

## Psychological Help-Seeking Intention among Undergraduate Students

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### ABSTRACT

The main goal of the present study was to examine psychological help-seeking intention among undergraduate students. A total of three hundred students were randomly selected from Rajshahi University of Bangladesh to measure the help-seeking intention by administering a Bangla-translated (Barman & Sutradhar, 2022) General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (Wilson et al., 2005). The data were analyzed by using *t*-test, one-way ANOVA, and *post-hoc tukey* test. The results revealed that there was no significant difference in help-seeking intention in respect of sex. The results also stated that rural areas students were significantly ( $t = 8.085, p < 0.01$ ) less intended to seek help than urban areas students. Additionally, higher socioeconomic class students were significantly ( $F = 168.282, p < 0.01$ ) more intended to seek help than middle and lower socioeconomic class students.

**Keywords:** *Help-Seeking Intention, Residential Area, Socioeconomic Status, and Undergraduate Students.*

Nowadays, psychological distress is a very common and serious issue among adolescents (Gore et al., 2011) and adults. Studies demonstrated that numerous academic stress, environmental and financial challenges are most prominent in the university environment (Adlaf et al., 2001; Ryan et al., 2010; Furnham et al., 2011) and mostly affect students. So, psychological difficulties are more common among university students. Additionally, studies reported that university students are experiencing high levels of psychological disturbance like loneliness, irritability, helplessness, social withdrawal and hostility also (Sandhu, 1995; Sawir et al., 2008). Despite this evidence of mental health problems among university students, the utilization of mental health services and their help-seeking intentions are relatively low over all the world including Bangladesh. Studies claimed that about 30% of the world's population was suffering from psychological disturbance and two-thirds of these people did not get any professional treatment (Kessler et al., 2005; Thornicroft, 2007). In this situation, the term 'Help-Seeking Intention' is a very important and crucial matter for everyone. Vogel et al. (2007) explained help-seeking intentions as the willingness of an individual to take professional psychological assistance

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from others to reduce mental distress. Similarly, Cramer (1999) defined help-seeking behavior as an actual behavior or experience of finding professional psychological help. Rickwood et al. (2012) also stated that help-seeking intention as, “an adaptive coping process that is the attempt to obtain external assistance to deal with a mental health concern”. Help-seeking intention simply defines as a behavior of actively seeking help from other people or any trustable sources. Gebreegziabher et al. (2019) classified the sources into two types one is formal and another is informal. They stated that formal sources as an individual who has a professional degree or knowledge in a relevant field or area and informal sources as parents, relatives, family members, or friends. Numerous researches were conducted in this area in different countries. One of these was conducted in Australia among 1168 students across three universities and found that around 83.9% of students were experienced mental health difficulties and 34.3% of students were involved in help-seeking behaviors (Stallman & Shochet, 2009). Another study also examined in the United States of America and found a significantly negative attitude toward counseling and a markedly lower tendency to receive psychological services (Henderson et al., 2007; Williams & Justice, 2010). Similarly, Mitchell et al. (2007) investigated attitudes and beliefs of African-American college students toward psychological treatment and found that less than 5% of students were chosen to share their distress with the clergy or mental health professionals. Similarly, Bifttu et al. (2018) investigated a meta-analysis Survey in Ethiopia and found that the prevalence of depression, help-seeking behavior, and intention were 20.5%, 38%, and 42% respectively. Oliver et al. (2005) also investigated 10302 respondents in the United Kingdom (UK) and found that about 63.1% of participants were preferred to seek informal help from family and friends when they were experiencing psychological distress. Leonardsson and Sebastian (2017) conducted a research in India among married, separated, and divorced women who had experienced some form of physical or sexual spousal violence and sought help and found that only 1% had sought help from formal institutions. Among them, 48.8% of women were experienced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and 1.5% were experienced only sexual violence. Studies also found in India that the possible recommendations for seeking help came from family members, relatives or friends ranging from 26%-87% (Sahu et al., 2019). Naved et al. (2006) studied the help-seeking behavior of women in Bangladesh and found that women did not share their violence because they believed that their husbands had the right to use violent behavior against them and other reasons were social stigma and the threat of murder.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Numerous researches enlightened that help-seeking intentions varies in terms of demographic variables. Several studies demonstrated that female college students saw mental health as a positive sense and higher rates of help-seeking behavior than male students' counterparts (Leong & Zachar, 1999; Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Vogel & Wester, 2003). Additionally, female respondents received more mental health services in times of psychological conflicts than male respondents (Fischer & Farina, 1995; Morgan et al., 2003; Ang et al., 2004). Similarly, Evans and Feder (2016) mentioned that females who experienced domestic violence abuse that they were less likely to seek help from professionals for social issues. As narrated above, there have numerous results found in significant sex differences and help-seeking intention. But several contradictory studies also found like Atkinson and Gim (1989) stated no significant gender role in psychological help-seeking intention. Additionally, Furnham and Andrew (1996) claimed that male and female participants showed the same attitude toward the help-seeking intention. Masuda et al. (2005) studied Japanese people and demonstrated that there was no significant difference in professional help-seeking behavior in terms of gender. Similarly, Atkinson et al. (1995) did

