensen et al. 1987); *I nag and demand while my partner withdraws, becomes silent, or refuses to discuss the matter further*

## Measures (Cont') + Data Analysis

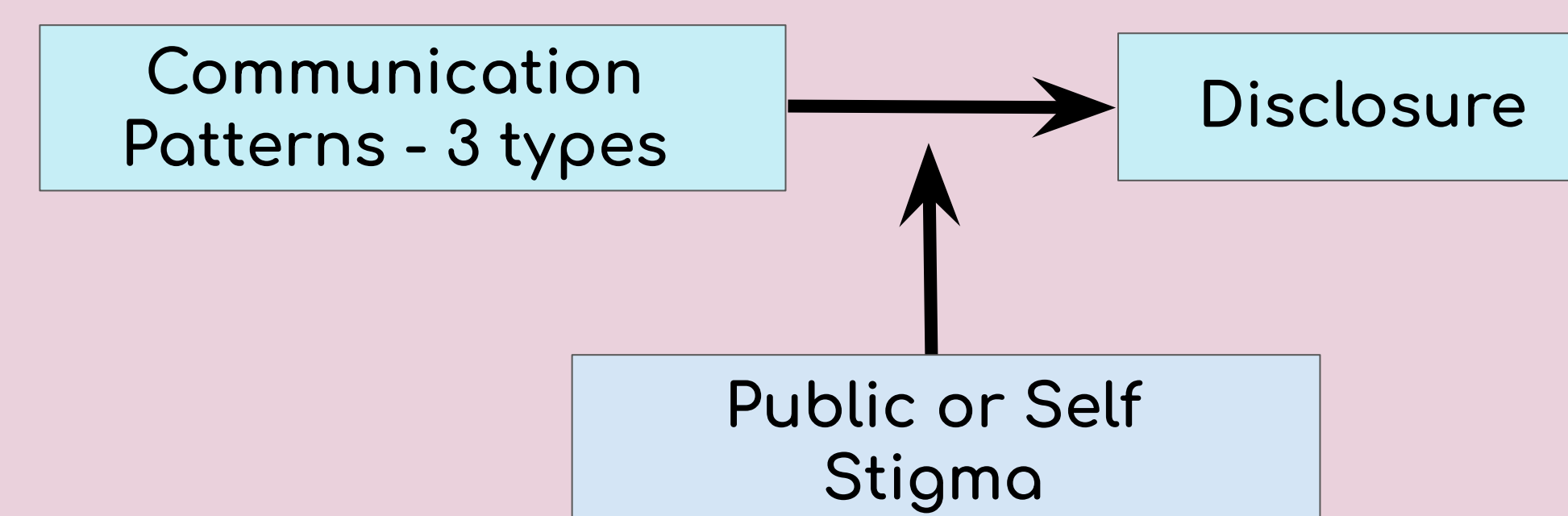
- **Patient willingness to discuss their attempt with their partner** measured by single item, *Have you talked to your partner about his/her experience (or lack thereof) with suicidal thoughts or behavior before you heard about this study?*

### Data Analysis

- Independent samples t-tests for three dimensions of dyadic communication and patient willingness to discuss suicide attempt
- Moderation analysis for three dimensions of dyadic communication and patient willingness to discuss suicide attempt via logistic regression (PROCESS macro in SPSS)

## Results

- No significant relationship between three communication patterns and patient's willingness to disclose suicidal thoughts and behavior
- Yet, moderation analyses showed interactions between communication patterns across stigma levels in relation to disclosure



Relationship	b	p*
CPQ CC <sup>1</sup> x Public Stigma	.015	.028*
CPQ SDPW <sup>2</sup> x Public Stigma	-.019	.021*
CPQ PDSW <sup>3</sup> x Public Stigma	-.013	.104
CPQ CC x Self Stigma	.005	.056
CPQ SDPW x Self Stigma	-.005	.131
CPQ PDSW x Self Stigma	-.003	.408

Table 1. Relationships between Communication Quality Subtypes and Disclosure moderated by Public or Internalized Stigma.

Significance Key: \*p < .05

<sup>1</sup> Communication Patterns Questionnaire Constructive Communication  
<sup>2</sup> Communication Patterns Questionnaire Self-Demand/Partner-Withdrawal  
<sup>3</sup> Communication Patterns Questionnaire Partner-Demand/Self-Withdrawal

## Discussion

- At high levels of public stigma, high constructive communication was associated with a higher odds of disclosure
  - ↑ disclosure when ↑ patient public stigma in relationships when partner reports productive communication style
  - Regardless of self stigma levels, disclosure is not any more likely in this communication style
- At high levels of public stigma, SDPW communication pattern was associated with a lower odds of disclosure
  - ↓ disclosure when ↑ patient public stigma in relationships when partner reports that patient withdraws in response to criticism
  - Regardless of self stigma levels, disclosure is not any less likely in this communication style
- There is no relationship between the likelihood of disclosure and communication patterns when partner withdraws in response to patient's criticism
  - Regardless of public or self stigma levels
- Future studies should distinguish between public and self stigma in discussions of suicide disclosure
- The relationship between communication styles and disclosure in romantic relationships may be more relevant to patients with high public stigma around mental health care

### Limitations

- Small sample size
- Lack of demographic diversity in couples
- Only used partner perception of communication patterns

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