

Psychological Help-Seeking Attitude and Locus of Control among College Student

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Received: 31/3/2014

Revised: 6/5/2014

Accepted: 13/5/2014

This study investigated psychological help-seeking attitude and its relation to gender, year in college, accommodation, and locus of control among college students. A total of 152 students (55.3% female and 44.7% male) participated in this study. Self-report data on psychological help-seeking attitude and locus of control scale were assessed. Results showed participants held positive attitude towards help-seeking. Help-seeking attitude did not vary by gender, year in college, and accommodation. Significant contribution attributed to locus of control. Externally locus of control type participants indicated more positive help-seeking attitude than internally type.

Keywords: help- seeking attitude, locus of control, students.

اتجاه طلب المساعدة النفسية ووجهة الضبط لدى طلبة الجامعة

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هدفت الدراسة إلى التعرف على اتجاه طلبة جامعة السلطان قابوس نحو طلب المساعدة النفسية وعلاقتها بالنوع، والسنة الدراسية، ومكان الإقامة، ووجهة الضبط لدى طلبة الجامعة. بلغ حجم العينة ١٥٢ طالبا وطالبة (٥٥,٣٪ طالبة و٤٤,٧٪ طالب)، وتم استخدام مقياس اتجاه طلب المساعدة ومقياس وجهة الضبط. أظهرت النتائج بأن الطلاب لديهم اتجاه ايجابي نحو طلب المساعدة النفسية. كما كشفت النتائج بأنه لا توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية تعزى للنوع، والسنة الدراسية، ومكان الإقامة. بينما وجدت فروق دالة إحصائية تعزى لوجهة الضبط، حيث أن الطلاب ذوي وجهة الضبط الخارجية لديهم اتجاه أكثر إيجابية نحو طلب المساعدة النفسية من ذوي وجهة الضبط الداخلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اتجاه طلب المساعدة، وجهة الضبط، الطلاب.

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Mental health is a foundation for the well being and academic success of students, and all universities clearly have an incentive to enhance the attitudes towards seeking professional help (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Studies of college counseling services reported a gap between treatment needs and help-seeking among students (Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007; Zivin, Eisenberg, Gollust, & Golberstein, 2009; Harrar, Affsprung, & Long, 2010). Various help-seeking models were purposed to understand the under-utilization of mental health services (Archer & Cooper, 1998; Caldeira et al., 2009; Zivin et al., 2009). Researchers found a general support for the negative association between mental health stigma and favorable help-seeking attitudes (Eisenberg, Downs, Golberstein, & Zivin, 2009; Masuda, Anderson, & Edmonds, 2012; Sherwood, Salkovskis, & Rimes, 2007). Moreover, seeking help implied lack of control and symbolized self-weakness (Ting, 2011) as well as a concern of being understood (Russel, Thomaon, & Rosenthal, 2008). Within this orientation, researchers recommended a continued exploration of help-seeking attitudes and related barriers in order to improve access to professional treatment. Additionally, they emphasized the necessity of developing informational programs that help overcome the inhibiting effect of these values and attitudes (Mackenzie, Erickson, Deane, & Wright, 2014; Rosenthal & Wilson, 2008, Vogel et al., 2007).

A wealth of research looked into the effect of gender on seeking counseling services, nevertheless the findings were mixed. Some studies found that women were highly likely to see counseling center as a service utilized primarily by them (Affsprung, 1996; Alex, Anton & Stuart, 2009; Türküm, 2005) and expressed more willingness than men to seek psychological help (Andrews, Stefurak & Mehta, 2011; Erkan, Ozbay, Cihangir-Cankaya & Terzi, 2012; Nam et al., 2010; Ramos-Snchez, & Atikson, 2009; Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994). Men reported greater fear of negative judgments of others if they sought counseling (Di Fabio, & Bernaud, 2008). These findings partially supported the argument that men's orientation towards success, power and competition, and their restricted emotionality have significant impact on their likelihood to seek professional help (Chan & Hayashi, 2010). On the other hand, other studies found that men

had better knowledge, beliefs and attitudes, and willingness to seek help for their problems than women (Bener, & Ghuloum, 2010). The underutilization of psychological help-seeking also did not appear to be a function of disparities in use associated with gender (Oluyinka, 2011; Rosenthal & Wilson, 2008).

