

**Comparative Study**

## **Mental Health and Attitude Towards Seeking Psychological Help Among Males and Females: A Comparative Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The National Youth Policy, 2014 defined youth as individuals between the age group of 20-24 years and it is the most vulnerable phase where mental illnesses are most prevalent (Mathers, 2006). Attitude towards seeking psychological help is defined as the openness towards help seeking and the value given to professional help (Fischer & Turner, 1970). The present study aims to explore the differences between males and females on Mental Health and Attitude towards seeking psychological help. As exploratory research, the study was conducted on 61 males and 61 female participants between the age group 20-24 years using purposive sampling technique and tools used were General health questionnaire and Attitude towards seeking psychological help scale. The results indicated that males and females do not differ on mental health and females were found to have positive attitude towards seeking psychological help.

**Keywords:** *Mental Health, Attitude Towards Seeking Psychological Help, Self-Stigma for Seeking Help, Youth*

The National Youth Policy, 2014 defined youth as the individuals between the age group of 20-24 years and most of the world population comprises the young population (NYP, 2014). The young age considered to be the most vulnerable phase where a lot of changes takes place from the physical bodily changes to the psychological changes where the individual starts to develop their self-concept and tries to find out the answer of what he/she is (Myers, 2009). This means that According to the Bio-psychosocial model developed by George L Engel in 1977 there lies an interconnection between biology, psychology and socio-environmental factors and if one of them gets affected then automatically the other also gets affected. He explained the development of illness through the complex interaction of biological factors, social factors and psychological factors and effect of each of these factors on one another (Engell, 1977). Hence along with the physical transition the mental health is also considered to be very important among the young population and the current paper is addressing to this issue. Out of these factors in this paper we are going to discuss mental health and its importance for the young population.

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**Received: October 14, 2021; Revision Received: January 02, 2022; Accepted: February 19, 2022**

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WHO, 2014 defined mental health as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes her/his potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. For an individual to be considered as mentally healthy Johada, 1958 said that a positive attitude towards self, growth, development and the ability to actualize, integration, autonomy, perception of reality and environmental mastery are all important. In today's world there are a lot of factors that affect the mental health of people and an article by (ATA, 2016) enumerated number of factors that affect the individual and they were self-esteem, feeling loved by someone, confidence, family breakup or loss, physical ill health and abuse. People usually focus on their physical health but most of them don't know what mental illness is and they often neglect it. It is important to understand that mental illness and behavioral disorders are present at any time in about the 10% of the adult population and the burden of mental disorders is highest in youth and young adults (Mathers, Lopez and Murray, 2006). In order to understand the prevalence of different mental disorders it is important to understand what mental illness is mental disorder also called as Mental illness is defined as a Behavioral or mental pattern that causes distress or impairment of personal functioning (Bolton, 2008). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in its fifth revision defined a mental disorder as a syndrome that is characterized by clinically significant disturbance in individual's cognition, emotion regulation or behaviors that reflect a dysfunction in the psychological, developmental or biological processes underlying mental functioning (APA, 2013). In India the prevalence of Mental Disorders ranges from 10 to 370 per 1000 population in different parts of the country (Reddy & Chandrashekar, 1998). The betterment of an individual through these mental disorders depend on the attitude of one for seeking psychological help and it is important to understand this only then one can plan intervention in order to help the individual.

The Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help (ATSPPH) is the level of openness towards help seeking, the value given to professional help and the preference to cope on one's own (Fischer & Turner, 1970). Individuals with Mental Health problems who actually seek psychological help are very less considerably only 11% where it was found that less than 40% of the populations who suffer from mental health issues seek help from a Professional (Andrews, Issakidis & Carter, 2001). Hence it was important to understand that even after suffering from mental illness or problems, what are the factors that stop them from taking Professional Psychological help. Researches have reported the factors that influence individuals for seeking psychological help and these were culture being the first in which it was noted that people belonging to collectivist culture do not seek help (Tokmanian, 1998). Females were found to have more positive attitude towards seeking help as compared to males and hence gender was another factor (Turner, 1970). Going through the socio-economic status it was found that people belonging to the upper SES were more towards seeking help as compared to lower SES (Tessler & Schwartz, 1972). In the same way family structure, prior knowledge and academic level were also found to be influencing the attitude for seeking help (Fischer, 1972).

### **LITERATURE REVIEWS**

National Mental Health Survey India, 2016 reported that about 20-25% of young people suffer from Mental Health and Substance use Disorders between the age 18-29 years and most mental illnesses begins at the age of 14 to mid 20s.

