

Research Paper

## The Role of Self-Efficacy and Social Support in Shaping Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help

Samra Lodi<sup>1\*</sup>, Nasheed Imtiaz<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

In recent years, mental health awareness has grown in India, yet a reluctance to seek professional help persists. There are individuals in India who acknowledge their mental health struggles but refrain from seeking professional support. This research primarily aims to examine how self-efficacy and social support influence the attitudes of young adults toward seeking professional help. The total number of participants involved in this study was 100 and their age range was 18-24 years. In this paper self report questionnaires were used to assess the level of students' social support, self-efficacy and attitude towards professional help seeking. The outcomes of the study were analyzed using regression analysis and the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The research results demonstrated a positive and significant relationship among young adults' social support, self-efficacy and their attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help. In addition to this, self-efficacy and social support both emerged as predictors of positive attitude towards seeking professional psychological help. It is suggested by this study that strategies should be developed to strengthen self-efficacy and enhance social support among young adults, so they can be encouraged to seek professional help when needed.

**Keywords:** *Social support, Self-efficacy, Professional help, Mental Health*

The increasing prevalence of mental health problems in India is turning into a major concern, affecting individuals across all ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and communities. Despite this, the pursuit of mental health counseling remains stigmatized, with many individuals hesitant to seek professional help due to cultural beliefs, limited awareness, and a lack of accessible services. The World Health Organization's recommended ratios are in stark contrast to India's current mental health workforce, where there is a significant dearth of trained professionals. The country has less than one mental health worker per 100,000 residents, indicating a severe shortage in this crucial field. This scarcity, combined with societal stigma, lack of awareness, preference for self-reliance creates significant barriers to accessing support, leaving countless individuals to cope with their mental health challenges alone (Gulliver et al., 2010). Moreover, many Indians still view mental health issues as a personal failing, often prioritizing family-based or religious support over counseling. As a result, individuals often delay seeking professional assistance

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

\*Corresponding Author

Received: November 21, 2024; Revision Received: November 28, 2024; Accepted: December 03, 2024

## **The Role of Self-Efficacy and Social Support in Shaping Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help**

until their symptoms become severe. While the prevalence of mental health problems is well-documented, the attitudes and help-seeking behaviors also need crucial considerations.

### ***Attitude toward seeking professional help***

As individuals navigate the complexities of life, seeking help can be a crucial step towards personal growth and well-being. Help-seeking is the process by which individuals actively seek support, guidance, or assistance to address a problem or fulfill a need. Professional help-seeking is an essential aspect of addressing mental health concerns, as it involves actively seeking support from trained professionals such as therapists, psychologists, or counselors. Research conducted by Rickwood et al. (2005) suggests that professional help-seeking can significantly improve mental health outcomes by providing individuals with the skills, coping strategies, and interventions required to manage symptoms effectively. In their study Rickwood et al. defines help-seeking as "the behaviour of actively seeking help from other people it is about communicating with other people to obtain help in terms of understanding, advice, information, treatment and general support in response to a problem or distressing experience."

Attitude toward seeking professional psychological help refers to an individual's perspective, beliefs, and predispositions regarding the use of professional mental health services, such as therapy, counseling, or psychiatric support. This attitude encompasses a range of cognitive and emotional responses that influence whether a person views professional help-seeking as positive, necessary, or beneficial versus unnecessary, stigmatizing, or ineffective. In their research paper, Fischer and Turner (1970) defined attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help as "one's tendency to seek or resist professional aid during a personal crisis or following prolonged psychological discomfort." Various factors cause individual to hesitate to receive help and be anxious or exhibit negative attitude about psychological help even though they need it (Komiya et al, 2000).