The influence of age in the under-utilization of psychological help had limited exploration in the literature. Researchers reported that as individuals aged the problems related to developmental stages became more complex and therefore they would be more willing to seek help from specialists in order to tackle their problems (Erkan et al., 2012). It was found that students with higher level of education exhibited more positive attitudes compared with those had less level of education (Al-Darmaki, 2003). Specifically, as Al-Krenawi, Graham, Dean, and Eltaiba (2004) reported that first and second year students had less positive attitudes towards psychological help. Researchers speculated that over the years, college students acquired more knowledge about psychological help-seeking. Moreover, with gaining more experience in academia and in growing older students would realize the disruptive impact of their psycho-physiological and cognitive responses on their academic performance (Al-Darmaki, 2003; Al-Krenawi et al., 2004, So, Gilbert, & Romero, 2005). However, other studies findings revealed no significant difference concerning level of education and help-seeking (Albizu-Garcia, Alegri, Freeman, Vera, 2001; Oluyinka, 2011).

Available research on the living arrangement and help-seeking attitudes reported that more positive attitudes was found with students who lived on campus (Al-Amary, 2003). This case might be illustrated by a first-semester student who had positive attitudes toward seeking help but did not know anyone on campus to talk to; for such a person, counseling might be very appealing because it would provide a much-needed opportunity for disclosure (Kahn & Williams, 2003). However, researchers documented that students living with their families and friends had less negative attitudes toward psychological help-seeking than those living on campus (Koydemir-Ozden & Erel, 2010). They argued that those students who had access to a network of family and friends might be encouraged to use active coping such as help-seeking whereas

students on campus had less opportunities for having this social network (Koydemir-Özden, 2010).

Locus of control was also found to be related to psychological-help-seeking attitudes (Kam Ming & Rebecca, 2006). Low perceived control was associated with seeking professional help (Jane & Howard, 1991), particularly; an internal orientation predicted help-seeking and positive thinking (Gianakos, 2002). As positive attitude might be interpreted that individual ego was self-directed and was leading to more favorable perception toward seeking professional psychological help (Oluyinka, 2011). However, Rokke, Al bsi, Lall, and Owsald (1991) argued that individuals with high internal locus of control showed a greater strength of self-efficacy and pain tolerance in comparison to external control. Such internally person when under stress might likely to generate positive self-thinking in order to maintain or increase feelings of mastery and perseverance (Gianakos, 2002).

For externally controlled individuals who let others control their lives by losing the control over their own lives, the levels of subjective well-being were expected to decrease (Karatas & Tagay, 2012). They were more likely to use dependent and avoidant decision-making style while internally controlled persons were more likely to employ the rational style which was negatively related to sensation seeking (Biaocco, Iaghi, & D'Alessio, 2009; Langan, Sankey, & Canty, 2009). However, individuals who felt that they had no personal control over their lives, particularly when depending on chance, luck or fate would have less positive attitude toward seeking help (Alex et al., 2009). On the other hand, other studies reported no relation between locus of control and the utilization of health services. The failure in finding significance explained in that student might not value health services and the act of seeking services in itself was actually seen as a stressful situation and as a result, was avoided (Andrews et al., 2011; Roddenberry & Renk, 2010).

The Statement of the Problem

Studies documented that counseling and mental health services contribute significantly in facilitating students' development and helping them dealing with their problems. Researchers called for further investigation of the contextual factors that might inhibit the utilization of

psychological help (Rosenthal, & Wilson, 2008; Vogel et al., 2007). The psychological help service is in its infancy in Omani culture. This is most specifically true with counseling since it is relatively new to the Omani students (Al-Bahrani, 2004). Psychological help services provided in SQU campus through two sources. The first source is the Student Counseling Center (SCC) that was established in 1999. The SCC provides different services in forms of individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultation, and outreach activities, such as; presentations for classes and workshops. Another source is the Behavioral Science Department providing services for students and public who are suffering psychologically.

