CAN LOCUS OF CONTROL, AFFECTIVE, AND COGNITIVE EMPATHY LEVELS PREDICT PUBLIC STIGMA TOWARDS FORENSIC PATIENTS?

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Aim & Objectives

- To assess whether **locus of control** and **empathy levels** predict public **stigma** towards forensic psychiatric patients (FPPs).
- To enhance the limited literature in this research area and identify suggestions for future research.

Locus of Control, Empathy & Stigma

- **Locus of control (LOC)** - a degree to which one believes in their control over their life events (Galvin et al., 2018).
    - **Internal LOC** – a belief that one has ultimate control over life events (Lefcourt, 2014).
    - **External LOC** - a belief that one's life events are determined by external factors (Lefcourt, 2014).
- **Affective empathy** – an ability to be sensitive to and sense the feelings of others (Healey, 2022).
- **Cognitive empathy** - an ability to construct a working model of others' emotions (Healey, 2022).
- **Stigma** - attributing a mark of shame to an individual (Goffman, 1963).

Hypothesis

- **Higher** internal LOC → **higher** levels of forensic stigma.
- **Higher** empathy levels → **lower** levels of forensic stigma.

Methodology

- 17-item Locus of Control of behaviour scale (Craig et al., 1984),
- 31-item Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy (Reniers et al., 2011),
- 12-tem Forensic Stigma Scale (Healey, 2022).

- Analysed via **multiple regression** utilising an enter method.
- **Predictor variables:** locus of control, affective and cognitive empathy.
- **Outcome variable**: stigma towards FPPs.

Participant Nationality

Results

- A weak, **significant negative association** was shown between overall empathy level, and the stigma scale scores (β = -.165, *p* = .004).
- A weak, **significant negative association** was shown between cognitive and affective empathy and the Responsibility/Blame subscale of stigma scale scores (β = -.097, *p* = .009; β = -.097, *p* = .001).
- A weak, **significant positive association** was shown between LOC and, the overall stigma scores (β = .152, *p* = .009).
- A weak, **significant positive association** was shown between LOC, and the Responsibility/Blame subscale of the stigma scale scores (β = .067, *p* = .010).
- A weak, **significant positive association** was shown between LOC, and the Dangerousness/Unpredictability subscale of the stigma scale scores (β = .084, *p* = .047).

Sample

141 participants (115 female; 23 male; 3 unknown)

