

Attitudes toward Seeking Professional Counseling

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ABSTRACT

The negative attitudes of people towards seeking professional help for mental health issues have been a persistent challenge in promoting access to mental health services. The purpose of the present study is to explore the attitudes of college students toward seeking professional psychological help, with a particular focus on differences between psychology majors and students majoring in other subjects. A total of 250 college students, including 125 college students majoring in psychology and the other 125 majoring in non-psychology subjects, completed a self-report survey-Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short Form (ATSPPHS-SF), measuring their attitudes toward seeking psychological help. The results indicated that psychology majors had a more positive attitude towards seeking professional psychological help compared to students majoring in other subjects. These findings have important implications for mental health providers, educators, and policy-makers, as they suggest that interventions to promote positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help may be most effective when targeted toward specific populations, such as students in certain academic programs.

Keywords: *Professional Psychological Help, Mental Health, College Students*

In contemporary society, the acknowledgment and acceptance of mental health challenges have become increasingly prevalent. Despite the growing awareness, seeking professional counseling remains complex and often stigmatized for many individuals. Understanding the attitudes towards seeking professional counseling is paramount for facilitating effective mental health interventions and reducing barriers to accessing care.

Attitudes toward seeking professional counseling play a crucial role in determining individuals' willingness to engage with mental health services, yet these attitudes remain complex and multifaceted. Understanding the factors that influence these attitudes is essential for improving access to and utilization of mental health care services. Attitudes toward seeking professional counseling play a pivotal role in determining individuals' willingness to address mental health concerns. Psychological models provide frameworks for understanding these attitudes, encompassing diverse perspectives on mental health and therapy.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research by Vogel, Wade, and Haake (2006) found that stigma surrounding mental health treatment significantly influences individuals' attitudes toward seeking professional counseling. They observed that perceptions of weakness and embarrassment were common barriers to seeking help. Similarly, studies by Barney et al. (2006) and Vogel, Wester, and Larson (2007) highlighted the role of gender in shaping attitudes toward counseling, with men generally exhibiting more negative attitudes compared to women. Cultural factors also play a significant role in attitudes toward seeking professional counseling. Sue, Cheng, Saad, and Chu (2012) emphasized the importance of considering cultural values and beliefs when examining attitudes toward counseling. Their research indicated that individuals from collectivistic cultures may be more hesitant to seek help due to concerns about familial and societal expectations.

Furthermore, studies focusing on specific populations have provided valuable insights. For instance, research by Masuda et al. (2009) explored attitudes toward counseling among Asian American college students and identified cultural stigma and lack of familiarity with counseling services as primary barriers. Similarly, studies by Brown et al. (2010) and Pérez, Hidalgo, and Ayala (2010) investigated attitudes toward counseling among Hispanic/Latino populations, highlighting the influence of cultural norms and language barriers. Recent research has also examined the impact of technology on attitudes toward counseling. Cook et al. (2018) investigated the acceptability of online counseling platforms among college students and found that convenience and accessibility positively influenced attitudes toward seeking help.

Psychological Health-seeking Stigma

Despite the diversity of psychological models, stigma surrounding mental health remains a significant barrier to seeking counseling. Stigma refers to negative attitudes and beliefs that lead to discrimination and social exclusion of individuals with mental health problems. Research by Corrigan (2004) has shown that stigma can contribute to feelings of shame and reluctance to seek help, perpetuating the cycle of mental health stigma.

The Importance of the Relationship between Therapist and Client

The therapeutic relationship serves as a cornerstone of counseling effectiveness, facilitating trust, empathy, and collaboration between therapist and client. Research by Martin et al. (2000) has underscored the impact of the therapeutic alliance on treatment outcomes, with a strong relationship predicting positive changes in clients' attitudes toward counseling. Cultivating a supportive and nonjudgmental therapeutic environment is essential for fostering openness and engagement in therapy.

Rationale of the study

Attitudes toward seeking professional counseling are influenced by various factors, including stigma, gender, culture, and technology. Understanding these attitudes is essential for developing effective interventions to promote mental health help-seeking behavior. By addressing the complex factors influencing attitudes toward counseling, mental health professionals can work toward creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for those in need of psychological support. Future research should continue to explore these factors across diverse populations and contexts to improve mental health services and reduce barriers to seeking help.