### **Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy encompasses an individual's conviction in their capability to activate the necessary drive, intellectual assets, and behavioral strategies to accomplish a specific task effectively within a given environment (Stazkovic & Luthans, 1998). The concept of self-efficacy was formally introduced by Bandura in his 1977 publication, "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change." The self-efficacy theory suggests that people's beliefs in their ability to cope with challenges and environmental demands impact how they start and persist in a certain behavior or action. Compared to those with low self-efficacy, individuals exhibiting higher level self-efficacy are more inclined to undertake challenging tasks, demonstrate great efforts and perseverance, and ultimately attain superior results (Schunk, 1989). This notion is supported by research in various domains, such as academic achievement, career choices, and health-related behaviors. For example, research has revealed that students who have stronger academic self-efficacy are more likely to engage in self-learning, persevere in the face of adversity, and eventually attain greater academic success. The idea of "self-efficacy" shows an optimistic view of oneself (Schwarzer, 1992). As individuals progress through life, self-efficacy emerges as an influential component of their self-concept, with the potential to influence life outcomes (Bandura, 1990). The presence of self-efficacy is conducive to goal setting, sustained effort, perseverance amidst difficulty, and recovery from setbacks. As an operative construct, self-efficacy directly influences subsequent behavior. Additionally, self-efficacy exerts significant influence on behaviors in numerous life domains (Grabowski et al., 2001) throughout the life course. Self-efficacy beliefs pertain not to an individual's actual

## **The Role of Self-Efficacy and Social Support in Shaping Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help**

capabilities or skills, but rather to their perceived competency in specific situations, irrespective of their true abilities. Gist and Mitchell (1992) define self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands.” Notably, this construct differs from other aspects of self-perception, including self-esteem and perceptions of self-worth and value (Staples et al., 1984). Earlier researchers focused on studying situation-specific self-efficacy, such as career self-efficacy and academic self-efficacy. However, there has been a growing shift in interest toward generalized self-efficacy (Schwarzer et al., 1992).

### **Social Support**

The concept of social support includes both the belief and the actual experience of being cared for, having access to help from others, and belonging to a connected social group. According to various studies social support significantly contributes to well-being, better physical and mental health, and enhanced overall quality of life. The existing literature has consistently demonstrated the correlation between improved mental health and social support (Harandiet al., 2017). Social support offers a sense of belonging, validation, and practical help, which can reduce the negative impacts of stressful situations and long-term illnesses. Studies have shown that social support can mitigate the effects of stress by reducing physiological stress responses and contributing to better physical and mental health outcomes (Hostinar & Gunnar, 2015). Previous studies have indicated that people with more perceived social support often experience less depression and greater self-esteem (Harandi et al., 2017). Social support is a key factor in psychological well-being, significantly influencing individuals' ability to cope with stress, maintain positive mental health, and foster resilience. Studies have shown that strong social support networks can act as buffer against stress, promoting better psychological outcomes and reducing the risk of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Research also highlights that the quality of social support may be more impactful than the quantity. High-quality support, characterized by genuine care and effective assistance, is associated with better health outcomes than large but less meaningful networks (Uchino, 2004). Moreover, social support is a multifaceted concept and its effectiveness can differ based on individual needs, circumstances and preferences (Taylor et al., 2004).

### **Purpose of the study**

#### ***Objectives***

- To assess the relationship between social support and attitudes toward seeking professional help.
- To assess the relationship between self-efficacy and attitudes toward seeking professional help.
- To assess the relationship between social support and self-efficacy.
- To explore the critical predictors of attitudes toward seeking professional help.

#### ***Hypotheses***

- **H1:** There will be positive relationship between social support and attitudes toward seeking psychological professional help
- **H2:** There will be positive relationship between self-efficacy and attitudes toward seeking psychological professional help
- **H3:** There will be positive relationship between social support and self-efficacy.
- **H4:** Social support will predict positive attitudes toward seeking psychological professional help.

## The Role of Self-Efficacy and Social Support in Shaping Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help

- **H5:** Self-efficacy will predict positive attitudes toward seeking psychological professional help.

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Design*

The study utilized a correlational research design to investigate the relationship of social support and self-efficacy (predictors) with attitudes toward seeking professional help (criterion variable).

#### *Participants*

The purposive sampling was used to collect data from 100 young adults (50 male and 50 female). The age range of the sample comprised was 18-24 yrs.