19-61 years

Discussion

- A **significant association** was found between **empathy** and **stigma** towards FPPs, complementing previous research (Injac-Stevović et al., 2020; Hecht et al., 2022).
    - **Higher empathy levels** were associated with **lower stigma** towards FPPs, with **cognitive** and **affective empathy** predicting the stigma concerning the **Responsibility/Blame** aspect towards FPPs.
- The **hypothesis** can be **partially supported** as LOC was found to be a significant predictor of stigma towards FPPs, yet it was found that:
    - **Higher external LOC** is associated with **higher Dangerousness/Unpredictability** and the **Responsibility/Blame stigma**.
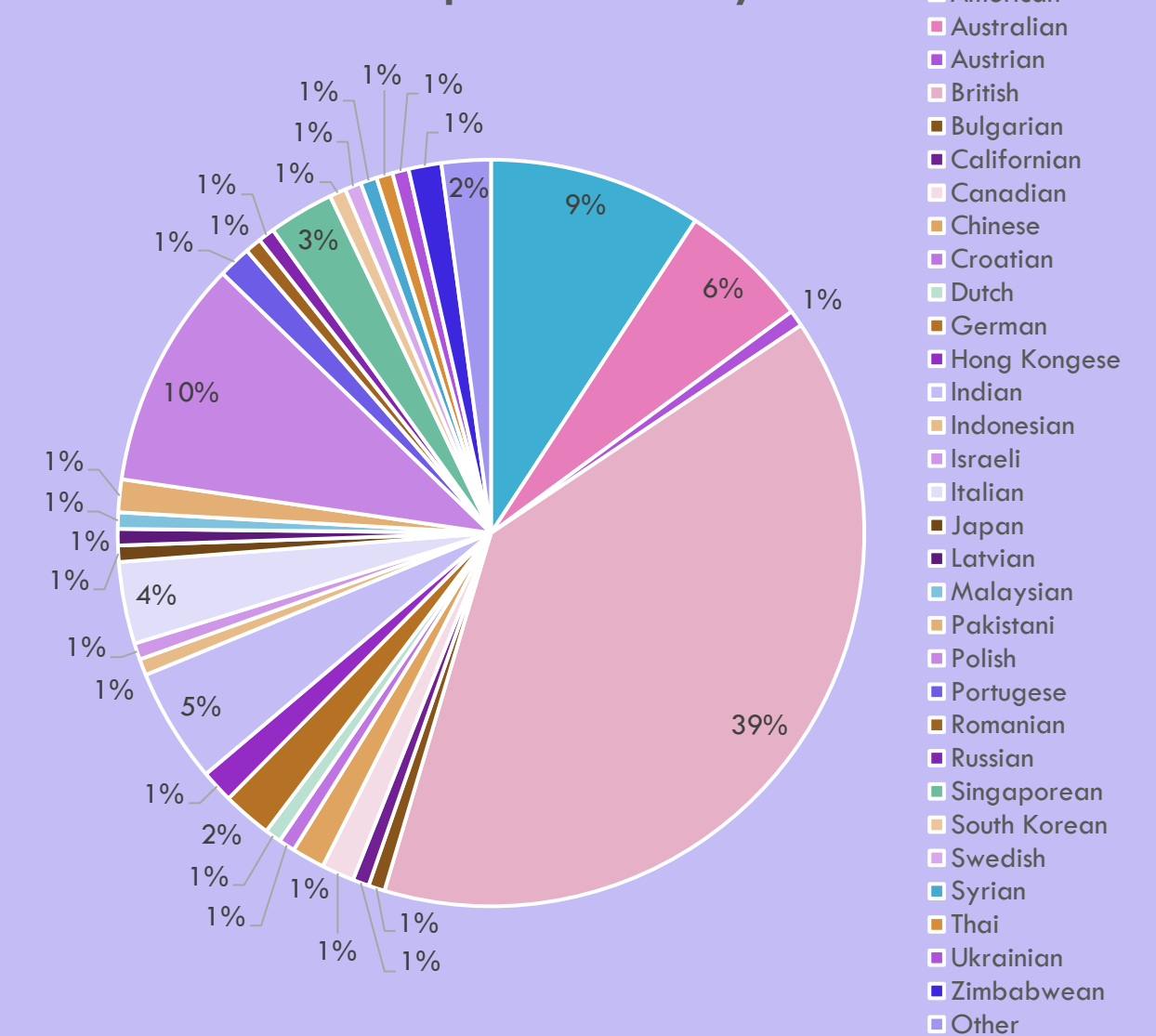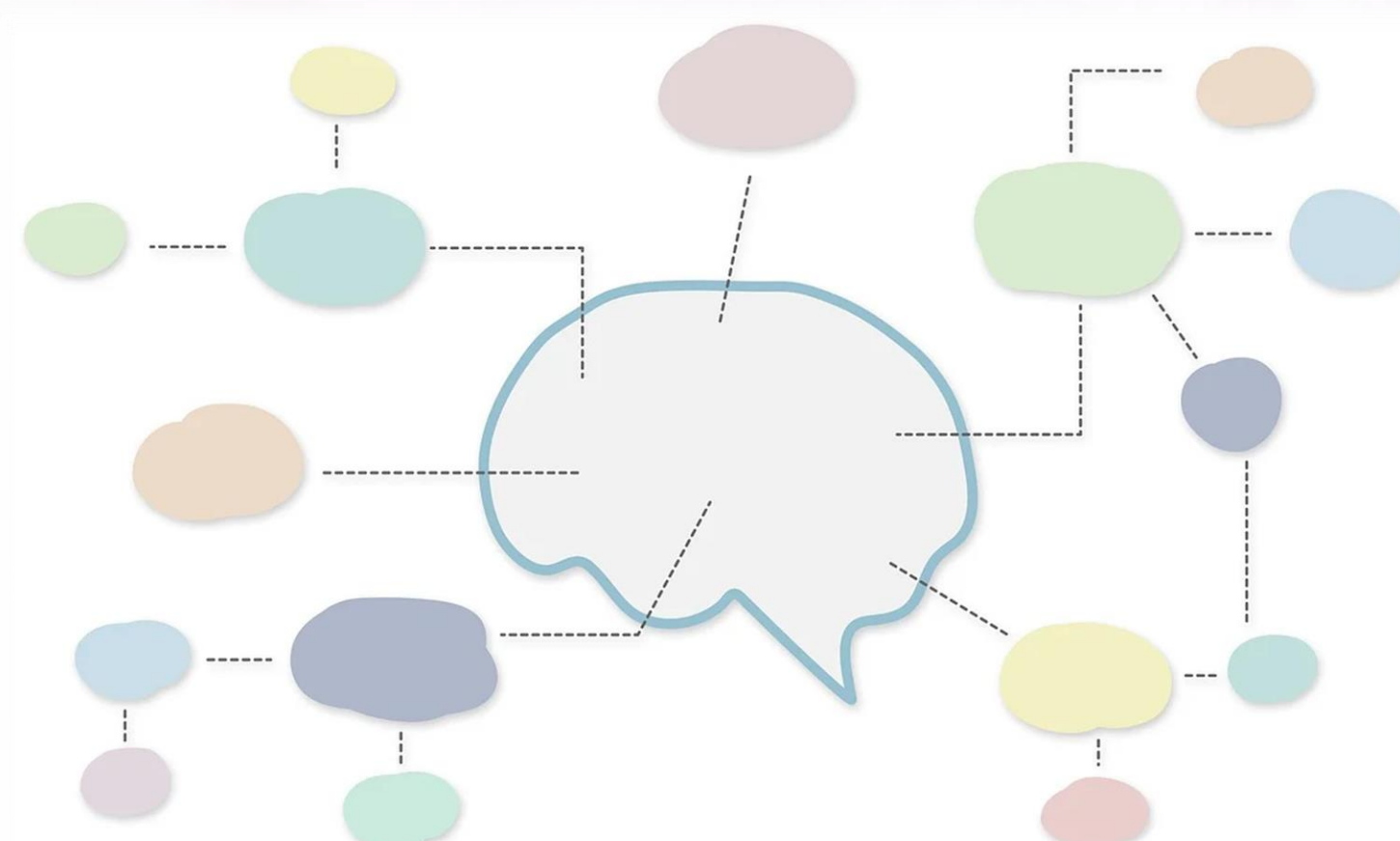
Conclusion

- This study contributes to the existing literature in the following ways as it was found that:
    - **cognitive** and **affective empathy** affects the **Responsibility/Blame stigma** towards FPPs,
    - **external LOC** affects the **Dangerousness/Unpredictability** and **Responsibility/Blame stigma** towards FPPs.
- Thus, this study is a good foundation for future research on empathy, LOC, and stigma. Replication of this study would be recommended to assess these associations with a bigger sample.

References:

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