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not find any gender role differences in help-seeking behavior. Another study also found that male and female students displayed similar attitudes toward help-seeking behavior. They did not find any significant differences in seeking professional help in terms of gender (Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982).

Oliver et al. (2005) mentioned that people who were living in urban areas were more sought help than rural areas when they needed physiological and psychological help and also claimed that socioeconomic status had indirectly affected seeking professional help. Again, Bamberger (2009) stated that the employees who were worked in urban areas were more concerned about psychological illness and more sought help from professionals and also speculated that socioeconomic status directly influenced this reason. Jorm (2012) mentioned that the urban areas people had frequently attended health awareness programs and campaigns concerning general mental health as a result these areas people were more seeking psychological help than in rural areas. Similarly, Yu et al. (2015) stated that the high-quality residential areas people had more concerned about mental health and more showed help-seeking behavior than in the lowest residential areas.

Roth and Leavey (2006) argued that older people were more concerned about mental health and seek help from the sources than younger people. They also stated that elite-class people were more concerned about psychological illnesses and more intended to seek help than middle and lower-class people. Bayer and Peay (1997) found that higher socioeconomic class people were fairly more aware of seeking help from professionals. Adamson et al. (2003) claimed that the higher socioeconomic level people were more likely to seek help from professionals and sources than the lower socioeconomic status people. Recently, Karumbaiah et al. (2022) stated that the students who were belonged to higher-class families were more sought help from professionals than middle and lower-class families. Additionally, Greidanus (2010) argued that people who were educated and had available to internet services and well economic conditions showed more help-seeking behavior than poor economic conditions people.

### ***Significance of the Study:***

Day by day mental health issues have become a global concern and creates different psychological difficulties, but a huge portion of these people do not take any professional advice or help. In Bangladesh, this rate is very low because of several barriers like availability of services, social stigma, financial burden, and situational causes. In this situation, it is vital issue to uncover the scenario of help-seeking intentions among Bangladeshi people. One of the main purposes of this study in Bangladesh is that it is the initial research, no such studies have ever been done in the past. Most of the existing research were done in western countries considering different variables. Another purpose of this study is that students are the significant group for the study of help-seeking intention (Zivin et al., 2009) and also the representative sample of any country. So, the researchers feel the dire need to conduct this study in Bangladesh and consider university students as an important part of this study.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

The main objective of the research was to find psychological help-seeking intention among undergraduate students. The specific objectives were as follows:

- To investigate whether help-seeking intention varies in respect of sex.
- To assess if help-seeking intention varies in terms of socioeconomic status.

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- To evaluate whether help-seeking intention varies according to the residential areas.

### *Hypotheses of the Study*

Considering the above objectives and reviewing the literature in detail following hypotheses were formulated.

- Female participants would higher intend to seek psychological help than male participants.
- Urban areas respondents would higher intend to seek psychological help than rural respondents.
- Socioeconomic status is directly related to the help-seeking intention.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Sample*

A total of 300 undergraduate students were randomly selected from Rajshahi University, Bangladesh. They were selected from seven departments among fifty-nine departments of Rajshahi University. Among them 300 undergraduate students, 119 were male and 181 were female respondents, 160 participants were from rural and 140 respondents were from the urban areas, 102 were lower class, 166 were middle class and 32 were from higher class families. All of them were students in third and fourth-year honors classes. Their age ranged from 19-21 years.

### *Instruments*

- **Personal Information Form:** The personal information form was used to collect demographic data (age, sex, birth order, residential area, and socioeconomic status) of the respondents.
- **Description of the Instruments:** The translated Bangla version (Barman & Sutradhar, 2022) scale of the General Help-Seeking Questionnaire was used for this study which was originally developed by Wilson et al. (2005) in Australia. To assess help-seeking intention from different sources, two questions were formulated one was regarding personal and emotional problems and another was about experiencing suicidal thoughts. Both sections consisted of similar ten helping sources and the response options for each item was 1-7 Likert points including 'extremely unlikely' was scored 1, 'unlikely' was scored 3, 'likely' was scored 5, and 'extremely likely' was scored 7. Each response indicated the level of help-seeking behavior from different sources. A high score on this scale indicated a higher level of help-seeking behavior and a lower score indicated a lower level of help-seeking behavior.