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Kirti & Gaur, 2015 in their study A Study of Mental Health Among Youth in India where the objective was to examine the reported mental health problems among youth in India. The data was collected from Youth in India: Situation and Needs conducted in 2006-2007, the data was analyzed using various statistical techniques such as bivariate techniques, life table approach, poisson regression, chi square test and ANOVA. The results found that there were higher prevalence of reported mental health problems among female as compared to male youth along with various factors that leads to it.

Afifi, 2007, in his study Gender Differences in Mental Health where the objective was to discuss why gender matter in mental health, to explain the relationship of gender and health seeking behavior as a powerful determinant of gender differences and to examine the gender differences in common mental health disorders. In this study it was found that the Mental health condition of women is lower as compared to men.

According to Freeman, 2006 in his study on Associations of hormones and menopausal status with depressed mood in women with no history of depression where the objective was to identify new onset of depressive symptoms and diagnosed disorders in the menopausal transition and to determine the associations of menopausal status, and other risk factors with these cases the sample taken was premenstrual women with no history of depression at cohort enrollment. Women are more prone to mental illness as compared to males because women undergoes a lot of hormonal change through her lifetime, whether it be the start of the menstrual cycle to menopause, pregnancy or postpartum. All this suggests that women are more prone to poor mental health.

In a study by Shelar, 2019 it was found that among 1000 college students from different universities of Mumbai between the ages 16-22 have experienced at least one prolonged episode of mental or emotional disturbance. The study further found that most of the people chose to ignore the episode and did not sought psychological help out of 1000 students only 10 students have sought help in their lifetime.

According to WHO report, India has one of the largest populations that is suffering from one form of mental illness or the other and that India is going towards mental health epidemic. Starting from autism, intellectual disabilities, depression, substance abuse, anxiety and psychosis in adulthood, putting this all together it was found that these mental health disorders account for 15% of the total global burden of diseases (Khajuria, 2019).

Study by Mondal, Bajaj, Goyal & Mukherjee, 2017 in their study on Prevalence of Sleep Disorders and severity of insomnia in psychiatric outpatients attending a tertiary level mental health care facility in Punjab, India where the aim of the study was to study the prevalence of sleep disorders and the severity of insomnia in psychiatric outpatients. The participants were 500 randomly selected patients were evaluated and the results found were 83.4% of the population had some type of sleep related disorder and the symptoms of insomnia was reported by 73% of the population and 29% of people has severe to moderate insomnia in their lifetime.

Furnham & Shaikh, 2000 in his study A Cross-cultural study of mental health beliefs and attitudes towards seeking professional help that aims to examine the relationship between culture beliefs about the causes of mental distress and attitudes associated with seeking professional help for psychological problems, the participants were 287 adults belonging to

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three groups and they were asked to complete two questionnaires: the orientation to seeking professional help and mental health explanatory model questionnaire and the results found were that men had less positive attitude to seeking professional psychological help as compared to women.

Turner & Fischer, 1970 while developing and standardizing a measure toward seeking professional help for psychological disturbance, while checking the scale reliability distinguished persons who had experienced any psychotherapeutic help from those who did not take any help found that females hold more positive attitude towards seeking professional psychological help and use more psychological services than males.

Ang, Lim, Tan & Yau, 2004 in their study titled Effects of Gender and Sex role Orientation on Help seeking attitudes, where the aim of the study was to investigate the effects of gender and sex role orientation on attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help in a sample of 163 participants who trainee teachers in Singapore and the statistical technique used was ANOVA and the results were that females have a positive attitude towards seeking professional psychological help as compared to males and were more willing to take recognize a personal need for professional help as compared to males.

Komiya, 2000 in a study titled Emotional Openness as a predictor of College Students Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help where this study tried to examine the effects of emotional openness and other potential predictors of attitude toward seeking psychological help, the sample taken were 311 college students and the results found while studying attitude towards seeking psychological help found that women have positive attitude towards seeking help as compared to their male counterparts.

Penn et.al, 2005 found that higher self-stigma for seeking help is associated with lower attitude towards seeking psychological help.

Mackenzie et al, 2006 in their study titled Age, gender, and the underutilization of mental health services: the influence of help seeking attitudes, where the objective was to explore the age and gender differences in attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help and also to examine whether attitudes negatively influence intentions to seek help among older adults and men, whose mental health needs are underserved. The sample were 206 community dwelling adults and completed the questionnaire and the results found were in their study that gender influenced the intentions to seek psychological help and that men had negative attitude towards psychological help while in distress as compared to women and that women exhibited more favorable attitude towards seeking help from a mental health professional as compared to males.

