

The Perspective, Perception and Attitude of Students towards Psychiatric Help

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The worldwide burden of mental health issue is becoming highly notable. College student is one of the population that at the high risk of getting mental illness. Although the case of mental health problem is increasing, students do not have the desire to seek help and believe that the issue is common among them to experience. The barrier from receiving proper treatments include personal stigma and attitude towards mental health. Therefore, the aim of this research is to study the perspective, perception and attitude of students towards psychiatric help. **Materials and methods:** A cross-sectional design was adopted and data were collected form the students of Management and Science University, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. Primary data was collected using self-administered questionnaire consisting of socio-demographic questions for part A, perspective, Perception and Attitude toward psychiatric help for part B and the perception towards mental illness for part C. A total of 194 students were randomly and equally pick as respondents. **Results:** Data was entered on SPSS version 2.3. The perspective is found to be negative among MSU students while the perception and attitude towards psychiatric help are positive. **Conclusion:** The perspective, perception and attitude are influenced by the demographic such as gender, age and religion that should be focus on to create awareness that promote help-seeking intervention among university students on having good mental health.

Keywords

Mental health; help-seeking; perspective; perception; attitude

INTRODUCTION

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” The concept of mental health includes the ability of an individual to acknowledge his or her abilities, to be able to work productively to contribute to the betterment of life and community and be able to cope with the stress and obstacle positively as possible. Mental health should be a concern to all human beings as its problem will affect the community. Everyone is susceptible to the immune disorder but mostly in the poor, homeless, traumatic people, abusive situation, less educated and victim of violence. Physical and mental health are closely related. The well-beings of the individual and its quality of life depends on the mental health and also not let astray the physical health. People always fear to talk about their mental health and condition that it is now ignored and neglected (WHO).

Students face many challenges and pressure once entering university life for unable to cope with academic pressure, dealing with stressful tasks and assignments, separation or homesick due to being away from family and home and attending lots of new responsibilities when growing up (Pedrelli et al.,2014). But, what makes students afraid of disclosing their problem with psychiatrist or professional help? National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) has conducted a survey on 2012. It is stated that the reasons why student do not disclose include fear of the impact and impression that people have towards them, lack of opportunity to disclose, unable to trust psychiatrist that their medical condition remain confidential and concern if their mental state affect their academic status and their chances of applying for job. This also contribute to their belief and attitude to seek help and to get treatment because fear of being labelled by the community and society (Downs and Eisenberg, 2012).

Students feel more comfortable talking to their family and close friends regarding their mental problem according to NAMI. However, to not getting proper treatment and support from the professionals could lead to suicidal ideation, behaviour and attempts. (Downs and Eisenberg, 2012). It is revealed that having a good knowledge of mental health reflects good attitude in handling mental health problems among university students as they became more open to medication and therapy (Despande et al., 2020). This study is to investigate the perspective, perception and attitude of Management and Science University students have towards psychiatric help of Shah Alam, Selangor in Malaysia.

MATERIALS & METHODS

In this study, cross-sectional design was adopted and data were collected form the targeted population at one point of time. The participants in this study are selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria set for the specific research.

The inclusion criteria are students of Management and Science University, Shah Alam only. The exclusion criteria are student outside of MSU Shah Alam and staff of MSU. Cross-sectional study is commonly used in for population-based surveys and to assess the prevalence of disease in clinical based samples. Also, this study is conducted for the aim of public health planning. The benefit of this design is that it is quick, easy and inexpensive to perform. Apart from that, quantitative method was used to collect the data. Survey was distributed through online questionnaire which consisted of instruments that measured the perspective, perception and attitude of students towards psychiatric help. Furthermore, in this study, simple random sampling was adopted because the entire population was given the equal chance of being selected as subject. The subjects were selected independently of the members of population.

Discrimination-Devaluation (D-D). D-D scale is used to measure the perspective that people have towards psychiatric help and is developed by Lally et al., (2013). The D-D scale evaluates the range of agreement on each statement which indicate that those who have gone to psychiatrist to receive help are devalue by people. In previous research, all statistical tests were two-sided and the level for statistical significance was 0.05. The original scale refers to mental patients but the concept is broadened by wording alteration to people who react to psychiatrist help. The responses are coded 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree). This study uses 6 of 12 items which include; 1) I would willingly accept a person who has received mental health treatment as a close friend. 2) I believe that a person who has received mental health treatment is just as trustworthy as the average person. 3) Despite my professional beliefs, I have negative reactions towards people who have mental illness. 4) I would think less of a person who has received mental health treatment. 5) I feel that receiving mental health treatment is a sign of personal failure. 6) I would be reluctant to date a man/woman who has received mental health treatment.

