

Research Paper

Counselling on Campus: Academic Discipline as a Factor in Stigma, Attitude, and Awareness

Saloni Jaitly^{1*}, Mahek Gupta², Pushpita Behera³

ABSTRACT

In the realm of higher education, universities offer indispensable counselling services designed to support students throughout their academic journey. However, the perception of and engagement with these services can vary significantly among students, often shaped by the academic discipline they pursue. This study delves into the complex interplay between students' attitudes toward seeking professional help, self-stigmatisation related to help-seeking, and their awareness of counselling services within the college context. A total of 170 students participated in this quantitative research. The study employed the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale (SSOSH) to gauge self-stigmatisation tendencies and the Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short Form (ATSPPHS-SF) to assess students' attitudes toward counselling. Along with that descriptive questions were asked to assess awareness of counselling services. The findings reveal a significant difference between self-stigmatisation and the willingness to seek counselling services among psychology and non-psychology students. However, there is a noteworthy absence of a significant discrepancy in the awareness of available counselling services within the college. These results underscore the dual nature of influence in academic discipline: while it fosters a positive attitude toward seeking help among psychology students, the institution is challenged to enhance the dissemination of information regarding the array of resources accessible to all students.

Keywords: *Help-seeking, Self Stigma, College Counselling Services, Academic Discipline*

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2018) defined mental health as 'a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'. Mental disorders occur when there exists a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation and behaviour and they are among the leading causes of ill-health and disability affecting over 450 million people worldwide (WHO, 2018). Mental disorders impact as many as one in seven Indians (Sagar et al., 2020). However, according to Hans et al., (2021) while an estimated 197.3 million people have mental disorders in India, a majority of this population either has no or limited access to mental health services. Thus, it becomes necessary to accumulate necessary mental

¹Alumna, 2024, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, Delhi University, Delhi

²Alumna, 2024, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, Delhi University, Delhi

³Assistant Professor, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, Delhi University, Delhi

*Corresponding Author

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health resources, understand what prevents individuals from making use of these resources and increase awareness about these resources.

India, in particular, reports a substantial treatment gap along with numerous barriers that prevent young adults from seeking help (Gururaj et al., 2016). A research by Jaisooriya et al., (2017) reported that attending college is stressful for most college students and is a period with significant stressors that may lead to poor mental health conditions in these young adults. Coping with academic stress, changes in their environment, and living away from the family for the first time all present various prominent challenges to these students (Chadda, 2018). The disruption caused by the recent pandemic has forced students to adapt to a completely new mode of learning, leading them to face a number of issues (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2020). There is a great feeling of fear and uncertainty among affected college students, wherein the pandemic has caused panic, anxiety, and depression (Chaturvedi et al., 2022; Xu & Huang, 2022). Many college students do not seek treatment for mental health disorders as they feel that symptoms are typical of college stress and also express concern that others will judge them for seeking treatment (Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Gollust, 2007). College students are reluctant to disclose their personal information with a stranger or feel fearful or embarrassed if their social circle notices that they are seeing a therapist (Sharma, & Thomas, 2022).

These barriers prevent young adults from seeking help and often lead to the manifestation of negative attitudes towards seeking professional help (Velasco et al., 2020). This attitude towards seeking mental health care can be defined as “a collection of beliefs about therapy and the evaluative component of these beliefs. These beliefs include whether the individual sees therapy as potentially beneficial and whether the individual views personal psychotherapy as an option for himself or herself” (Thomas et. al, 2014). College students often exhibit a less favourable attitude, influenced by the stigma associated with seeking professional help. Additionally, a noteworthy presence of self-stigma is observed within the young adult population. Self-stigma is the reduction of an individual’s self-esteem or self-worth caused by the individual self-labelling herself or himself as someone who is socially unacceptable (Vogel, et al., 2006). In the case of seeking psychological help for a personal problem, the largely negative images of mental illnesses presented by western cultures could lower an individual’s internalised self concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy if they were to seek treatment (Corrigan, 1998, 2004; Holmes & River, 1998; Ahuja, et al., 2017).

Indian Studies indicate that stigma has a significant inverse relationship with the attitudes towards seeking professional counselling among college students. According to Chadda and Deb (2013), in collectivistic societies like ours, the self is defined relative to others, and is concerned with feelings of belongingness, dependency, empathy, and reciprocity, and is focused on small, selective in-groups at the expense of out-groups. Relationships with others are emphasised, while personal autonomy, space and privacy are considered secondary. In such an environment the attitude towards seeking psychological help can be negative especially among college students as their need of social approval is more than adults. In addition, according to Carson and Chowdhury (2000), “Counselling or therapy is generally an unknown, misunderstood or devalued enterprise in India.”

