

# Professional and Psychological Help Seeking Behavior among College Students

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## Abstract

Mental and behavioral problems are the leading causes of health problems in young people both in high and low resource countries, accounting for one third of all years lost productivity due to this disability. It implies that, healthy students can productively contribute to the development of a country.<sup>19</sup> As India is the world's most youthful nation college students seeking professional and psychological help for their mental health issues and becoming mentally healthy is essential for their successful college life. This study is conducted to understand the Professional Psychological Help Seeking Behavior of college students for their Mental health issues and to know the gender differences. Convenient sampling was used with 60 respondents from a reputed college of Mangaluru, Karnataka. Attitude towards professional psychological help seeking scale (Fischer, 1995) and Socio demographic profile were used for data collection. The study revealed poor attitude among college students for professional help seeking for mental health and recommends for an increased education and awareness to reduce the perceived stigma for help seeking. More defined policies and programmes have the potential to improve students' access to a full range of mental health services which in turn contribute to overall development.

**Keywords;** *Professional Help-seeking, Mental Health, College Students*

## Introduction

### Students in India

According to World Health Organization (WHO), Mental and behavioral problems are the leading causes of health problems in young people in both high and low resource countries, accounting for one third of all years lost productivity due to this disability. It implies that, healthy students can productively contribute to the development of a country. As stated by Division for Social Policy and Development Disability of United Nations, Mental health issues are among the ten leading causes of disability in both developed and developing countries. Poor mental health is both a cause and a consequence of poverty, compromised education, gender inequality, ill-health, violence and other global challenges. It impedes the individual's capacity to work productively, realize their potential and make a contribution to their community. There is growing recognition within the international community that invisible disabilities, such as mental health is one of the most neglected yet essential development issues in achieving internationally agreed development goals.

India is the world's most youthful nation, with two-thirds of population under the age of thirty-five. It is the strength and skills of these youngsters that will usher in New India.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, college students seeking professional and psychological help for their mental health issues and becoming mentally healthy is essential for their overall development which in turn contributes for healthy nation.

### Mental Health Issues among College students

WHO defines Mental Health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community". It also emphasizes that "mental health is not just the absence of mental disorder".

Mental health issues are a set of clinically recognizable symptoms present in an individual for a period of time and the individual experiences distress due to these symptoms as they interfere with his or her personal functioning like academic work, relationships

and social interactions. Mental health professionals associated with college mental health services also opine that late adolescent and college going persons are highly vulnerable to the limitations in personal growth, imposed by emotional disturbances of varying severity.<sup>21</sup>

Transition from college students to adulthood, especially among college students can be an extremely stressful period owing to many challenges those can ultimately affect their mental health. Stress can be negative or positive to an individual, depending on the factors such as strength and persistence of the stress, social support.<sup>22</sup>

The Mental-health symptoms during the transition period have a significant impact on the development of students and their social and economic integration, including employability. Mental-health issues have a significant impact across a wide range of developmental outcomes, limiting opportunities for social integration. One area that can be impacted by mental-health conditions during adolescence and young adulthood is the development of safe and healthy relationships with peers, parents, teachers and romantic partners. In fact, adolescence is the developmental period that is critical for identity formation and taking on roles, especially with peers.<sup>23</sup>

According to the Report on Mental Health and Development 2008 Mental and behavioural issues are the leading causes of health problems in young people in both high- and low-resource countries accounting for one third of all years lost productivity due to this disability.

Attention to global mental health moves beyond treatment-oriented programmes in health-care settings to include broader approaches inspired by public-health and social-inclusion considerations. Recently, mental-health issues have attracted global attention. The 2007 Lancet Series on Global Mental Health led to the launch of a coordinated Movement for Global Mental Health, comprising over 95 institutions and 1,800 individuals worldwide.

In 2010, the World Health Organization (WHO) produced a Report on Mental Health and Development (2010a), highlighting people with mental illnesses as a vulnerable group subject to stigma and social isolation, human-rights violations and exclusion from policies and decision-making that affected them. Later that year, in its resolution on global health and foreign policy,

the United Nations General Assembly recognized the need to target mental health in development, reinforcing previous international commitments toward mainstreaming disability issues in development. The WHO has developed the Mental Health Gap Action Programme, along with technical tools to support non-specialist mental-health service capacity in low- and middle-income countries. This international momentum to acknowledge and address the global burden of mental-health problems is critical to dealing with this issue at a global level.