In a Study by Munira, narueomon & ssekamnya 2012 on 200 Indian students of Jawaharlal Nehru University it was found that Indian students have a positive attitude towards seeking psychological help and they also found that gender was the main predictor of attitude where females were found to have positive attitude for seeking help as compared to males. Age did not play a significant role in attitude towards seeking psychological help.

Mackenzie et al, 2006 in their study titled Age, gender, and the underutilization of mental health services: the influence of help seeking attitudes, where the objective was to explore the age and gender differences in attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help

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and also to examine whether attitudes negatively influence intentions to seek help among older adults and men, whose mental health needs are underserved. The sample were 206 community dwelling adults and completed the questionnaire and the results found that older adults had a more positive attitude towards seeking help and they tend to have favorable attitude for seeking help from primary care physician as compared to young individuals.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Aim*

The aim of the study is to find gender difference and relationship among mental health and attitude towards seeking psychological help.

#### *Objective*

- To compare the Mental Health of Males and Females
- To compare the Attitude towards Seeking Psychological Help among Males and Females.
- To study the relationship between Mental health and Attitude towards seeking Psychological help among females
- To study the relationship between Mental health and Attitude towards seeking Psychological help among males.

#### *Hypotheses*

- Males will have better Mental Health as compared to Females.
- Females will have positive attitude towards seeking psychological help as compared to males
- There will be a significant positive correlation between Mental Health and positive attitude towards seeking Psychological help among Females
- There will be a Negative Correlation between Mental Health and positive Attitude towards seeking Psychological Help among Males.

#### *Sample*

The sample of the study consisted of total 122 young people out of which 61 were females and 61 were males between the ages 12-29 years. Purposive sampling has been used for data collection.

#### *Instruments*

Two measures were used in this study,

- **General Health Questionnaire:** The test was developed by Goldberg and Hillier in the year 1972. It is a self-administered screening questionnaire which is developed to be used in consulting settings aimed at detecting those with any diagnosable psychiatric disorder (Goldberg, 1972). The test concerns itself with two major classes of phenomenon: The inability to carry out one's normal healthy functions and the appearance of any new phenomenon of a distressing nature (Goldberg, 1977). The GHQ consists of sets of questions which forms a lowest common multiple of symptoms which can be seen in various syndromes of mental disorders and hence differentiate psychiatric patients as a general class from those who consider them as well (Goldberg, 1977). The short version of the General Health Questionnaire contains 28 items that are scored from better than usual, same as usual, worse than usual and much worse than usual. This scale measures the complaints of the

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individual that are present or very recent and not in the past. The whole test was divided into 4 subscales and the total score of the scale was called as the severity rating index of the individual and the total score ranged from 20-112 and higher the total score the poorer the psychological wellbeing of the individual. The scale reported good psychometric properties with internal consistency to be cronbach-alpha 0.92 and spearman split half reliability to be 0.84. The four scales of GHQ are somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction and severe depression (Goldberg, 1977).

- **Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-SF:** The test was developed by Fischer & Farina in the year 1995. It is a 10 item lickert type scale in which item 2, 4, 8 and 10 are reversed type. The scores of the test lie between 0-30 with high score indicating more favorable attitude towards seeking help and low score indicating a negative attitude towards seeking help. The test has good psychometric properties with internal consistency to be 0.82-0.84 and test re test reliability to be 0.80. The test contains 2 dimensions that help to identify the attitudinal determinants for why individuals avoid the treatment even while suffering from problems and whether or not these factors are associated with the non-compliance of the patients with the treatment process and illness (Fischer & Farina, 1995): Openness to seeking Treatment for Emotional Problems: This factor deals with the openness to seeking the mental health care services for one's own emotional problems. Item number 1, 3, 5, 6 and 7 measure this dimension among the individuals (Fischer & Farina, 1995). Value and need in seeking treatment: This factor involve the perceptions of an individual about how much value they place on the treatment process. Item number 2, 4, 8, 9 and 10 measures this dimension among the individuals (Fischer & Farina, 1995).

### *Procedure*

The study was designed by reviewing the previous researches done on mental health, attitude towards seeking psychological help and self-stigma associated with seeking help among young population. The sample was selected from the youth population of different Universities and colleges of Pune and Lucknow. The tools were selected according to the variables which were General health questionnaire and Attitude towards seeking psychological help scale. A Pilot study for Indian Adaptation of the tool has already been done on the students, 25 students were given the questionnaire and they were asked to read all the items and tell if they faced any problem in understanding the items. No problems were reported by the sample regarding language of the tool and its applicability to Indian culture. Hence the three questionnaires were used as for further research.