The present study divides its sample on the basis of subject choices taken up by university students, this allows the study to draw an understanding of whether learning about mental health and psychological concepts brings attitudinal changes related to help seeking in an individual.

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Research shows a variety of conclusions with respect to the help seeking behaviour of those exposed to psychological concepts. Professionals who are introduced to concepts of self-care and personal therapy early in their training are more likely to engage in such activities throughout their career (Visser & Kronsnick, 1998). Fischer and Farina (1995), for example, reported moderate correlations between positive attitudes to mental health treatment (mean score in the Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale Short Form [ATSPPHS-SF]) and help-seeking behaviour in a sample of undergraduate psychology students.

Comparative studies between psychology and non-psychology students also reveal interesting trends. A study conducted by Nizam and Nen (2022) revealed a significant difference in the self-stigma scores between those who studied psychology and those who did not ($t = 3.908$, $df = 194$, $p.05$). These findings indicate that psychology students have a more favourable attitude toward seeking counselling services than non-psychology students (Nizam & Nen, 2022).

Eigenhuis et al. (2021) reflected how one of the most important barriers to help-seeking was found to be attitudinal concerns among adolescents and young adults. Studies show that when people believe that seeking help will be more beneficial than a risk, they are more likely to have a positive attitude toward seeking treatment (Shaffer et al., 2006). Though these findings might not be eligible to be generalised across the globe, it provides important information as to how structural constraints such as money or time provide less of an impact than one's beliefs about and towards help-seeking or the treatment itself (Vogel et al., 2007).

It is also absolutely essential to raise awareness about already available resources which will in turn lead to the manifestation of more positive attitudes towards seeking professional help and probable reduction in levels of self stigma.

Mental health promotion aims at presenting mental health as a positive concept, college provides an important setting for cultivating mental health awareness in students (Hameed, et al., 2019). This period is especially important to help youth overcome mental health problems. About 75% of persons suffering from adult-type psychiatric disorders have experienced its onset by 24 years of age (Kessler et al., 2005) which may have significant adverse implications on a wide array of life aspects including academics (Kessler et al., 1995), substance use (Weitzman, 2004), social relationships (Kessler, Walters, & Forthofer, 1998), etc. Poor awareness and low inclinations to seek professional help compound the challenges related to youth mental health (Mehrotra, Fathima, & Sudhir, 2018).

In November 2012, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), The Government of India started an initiative to require all central government funded institutions including the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Indian Institute of Management (IIM), and National Institute of Technology (NIT) to have counselling facilities for their students. This new policy and the University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines indicate that student counselling systems must be in place in Institutes of Higher Education (IHE), and teacher-counsellors need to be trained to offer psychological support to youth. Also, the UGC recommends setting up student counselling centres. However, there have been gaps in the implementation of relevant policies and programs. Unfortunately, there is no data on the uniform implementation of such guidelines across IHE. Field observations suggest that, while several institutes have made provisions for counselling

services in some way, there are no systems in place to continuously capture the nature and quality of services offered, nor do they gather and assess student perspectives on ease of access and utility. In several instances, counselling services when available tend to have suboptimal uptake. Large-scale epidemiological studies have found that less than 40% of individuals with a mental health concern seek any type of professional help (e.g., Andrews, Issaki-dis, & Carter, 2001; Kessler et al., 2001; Regier et al., 1993). Thus, promotion of mental health services and raising awareness about the availability of counselling services is extremely crucial.

The current study included awareness as an important aspect affecting help seeking behaviour in students who studied psychology and those who did not. Most of the research carried out in this domain has focused on the availability of counselling services and whether they are accessible to adolescents and young adults, findings of a majority of these researches show that there exists a low level of counselling awareness in this population which stems out of, both, lack of availability and accessibility in addition to the attachment of a negative connotation towards seeking help. Hence, it was felt essential to include the aspect of awareness while assessing attitude in this population.

Hence, this study aims to explore the distinctions in attitudes and self-stigma towards professional help, as well as the awareness of counselling services, between psychology and non-psychology students. The investigation also seeks to comprehend the relationship between academic discipline and the levels of stigma, attitude, and awareness concerning counselling services in a college setting.

Thus, the aim of this study is to understand how psychology and non-psychology students differ in their attitude and self-stigma towards professional help along with levels of awareness about counselling services in college. The study tries to understand the relationship of academic discipline with stigma, attitude and awareness of counselling services.