## Review of Literature

Kumar Rajesh, Prinja Shankar and Lakshmi P.V.M.<sup>24</sup> conducted a study to assess the perceived health problems and help seeking behavior and utilization pattern of adolescent health clinics. A pre-tested, semi-structured questionnaire was administered to 360 school going college students who were selected by stratified random sampling from two sectors of Chandigarh where services were being provided by a school-based and dispensary-based adolescent health clinic. The study revealed that majority (81%) of the college students having some health problem during last three months prior to the survey; predominant (60%) problems were psychological and behavioral in nature. To resolve these problems boys consulted mainly friends/peers (48%) while girls consulted their mothers (63%). Compared to the dispensary-based adolescent health clinic, utilisation was significantly higher in a school-based clinic where proportion of psychological or behavioral problems reported was also significantly higher.

Daniel Eisenberg<sup>25</sup> conducted a study using random sample of 5,555 college students from a diverse set of 13 universities, with an objective to see the association of help-seeking behavior with both perceived public stigma and people's own stigmatizing attitudes or personal stigma. There were three main findings: (a) Perceived public stigma was considerably higher than personal stigma; (b) personal stigma was higher among college students with any of the following characteristics: male, younger, Asian, international, more religious, or from a poor family; and (c) personal stigma was significantly and negatively associated with measures of help seeking whereas perceived stigma was not significantly associated with help seeking.

Eisenberg, Golberstein and Gollust<sup>26</sup> conducted a study with the objective of quantify mental health service

use and estimate how various factors are associated with help-seeking and access in a university student population. A Web-based survey was administered to a random sample of 2785 college students attending a large, public university with a demographic profile similar to the national student population. The study revealed that, 30% of respondents perceived a need for professional help for their mental or emotional health in the previous year. As expected, college students with current mental health issues, as indicated by positive screens in the PHQ (Patient Health Questionnaire) depression or anxiety instruments, were significantly more likely to perceive a need for services and to receive services.

Reviewed studies show that the help-seeking behaviour of students has focused mainly on the friends, parents or try to cope alone, and subsequently turn to adult. Stigma is a considerable barrier to mental health service delivery among students. In addition to that, embarrassment and the lack of basic knowledge about mental health impact on the Help seeking behaviour of students. The issue of stigma is further challenged by the lack of quality mental-health services.

### Methodology

**Title:** Help-seeking Behavior of College students for Mental Health Issues

**Aim of the Study:** To assess the Help-seeking Behavior of College students for Mental Health Issues.

**Objectives:** 1. To understand the Professional Psychological Help seeking behavior of college students for their Mental health issues

2. To know the gender differences in Professional Psychological Help Seeking Behavior among college students.

**Importance of the study:** Mental health issues among college students are detrimental to the development of an individual and also to the country. Mental and behavioral problems are the leading causes of health problems in young people in both high and low resource countries, accounting for one third of all years lost productivity due to this disability <sup>i</sup> Thus, healthy students productively contribute to the development of a country. Transition from college students to adulthood, especially among college students can be an extremely stressful period owing to the many challenges those

can ultimately affect their mental health.<sup>4</sup> Hence, seeking professional and psychological help for mental health is essential for the college students. This study is conducted in Mangalore, Karnataka which is known for its educational excellence and attracts student from across the nation.

**Research Design:** Cross-sectional Research design was applied.

**Population:** The target population was first-year degree college students of two reputed colleges in Mangaluru, Karnataka, India.

**Sample Size and Technique:** The sample size was 60, Convenient Sampling method was applied for the study.

**Sources of data:** The study used Primary data and reviewed secondary literature.

#### Description of the Tools

**1. Socio Demographic Sheet** developed by the researcher includes age, gender, religion, hobbies, type of college, mode of stay, financial background, parents' occupation and qualification of parents, and such other information that taps their college life.

**2. Attitude towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (Fischer et.al., 1995):** The scale contains 10 items, reverse score items 2,4,8,9 and 10, and then add up the ratings to get a sum. Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes towards seeking professional help. Calculate a mean for males, for females, and for each of the groups to examine group differences. The scale is on public domain.

