



Breaking Barriers: Understanding Mental Health Stigma and Help-Seeking Behavior in Young Adults

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Abstract

Mental health problems need adequate treatment and management but due to prevailing societal conditions like stigma, inaccessibility in mental health, lack of awareness and financial issues impede young adults from seeking professional mental health care. The present study aims to find out the relationship between help seeking behaviour and mental health stigma among young adults as well as to find whether mental health stigma and help seeking behaviour differ with respect to gender. The sample comprises 400 young adults of 18-25 years of age randomly selected from different districts of Kerala. Stigmatizing Attitudes-Believability, Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short and personal data sheet were used to collect data from participants. Findings revealed that there was no significant difference in mental health stigma and help seeking behaviour among young adults based on gender. But there was a significant negative correlation between these study variables. This study provided insights on the stigmatic experiences and helping behaviour among young adults which can be used for further studies.

Keywords: Mental Health Stigma; Helpseeking Behaviour; Young Adults

Introduction

Mental health has been a dynamic apprehension for people all over the world. Many countries and global communities are working hard to resolve the issues of mental health conditions. Mental health is a basic human right and vital for personal, community, and socio-economic development [1]. The majority of the mental health problems are affecting the younger adults. Since young adults are the strength of every nation. It is inevitable to alleviate the plight of young adults suffering from various mental health issues [2]. Many reasons undermine the mental health condition such as physical, social, environmental, cognitive, and biological

factors. Factors like emotional intelligence, substance use, and genetics can increase the susceptibility of mental illness [3]. Mental health problems need adequate treatment and management but due to prevailing societal conditions like stigma, inaccessibility in mental health, financial issues impede young adults from seeking appropriate mental health care. Zoppi L [4] defined mental health stigma as, "societal disapproval, or when society places shame on people who live with a mental illness or seek help for emotional distress, such as anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, or PTSD" [5]. Such stigmas is applicable to mental illness and it seems to create oneself with a cover of stigmatized attitude which makes them as inferior and incompetent. Stigmatizing

attitude deteriorates an individual's confidence and self-belief and esteem which ultimately reflect in lower recovery. There are a number of factors that contribute to mental health stigma among young people in India, including a lack of mental health knowledge, traditional cultural beliefs about the causes of mental illness, and a lack of mental health education in schools and communities.

Research has shown that mental health stigma is a significant issue in India with many people holding negative attitudes towards individuals with mental illness [6,7]. A study of mental health stigma among college students in India found that more than 50% of participants held stigmatizing attitudes towards mental illness [8]. Another study found that more than 60% of young people in India reported experiencing some form of stigma related to mental illness [9]. The prevailing mental health stigma restricts from seeking professional help for mental health problems. The act of deliberately soliciting assistance from others through communication is known as help-seeking behaviour [10].

Earlier researches suggest that young people are less likely to seek help from others, particularly professional help [6]. Young adults become hesitant to seek help due to the negative undertones that are often associated with mental health and seeking support. Cultural and social norms play another important role in help seeking. Gender roles and norms in the society also influence seeking help, for example in case of males they feel pressure to conform to traditional masculine gender roles that prioritize strength and independence. Seeking help could consider them as inferior and weak therefore they are reluctant to call for help. Past literature on studying the mental health stigma, help seeking behaviour are meagre in Kerala population. The present study aims to understand the relationship between mental health stigma and help seeking behaviour among young adults.

Objectives

- To find out whether there is any significant difference in mental health stigma among young adults based on gender.
- To find out whether there is any significant difference in Help-seeking behaviour among young adults based on gender.
- To find out whether there is any significant relationship between mental health stigma and help-seeking behaviour among young adults.

Hypotheses

- There will be significant differences in mental health stigma among young adults based on gender.

- There will be significant differences in help-seeking behaviour among young adults based on gender.
- There will be a significant relationship between mental health stigma and help-seeking behaviour among young adults.

Methods

Research Design

The present study uses descriptive research design.

Sample

The sample used in the present study comprises 400 young adults of 18-25 years of age. In this sample, 200 are females while 200 are males from the total population of 400 young adults. All the participants were selected from different districts of Kerala. The method of sampling used in the present study was random sampling.

Tools

The following tools were used for measuring the variables under study.

Stigmatizing Attitudes-Believability

The mental health stigma was assessed using Stigmatizing Attitudes-Believability scale [11]. The Stigmatizing Attitudes-Believability is an eight-item self-report questionnaire to measure stigmatizing attitudes toward mental health. Item responses are summed to an overall score ranging from 8 to 56. The scale showed acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .78 [12].

Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short

Help Seeking Behaviour was measured by the Attitudes toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short Form (ATSPPHS-SF), developed by Fischer and Farina in 1995. The scale measures a person's disposition toward seeking out professional assistance for psychological issues. This scale has got two versions i.e. full and short form [13]. The Attitude toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help scale-short form is a 10 item 4 point Likert self-report measure which can be completed in about 5-10 minutes. The scale measures zero indicating - disagree to three indicating agree. The total score is measured by summing up the 10 items with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes towards seeking professional help [14]. It has an internal consistency $\alpha = .77$ [15].

- Personal data sheet (prepared by investigator) for collecting personal details and sociodemographic details of participants.