#### *Instrument*

- **Personal data sheet and consent form:** It comprises of detailed information about the research participants.
- **General Self-efficacy Scale (GSE)** by Schwarzer and Jerusalem, M (1995): The scale comprises 10 items, each with four response options: "Not at all true," "Hardly true," "Moderately true," and "Exactly true," scored from 1 to 4 respectively. The overall score is calculated by summing the individual scores from all ten items, resulting in a possible range of 10-40. Higher scores indicate increased self-efficacy. This scale measures a single global dimension. Cronbach's alpha was .896 for the entire sample.
- **Social Support:** The Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL-12) is a short form of the original 40-item scale developed by Cohen and Hoberman (1983), designed to assess perceived social support. It has 12 items and is scored on a 4-point Likert scale. Respondents can choose from options ranging from "definitely false" to "definitely true," including "probably false" and "probably true." The ISEL and other social support assessment tools demonstrate validity coefficients between 0.30 and 0.46. Additionally, the internal consistency of these measures is robust, with Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) values falling within the range of 0.88 to 0.90. Cronbach's alpha for this sample was .883.
- **Attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help Short Form (ATSPPH-SF):** Fischer and Farina (1995) adapted a previously established self-assessment tool for evaluating attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. The ATSPPH-SF is a short version, consisting of 10 items in contrast to the original 29-item version. It uses a 4-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from agree to disagree, including partly agree and partly disagree options. Higher scores on this scale indicate a more favorable attitude towards seeking professional help. Cronbach's alpha for this sample was .784.

#### *Procedure*

Participants in the study were approached directly. Questionnaires were administered with standard instructions written on them. Rapport was established to ensure their comfort, and they were debriefed on the entire study. They were graciously appreciated for their cooperation. The scoring of all the tools was done following their individual manual instructions.

**RESULT**

*Table 1: Showing descriptive statistics of participant’s age, Self-Efficacy, Social Support and Attitudes toward seeking professional help among young adults.*

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SE	100	18	40	30.62	5.108
SS	100	12	48	35.70	7.659
ATSPPH	100	11	39	29.94	5.029
Age	100	18	24	20.98	1.614

SS = Social Support, SE = Self-Efficacy, ATSPPH = Attitudes toward seeking psychological professional help.

From table 1 it can be observed that the mean age of the participant was 20.98 with a standard deviation of 1.614. In addition to this, the mean score of self-efficacy was 30.62 with a standard deviation of 5.108. The mean score of social support was 35.70 with a standard deviation of 7.659. And the mean score and standard deviations for attitude toward seeking professional help were 29.94 and 5.029 respectively.

*Table 2: Showing correlation coefficient between Social support, Self efficacy and Attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help among young adults.*

Variables	SS	SE	ATSPPH
SS	1		
SE	.592**	1	
ATSPPH	.650**	.552**	1

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

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

SS= Social Support, SE= Self-Efficacy, ATSPPH = Attitudes toward seeking psychological professional help.

Table 2 shows the positive correlation between social support (SS) and attitudes toward seeking psychological professional help (ATSPPH)  $r = .650$  at .01 level of significance. Hence, H1 stated that there will be positive relationship between social support and attitude toward seeking psychological professional help among young adults is accepted.

Table 2 further indicate the positive correlation between self-efficacy (SE) and attitude toward seeking psychological professional help (ATSPPH)  $r = .552$  at .01 level of significance. Therefore, H2 stated that there will be positive relationship between self-efficacy and attitude toward seeking psychological professional help among young adults is accepted.

Moreover, table 2 also shows that social support and self-efficacy are also positively correlated with each other  $r = .592$  significance at .01 level. Therefore, H3 stated that there will be positive relationship between self-efficacy and social support among young adults is accepted.

**Table 3: Showing the results of regression analysis considering Self-efficacy and Social support as predictors of Attitudes toward seeking psychological professional help among young adults (N=100).**

Predictor	Standardized B	Multiple R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Adjusted	F	Sig
SS	.650	.650	.423	.417	71.875	000**
SE	.552	.552	.304	.297	42.875	000**

\*\* $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed); \* $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed)

Table 3 shows that social support emerged as a critical predictor of positive attitudes toward seeking professional help among young adults. The square of multiple correlations ( $R^2=.423$ ) shows that social support among young adults account for 42% of the variance in attitudes toward seeking psychological professional help. The F-statistic is significant (71.875),  $p < .01$ , indicating that social support is a statistically significant predictor of the dependent variable (ATSPPH). Moreover self-efficacy can also predict positive attitude toward seeking psychological professional help among young adults. The square of multiple correlations ( $R^2=.304$ ) shows that self-efficacy among young adults account for 30% of the variance in attitudes toward seeking psychological professional help. The F-statistic is significant (42.844),  $p < .01$ , indicating that self-efficacy is a statistically significant predictor of the dependent variable (ATSPPH).