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Objective of the study

To explore the attitudes of psychology and non-psychology college students toward seeking professional counseling.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The 125 participants were divided into two categories of having a psychology background and non-psychology background. The data was collected through purposive sampling. Data from all these participants were given questionnaires concerning the aforementioned variables. The scoring was accordingly obtained and compiled. Informed consent was obtained in written form from participants.

Tools

1. Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help (ATSPPH)-Short Form: ATSPPHS-SF measures an individual's willingness to seek help from mental health professionals. Developed by Fischer and Turner in 1970 to understand the factors that influence a person's decision to seek help and to identify potential barriers to seeking help. Respondents rate their level of agreement with each statement on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Its validity has been established through rigorous empirical validation, including confirmatory factor analysis and criterion-related validity assessments, affirming its capacity to accurately measure attitudes towards seeking professional help. Furthermore, the scale demonstrates commendable reliability, as evidenced by its high internal consistency and test-retest reliability coefficients, ensuring consistent and replicable results across different contexts.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Group descriptives

Sample Size (N)		Mean Standard	Skewness	Deviation	Kurtosis
Psychology	125	19.7	4.95	-0.846	0.420
Non-psychology	125	15.7	5.37	-0.427	-0.150
Total	250	17.7	5.54	-0.567	-0.127

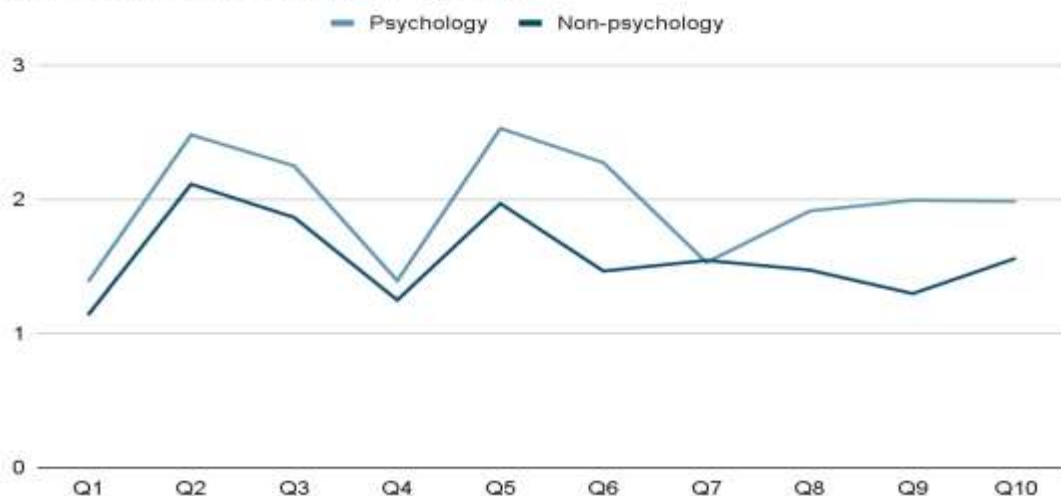
The mean values of ATSPPH-SF Scores for psychology students, non-psychology students, and total students were found to be 19.7(SD=4.95), 15.7(SD=5.37) and 17.7(SD=5.54) respectively. The skewness of the scores for psychology students was found to be -0.846, indicating that the distribution was left-skewed. Also, the values of skewness of the scores for non-psychology students, and total students were found to be -0.427 and -0.567 respectively, indicating that the distribution was left-tailed. The values of Kurtosis for the scores of psychology students, non-psychology students, and total students were found to be 0.420, -0.150, and -0.127 respectively. This indicated that psychology students' distribution was leptokurtic, while the non-psychology and total students' distribution was platykurtic.