Research Questions

The main aim of this study was to understand the variation of students' attitudes towards psychological help seeking. Three primary questions were investigated:

1. What is the nature of the participants' attitudes towards seeking psychological help?
2. Are there significant differences in the participants' attitudes towards seeking psychological help in relation to their gender, study year, and type of accommodation?
3. Are there significant differences in the participants' attitudes towards seeking psychological help in relation to their locus of control?

The Significance of the Study

Previous studies explored the influence of personal factors such as gender, level of education, and locus of control to understand college's students under-utilization of psychological help within different cultural contexts (Andrews, Stefurak, & Mehta, 2011; Harrar et al., 2010; Oluyinka, 2011; Roddenberry & Renk, 2010). However, the psychological help-seeking and its association with the concept of the locus of control remained uninvestigated among Arab students (Al-Bahrani, 2004; Al-Bahrani, Aldhafri, Alkharusi, Kazem & Alzubadi, 2013; Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 1993). Therefore, researching possible predictors of the help-seeking attitude is important because such knowledge can assist mental health professionals to make their services more attrac-

tive (Andrews et al., 2011; Oluyinka, 2011; Roddenberry & Renk, 2010).

METHOD

Participants

A total of 152 students (55.3% female and 44.7% male) participated in this study. The participants were recruited from introductory and advanced undergraduate education classes at SQU. Of the total participants, 74.4% were accommodated on campus and 25.6% off campus. Considering the high variation of students' study year, the researcher divided students into two groups: The first consisted of 36.2% of students who were in their first to third years, and the second included of 63.8% students who were in their fourth to seventh year. More than 11% of the participants reported receiving some psychological help at some point in their lives and 88.8% reported to have never received any help at all. Almost 97% of the sample indicated that there was a need for psychological services on campus.

Measures

Locus of Control Scale

Students completed the Arabic Version of Rotter's Locus of Control Scale (Kfafi, 1982). The concept of locus of control refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they can control events that affect them. Items measure beliefs about the nature of the world not preferences of internality and externality. Individuals with an internal locus of control believe that events result primarily from their own behaviors and actions, while reliant on luck, chance, fate or control of powerful others mark as an external locus of control (Beretvas, Suizzo, Durham, & Yarnell, 2008). The Arabic Version of Rotter's Locus of Control was used with Omani population and reported a reliability of 0.82 (Kazem, Al-Jamali, & Al-Qadhi, 2008). This scale consisted of 29 dichotomous forced choice items (six are filler items); each of the 23 items consisting of an external and an internal belief. A total score was computed using scores on the 23 items that were not filler items. It was given for an external one and zero for an internal control. Low scores (zero) indicated higher internal control and high scores (23) indicated external control (Kfafi, 1982).

Psychological Help-Seeking Attitude

The items were extracted from Alsamadi's (1994) measure of the students' attitudes towards counseling. This instrument measure the extent to which people perceive the likelihood that they will seek psychological help and address three dimensions of help seeking. The first dimension measure the confidence in counseling, the second assess the confidence in counselors, and the third related to students attitudes towards the help seeker (stigma tolerance). The items were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale had validity evidence and reported external reliability of (0.89) and internal reliability of (0.86) using Cronbach-alpha (Alsamadi, 1994). For the present study, the measure consisted of 31 items. A Cronbach's alpha of (0.78) was obtained for the whole scale and for three subscales: Confidence in the counselor (11 items, $\alpha=0.49$), confidence in counseling (7 items, $\alpha=0.58$), and stigma intolerance (13 items, $\alpha=0.64$). Some sample items is "I would feel comfortable when getting things out of my chest with a counselor." Another example is "I would seek counseling help regardless what people say."

