

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEEKING PROFESSIONAL MENTAL HEALTH HELP AMONG STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The likelihood of addiction increases as more school-aged youngsters use smartphones. When faced with an uncomfortable circumstance or pressure, kids with poor self-efficacy frequently turn to their smartphones as a coping strategy to instill a sense of security. This study aimed to understand the relationship between mental health literacy and students' attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. The sampling technique used was stratified random sampling of 386 college students to fill out a questionnaire that assessed their mental health literacy and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help. The mean of mental health literacy score was 118 (SD=14.01) while the overall mean attitude towards seeking professional psychological help was 21 (SD=7.30). A correlation coefficient of r is found in statistical tests examining the relationship between the two variables. A significant correlation between the two variables is revealed by statistical testing ($r=0.784$, $p=0.010$). This study shows a significant correlation between mental health literacy and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help. Formulating strategies for education and promoting mental health services in higher education units is important.

KEYWORDS *Mental Health, Mental Health Literacy, Professional Help, Psychological Help, Students*



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INTRODUCTION

Student mental health issues are a significant challenge for the university sector (Priestley et al., 2022; Ramluggun et al., 2022; Spear et al., 2021). The frequency of depression among college students ranges from 10 to 85%, according to a systematic review, with a weighted mean prevalence of 30.6% (Jiang et al., 2015; Nkporbu & Ayodeji, 2022; Wong et al., 2021). Nearly a quarter (24.4%) of students exhibit symptoms of depression, according to a more recent analysis that focused on college students in low- and middle-income nations (Akhtar et al., 2020). Despite the concerning prevalence of psychological discomfort in this demographic, students have been shown to have difficulty talking about their mental health issues, mainly because mental health is stigmatized and they fear social isolation as a result (Davies et al., 2016). Some students lack the resources they need to ask for assistance because they are unaware of them. Some students do not seek help because they believe they are supposed to handle the strain that comes with their classes, making them believe their mental health issues are unimportant. Additionally, some students dislike having mental health records because they believe it would hinder their ability to advance in their careers (Orygen, 2017).

A study found that mental distress was closely linked to both intuitive expectations and knowledge and use of mental health services, indicating that students who require mental health services will be more aware of their availability and make use of them. This result shows how well this university informs needy students about the mental health resources that are accessible (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Lattie et al., 2019). However, it also suggests that some students experiencing mental discomfort were either unaware of such resources and chose not to use them, or they were not sufficiently informed about them. Given the anticipated rise in mental health needs on college campuses, more and continuous attention should be paid to informing those who may need mental health assistance (Rhodes et al., 2022).

Considering that there may be a rise in mental health needs on college campuses, more and continuous emphasis should be paid on informing those who may need mental health assistance (Lipson et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Distressed students are more likely to be aware of and make use of the mental health resources that are offered. Upon deeper inspection, though, it appears that some students who require mental health assistance might not get it since they are unaware of the resources that are accessible to them. To improve knowledge of mental health conditions and the long-term advantages of students recovering from mental health issues, it is anticipated that a thorough and accurate understanding of mental health issues and the mental health services offered on campus will promote the behavior of seeking mental health assistance. Thus, this study aims to provide additional insight into the connection between students' attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help and their level of mental health literacy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a cross-sectional study aimed at understanding the relationship between mental health literacy and students' attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help.

This study's population consists of 386 college students from the faculty of health sciences. The sampling technique used was stratified random sampling, which involved 386 respondents.

Instrumen penelitian yaitu Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS) dan Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale – Short Form. Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS). The MHLS is a 35-item, scale-based measure that assesses an individual's mental health literacy level (O'Connor & Casey, 2015). The scale assesses the ability to recognize disorders, where to seek information, knowledge of the risk factors and causes, knowledge of self-treatment, professional help available, and attitudes that promote recognition or appropriate help-seeking behaviors. Scores for the MHLS range from 35 to 160, with higher scores indicating greater literacy. The Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help (ATSPPH) (Fischer & Farina, 1995) is a set of 10 items with a 4-point Likert scale to examine attitudes toward asking for help. A higher score denotes a more positive attitude toward pursuing expert psychological assistance. According to Fischer and Farina (1995), Cronbach's α was 0.84.

Descriptive statistics were used to assess data on respondent characteristics. Pearson correlation analysis determined the relationship between mental health literacy and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help.

The Research Ethics Committee Faculty of Health Sciences at Universitas Jenderal Soedirman accepted this study and assigned it the ethical review number 1536/EC/KEPK/VIII/2024. All respondents gave their informed consent. The respondents were given important information regarding the study's processes, goals, risks, and advantages. The respondents' privacy was likewise protected during the entire study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The overall mental health literacy score was 118 (SD=14.01), while the overall mean attitude towards seeking professional psychological help was 21 (SD=7.30). Table 1 explains the relationship between mental health literacy and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help.

