The purpose of the proposed study is to evaluate the effect of outsiders’ opinions on personal mental illness perception. How treatment is addressed is affected by the individual’s perception of the diagnosis, which can be affected by outside opinions. Thirty clients of a mental health clinic will be interviewed before their first and second therapy sessions; before the second session, each participant will be exposed to either a positive, neutral, or negative opinion about mental illness. The change in their interview answers will determine how influential they perceived the opinion to be. The survey will identify the participants’ feelings of acceptance or rejection, and denial in terms of their mental illness, thereby measuring their general perception of their mental illness. The results are expected to show that exposure to positive opinions lead to acceptance of the condition, while negative opinions lead to rejection or denial of the condition.

Methods

Participants

The proposed study would consist of at least 30 participants from a single mental health clinic. It could use more if the location had that level of incoming clients. The participants would be the facility’s first 30+ new clients that agreed to participate in the study.

Procedure

During the scheduling of their first appointment, the clients would be given the option to participate in the study. If they agree to participate, they would be informed that they would simply answer a few questions before their first two sessions begin. They would be told that the experiment was a survey to see how people view therapy and their mental illness. Prior to the start of the experiment, the participants would have been randomly assigned to one of three opinion groups: positive, neutral, and negative. The positive group would be exposed to strangers discussing how they think therapy is nothing to be ashamed of, and that mental illness does not mean that there is something wrong, simply that they are different, and that mental illnesses should be accepted just like any other part of a person. The neutral group would be exposed to strangers discussing how they don’t have an opinion regarding mental illness and going to therapy, and how they wish people would just do whatever they think is best for themselves. The negative group would be exposed to strangers discussing how mental illness is not real, and how they think people are either normal, or they are “crazy.” They will mention that they believe therapy is a waste of time and money. When the participants came in for their first appointment, they would answer questions about their perception of their condition and their views on therapy. They would be given questions such as “How detrimental to your life do you view your own diagnosis?” and then answer by selecting a number 1-10, 1 being extremely detrimental, 10 being not detrimental at all. The questions would all be either a scale of effect—as described previously—or a scale of agreeing or disagreeing. Prior to the second session, the participants would be exposed to strangers discussing their views on mental illness for no more than five minutes in the lobby or waiting area. The questions would be administered at the beginning of the therapy session to limit the time lapse between exposure and testing. The change in the answers would be measured. The participants would be put through debriefing at the end of the session to inform them of the true nature of the study. This would ensure that they understood that whatever opinion they heard was not real or directed at them specifically.

Discussion

Overall, the proposed study would help not only professionals, but also the average person understand how much of an impact outsiders’ opinions affect people struggling with mental illness. This is essential to understand how to create positive environments for those suffering from mental illness. The proposed study would ultimately add to the understanding of mental illness, which is a complex and potentially ever-changing topic. Accessing information that would allow a variety of people to not just understand mental illness better, but also understand their impact on those with mental illness, is critical to providing the most positive atmosphere for those living with mental illness. A healthy, positive atmosphere is important for those suffering from mental illness because that is what allows them to learn to manage their condition in the best way. This type of research is beneficial not only to professionals, but also to individuals suffering from mental illness and those individuals’ support systems. This research will tell professionals how significant an impact outside opinions have on those suffering from mental illness. It will also inform those suffering from mental illness of the potential dangers of taking outside opinions into consideration when determining their own thoughts on their own mental illness. This research could also help people surrounding those with mental illness understand the consequences of having certain opinions about the individual and their condition. Overall, this research would provide a variety of people with essential information regarding the perception of mental illness.

References