Data analysis

t- tests was used to examine the differences in students' attitudes in regard to three subscales. Then, a multivariate analysis of variance was performed to investigate the effects of gender, study year, and accommodation on seeking psychological help attitude. The independent variables were gender (female versus male), study year (first to third year versus fourth to seventh), accommodation (on campus versus off campus), and locus of control (internal versus external). The dependent variable was seeking psychological help attitude scores within three domains (confidence in counselor, confidence in counseling and, stigma intolerance). The analysis was performed at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

To answer the research question: "What is the nature of the participants' attitudes towards seeking psychological help?" Researcher calculated means and standard deviations of each domain. One sample t-test was used to investigate the nature of the attitude. Table 1 shows

the summary of students' attitudes within the three domains.

Table 1
Summary of the one-sample t-test on the psychological help-seeking attitude (n=152)

Domains	M*	SD	T**	Sig.
Confidence in counselor	3.59	.385	19.16	0.001
Stigma	3.24	.446	6.72	0.001
Confidence in counseling	4.06	.483	27.09	0.001
The total of Attitudes	3.54	.343	19.65	0.001

*= Comparison with hypothetical mean 3, ** $p < .05$

Table 1 shows the value of t-test for three domains ranged from (19.16 to 27.09). Further, the total mean (3.54) was larger than the hypothetical mean (3), which reflected a positive attitude towards seeking psychological help. Based on the means of the three domains, the participants reported higher level of confidence in the counseling, second in counselor, and third in stigma intolerance.

To answer the second question: "are there significant differences in the attitudes towards seeking psychological help due to gender, year in college, and accommodation?" a 2 by 2 by 2 by 2 MANOVA design was tested for the variance of seeking psychological help measure and its subscales (stigma tolerance, confidence in counselor, and confidence in counseling). Table 2 shows the summary of means and standard deviations of gender, year in college, and accommodation.

The Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed no statically differences could be attributed for gender (Wilks's Lambda (3, 144) .997; F .129; $p < .943$), study year (Wilks's Lambda (3, 144) .999; F .045; $p < .987$), and accommodation (Wilks's Lambda (3, 144) .998; F.095; $p < .963$).

To investigate the third question: "Are there significant differences in the participants' attitudes towards seeking psychological help in relation to their locus of control?" A 2 x 3 multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to compare internal and external locus of control with regard to seeking psychological help attitude. Table 3 presents means and standard deviations for measures of seeking-psychological help attitude as a function of internal and external locus of control. Table 4 presents results of the multivariate and univariate analyses of variance for the effects of internal and external locus of control on the attitudes toward seeking psychological help.

As shown in Table 4, there was a statistically significant multivariate interaction effect between locus of control and the attitude towards seeking psychological help (Wilks's Lambda (3, 148) .901; F 5.421, $p < .001$). Approximately 1% ($\eta^2 = .100$) of the variability in the participants' seeking- help attitudes could be accounted by the locus of control.

Table 2
Means and standard deviations of students' attitude according to gender, study year, and accommodation (n=152)

Variables	N	Stigma tolerance		Confidence in counseling		Confidence in counselor	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Females	68	3.59	.397	3.27	.454	4.00	.521
Males	84	3.60	.376	3.21	.440	4.10	.447
1-3 study year	55	3.22	.467	4.07	.489	3.59	.298
4-7 study year	97	3.25	.435	4.05	.482	3.60	.428
On campus	72	3.22	.449	4.10	.461	3.60	.384
Off campus	80	3.22	.449	4.10	.461	3.60	.384

Table 3
Means and standard deviations for measures of attitudes toward seeking psychological help as a function of locus of control (152)

Locus of Control	N	Stigma		Confidence in counseling		Confidence in counselors	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Internal	48	3.12	.417	3.84	.493	3.49	.310
External	104	3.29	.449	4.16	.446	3.64	.407

Table 4
Multivariate and univariate analyses of variance for effects of locus of control on the attitudes toward seeking psychological help

Variables	Sum square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta
Stigma intolerance	1.038	1	1.038	5.363	.022	.035
Confidence in counseling	3.207	1	3.207	15.013	.001	.091
Confidence in counselors	.764	1	.764	5.297	.023	.034
Stigma intolerance	29.027	150	.194			
Confidence in counseling	32.045	150	.214			
Confidence in counselors	21.640	150	.144			