The combined square of multiple correlations of social support and self-efficacy ( $R^2=.466$ ) shows that 46% of variance in attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help was explained by social support and self-efficacy. By considering the F value of social support and self-efficacy ( $F= 42.267$ ,  $p < .01$ ) it can be concluded that self-efficacy and social support contributed significantly in predicting attitude toward seeking psychological professional help. Hence H4 and H5 stated that self-efficacy and social support will emerge as predictors of attitudes toward seeking psychological professional help are accepted.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the intricate relationship between social support, self-efficacy and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, among young adults. The result align with prior research that identifies social support is predictive of positive attitudes toward seeking help (Orji & Abikoye, 2019). Previous studies have shown that social support enhances coping strategies and promotes positive health behaviors by boosting self-efficacy; thereby enabling individuals to seek help effectively (Tsang et al., 2012). Another research highlights that social support plays a crucial role in reducing perceived stigma (Vogel et al, 2007) which can enhance the probability of individuals seeking professional psychological help. Another study suggested that individuals with high perceived social support are more likely to feel empowered to access mental health services (Harandi et al., 2017). Adolescents who received encouragement from their social networks were more open to seeking therapy or counseling (Rickwood et al., 2005). The buffering hypothesis posits that social support mitigates the adverse effects of stress and enhances coping mechanisms (Cohen & Wills, 1985). This underscores the need for supportive environments that encourage adolescents to engage with mental health resources (Slone et al., 2013; Garland & Zigler, 1994).

This study also found a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and attitudes toward seeking professional help. It suggests that young adults with high self-efficacy are more inclined to seek help compared to those with low self-efficacy. These findings are

## The Role of Self-Efficacy and Social Support in Shaping Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help

consistent with the previous research, that adolescents with higher self-efficacy are more likely to overcome stigma and seek psychological assistance (Garland & Zigler, 1994; Blanchard et al., 1995). They demonstrate greater confidence in their ability to navigate the help-seeking process and cope with challenges associated with seeking assistance (Martín-Arbós et al., 2021; Vogel et al., 2005). Additionally, self-efficacy serves as a personal resource that empowers individuals to face challenges and utilize support systems effectively. Research has consistently shown that higher self-efficacy correlates with a willingness to seek help and engage with interventions (Garland & Zigler, 1994). This suggests that interventions targeting self-efficacy enhancement can significantly impact young adults' attitudes and behaviors toward professional help-seeking.

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This research contributes valuable understanding to the relationship between self-efficacy, social support, and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, filling a significant gap in the current literature. While prior research has examined these variables (social support and self-efficacy) individually, no study has explored their combined impact on help-seeking behaviors. The findings demonstrate that self-efficacy and social support are significant predictors of positive attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, particularly among young adults. This suggests that fostering a sense of competence and ensuring a robust support system can encourage individuals to seek assistance when faced with psychological challenges.

The implications of this research are significant for mental health practitioners, educators, and policymakers. It highlights the necessity of developing targeted intervention programs that explicitly aim to enhance self-efficacy and social support. Such programs can include skills training, mentorship, peer support initiatives, and community-based activities that foster a sense of belonging and competence. By empowering young adults to believe in their ability to manage life's challenges and creating an environment where support is readily available, these interventions can reduce barriers to seeking professional help.

#### *Limitation*

The study's reliance on convenience sampling may compromise the generalizability of the findings because of potential sample bias and subjective participant selection. The sample size of 100 may limit the generalisability of the findings to a larger population. Participant biases could also potentially influence the outcomes of research.

### REFERENCES

- Atkinson, D. R., & Gim, R. H. (1989). Asian-American cultural identity and attitudes toward mental health services. *Journal of counseling psychology, 36*(2), 209.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review.*
- Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action. *Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1986* (23-28), 2.
- Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current directions in psychological science, 9*(3), 75-78.
- Bentil, E. E., & Bentil, W. (2015). Understanding the help seeking behavior of Accra Polytechnic students: A qualitative approach. *public health, 5*(6), 172-85.
- Blanchard, C. G., Albrecht, T. L., Ruckdeschel, J. C., Grant, C. H., & Hemmick, R. M. (1995). The role of social support in adaptation to cancer and to survival. *Journal of psychosocial oncology, 13*(1-2), 75-95.

***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:*** Lodi, S. & Imtiaz, N. (2024). The Role of Self-Efficacy and Social Support in Shaping Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(4), 1623-1630. DIP:18.01.153.20241204, DOI:10.25215/1204.153