METHODS

Objective

- To evaluate the differences in attitudes toward professional psychological help among students enrolled in psychology and non-psychology courses.
- To examine distinctions in self-stigmatisation for seeking psychological assistance among students enrolled in psychology versus non-psychology courses.
- To elucidate the pattern of awareness about counselling services in college among psychology and non-psychology students.

Hypothesis

- **H1:** Students with psychology coursework in their academic curriculum will have a more positive attitude towards seeking professional psychological assistance as compared to those who do not have psychology coursework.
- **H2:** Students with psychology coursework in their academic curriculum will have lower levels of self-stigmatisation associated with help-seeking behaviour in comparison to students who do not have psychology as a part of their academic program.

Research Design

The study employed a survey methodological approach wherein data acquisition was facilitated by the administration of a structured online questionnaire containing close-ended questions.

Sample

- The study encompassed participants aged between 18 to 25 years who were enrolled in either undergraduate or postgraduate programmes in India and were required to have proficiency in English Language.
- Participants outside the age range were excluded from the study. Thus, of 183 responses received, the data for a total of 170 students (92.89%) ranging from 18-25 years (mean [M] = 19.42, standard deviation [SD] = 1.79 years) were considered for the present study. Hundred participants (58.82%) had psychology as a subject in their universities while seventy (41.18%) participants did not have psychology as a subject.

Instruments

The online form circulated among participants was divided into three sections, as explained next.

- Section A included a note about the study background, consent form, and demographic information sheet. Respondents confirmed their informed consent before proceeding with the rest of the form. The form offered information about data confidentiality and the right to withdraw from participation.
- Section B contained the following scales to assess attitude towards seeking professional psychological help and self stigma:
 1. Participants' stigma of seeking psychological help was assessed with the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale (SSOSH; Vogel et al., 2006). The SSOSH consists of ten items that measure an individual's internalised stigma of seeking psychological help. It uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with higher scores indicating greater self-stigma. Sample items include: "My self-confidence would not be threatened if I sought professional help" and "It would make me feel inferior to ask a therapist for help." The internal consistency was reported to range from 0.72 to 0.89 across several countries (Vogel et al., 2017).
 2. Attitudes toward seeking psychological help were assessed using the Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short Form (ATSPPHS-SF; Fischer & Farina, 1995). The ATSPPH-SF is a 10-item measure adapted from the original 29 item ATSPPH (Fischer & Turner, 1970). Items are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*disagree*) to 3 (*agree*), with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Sample items included "If I believed that I was having a mental breakdown, my first thought would be to get professional attention," and "Personal and emotional problems, like many things, tend to work out by themselves." Fischer and Farina (1995) reported that ATSPPH-SF scores highly correlated with the full-scale scores from the original measure, produced a good internal consistency coefficient that ranges from from 0.65 to 0.83. The ATSPPH-SF has demonstrated good internal consistency coefficients in samples of racially/ethnically diverse community adults (Gloria et al., 2010) and college students (Kim & Kendall, 2015). It has a validity coefficient of 0.83.

- Section C consisted of 4 additional close-ended questions anchored on the topic of awareness of counselling services offered in college/university. Research questions revolved around a student's level of awareness of counselling services available in the college/university. The four questions were: “Do you have a college counsellor?” “What is the gender of the counsellor?” “Do you know where the counsellor’s office is located on the campus?” and “Do you know the timings of your counsellor’s office?”

Data Collection

Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants through personal networks by sharing a google form among potential respondents via email and other social media platforms. The data for the study were collected between November 2022 and June 2023. All responses collected via the online survey were coded in an excel sheet to ensure confidentiality. Statistical analysis was performed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 20 for Windows. An independent t-test was run to compare self-stigma and attitudes toward professional psychological help between two student groups. Furthermore, descriptive pie charts were employed to highlight the disparities between psychology and non-psychology students in relation to their awareness of counselling services within the college

RESULTS

A total of 170 participants’ data was analysed. All of these were college students out of which 100 (58.82%) students had psychology as a subject and 70 students (42.18%) did not have psychology as a subject. All of them were between 18-25 [$M=19.42$]. Participants belonged to different universities or colleges across various cities of the country.