General Help Seeking Questionnaire had satisfactory reliability and validity. The Cronbach alpha of the full scale was  $\alpha = 0.91$ . It was noted that the correlations between intention and actual help-seeking behaviors from informal sources were  $r = 0.48, p < .001$  in the intimate partner and  $r = 0.42, p < .001$  in the non-parent family. It was also noted that the correlations between intention and actual help-seeking behaviors from formal sources (mental health counseling) were  $r = 0.17, p < .05$ .

After selecting an item from the original scale, the researchers transformed it into Bangla, which was then reviewed by three judges for final approval of the Bangla version. The judges were all Rajshahi University professors. A focus group was formed before the final scale was created. Then the final scale was then translated and ready for use.

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### Procedure

The data were directly collected from the respondents of Rajshahi University. At first, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and established a good rapport with them. The data of the respondents were collected from two groups such as male and female. While collecting data from this institution, the respondents were ensured that their responses to the questionnaire were for only academic purposes and would be kept confidential. Before taking the data, the respondents were given printed instructions. They were told to read the instructions and not to omit any things from the questionnaire. After collecting all of the questionnaires from the participants, each questionnaire was verified to see if there are any omissions. If any omissions were discovered, the respondent was asked to fix them. Finally, the respondents were praised for their spontaneous cooperation and thanked for their participation.

### RESULTS

The present study was to examine the psychological help-seeking intention among undergraduate students. For this reason, a Bangla-translated (Barman & Sutradhar, 2022) General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (Wilson et al., 2005) was used. Then 300 participants were categorized sex into two types (male & female), residential area into two types (rural & urban), and socioeconomic status into three classes (lower, middle & higher). Finally, the obtained data were analyzed by employing *t*-test, one-way ANOVA, and *post-hoc tukey test*. The results of the study has been presented below.

**Table 1 Mean Differences on Help-Seeking Intention Scores between Male and Female Students**

Measured Variable	Types of Respondents	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Degrees of freedom (df)	t
Help Seeking Intention	Male	119	78.96	18.413	298	1.380*
	Female	181	81.64	12.880		

\**p* = NS

The result table 1 shows that the mean (*M*) of the male and female students are 78.96 and 81.64 respectively. The standard deviation (*SD*) of the male and female students are 18.413 and 12.880 respectively. The degrees of freedom (*df*) is 298 and the calculated *t* value is 1.380, which is not significant. The result stated that female students are not more intended to seek help than male students.

**Table 2 Mean Differences on Help-Seeking Intention Scores between Rural and Urban Students**

Measured Variable	Types of Respondents	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Degrees of freedom (df)	t
Help Seeking Intention	Rural	160	74.58	15.403	298	8.085*
	Urban	140	87.43	12.093		

\**p* < 0.01

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The result table 2 displays that the mean ( $M$ ) of the rural and urban students are 74.58 and 87.43 respectively. The standard deviation ( $SD$ ) of the male and female students are 15.403 and 12.093 respectively. The degrees of freedom ( $df$ ) is 298 and the calculated  $t$  value is 8.085, which is significant at 0.01 level. The result shows that rural students are less intended to seek help than urban students.

**Table 3 Results of One Way ANOVA on Help-Seeking Intention Scores of three Classes of Socioeconomic Status (SES)**

Measured Variable	Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of freedom (df)	Mean Squares (MS)	F
Help Seeking Intention	Between Groups	37389.274	2	18694.637	168.282*
	Within Groups	32994.112	297	111.091	
	Total	70383.387	299		

\* $p < 0.01$

The result table 3 demonstrates that the difference in help-seeking intention among the three groups (lower, middle & higher) of socioeconomic status is significant at 0.01 level. In order to analysis the significant difference among the three groups, *post-hoc tukey* test were employed. The result of the *post-hoc tukey* test has been presented in table 5.

**Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of Help-Seeking Intention Scores in terms of Socioeconomic Status (SES)**

Socioeconomic status	N	Maximum	Minimum	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Lower class	102	102	18	66.33	13.691
Middle class	166	126	54	85.48	8.431
Higher class	32	124	81	100.50	8.673

**Table 5 Post-hoc Tukey test on Help-Seeking Intention Score of three Classes of Socioeconomic Status (SES)**

(I) Socioeconomic status	(J) Socioeconomic status	Mean Difference (MD) (I-J)	Standard Error	95% Interval Lower Bound	Confidence Upper Bound
Lower class	Middle class	-19.149*	1.326	-22.27	-16.03
	Higher class	-34.167*	2.136	-39.20	-29.14
Middle class	Lower class	19.149*	1.326	16.03	22.27
	Higher class	-15.018*	2.035	-19.81	-10.22
Higher class	Lower class	34.167*	2.136	29.14	39.20
	Middle class	15.018*	2.035	10.22	19.81

\* $p = 0.05$

The result table 5 mentions that higher class participants are more intended to seek psychological help than lower class (mean difference = 34.167) and middle class (mean difference = 15.018) students, which are significant at 0.05 level.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to investigate the psychological help-seeking intention among undergraduate students. For this reason, three hundred respondents were randomly selected from seven departments of Rajshahi University, Bangladesh. A Bangla-translated (Barman & Sutradhar, 2022) of the General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (Wilson et al., 2005) was administered to measure help-seeking intention. Three hypotheses were formulated to test the study.

The first hypothesis was 'Female participants would higher intention to seek psychological help than male participants'. The result of the *t*-test was presented in table 1. The table 1 demonstrated ( $t = 1.380$ ,  $df = 298$ ,  $p = NS$ ) that male respondents were not significantly lower help-seeking intentions than female students. The result did not confirm the hypothesis. But the result was consistent with prior findings (Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982; Atkinson & Gim, 1989; Atkinson et al., 1995; Furnham & Andrew, 1996; Masuda & Suzumura, 2005). The researchers argue that in society, peoples are obeying social values and norms which is individualized by their strength, expressive style of emotion, feelings, and aggressiveness. The above characteristics are seen as variables of help-seeking behavior and these characteristics are more common in males and females. These are the major causes of similar interest in help-seeking behavior in terms of gender. Other causes are both genders are feeling less hesitant, less restrictive, equal rights, and more open-minded about seeking professional help.

The second hypothesis was 'Urban areas respondents would higher intend to seek psychological help than rural respondents'. The result of the *t*-test was presented in table 2. The table 2 showed ( $t = 8.085$ ,  $df = 298$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) that urban areas participants were significantly higher help-seeking intentions than rural areas participants. The result confirmed the hypothesis and was consistent with previous findings (Oliver et al., 2005; Bamberger, 2009; Jorm, 2012; Yu et al., 2015). The authors argue that the main causes of avoiding professional help in any society are social stigma, lack of mental health literacy, more trust in informal help, lack of knowledge about services, and negative experience of prior seeking help (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Gulliver et al., 2012), which is very common in rural areas in Bangladesh. Other reasons are low education, availability of treatment, financial crisis, social situation, and more dependence on traditional healers very common in rural areas than urban areas and less intention of help-seeking behavior.

The third hypothesis was 'Socioeconomic status is directly related to the help-seeking intention'. The result of the one-way ANOVA test was showed in table 3. The table 3 mentioned ( $SS = 37389.274$  &  $32994.112$ ,  $MS = 18694.637$  &  $111.091$ ,  $df = 2$  &  $297$ ,  $F = 168.282$  and  $p < 0.01$ ) that there was a significant impact of socioeconomic status on help-seeking intention. The result confirmed the hypothesis and was consistent with previous findings (Bayer & Peay, 1997; Adamson et al., 2003; Rothì & Leavey, 2006; Greidanus, 2010; Karumbaiah et al., 2022). The result of *post-hoc Tukey* test were presented in table 5. The table 5 revealed that higher socioeconomic class participants were significantly ( $p = 0.05$ ) more intended to seek help than middle class ( $MD = 15.018$ ) and lower class ( $MD = 34.167$ ) participants. Basically, various factors are included for elite-class people to seek more psychological help from professionals or other people. Generally, higher socioeconomic class people have higher recognition of the psychiatric disorder, more knowledge of factors affecting psychological well-being, beliefs, and more positive attitudes toward mental health (O'Connor et al., 2014). Other major causes of more intent to seek



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psychological help in the higher class students are more financial ability, less social stigma, education level, social environment, and neighborhood context than lower class people.

The present research stated that help-seeking intention is a significant variable of mental well-being. The findings would create greater scope for the students, government, and mental health professionals to reframe, reconsider and rebuild the impacting variables to enrich the psychological services in university settings. Additionally, this study is also considered a frame of reference for further research in Bangladesh. Despite these positive implications, the research has some limitations. First of all, the study only considered university students and did not cover all universities in Bangladesh. Secondly, the sample of the study was only selected from the third and fourth-year honors classes.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The Authors have no conflict of interest to publish this study.

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