

How Mental Health Knowledge Shapes Attitudes: A Study of APF Personnel's Willingness to Seek Professional Help

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ABSTRACT

Armed Police Force Nepal (APF) is one of the national security agency whose main job is to maintain internal security, protect Nepal's borders, assist in disaster response and relief efforts. Due to the nature of their job they face a lot of stress that might impact their mental health. Recently two APF personnel have committed suicide which reveals the mental health of the personnel, and also reflects that addressing mental health concerns is crucial for maintaining resilient and effective personnel in APF Nepal. Knowledge about mental health related problems help in acknowledging the symptoms at an early stage thus encourages the personnel to seek professional help. The aim of the study is to assess knowledge about the mental health and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help among the APF service personnel. 145 participants took part in the study. The tools used were Mental Health Knowledge Questionnaire (MHKQ) and Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help-Short Form (ATSPPH-SF). The result indicated that there is a positive correlation between the mental health knowledge and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help among the Armed Police Force service personnel.

Keywords: *Mental Health, Knowledge, Attitude, Armed Police Force, Nepal, Professional help*

The Armed Police Force Nepal (APF), established in 2001, serves as a crucial national security agency with paramilitary functions. Its primary role is to maintain internal security, border protection, assist in disaster response and relief efforts. The APF operates under the Ministry of Home Affairs and plays a pivotal role in ensuring law and order across the country.

One of the primary responsibilities of the APF is border protection and performing as a border security force. Nepal shares international borders with China and India, making border security a foremost aspect of national defense. APF personnel are deployed along these borders to prevent illegal activities such as smuggling, human trafficking, illegal migrants, and cross-border crimes. Their presence helps safeguard Nepal's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

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Additionally, the APF plays a significant role in maintaining internal security and supporting law enforcement agencies in maintaining public order. APF personnel are often called upon to assist local police in handling civil unrest, protests, and other security challenges. Their paramilitary nature and specialized training makes them well-equipped to handle various law enforcement tasks effectively.

Furthermore, the APF is actively involved in disaster response and relief efforts. Nepal is prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, landslides, and floods. APF personnel are trained in disaster management, search and rescue operations. They play a key role in providing humanitarian assistance, rescuing stranded individuals, and restoring order in affected areas during times of crisis.

Moreover, the APF engages in community policing initiatives to foster trust and cooperation between law enforcement agencies and local communities. Through outreach programs and community engagement activities, APF service personnel work to address security concerns, promote crime prevention strategies, and build stronger relationships with the public.

Currently APF comprises over thirty-six thousand service personnel who are executing most of their duties in non-family duty stations where the working condition is characterized by limited facilities and a modest pay scale. The challenging circumstances of such duty stations underscore the pressing need to address the mental health and wellness concerns of the service personnel. Other reasons which can contribute to the mental health issues among the APF service personnel are deployment in conflict areas, domestic issues, institutional issues, stigma, substance abuse, military sexual trauma etc. From the year 2004 until date a total of 77 APF service personnel have committed suicide. The families impacted by this tragedy experience profound grief as they mourn the loss of their loved ones. However, the country is also facing a critical situation as it is losing skilled manpower. The loss of a comrade within a unit can significantly impact the morale and motivation of entire team. All this shows that some concrete steps need to be taken for maintaining the mental well-being of the APF service personnel.

The knowledge about the signs and symptoms will help in reducing the stigma related to mental health disorders and will enhance help seeking behaviour. Prior research has been done on prevalence of mental illness among APF service personnel. However, the authors were not able to trace any research paper on the knowledge of APF service personnel about mental health and their attitude towards seeking professional help in Nepal.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Egle Mazulyte Rasytine & et al. (2023) investigated the suicide risk, alcohol consumption and attitudes towards psychological help-seeking among Lithuanian General Population Men, Conscripts and Regular Active-Duty Soldiers. A total of 1195 males took part in the study out of which 445 from the general population, 490 were conscripts and 260 were regular AD soldiers. The result revealed that military personnel show a significantly lower suicide risk, compared to the general population sample. Further it was also revealed that there was no difference in the alcohol consumption among the three groups. It was also found out that conscripts have significantly more negative attitude towards psychological help as compared to regular AD soldiers and general population men.

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Andrews et al. (2023) observed the mental health knowledge, stigma and service use intentions among Royal Canadian Mounted Police Cadets (RCMPC). A total of 772 participants took part in the study. The result revealed that RCMPC cadets had significantly lower level of mental health knowledge and stigma and higher service use intentions than serving RCMP. Further it was also found out that female cadets reported statistically significantly higher score on mental health knowledge and service use and lower scores on stigma as compared to male cadets.

Saini et al. (2023) studied the mental health literacy of troops in India. A total of 975 soldiers took part in the study. It was revealed that overall awareness about mental health issues was just 26.21%.

Lane et al. (2021) assessed the attitude of police towards seeking professional mental health treatment in Canada. A total of 112 police officers were selected for the study. The result revealed the positive attitude towards seeking professional help for mental health treatment among the officers.

Rachel L. Krakawer & et al. (2020) examined the mental health knowledge, stigma and service use intentions among public safety personnel in Canada. A total of 4,108 personnel took part in the study. The result revealed that correctional workers reported good mental health knowledge, less stigma and highest intention to use mental health services. Conversely, firefighters reported the lowest mental health knowledge, highest stigma and lowest willingness to seek professional help.