To verify the hypothesis which states that Students who have psychology as a subject will have a positive attitude towards seeking professional psychological help in comparison to those who don’t have psychology as a subject an independent t-test value has been calculated. Findings from the t tests revealed a significant difference in the professional psychological help seeking attitude of psychology and non-psychology students. Table 1 represents the results of the t tests, along with the levels of significance. The independent t value is 4.981 at alpha value 0.037 ($p<0.001$) which signifies that there exists a statistically significant difference between the two groups. To elaborate, students who have psychology as a subject reported a more positive attitude towards seeking help than students who do not have psychology as a subject. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

Table No. 1 Comparison of groups on Attitude towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help

Subject	N	Mean (SD)	t-value (df)	p-value
Psychology	100	30.68 (4.80)	4.981 (168)	0.037*
Non-Psychology	70	26.54 (6.0)		

Note: * $p < 0.001$

To verify the second hypothesis which states that students who have psychology as a subject will have lesser self-stigma of seeking help in comparison to those students who don’t have psychology as a subject an independent t-test value has been calculated. Findings from the t tests revealed a significant difference in the Self-stigma of seeking help for mental health concerns of psychology and non-psychology students. Table 2 represents the results of the t-tests, along with the level of significance. The independent t value is -4.545 at alpha value

0.004 ($p < 0.01$) which signifies that there exists a statistically significant difference between the two groups. To elaborate, students who do not have psychology as a subject reported greater stigma than students who have psychology as a subject. Hence, the second hypothesis is also accepted.

Table No. 2 Comparison of groups on Self-stigma

Subject	N	Mean (SD)	t-value (df)	p-value
Psychology	100	19.92 (4.88)	-4.545 (168)	0.004**
Non-Psychology	70	24 (6.82)		

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

The responses gathered from section C were subjected to a descriptive analysis. The findings have been graphically represented in the following pie chart. The data indicates that among the students surveyed, 71% (Figure 1.1) of those studying psychology as a subject reported the presence of counsellors in their respective colleges. In contrast, only 52.9% (Figure 2.1) of students without psychology as a subject reported the availability of counsellors in their college.

Subsequently, a subset of students' responses who answered positively to the presence of counsellors in their college were further analysed with respect to three additional questions. Among non-psychology students, 67.6% (Figure 1.2) confirmed the presence of a female counsellor, while 64.8% (Figure 2.2) of psychology students also reported the same. It is worth noting that 46.1% (Figure 1.3) of psychology students provided no response and 15% responded with 'maybe' when asked about their knowledge of the counsellor's location, constituting uncertainty or lack of awareness. In contrast, 60% (Figure 2.3) of non-psychology students were able to specify the location of their counsellor. In terms of knowledge about counsellor timings, 52.2% (Figure 1.4) of psychology students provided a 'No' response and 13% provided a 'maybe' response, again indicating uncertainty or lack of awareness. Similarly, 52.6% (Figure 2.4) of non-psychology students were also unaware of their counsellor's timings, with 7.9% of them responding with 'maybe' signifying their uncertainty with respect to the same.

Figure 1.1 Responses of psychology students on the question 'Does your college have a counsellor?'

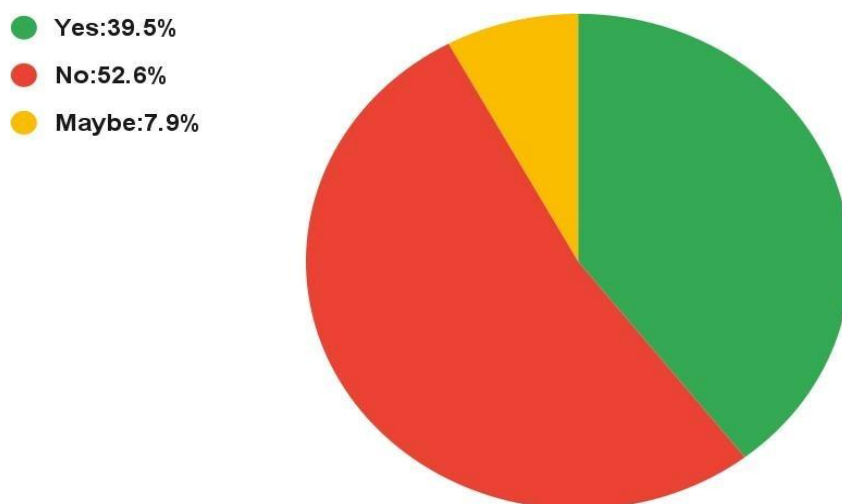


Figure 2.1 Responses of non-psychology students to the question ‘Does your college have counsellors?’