Perception of Mental Health Services (POMHS). POMHS scale is related with perception of help-seeking and it is developed by Czyz et al., (2013). It records the perception that people have towards help-seeking through series of questions. The scale asks the respondents regarding the extend of agree and disagree of the following reason from not asking help form professional like psychiatrist. 5-points Likert scale is used. 6 of 8 items are used in this research which include 1) I believe that psychiatric help is not needed due to problems being minor or transient. 2) I am lacking of time to search for psychiatric help. 3) Preference for self-management of problems I would prefer to seek help from family or friends. 4) Pragmatic barriers to accessing services such as long waiting period to see professionals, financial concerns and not knowing where to go for help. 5) I am concerns about stigma and discomfort related to discussing problems with professionals. 6) I have the doubt that professional help would be beneficial.

Students' attitudes towards seeking of psychological help (ATSPPH). ATSPPH is developed by Fischer & Turner (1970) but the questionnaire is modified by Flajsman, A. M., &Kuzman, M. R. (2017). The scale is used to assess the attitude of students towards psychiatric help by offering Lykert type scale responses. The questionnaire contains 29 statements but 13 items are used in this research. The statements include; 1) I have negative past experiences with professional help seeking. 2) It is difficult to talk about personal affairs with highly educated people such as doctors, lecturers, and counsellors. 3) I would feel uneasy going to a psychiatrist because of what some people might think. 4) A person should work out his own problems; getting psychological counselling would be a last resort. 5) The idea of talking about problems with a psychologist strikes me as a poor way to get rid of emotional conflicts. 6) If I suffer from mental health problems, I would not want people to know. 7) Having been mentally ill carries with it a burden of shame. 8) There are experiences in my life I would not discuss with anyone. 9) If I were experiencing a serious emotional crisis at any point in my life, I would be confident that I could find relief in psychotherapy. 10) There are certain problems that should not be discussed outside one's immediate family. 11) Would not be reluctant to seek help if I had a mental illness. 12) If a good friend asked my advice about a mental health problem, I might recommend that he see a psychiatrist. 13) Although there are clinics for people with mental troubles, I would not have much faith in them.

The questions have been chosen thoroughly and divided into its own variables. The questions selected are chose based on the demographic factor of Malaysian and MSU society which are gender, age, race, religion, marital status, and education. It has to be made sure that the questions do not cause any discomfort and contain sensitive sentiments especially regarding race and religion. It has to be suitable for all students regardless the race, sex and religion to participate in this research study as to not create any biasness as Malaysia is a multi-cultural and multi-races country with lots of different backgrounds and beliefs.

RESULT

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of D-D, POMHS and ATSPPH

	Mean score	S.d	Median	Range score	Min score	Max score
D-D	16.35	3.04	16.00	24.00	6	30
POMHS	18.25	3.06	18.00	17.00	9	26
ATSPPH	40.61	6.02	40.00	38.00	19	57

As explained in the materials and method, a new set of question is generated and divided according to its variables which are perspective, perception and attitude towards psychiatric help. The new set questionnaire contains 25 questions. The score range is developed individually using SPSS Version 21.1. Range helps to divide the values into upper and lower boundaries. The range of each measure is stated in Table 1 with the value D-D = 24.00, POMHS = 17.00 and ATSPPH = 38.00. The mean score is calculated using SPSS Version 21.1. The mean score is used to interpret whether respondents have favourable or non-favourable traits in each variable section. The result is explained below.

Regarding D-D measure, the analysis showed that student had a mean score of 16.35 with Standard Deviation = 3.04. The range obtained is 24.00. Their mean score (16.35) fell below the range (24.00) of scores for the D-D measure. The worst score is 6 while the best score is 30. The outcome obtained in the current study suggests that MSU students have less favourable perspective toward seeking psychological help.

Furthermore, POMHS measure proclaimed the mean score of 18.25 (Standard Deviation = 3.06) with scores range of 17.00. the worst score is 9 while the best score is 26. The mean score (18.25) of POMHS measure fell above the range (17.00), highly indicates that MSU students show positive and good perception towards help-seeking.

Another point to note, overall MSU students mean score on the measure of ATSPPH was 40.61 (Standard Deviation = 6.02). The score range is 38.00. the worst score is 19 while the best score is 57. This value of the mean score (40.61) fell above the range score (38.00) of possible scores for this measure. This indicate that MSU students express favourable and positive attitude in attending mental health treatment.