Ren-Ping Gu & et al. (2020) assessed the attitudes and perceived barriers to mental healthcare in the People's Liberation Army Navy in China. A total of 676 navy personnel were recruited for the study. The result revealed that 88.44% of the personnel reported that they are willing to seek help if they had a mental health problem. Further organizational barriers, not knowing the location of mental health clinics and being perceived as weak were the main barriers to seeking mental healthcare.

Taylor et al. (2020) explored the knowledge about mental health disorders among US veterans. 15 participants were recruited for the study. The result revealed that majority of the participants had little or no perceived knowledge about mental health disorders.

Wood et al. (2020) investigated the characteristics of Canadian Armed Forces help-seekers, non-help seekers, and no mental health need groups. A total of 21,690 personnel took part in the study, out of which 6,996 belong to Regular Force and 1,469 belong to Reserve Force. The participants were divided into three groups as help seekers, non-help seekers and no-need. The result revealed that help-seekers had more negative attitude towards seeking mental health care.

Thomas et al. (2016) investigated the mental health literacy in US soldiers. A total of 2,048 soldiers took part in the study. It was found out that soldiers with senior rank and with more combat deployments had higher knowledge about mental health problems. Further it was also revealed that soldiers who had mental health problems reported higher knowledge about mental health problems.

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Kerry M. Karaffa & Karim Tochkov (2013) explored the attitudes of Law Enforcement Officers towards seeking mental health treatment in the US. 158 sworn officers participated in the study. It was found out that law enforcement officers held a more negative attitude toward seeking professional help.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objective: To assess the knowledge about mental health and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help among Armed Forced Police personnel.

Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between knowledge about mental health and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help.

Sample: Purposive sampling technique was used to draw the sample. A total of 145 officers took part in the study.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria

- Only males
- Officers only
- Age between 20-55 Years
- Willingness to participate in the study
- Must be in service

Exclusion criteria

- Not willing to participate in the study
- Female officers were excluded from the study

Tools

- **Mental Health Knowledge Questionnaire (MHKQ)** – It is a 20-item scale that is self-administered. It was developed by the Chinese Ministry of Health (MOH) in 2009. It measures the individual's knowledge about mental health. The MHKQ was found to be reliable and valid. The Cronbach's coefficient of MHKQ was reported to be 0.61 and the validity was significant and internally consistent.
- **Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help-Short Form** – Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help – Short Form (ATSPPH-SF) is a 10-item scale developed by Ficher. Each item is rated on a 4-point scale ranging from disagree to agree. The test-retest reliability was 0.80 and internal consistency ranges from 0.82-0.84.

RESULT

The data was analyzed by using SPSS. Mean, Standard deviation and Pearson's Correlation were used to evaluate the data.

Table 1: Mean and Standard deviation of Mental Health Knowledge and Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
MHKQ	15.03	2.16
ATSPPH-SF	17.43	2.78

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The table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of each of the variables. The mean and standard deviation of mental health knowledge is 15.03 and 2.16 respectively. The mean and standard deviation of attitude towards seeking professional psychological help is 17.43 and 2.78 respectively. This shows that there is an average level of knowledge about mental health problems and also average positive attitude towards seeking professional psychological help among the sample.

Table 2: Correlation between Mental Health Knowledge and Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help.

ATSPPH-SF		
	Correlation Coefficient(r)	.325**
MHKQ	p – value	.000

** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 indicates the Pearson correlation result and it shows that there is a moderate positive correlation between mental health knowledge and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help.

DISCUSSION

The goal of the current study was to examine the mental health knowledge and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help among the Armed Police Force Nepal (APF) service personnel. It was revealed that they have average level of knowledge regarding the mental health problems and have a positive attitude towards seeking professional psychological help. The result contrasts with the prevailing literature which indicates that numerous officers are reluctant to seek professional assistance for the mental well-being due to various factors such as stigma and pluralistic ignorance (Karaffa and Koch 2016). But our result has been supported by the study done by Rachel L. Krakauer and colleagues 2020 where they revealed that correctional personnel have the highest mental health knowledge, less stigma and highest intention to use mental health services.

The average level of mental health knowledge and positive attitude among APF service personnel can be due to the awareness among them. This awareness among the service personnel is provided by the Psychological Studies and Counseling Service Unit which was established in 2022 by the Armed Police Force Nepal. Since its establishment a lot of interactive sessions, training, awareness programs and workshops have been conducted on the topic of mental health. Further counseling services have been provided to the APF service personnel who are going through some mental health crisis. All this leads to create awareness and enhance knowledge about the mental health problems and create a positive attitude towards seeking psychological help among the APF personnel and reducing the stigma, taboo and discrimination attached to mental illness.

The present paper indicated that positive association between the average level of mental health knowledge and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help shows that awareness about the topic can motivate people to seek help during the mental health crisis.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that a positive correlation exists between the mental health knowledge and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help.

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Limitation

- The size of the sample was small.
- Only males were selected for the study.
- The use of self-rating measures may lead to bias since individuals may give answers that are socially desirable.
- Junior rank APF service personnel were not the part of the sample.

Recommendations

- Further research can be done on broad universe.
- Samples from other gender can be included to have a better representative sample of the population.
- Junior rank APF personnel can be included.
- In future, research on other variables like stigma and institutional barriers towards seeking psychological help can be done.

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Conflict of Interest

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