Table 1. The relationship between mental health literacy and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help (n = 386)

Variable		r	p
Mental health literacy	Attitude towards seeking professional psychological help	0,784	0,010

This study's results indicate a significant correlation between mental health literacy and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help ($p < 0.05$).

Six characteristics are examined by mental health literacy: attitudes toward mental disorders and their sufferers that can influence recognition and the search for appropriate help; knowledge about risk factors and causes of mental health disorders; knowledge and beliefs about self-help interventions; knowledge and attitudes about professional mental health assistance that is available; and the ability to identify mental health disorders caused by specific psychological disturbances (Gorczynski & Sims-Schouten, 2024). In addition to an individual's understanding of mental health management, diagnoses, and treatments, Kutcher et al. (2016) proposed a broad definition of mental health literacy encompassing action to reduce stigma around mental health issues and promote effective help-seeking behavior. This holistic concept is supported by numerous research that demonstrate a substantial negative correlation between stigma and mental health awareness.

More studies have also shown that stigma is a significant deterrent to getting help, and that discriminatory actions against people with mental health diagnoses are negatively correlated with the perception of need for assistance among such individuals (Schomerus et al., 2019). According to Cheng et al. (2018), there is a significant prevalence of stigma and poor levels of mental health literacy among students, and mental health literacy is a major predictor of help-seeking behaviors among US university students. Students who identify a condition in a situation are more likely to seek help and choose treatment. This could be a result of self-labeling as having a specific mental illness, which triggers a schema for what should be done. Self-identifying as having a disorder may also make it easier for medical professionals to identify the young person's issue. Identifying a mental illness may help someone seek help, but to receive quality care, the person must also be aware of the variety of professional assistance and evidence-based therapies that are available. When the public's perceptions of different experts are investigated, it is evident that those with specific training in mental problems cannot be seen as favorably as more generic expert assistance. Attitudes towards seeking professional mental health assistance are also one of the components of the help-seeking behavior process that involves individual cognitive orientation (Bitman-Heinrichs, 2017). Attitudes towards seeking professional mental health assistance generally reflect a complex decision-making process influenced by individual personal abilities such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as other external factors, especially stigma and social support. (Ramon et al, 2020).

Students with good mental health literacy will be able to help other students more quickly in identifying the characteristics of a mental disorder, knowing the available professional help, understanding effective strategies to improve mental health, and determining the appropriate professional psychological help when someone cannot cope with their psychological problems on their own (O'Connor et al, 2015). Someone who has good knowledge of psychological symptoms, causal factors, and psychological therapy services or mental health consultations will have a higher willingness to seek psychological help. (Do et al, 2019). The level of mental health literacy has a positive relationship with the behavior of seeking mental health care. Studies on early adults also show the same thing: that good mental health literacy is associated with a lower tendency for self-stigma and a higher tendency for the intention to seek mental health assistance.

There can occasionally be significant differences between public and professional opinions, according to surveys of public opinion of professionals and treatments conducted in a variety of nations. The public's favorable perception of unofficial sources of assistance, such as friends and family, is one recurring finding. Indeed, their ratings are frequently higher than those of mental health specialists. Getting social support from friends and family can be helpful, but it can be problematic instead of getting professional assistance. College students are one group that raises special concerns because they frequently state that they will seek support from peers in the event of a mental health issue. According to certain studies, a greater number of respondents view psychiatric drugs as potentially hazardous than as beneficial or comparable to non-evidence-based therapies like vitamin supplements and dietary modifications. However, opinions of psychological treatments are typically more favorable. Though targeted psychological interventions like cognitive behavior therapy are frequently seen more favorably, generic counseling is widely accepted (Rhodes et al., 2022).

Implications and limitations

Our work has limitations. First, this is a cross-sectional study, where only associations and not predictions can be observed from the data. Second, we did not collect data on students' mental health histories, limiting the generalizability of the findings. It is necessary to provide culturally sensitive interventions that engage a variety of students, faculty, and mental health specialists in the academic environment.

CONCLUSION

Given the evidence that various aspects of mental health literacy (MHL) are associated with improved mental well-being, positive attitudes, and greater intention to seek mental health services, it is recommended that future research and policy initiatives prioritize the development and implementation of structured mental health literacy programs in educational institutions, workplaces, and community settings. These programs should focus on enhancing individuals' knowledge about mental disorders, reducing stigma, and equipping people with the necessary skills to recognize symptoms and seek appropriate help. Additionally, longitudinal studies are suggested to evaluate the long-term impact of MHL interventions on help-seeking behavior and actual mental health outcomes across diverse populations.

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