Table 2: Association of Demographic Variables with Items of D-D, POMHS and ATSPPH

Subscale	NO.	Age	Gender	Race	Religion	Marital Status	education
Perspective (D-D)	1.	0.186	0.008	0.968	0.987	0.820	0.364
	2.	0.725	0.063	0.810	0.965	0.898	0.045
	3.	0.579	0.089	0.246	0.657	0.800	0.988
	4.	0.093	0.749	0.323	0.954	0.861	0.523
	5.	0.234	0.061	0.671	0.715	0.909	0.000
	6.	0.173	0.910	0.016	0.069	0.674	0.657
Perception (POMHS)	7.	0.204	0.963	0.875	0.840	0.782	0.224
	8.	0.173	0.839	0.205	0.192	0.692	0.068
	9.	0.112	0.640	0.783	0.618	0.609	0.496
	10.	0.005	0.030	0.613	0.434	0.619	0.070
	11.	0.149	0.549	0.593	0.212	0.927	0.612
	12.	0.337	0.445	0.956	0.868	0.302	0.008
Attitude (ATSPPH)	13.	0.484	0.015	0.087	0.623	0.791	0.388
	14.	0.682	0.949	0.230	0.183	0.354	0.110
	15.	0.364	0.035	0.554	0.443	0.690	0.169
	16.	0.607	0.781	0.650	0.416	0.457	0.291
	17.	0.159	0.528	0.857	0.252	0.910	0.009
	18.	0.119	0.947	0.179	0.080	0.500	0.190
	19.	0.780	0.475	0.135	0.619	0.158	0.386
	20.	0.322	0.281	0.387	0.012	0.929	0.776
	21.	0.451	0.613	0.676	0.342	0.962	0.081
	22.	0.015	0.066	0.357	0.067	0.738	0.513
	23.	0.209	0.049	0.653	0.459	0.626	0.038
	24.	0.554	0.352	0.197	0.099	0.851	0.000
	25.	0.618	0.596	0.757	0.533	0.429	0.029

Association of the demographic variables with the items of D-D, POMHS and ATSPPH is shown in Table 2. With respect to perspective, the frequency among female was more in favour of positive perspective towards help seeking {question no. 1 ($p=0.008$)}. In question no. 2 with $p=0.045$ and question 5 with $p=0.00$ degree students portrayed good perspective as they believed that people who seek help can be as trustworthy as other people and not a sign of failure. Malay community showed that they have no problem in dating people who went to see psychiatrist based on question no.6 ($p=0.016$).

In regards to perception, participants showed negative perception when they believed that barriers of help seeking include financial status, long waiting period and lack of knowledge on mental health services ($p=0.030$) in question no.10. Age group of 21-25 showed concern that barriers of help seeking include financial status, long waiting period and lack of knowledge on mental health services {question no.10 ($p=0.005$)} and most bachelor degree students believed the benefit of seeking help from professionals ($p=0.008$)

As for attitude of respondents, bachelor students displayed positive attitude when having no problem to disclose, promoting help seeking intervention among friends and have faith in mental health clinic {question no.17 ($p=0.009$)}, question no.24 ($p=0.000$) and question no.25 ($p=0.029$). Respondents also showed good attitude by having no reluctances to seek mental help according to question 23 with $p=0.038$. However, in question no.20, Muslim respondents viewed that there are certain experiences in life that should not be discussed with anyone ($p=0.012$) and that certain problem should not be talk over outside of one's immediate family for respondent between 21-25 years old {question 22, ($p=0.015$)}.

DISCUSSION

Three important variables a) Perspective, b) Perception and c) Attitude were made part of this study as they are effective in giving the ideas of general belief of students regarding psychiatric help among Management and Science University students. In terms of perspective, the analysis showed that student had a mean score of 16.35 (Standard Deviation = 3.04) with the range of 24.00. Their mean score fell below the range of scores for the D-D measure. The outcome obtained suggests that MSU students have less favourable perspective toward seeking psychological help. Supported by the previous research by Lally, J (2013) on stigma of mental illness and help-seeking intention in university students however, showed that the perspective towards psychiatric to be positive and did not act as barriers in help-seeking intervention among students in Ireland.

The difference suggests that the students of Management and Science University may have inflated the view of public stigma. These findings could serve as a discovery for future initiative that aim on reducing the levels of public stigma regarding help-seeking interventions (Eisenberg D et al., 2009). There is no consistent evidence from previous study that proves stigma could be lessen through contact with individuals who have receive treatment for mental health issues but, it may be explained through negative encounter with people they know to have mental health issues regarding the treatment and the way they are viewed (Lally J., 2013).

With regard to perception on psychiatric help, students of MSU showed positive belief and value they have towards seeking professional help. Although in item no.11, 79 students (40.7%) showed concern about stigma and discomfort when discussing their problem, 84 students (43.3%) believed that professional help would be advantageous and favourable. Based on a research done by Akiko Kamimura in 2018 regarding perceptions of mental health and mental health services among college students in Vietnam and the United States, she compared the result of Vietnam and United States students. In her findings, Vietnam students show negative result while U.S students show positivity in the perception. Participant's view on help-seeking may influenced by the knowledge that they have on mental health, potential stigma, parents' and friends' view as vital help resources (van der Ham et al., 2011; Han and Pong, 2015).