Procedure

The present study was conducted among young adults to find the relationships between mental health stigma and help seeking behaviour. The method of sampling used in the present study was random sampling. The data was collected among young adult population with the help of questionnaire method. Instructions were given prior to the data collection and they were informed and assured that their personal information and responses will be kept confidential. A consent form and personal data sheet was given along with the questionnaire and the participants had to fill out the informed consent and give responses to the questions. After data collection, the data was scored using the manuals of instruments used and analysis was done using SPSS (version 25.0). For generating tables Microsoft word and excel sheets were used. The obtained data were analysed using the following statistical techniques such as student's t-test and Pearson Correlation Coefficient.

Results and Discussion

Mental health stigma and help-seeking behavior among young adults were compared on the basis of gender. To find

out the significant difference t-test was carried out. Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the scores in mental health stigma, and help-seeking behavior among young adults based on gender. From the table, the gender of young adults has been grouped into two, such as male (N=200) and female (N=200) and a total of 400 participants included in the study. Independent sample t-test is used for test statistics. On comparing the mean scores obtained on mental health stigma, male young adults (M=28.88) is to said have higher mental health stigma than female young adults (M=27.60) and it was not significant. There are studies aligning with results of the present study. In a study by Hori H, et al. [16] there was no significant effect of gender on stigmatizing attitudes toward mental illness. In another study among young nurses by Katsuki F, et al. [17], the study found that there was no significant difference in gender on mental health stigma towards persons with mental illness. Thus, gender does not play a significant role in mental health stigma. Every individual devoid of gender are experiencing similar stigmatic experiences therefore the conditions and consequences are similar to both male and females. Cultural norms and social taboo are same for both the genders. Hence, hypothesis H1 is not accepted.

Variables	Male (N=200)		Female (N=200)		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Mental health stigma	28.88	7.25	27.6	7.196	1.765

** Significant at 0.01 level

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the scores in mental health stigma among young adults based on gender.

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the scores in help-seeking behavior among young adults based on gender. Independent sample t-test is used for test statistics. There was no significant difference in help seeking behaviour among male and female young adults. In case of mean scores of help seeking behaviour, female young adults (M=16.03) shown to have higher help seeking behaviour than male young adults (M=15.36). Females showed positive

help seeking attitude than compared to males. Due to the societal expectations and gender norm as males should be self-reliant etc., males seek help less compared to females. But in this study there was no significant difference in help seeking behaviour. There are only limited studies which have studied the help-seeking behaviour based on gender. Gender is not a strong determinant of help-seeking behaviour. Hence, hypothesis H2 is not accepted.

Variables	Male (N=200)		Female (N=200)		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Help-seeking behavior	15.36	4.36	16.03	4.402	-.1529

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of the scores in help-seeking behaviour among young adults based on gender.

The Table 3 shows the results of coefficient of correlation obtained between mental health stigma and help-seeking behavior among young adults. Mental health stigma and help seeking behavior were negatively related ($r = -.139$) and it was found to be significant at 0.01 level. When the mental health stigma is increased there will be a decrease

in help seeking behavior. Mental health stigma is apparently prevalent in this society. Social norms, cultural beliefs etc. tend to increase the stigmatic beliefs in people. High stigmatic individuals develop a sense of self-reliance as if they can manage a trauma or stress alone instead of seeking professional help. Thus, such thoughts can alleviate asking

professional help. Prevailing stigmatic beliefs also increase the concerns while assessing health care. They might be inhibited by the thoughts of cost, confidentiality, quality of health care etc. Hence, increased stigma leads to reduced help-seeking behaviour.

Variables	Helpseeking behaviour
Mental health stigma	-.139**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3: The coefficient of correlation obtained between mental health stigma and help-seeking behaviour among young adults.

In order to support the present study there has been studies that support the findings. Clement S, et al. [18] systematically reviewed previous literature on help seeking and mental health stigma and found 144 studies between the year 1980 and 2011. About fifty six studies found relationship between mental health stigma and help seeking behaviour. Most of the studies were centred among university students and there was seen a negative relationship between both study variables and it was significant. Hence, hypothesis H3 is accepted.

Implications

The present study adds to the essential existing literature of help-seeking behaviour and mental health stigma. Mental health is a heated subject nowadays due to the increasing number of incidence irrespective of age, gender and socioeconomic status. There are a number of reasons that influences an individual refrain from seeking psychological help. This study attempts to deepen the knowledge of prevailing mental health stigma and helpseeking behaviour. Findings reflect on the need for designing various awareness programs for enhancing helpseeking behaviour and reducing stigma. New policy making and curriculum amendments incorporating mental health education can be developed young adults.

Limitations

The study had certain limitations as it was limited to male and female genders. The study did not explore the attitudes and responses from other gender population. The prevalent public stigma may tend to conceal participants from genuine responses which may create bias responses.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies have to be done among mental health professionals and other age groups in order to bring new insights on their perception to the help seeking behaviour

and mental health stigma. New researches determining the efficacy of existing mental health projects have to be widely implemented as it may help in bringing in challenges in mental health advocacy.

Conclusion

The present study aims to find out the relationship between help seeking behaviour and mental health stigma among young adults as well as to find whether mental health stigma and helpseeking behaviour differ with respect to gender. Findings revealed that there was no significant difference in mental health stigma and helpseeking behaviour among young adults based on gender. But there was a significant negative correlation between these study variables. This study provided insights on the stigmatic experiences and helping behaviour among young adults which can be used for further studies.

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