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Table No. 2 Average of responses on attitudes towards seeking professional help-short form

S. No	Items	Average	
		Psychology Group	Non-Psychology Group
1.	If I believed I was having a mental breakdown, my first inclination would be to get professional attention	1.384	1.136
2.	The idea of talking about problems with a psychologist strikes me as a poor way to get rid of emotional conflicts	2.48	2.112
3.	If I were experiencing a serious emotional crisis at this point in my life, I would be confident that I could find relief in psychotherapy	2.248	1.864
4.	There is something admirable in the attitude of a person who is willing to cope with his or her conflicts and fears without resorting to professional help	1.392	1.248
5.	I would want to get psychological help if I were worried or upset for a long period of time.	2.528	1.968
6.	I might want to have psychological counseling in the future.	2.272	1.464
7.	A person with an emotional problem is not likely to solve it alone; he or she is likely to solve it with professional help.	1.528	1.544
8.	Considering the time and expense involved in psychotherapy, it would have doubtful value for a person like me.	1.912	1.472
9.	A person should work out his or her own problems; getting psychological counseling would be a last resort	1.992	1.296
10	Personal and emotional troubles, like many things, tend to work out by themselves.	1.984	1.56

Psychology and Non-psychology Average Score



Graph No. 1 Average scores of psychology and non-psychology students

The above graph and table show the average scores of the psychology and non-psychology students on the ATSPPH-SF scale. The average scores for item nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

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and 10 for psychology students were found to be 1.384, 2.48, 2.248, 1.392, 2.528, 2.272, 1.528, 1.912, 1.992, and 1.984 respectively. Similarly, the average scores for item nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 for psychology students were found to be 1.136, 2.112, 1.864, 1.248, 1.968, 1.464, 1.544, 1.472, 1.296, and 1.56 respectively.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

The result of the current study confirms that non-psychology background people are less likely to seek professional help when in need. People who are not familiar with the field of psychology may have misconceptions about counseling and mental health, which can create barriers to seeking help.

For Item 1, which pertained to the inclination to seek professional assistance in the event of a perceived mental breakdown, mean scores for psychology and non-psychology students were 1.384 and 1.136, respectively. This aligns with findings from a study in Canada, revealing that one in ten young individuals sought professional help for their issues (Findlay & Sunderland, 2014).

Regarding Item 2, which addressed the efficacy of discussing problems with a psychologist, mean scores for psychology and non-psychology students were 2.48 and 2.112, respectively. In contrast, Han et al. (2018) observed that 40.4% of Chinese university students expressed willingness to consult a psychiatrist for suicidal ideation, often preferring informal social networks over professional assistance.

Concerning Item 3, which examined confidence in finding relief through psychotherapy during a serious emotional crisis, mean scores for psychology and non-psychology students were 2.248 and 1.864, respectively. Coppens et al. (2013) discovered that over 69% of surveyed individuals in Europe displayed openness towards seeking professional help, with approximately 50% acknowledging its value.

For Item 4, which explored admiration for self-reliance in handling emotional conflicts, mean scores for psychology and non-psychology students were 1.392 and 1.248, respectively. Corrigan et al. (2014) and Jorm et al. (2000) highlighted that individuals valuing emotional self-reliance and perceiving help-seeking as a sign of weakness were less inclined to seek mental health services.

Item 5, regarding the willingness to seek psychological help for prolonged worry or distress, yielded mean scores of 2.528 and 1.968 for psychology and non-psychology students, respectively. Abolfotouh et al. (2019) reported that 43.5% of participants in Saudi Arabia indicated a readiness to seek professional assistance for severe emotional issues.

Item 6, focusing on the potential future utilization of psychological counseling, yielded mean scores of 2.272 and 1.464 for psychology and non-psychology students, respectively. Mojtabai et al. (2016) revealed from the National Comorbidity Survey (NCS) that one-third of respondents in the USA would definitely seek professional help.

For Item 7, which addressed the likelihood of solving emotional problems alone versus with professional assistance, mean scores for psychology and non-psychology students were 1.528 and 1.544, respectively. This mirrors the findings of Han et al. (2018), wherein 40.4% of Chinese university students expressed a willingness to seek help from a psychiatrist for suicidal ideation.

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Regarding Item 8, concerning the perceived value of psychotherapy relative to time and expense, mean scores for psychology and non-psychology students were 1.912 and 1.472, respectively. Rickwood et al. (2005) noted that young individuals often delay seeking mental health assistance due to perceived time constraints, while Andrade et al. (2014) identified cost as a primary barrier to help-seeking in Brazil.