**Data Analysis:** The data is analyzed through descriptive statistics. Frequency, Mean and Standard Deviation are used and SPSS 17.0 Version is applied.

### Results and Discussion

**Table 1- Demographic Variables**

Variables	Frequency %
Male	30 (50%)
Female	30 (50%)
Total	60 (100%)

**Cont ... Table 1- Demographic Variables**

18 Years	39 (65%)
19 Years	21 (35%)
Total	60 (100%)
High Income	8 (13.3%)
Middle Income	48 (80%)
Low Income	4 (6.7%)
Total	60 (100%)

Table No.1 shows that there were equal number of male (50%) and female (50%) college students. There were 65% college students in the age of 18 years, 35% were of 19 years age group. Regarding the financial background of the participants, 8% of college students were from high income background, 48% were middle income background and 4% were from low income background.

**Table 2- Help Seeking behaviour among College students**

ATPPHS (Attitude towards professional psychological help seeking)	Mean Score Mean Percentage	Standard Deviation
Help Seeking Behaviour among college students	14.06 (46.86%)	±6.20
Male	11.46 (38.2%)	±5.38
Female	14.86 (49.53%)	±5.17

Table No. 2 shows the mean score of Attitude towards professional psychological help seeking behaviour among college students. The maximum score of the scale was 30 whereas the overall mean score obtained in this study is 14.06 (±6.20) with mean percentage 46.86%. It shows a low level of help seeking behaviour among college students. With regard to gender, the mean score of male college students was 11.46(±5.38) with mean percentage 38.2%. This shows low level of help seeking attitude among male college students. Whereas, the mean score of help seeking (ATPPHS) among female college students was 14.86

(±5.17) with mean percentage 49.53% which also shows low level of help seeking attitude among female college students. Thus the study shows poor level of help seeking behaviour among both male and female college students. This will hamper the overall development of the student population by affecting their mental health and lead to mental health issues.

The study shows that the Professional and Psychological Help Seeking Behaviour among both the male and female college students are in low level. The mean score of ATPPHS among male college students is much lower than the mean score of female college students who in turn also seek poor level of help for their mental health issues. This will lead to unprofessional help seeking resulting in intensifying mental health issues among college students which is highlighted in study by Chandrashekar <sup>iii</sup> that 15 to 20% of the college students having recognizable mental disorders. Only a few colleges provide counseling services through trained manpower in our state. College students with mental morbidity do not seek Psychiatric treatment because psychiatric services are not available in an affordable and approachable manner, stigma attached to mental disorders and lack of awareness. Thus majority of the college students, who need help, remain unattended and uncared. Similarly, NAMI conducted a national survey of college students to learn about their mental health in colleges in U.S.A. and highlighted that, stigma remains the number one barrier to college students seeking help and survey respondents shared valuable ways in which schools can work more effectively to combat stigma.

Thus, there is a need to create awareness on mental health among college students. The professional help seeking also need to be encouraged through the active involvement of teachers and college management who can help the college students for professional intervention by introducing Campus Mental Health Services which will help to combat stigma and promote mental health among college students. The same has been highlighted by Eisenberg, Hunt and Speer <sup>10</sup> who emphasized about help-seeking behavior for mental health issues in college population and offers a perspective on next steps for improving knowledge and practice in this area. He also stressed that, traditional barriers such as stigma can only partially explain the high prevalence of untreated disorders and suggested for campus-based intervention strategies such as anti-stigma campaigns, screening programs and gatekeeper trainings. Such programs will create awareness among students; helps to adopt

healthy coping styles and also to seek professional and psychological help for their mental health issues.

### Conclusion

In total, healthy students can productively contribute to the development of a country. Mental health is not popular area in India where the concept of campus mental health and policies to promote mental health in schools and colleges is minimal. The help seeking behaviour of college students for their mental health issues need to be encouraged by the government and policy makers in such a way that promotes their mental health and intergenerational equity which will contribute to their overall development.

**Ethical Clearance:** This study is a part of my Ph.D Study and Ethical Clearance is taken from Institutional Ethics Committee, School of Social Work, Roshni Nilaya, Affiliated to Mangaluru University, Mangaluru.

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**Conflict of Interest:** Nil

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