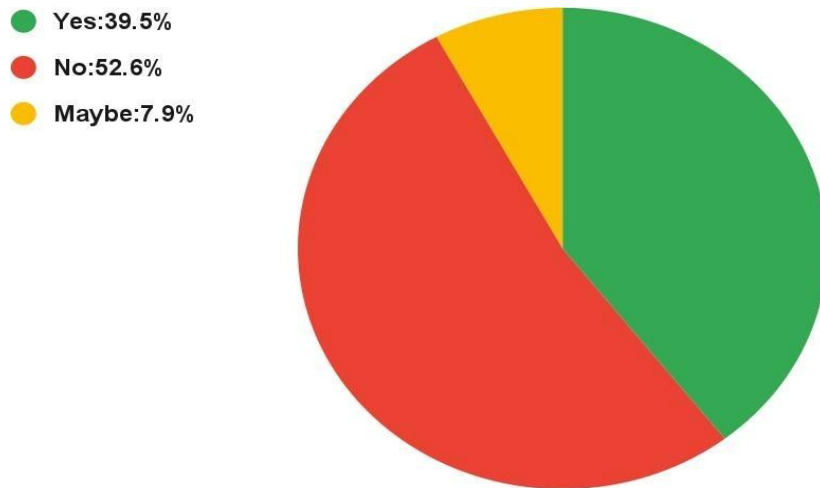


Figure 1.2 Responses of psychology students on the question ‘What is the gender of the counsellor?’

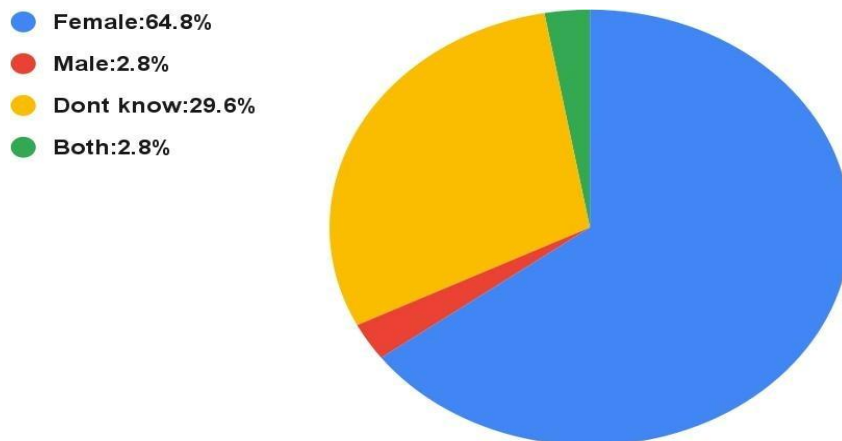


Figure 2.2 Responses of non-psychology students on the question ‘What is the gender of the counsellor?’

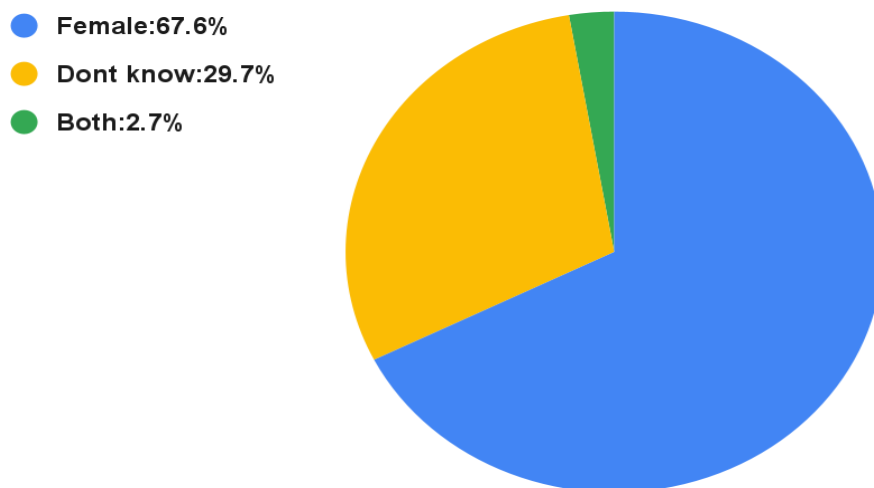


Figure 1.3 Responses of psychology students on the question ‘Do you know where the counsellor’s office is located on the campus?’