Item 9, examining the prioritization of self-resolution over psychological counseling, yielded mean scores of 1.992 and 1.296 for psychology and non-psychology students, respectively. Kauer et al. (2019) highlighted stigma and negative attitudes as significant impediments to help-seeking among young people in Australia.

Finally, Item 10, which assessed beliefs in the natural resolution of personal and emotional troubles, yielded mean scores of 1.984 and 1.56 for psychology and non-psychology students, respectively. Cunningham et al. (2014) identified stigma and negative attitudes towards mental illness as primary deterrents to professional help-seeking among young individuals in Ireland.

One reason why non-psychology background individuals may be hesitant to seek professional help is due to a lack of awareness or education about mental health issues. Research has shown that individuals who are more knowledgeable about mental health are more likely to seek help when they need it (e.g., Mackenzie et al., 2004). Another factor that can contribute to the reluctance to seek professional help among non-psychology background individuals is the stigma associated with mental illness. Stigma is a significant barrier to seeking help for mental health issues, and people who are not familiar with the field of psychology may be more likely to hold negative attitudes toward mental illness and seeking help (Vogel et al., 2009). They may believe that seeking help for mental health issues is a sign of weakness or that mental health problems are not legitimate health concerns.

Finally, non-psychology background individuals may be less likely to seek professional help for mental health issues because of the high cost of counseling. Many people may not be aware of the different types of mental health services available to them, such as low-cost or free counseling services offered by non-profit organizations. Others may not have health insurance that covers mental health services, making counseling unaffordable. In summary, non-psychology background individuals may be less likely to seek professional help for mental health issues due to a lack of knowledge or understanding about mental health, stigma, and the high cost of counseling. Increasing education and awareness about mental health and counseling services can help to reduce these barriers and encourage more people to seek the help they need.

Also, it was found that in every item the average of the psychology background scored more positively than the non psychology background. It further supported that notion of the attitude of the non-psychology and how learning psychology gives people a more positive perspective towards professional help. Learning psychology can change an individual's perspective on seeking professional help for mental health issues. By studying psychology, individuals can gain knowledge about mental health and the benefits of seeking professional help, which can help reduce stigma and misconceptions about mental health.

A study by Poremski et al. (2019) found that psychology students had more positive attitudes toward seeking help for mental health issues than non-psychology students. The

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study also found that psychology students had a better understanding of mental health and were more likely to recognize symptoms of mental illness. In another study by Reavley and Jorm (2011), it was found that mental health literacy, which refers to knowledge and beliefs about mental health, was associated with help-seeking attitudes. Individuals who had higher mental health literacy scores were more likely to seek help when they needed it.

Furthermore, a review by Clement et al. (2015) found that learning about mental health and mental illness in the classroom can help reduce stigma towards mental health and increase help-seeking attitudes among students. In summary, learning psychology can change an individual's perspective on seeking professional help for mental health issues by increasing knowledge about mental health and reducing stigma. Psychology students may be particularly likely to have positive attitudes toward seeking help for mental health issues due to their education in the field.

Limitations

There is a possible limitation of sample bias which can limit the generalizability of the findings. Participants in research studies may also have biases that can affect the outcome of the study. It was difficult to control all variables that could impact the outcome of the study that can lead to confounding variables that can limit the validity of the results.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research studies on attitudes toward seeking professional counseling indicate that individuals who do not have a background in psychology are less likely to seek professional help, indicating a need for heightened efforts to bolster comprehension in this area. Notably, psychology majors exhibited greater cognizance and receptivity toward seeking therapy and professional psychological aid compared to their counterparts studying non-psychological subjects. To address this gap, interventions such as mental health education initiatives, the training of mental health professionals, and the promotion of mental health service utilization are imperative, particularly among vulnerable populations. Overall, while there are challenges to increasing access to mental health services, it is crucial to continue to work towards improving access to care for all individuals, regardless of their background or experience with psychology. By addressing these challenges, we can work towards a future where everyone has access to the care they need to achieve optimal mental health and well-being.

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Conflict of Interest

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