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## Understanding and Navigating Stigma Around Mental Illness

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Oral Presentation O4.1

## **UNDERSTANDING AND NAVIGATING STIGMA AROUND MENTAL ILLNESS**

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Mental illness stigma comes from a misunderstanding about mental health and its origins. This often results in harmful perceptions and stereotypes of those with mental illness. On college campuses, students navigate both mental health issues and the stigmas that surround them. This study uses both survey and interview data to explore student perceptions about mental illness and how students suffering from mental illness deal with stigma as they navigate the institution. Almost 1 in every 3 Illinois Wesleyan students that responded to my study have been diagnosed with a mental illness, yet over 80% of respondents have experienced symptoms. Despite that, there remains a large disconnect between how people think students with mental illness should be treated and how they actually are. A fear of stigma keeps many students quiet about their struggles, leading to more distant and underdeveloped relationships with peers and professors. I explore the implications of these findings as well as coping strategies that students develop in navigating these identities.