Based on the result on attitude, MSU students show favourable attitude towards seeking psychiatric help. These results are in line with Flajsman, A. M., &Kuzman, M. R. (2017), and the majority (Bulbena et al. 2005, Kuhnigk et al., 2007, Lyons et al., 2014) but not in Gazdag (2009). Furthermore, students of MSU showed willingness to see and engage with psychiatrist. They believe and have confidence in mental health services provided. Supported by the item no.23, 102 students would not be unwilling to look for help if they have mental illness. Also in item no.21, 100 students agreed they could find relief in psychotherapy when having emotional crisis at any points of life. One probable explanation that lead to positive attitude is the quality of education on mental health as well as self-evaluation of the knowledge acquired (Flajsman, A. M., &Kuzman, M. R, 2017)

The perception on mental illness is found to be positive among MSU students. The difference of positive and negative result can be due to stigma towards those with mental illness stated by Akiko Kamimura (2018). Moreover, in this study, the correlation of perspective, perception and attitude with perception on mental illness can be seen.

Further study is needed to discover the relation of the main factors (perspective, perception and attitude towards psychiatric help) with perception on mental health.

There are a few limitations that should be highlighted to improve the discoveries regarding this research. First, the time limitation. As the time given is 6 months to complete this research, it prevents from getting a large scale participant which would have been more accurate due to time constraint. Next, lack of research design, it prevents from forming the causal between stigma and help-seeking intention. An imminent study would be helpful to overcome this limitation. Moreover, the detailed study on perception on mental health and how it correlates with perspective, perception and attitude is also lacking as the information of the participants is very limited to understanding perspective, perception and attitude only.

For future research, to acquire bigger sample size is much recommended to get accurate and dependable results. Secondly, the stigma level should be measured for better understanding on the causal and its effects on perspective of students on help-seeking. Other than that, a detailed study regarding the perception on mental illness should be implemented to understand its relationship with perspective, perception and attitude of students towards psychiatric help. Last but not least, initiative should be considered to impart the knowledge, awareness and contact intervention will prove useful revamping the discrimination against mental illnesses and help seeking intention.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study was conducted to identify the perspective, perception and attitude of students towards psychiatric help specifically in Management and Science University. The study was analysed by obtaining information regarding perspective, perception and attitude towards psychiatric help through sets of questionnaire which include the Discrimination and Devaluation (D-D) scale, Perception on Mental Help Services (POMHS) scale and Students' attitudes towards seeking of psychological help (ATSPPH) scale. The population of this study was focused on the students of Management and Science University with the age of 18 and above, both gender, diverse in race, religion and educational level.

Concisely, it was discovered that perspective towards psychiatric help appeared to be negative among MSU students with the mean score of 16.35. Therefore, the null hypothesis is there is no significance between perspective of students towards psychiatric help at Management and Science University, Shah Alam. is accepted while the alternative hypothesis, there is significance between perspective of students towards psychiatric help at Management and Science University, Shah Alam is rejected.

Perception and attitude however were found to be positive among MSU students with the mean score of 18.25 and 38.00 respectively. These indicate that MSU students' express favourable perception and attitude in seeking and attending mental health treatment. The null hypothesis, there is no significance between perception of students towards psychiatric help at Management and Science University, Shah Alam and there is no significance between attitude of students towards psychiatric help at Management and Science University, Shah Alam are rejected. The alternative hypothesis, there is significance between perception of students towards psychiatric help at Management and Science University, Shah Alam and there is significance between attitude of students towards psychiatric help at Management and Science University, Shah Alam are accepted.

On the other hand, the correlation of perspective can be seen between genders, race, and education with p-value (<0.05). In perception, there is correlation between age, gender and education with p-value (<0.05). lastly, there is correlation of attitude with religion and education with p-value (<0.05). The null hypothesis, there is no correlation between demographic factors among students with perspective, perception and attitude towards psychiatric help is rejected. The alternative hypothesis, there is correlation between demographic factors among students with perspective, perception and attitude towards psychiatric help is accepted.

on the whole, based on the result, the students of MSU show openness, have no difficulty in disclosing their problem to the professionals and not reluctant to seek treatment as they believe in the importance of having good mental health. However, they seem to be negative towards perspective due to barriers like public and social stigma towards psychiatric help. Based on the result, hopefully we can see fewer number of psychological distress and suicidal cases in MSU community in the future and provide better intervention for the university to reduce the stigma on attending psychological therapy among students. It should be as acceptable to seek mental health aid as it is to seek help for physical health. Further studies is highly recommend to explore this phenomenon in a more depth manner.

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