$p < .05$

DISCUSSION

Studies on psychological help-seeking attitudes demonstrated the under-use of professional sources of help on college campus and suggested that stigma reduction efforts on college campuses might be most effective if they were targeted and tailored to the attitudes and behaviors of specific student population (Eisenberg, et al., 2009). In the current study, students showed positive attitudes towards seeking professional help and it was reflected in their confidence towards counseling, counselors, and tolerance to stigma respectively. This result, in line with some studies, noted that students at higher education showed slight confidence in psychological health providers and tolerance to stigma that is attached to help-seeker (Al-Darmaki, 2003). This finding was partially interesting because Al-Bahrani (2004) reported that there was a lack of understanding of mental health problems and unfamiliarity with mental health services among Omani students. The positive attitude that was found in the current study might be explained as the participants had some awareness or exposure to the concept of psychological help seeking. Counseling services introduced to students at SQU in 1999 and were career counseling implemented in secondary school in 2007. Therefore, the positive attitudes were probably based on their experience.

The studies that investigated the effects of gender on psychological help-seeking attitudes reported inconsistent findings. The present study revealed no significant differences in attitudes in regards to gender. This finding was unexpected given the research supporting the contribution of gender to help-seeking attitudes (Ramos-Sanchez & Atiknson, 2009). However, this finding was consistent with study of Oluyinka (2011). The present study found also no significant effects of study year and accommodation variables on help-seeking attitudes. It is possible that participants were aware of the benefit of psychological help because of the outreach program and referral system that the student counseling center implemented. It might be also attributed to the limited range and variation of the sample in which most participants were from an educational college and consequently that possibly hindered finding differences. However, some studies reported also no effect of level of education on the attitude towards psy-

chological help-seeking measure (Albizu-Garcia et al., 2001; Oluyinka, 2011).

It appears that the significant result of this study was the contribution of locus of control in students' attitudes towards seeking psychological help. The results revealed that there was significant role of the locus of control on students' attitudes towards help-seeking attitude. The effect was located within external control pointing out that students with external control appears to be more inclined to have positive attitudes in seeking psychological help. This finding was inconsistent with a previous result indicating external individuals had less positive attitude (Alex, et al., & Staurt, 2009). Analyzing the external locus control with regard to three domains of help-seeking attitude measure demonstrated that students had greater confidence in counseling as it played part in helping people with various concerns.

This result may show that students with external locus of control probably considered counseling services as a source to help them cope with what they encounter and therefore enhanced their adjustment. Particularly, it was expected that people with external locus of control used avoidance and sought social support when they faced a stressful situation (Arslan, Dilmaç & Hamarta, 2009). This finding had implication for counseling service to enforce the referral system since the external locus individuals reflected positive attitudes. This implication goes in line as Caldeira et al., (2009) reported that individuals who experienced social pressures to obtain treatment were significantly more likely to seek help than their non-pressured counterparts. Indeed, Al-Bahrani (2004) reported some factors influenced students' decision to seek help revolved around when a mandatory referral was required. Likewise, students' decision not to use counseling specifically, and mental health services in general, was the stigma attached to these services

Based on the mean of stigma intolerance, the significant implication for counseling providers is to highlight a message in the outreach efforts indicating that seeking help is a reasonable decision when dealing with significant issues. As e-mental health services might lessen the stigma associated with accessing mental health services and promoting and making e-mental health services more widely available

could provide those with higher levels of stigma a service option that they might not otherwise seek (Klein & Cook, 2010).

This study had limitations that should be considered: The first is related to sample size. The findings of this study are restricted to the sample that was chosen to be investigated. However, as McDonald, Seifert, Lorenzet, Givens, and Jaccard (2002) indicated that the multiple indicator structural equation modeling method performed well with sample sizes of 120. Further, some variables investigated in this study did not explain the variation in the psychological help-seeking attitude. Therefore, a future implication for research is to include seekers and non-seekers of help as well.

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