

Predictors of University Students’ Intentions to Seek Psychological Counseling and Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help

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Abstract

Background: Mental health problems are prevalent among university students worldwide. Studies have shown that most students do not disclose and do not get the psychological help and the support they need.

Objectives: The aim of this survey is to investigate the intentions to seek psychological counseling (ISC) among university students as well as their attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help (ATSPPH), and the predictors of those intentions and attitudes.

Design and Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted among a sample of 420 students at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

Results: Depression, test anxiety, and difficulty sleeping are the three main reasons for which students would seek psychological help. The source the students were most preferred to ask help was one’s family followed by psychologists and psychiatrists. Students’ ATSPPH is a positive predictor of their ISC, while students’ self-stigma of seeking help (SSOSH) is a negative predictor of the ATSPPH. Moreover, students’ awareness of the psychological help system available on campus, free of charge, is a positive predictor for both ISC and ATSPPH.

Conclusion: Different interventions are needed to enhance students’ mental health literacy and awareness of the available professional psychological help on campus.

Table 1. Scales used in this survey

Scale	Description
ISCI	Intentions to Seeking Counseling Inventory (ISCI) A 17-item scale that measures participants’ intentions to seek psychological help or counseling services for a range of specified problems (e.g., weight control, excessive alcohol use, depression, test anxiety, loneliness) [25]. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale from “very unlikely = 1” to “very likely = 4”. The total score ranges from 17 to 68, with higher scores indicative of more likelihood of seeking counseling for the various issues [26-28]. Internal Consistency (Cronbach’s α): 0.90 in a previous study [28] 0.89 in the current study*

Scale	Description
ATSPPH-SF	Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help short-form (ATSPPH-SF) It is a shortened 10-item revision scale of the original 29-item ATSPPHS designed to assess the multi-factorial nature of individuals' attitudes towards seeking help for mental health issues [29]. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale from "disagree = 1" to "agree = 4". The total score ranges from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicative of more positive attitudes towards getting professional help. Internal consistency (Cronbach's α): 0.84 in the original study [29], 0.82 [30], 0.80 [31], and 0.77 [32] in other previous studies 0.80 in the current study*
SSOSH	Self-Stigma of Seeking Psychological Help '10-items' (SSOSH) It is a 10-item self-report scale designed to assess the self-stigma associated with seeking psychological help [30]. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale from "disagree = 1" to "agree = 4". The total score ranges from 10 to 40, with higher scores reflect more significant perceived self-stigma associated with seeking psychological help. Internal consistency (Cronbach's α): 0.91 in the original study [30] 0.82 in the current study*
SSRPH	Social Stigma Scale for Receiving Psychological Help (SSRPH) It is a 5-item self-report scale designed to assess the perceived public stigma associated with seeking professional help [28]. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale from "disagree = 1" to "agree = 4". The total score ranges from 5 to 20, and higher scores reflect more significant perceived public stigma associated with receiving professional psychological help. Internal consistency (Cronbach's α): 0.72 in the original study [33], 0.76 [25] and 0.73 in other previous studies [28]. 0.70 in the current study*, which makes the unidimensional factor structure of this scale uncertain. However, the authors decided to keep this scale for further analysis, and to repeat the analysis with its different items.
Cronbach's α could not be improved by omitting any of the items.	*Cronbach's α could not be improved by omitting any of the items.

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