The Instructions were given to participants according to the scales and consent was taken and confidentiality of the results was assured. After the conduction of the test, the scoring was done according to the norms of the tests and then the final assessments will be made. The data was analyzed by applying t test to find the gender differences and Pearson Product moment correlation to find the relationship among the variables.

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**DATA ANALYSIS**

*Table 1 Gender Differences in Mental Health*

Variables	Females			Males			t value
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
Somatic symptoms	61	13.55	3.11	61	14.13	3.23	0.998
Anxiety and Insomnia	61	16.19	4.63	61	14.81	3.77	1.80
Social Dysfunction	61	13.16	4.21	61	13.78	3.31	0.90
Severe Depression	61	13.98	4.37	61	13.91	3.97	0.087
Total GHQ	61	57.47	13.52	61	56.59	11.74	0.386

*Table 2 Gender difference in Attitude towards Seeking Psychological Help*

Variables	Females			Males			t
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
Openness to Treatment for Emotional Problems	61	10.98	3.4	61	10.45	3.01	0.9
Value and need in seeking treatment	61	8.1	2.54	61	7.8	3.22	0.74
Total ATSPH	61	19.21	4.81	61	16.85	4.88	2.68**

*Table 3 Relationship between Mental Health and Attitude Towards Seeking Psychological Help among Females.*

Variable	N	M	SD	1	2
Attitude towards Seeking Psychological Help	61	19.21	4.81	-	0.14
Mental Health	61	57.45	13.52	0.14	-

*Table 3.1: Relationship between the dimensions of Mental Health and Attitude towards Seeking Psychological Help among Females.*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Openness to Treatment for Emotional Problems	-	-	-	-	-	-
Value and need in seeking treatment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Somatic Symptoms	-0.04	0.07	-	-	-	-
Anxiety and Insomnia	0.105**	0.21	-	-	-	-
Social Dysfunction	0.12**	0.13	-	-	-	-
Severe Depression	0.10**	-0.009	-	-	-	-

*Table 4 Relationship between Mental Health and Attitude towards Seeking Psychological Help among Males.*

Variable	N	M	SD	1	2
Attitude towards Seeking Psychological Help	61	16.85	4.88	-	0.07
Mental Health	61	56.59	11.74	0.07	-

*Table 4.1 Relationship between the dimensions of Mental Health and Attitude Towards Seeking Psychological Help among males.*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Openness to Treatment for Emotional Problems	-	-	-	-	-	-
Value and need in seeking treatment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Somatic Symptoms	-0.04	0.15	-	-	-	-
Anxiety and Insomnia	0.29**	0.16**	-	-	-	-
Social Dysfunction	0.32**	0.16**	-	-	-	-
Severe Depression	0.18**	0.09**	-	-	-	-

## **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of the study was to examine the gender differences and relationship between Mental Health and Attitude towards seeking Psychological help among the youth population between the ages 20-24 years.

The first objective of the study was to compare the mental health of males and females and the result indicated that there was no significant gender difference in mental health as the  $t$  value was 0.38 and was not significant at any levels of significance. This indicates that in the present study we cannot say whether males are better on mental health or females. As according to the previous researches quoted in the literature review most of the studies reported that there exist gender differences in mental health and mostly females were found to have poor mental health as compared to males. As in a study done on Indian youth population by (Kirti & Gaur, 2015) reported that there was higher prevalence of reported mental health problems among female as compared to the male population. After going through most of the literature done on this issue the first hypothesis was formulated that stated that Males will have better mental health as compared to females but as the result indicated no gender difference on mental health hence the first hypothesis is not retained and is rejected and this result can be supported by a World Health Organization study on Gender and Mental Health in 2002 it was reported that there are no gender difference in the overall prevalence of mental health disorders and associated conditions (WHO, 2002), also as there were no gender differences reported in the present hence it can be said that mental health is gender neutral for the mentioned sample.

As this study also tried to tap on various mental disorders but could not find any empirical evidence hence further probing is needed to understand the illness specificity of the population in terms of gender.

The second objective of the study was to compare the attitude towards seeking psychological help among males and females and the result indicated that there are gender differences present on the attitude towards seeking psychological help as the  $t$  test value was 2.68 and was significant at 0.01 level of significance and the means indicated that females had more positive and favorable attitude towards seeking psychological help for mental health problems as compared to males. This result is supported by previous researches done on this phenomenon like in a study by (Komiya, 2001) it was reported that women have more positive attitude towards seeking psychological help as compared to males and other studies also reported that gender influences the intentions to seek psychological help (Mackenzie, 2006) and also reported that women are more willing to recognize and report their problems than men. Hence the second hypothesis that females will have a positive attitude in seeking psychological help as compared to males is retained and accepted.