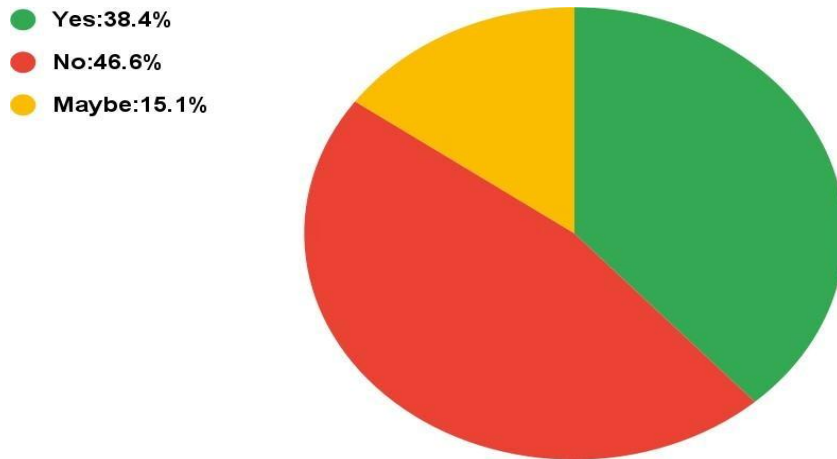


Figure 2.3 Responses of non-psychology students on the question ‘Do you know where the counsellor’s office is located on the campus?’

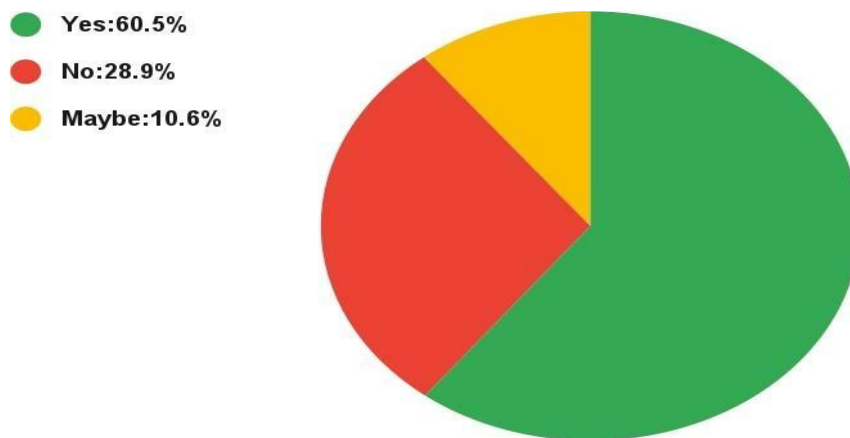


Figure 1.4 Responses of psychology students on the question ‘Do you know the timings of your counsellor’s office?’

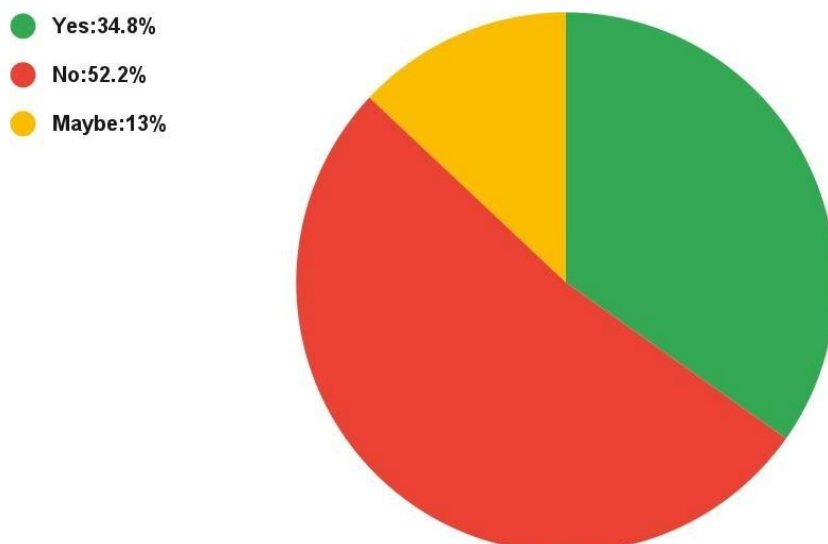
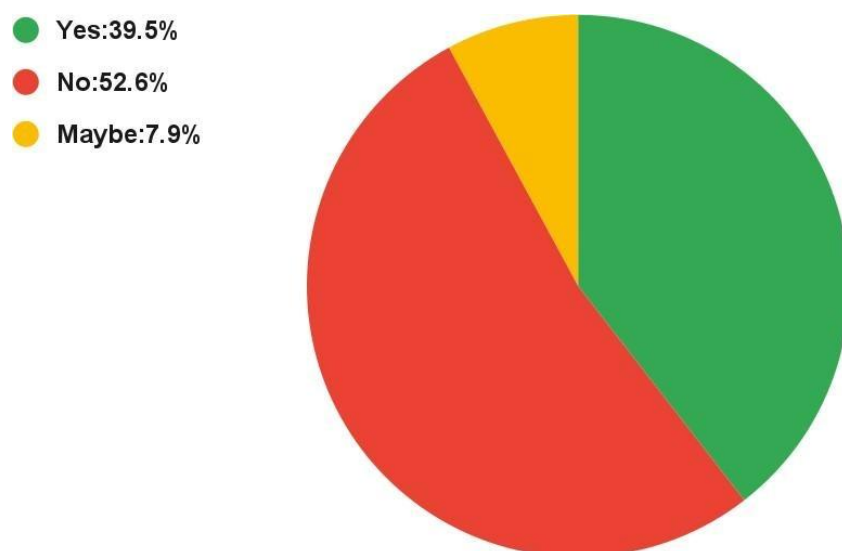


Figure 2.4 Responses of non-psychology students on the question ‘Do you know the timings of your counsellor’s office?’



DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed significant differences in self-stigma and attitudes towards professional psychological help between psychology and non-psychology students. Psychology students had a more favourable attitude towards counselling than non-psychology students. Furthermore, psychology students also reported lesser self-stigma as compared to non-psychology students. The extent to which people understand causes of mental illness, effectiveness of treatment, recovery process, and mental health resources is related to mental health help-seeking (Downs & Eisenberg, 2012; Gulliver et al., 2010; Thompson, Hunt, & Issakidis, 2004). Researches have shown that mental health help seeking is predicted by help-seeking attitudes (Chen et al., 2020; Burris & Andrykowski, 2011) Thus, the positive attitude of students enrolled in psychology coursework towards counselling can be linked with the in-depth understanding of mental health, psychological assessment and mental health illnesses in their coursework. Similarly, non-psychology students lack an opportunity to get any exposure to deepen their understanding about mental health in their coursework and prevalence of public stigma (Gaiha et al., 2020) together may act as a further barrier in fostering a positive attitude towards counselling.

However, previous research evidence indicates that in general college students are hesitant to seek help because of fears regarding stigmatisation (Weitzman, 2004), fear of expressing emotions (Komiya, Good, & Sherrod, 2000), the desire to avoid discussing distressing or personal information (Kelly & Achter, 1995; Cepeda-Benito & Short, 1998; Vogel & Wester, 2003) and due stigma of seeking treatment which is one of the most cited reasons (Corrigan & Penn, 1999; Corrigan, 2004). Research shows mental health literacy can help eliminate stigma associated with mental illness and positively influence attitudes toward seeking treatment (Nizam & Nen, 2022) as stigma usually arises from lack of awareness and education about the nature and complications of mental illness (Arboleda-Florez, 2002).

The descriptive analysis of the four additional questions revealed that only 71% students with psychology and 52.9 % students without psychology reported the presence of a counsellor in their college. In total, 63.52% of the total sample size reported the presence of counsellors in their college. According to the UGC guidelines on safety of students on and

off campuses of higher educational institutions (HEIs) should mandatorily put in place a broad-based 'Students Counseling System' for the effective management of problems and challenges faced by students. However, there have been gaps in the implementation of relevant policies and programs. (Mehrotra, 2020). Thus, it suggests that despite the guidelines some universities and colleges may not have appointed counsellors. While several institutes have made provisions for counselling services in some way, there are no systems in place to continuously capture the nature and quality of services offered, nor do they gather and assess student perspectives on ease of access and utility (Mehrotra, 2020). Furthermore, this suggests a possibility of the institution's claim to offer counselling services to only exist for namesake. Secondly, it is conceivable that colleges do have counsellors, but students are largely unaware of their availability. A study by Yorgason et al. (2008) reported that between 30% to 60% of the American college students were actually unaware or unsure regarding the availability of campus mental health services. The results of the present study are consistent with the previous research on this topic. The lack of student awareness regarding mental health resources indicates that many students may possess knowledge about mental health issues and their causes (Dobmeier et al., 2013) but are the least likely group to seek professional help related to mental health (Stunden et al., 2020).