The third objective of the present study was to study the relationship between mental health and attitude towards seeking psychological help among females and the result indicated that there was not significant correlation between them as the  $r$  value was 0.14 and was not significant at any levels hence in this study it cannot be accounted that if mental health of the person will be good then there attitude towards seeking psychological help will also be high or vice versa hence further probing is needed to understand the relationship as previous studies have reported that people with mental illness or bad mental health tend to avoid seeking help and have a negative attitude towards seeking psychological help mostly because of lack of knowledge about the treatment process, stigmatization beliefs about the



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people who suffer from such disorders (Mostafa., Almutairi., salama., anwar & adlan, 2019). Hence previous studies showed a relationship between mental health and attitude towards seeking psychological help but this study could not establish a relationship hence further probing is required. According to the results the third hypothesis that there will be significant positive correlation between mental health and positive attitude towards seeking psychological help among females is not retained hence is rejected. Further in this study relationship between the dimensions of mental health and attitude towards seeking psychological help was also established and it was found that anxiety and insomnia had a positive correlation with openness to treatment for emotional problems and this result indicated that females who may suffer from insomnia and anxiety are more willing and open to seek help for their anxiety and sleep problems as reported by studies that women suffer more anxiety and sleep related disorders and they are more likely to report if not directly to hospitals or doctors then to their family members (Piggot, 2002). The second-dimension severe depression also had a positive correlation with openness to treatment for emotional problems among women and it is given in studies that women have a very high prevalence rate for depression (DSM V) and that they are high in help seeking behavior as compared to males hence they will seek help and report their problems in crisis more as compared to males.

The fourth objective of the study was to study the relationship between mental health attitude towards seeking psychological help among males and the result indicated that there is no relationship between both as the correlation value was 0.07 which was not significant at any level of significance hence it means that the fourth hypothesis is rejected and not accepted and moreover in males by this result one cannot say that when a person will have poor mental health then their attitude will reduce or increase towards seeking help as quoted earlier also in the literature.

Further an attempt was made to establish a relationship between the dimensions of mental health and attitude and it was found that males who were having anxiety insomnia, severe depression and social dysfunction were also high on openness to seeking treatment for emotional problems as it is evident from the studies that men are more likely to be reported with disorders such as anti social personality disorder and substance abuse disorders and sometimes depression also as compared to females and due to their availability and liability to keep working in the society they are more likely to report their problems to the doctors and seek help (WHO, 2007). Further also had a positive correlation between anxiety insomnia, social dysfunction and severe depression with need and value in seeking treatment which means that if the mental health of males will be affected with such disorders, then their value and need to take mental health services will also increase.

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

According to the results obtained it was found that the first hypothesis that males will have better mental health as compared to females was rejected as there was no gender difference found. The second hypothesis that females will have a positive attitude towards seeking psychological help as compared to males was retained and accepted as there were gender differences found and females were found to have positive attitude towards seeking psychological help as compared to males. The third hypothesis that there will be a significant positive correlation between mental health and positive attitude towards seeking psychological help among females was not retained as there was no correlation found. The fourth hypothesis that there will be a negative correlation between mental health and

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positive attitude towards seeking psychological help among males was not retained and accepted. After going through the results, it can be concluded that as my main aim to do research on this topic was to see whether actually exist gender differences between mental health and attitude towards seeking psychological help and to see how much aware our generation is about their mental health and their attitude from seeking help when in crisis. And I made a conclusion after going through the results is that one reason for such a result would be that so much awareness about health has not gone in vain and the youth is sensitized towards their mental health.

### *Future implications*

The present study can be used in schools and universities and the students could be explained the importance of mental health and attitude towards seeking psychological help and interventions could be made after applying the GHQ scale and then identifying the Attitude of the individuals with poor mental health condition and then giving them appropriate guidance from the school. The study can help in the awareness could be made in the adolescents as it is the most vulnerable phase of the human development and children are more susceptible to changes, so telling them what is good and what is not is important so that they can follow a correct path. It can be said that the psycho education of the parents is possible about the possible age wise threat. And at last, this study reveals different results as compared to other previous researches done on the same topic so this can generate curiosity among the individuals to further probe and study the phenomenon in more detail.

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### ***Acknowledgement***

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

***How to cite this article:*** Pandey V. & Deshmukh J. (2022). Mental Health and Attitude Towards Seeking Psychological Help Among Males and Females: A Comparative Study. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 10(1), 006-017. DIP:18.01.002.20221001, DOI:10.25215/1001.002