The subsequent analysis of responses from students who confirmed the presence of counsellors in their respective colleges have yielded noteworthy insights. In both groups, an approximate range of 65% to 68% of respondents reported the gender of their counsellor to be female. However, the remaining 30% acknowledged the presence of counsellors in their college but remained uninformed about the counselors' gender. This suggests that they have neither seen the counsellor indicating somewhat superficial awareness of counselling services among this subgroup. This finding further underscores a notable gender disparity in the employment of counsellors, as there appears to be a dearth of male counsellors within college settings. Kamunyu et al. (2020) found out in their research that male students prefer male counsellors and females prefer female counsellors. Thus, this gender imbalance could potentially discourage male students from seeking counselling services, particularly if they prefer to discuss their challenges with a counsellor of the same gender. In summary, out of the 63.52% of individuals who confirmed the presence of a counsellor, a significant subset, comprising 29.62%, has not had the opportunity to meet or know the credentials of their counsellor, consequently, remaining unaware of their counsellor's gender.

A notable contrast emerges when examining responses concerning the awareness of the counsellor's office among those who confirmed the presence of counsellors in their respective colleges. Within this subset, only 38.4% of students enrolled in psychology courses demonstrated knowledge of the counsellor's location within the college, in contrast to 60.5% of students who are pursuing courses outside the domain of psychology exhibited a clear understanding of the counsellor's office location on campus. One conceivable explanation for this divergence lies in the notion that faculty members teaching psychology courses might serve as the initial point of contact for students experiencing distress, given their training in providing psychological support. However, despite their professed willingness to seek professional help, a substantial portion of psychology students appears to lack knowledge about the available resources for accessing assistance within the college. This might indicate that increasing knowledge about mental disorders causes a positive change in the attitudes toward seeking psychological help, but additional interventions might be needed for behavioural change (Dinar et al., 2021). On the other hand 60.5% of students without psychology as a subject have an in-depth knowledge about the whereabouts of the counsellor's office.

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Finally, in the course of examining responses, an analysis of the awareness of the a counsellor's office hours reveals that approximately 52% to 53% of respondents, regardless of their academic discipline, lacked knowledge about the counsellor's operating hours. This observation suggests that a substantial proportion of the surveyed individuals may not have proactively sought assistance or that universities have inadequately promoted their counselling services, resulting in unawareness with respect to the timings of the counselling centre among the student body. Thus, a substantial portion of college students only have a superficial awareness about the counselling services offered in their university or college.

Therefore, promoting awareness and strengthening of the availability of counselling services in college should be coupled with the interventions to foster a positive outlook towards mental health as well as mental health professionals. Prevention and early intervention for mental health problems in higher education students are considered vital to minimise long-term impairment (Stallman, 2011; Reavley, 2010).

Limitations

The study did not account for the impact of barriers like paucity of time to engage in treatment, behaviour of the staff in the counselling centres, scepticism about treatment efficacy among others. There exists a limited causality inference since it is difficult to determine whether just studying a particular subject is contributing to the results or psychology students might already possess these positive attitudes when they enrol in psychology graduate programs. Additionally, social desirability bias might have occurred while answering questions on counselling services awareness. The effects of gender, ethnicity, cultural background, socio-economic status in the sample has not been explored. Addressing these limitations through different study designs, and analysis techniques, and thoughtful consideration of the potential sources of bias is essential to enhance the quality and reliability of our research findings.

Future Implications

This study explores the dynamic relationship between academic discipline, self-stigma, attitude, and awareness of counselling services. Individuals with comprehensive understanding of mental-health concepts displayed a positive attitude towards seeking help however, lacked awareness of available college counselling services. This underscores the need for university initiatives to meticulously promote counselling services through on-campus and social media channels.

Conversely, those with a negative attitude towards seeking psychological help in college displayed some awareness of counselling services. This emphasises the need for spreading mental-health literacy among university students to highlight the importance of mental health, dismantle stigma and encourage timely help-seeking. In essence, a holistic approach is required, encompassing existing or hiring counselling services along with on-campus mental health promotion, mentor-mentee systems, peer support networks, easily accessible counselling, and streamlined referrals to specialised mental health professionals.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study illuminates significant differences in self-stigma and attitudes toward professional psychological help between psychology and non-psychology students, highlighting the positive outlook of psychology students. The disparity in awareness of counselling services suggests a critical need for comprehensive mental health literacy initiatives. Despite UGC guidelines mandating a 'Students Counseling System,' gaps in

implementation raise concerns about the actual availability of counsellors. Gender disparities in counsellor representation and a notable lack of awareness regarding their presence further highlight potential barriers to seeking help. Notably, psychology students, despite their coursework, exhibit limited awareness of counselling resources. To foster positive attitudes and eliminate stigma, interventions should focus on enhancing mental health literacy and ensuring accessible, well-promoted counselling services on campuses. The study underscores the importance of cultivating a supportive mental health culture in higher education.

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