

Summary

An Investigation of Attitudes Towards Getting Psychological Help: A Comparison between a Sample of Psychology Students and a Community Sample from Turkey

Cansel Dinar¹

Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University

Özden Yalçınkaya-Alkar

Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University

Individuals may sometimes face problems that exceed the coping mechanisms and may need professional help. However, studies show that the rate of receiving psychological help is low when individuals have difficulty (Andrews et al., 2001; Erol et al., 1998). In addition, individuals tend to give priority to receiving help from informal sources (Atik & Yalçın, 2011; Bilican, 2013; Brimstone et al., 2007; Koydemir & Demir, 2005; Koydemir et al., 2010; Portt, 2020; Yalçın, 2016). The tendency of individuals with serious problems not to seek psychological help may cause impairment of their functionality and it may adversely affect the quality of life of themselves and their caregivers. In fact, Turkey National Burden of Disease Report (2004) reveals that mental disorder, is ranked as second, is an important cause of disease burden.

Gender (Ang et al., 2004; Çebi & Demir, 2019; Fischer & Turner, 1970; Goh et al., 2007; Kakhnovets, 2011; Türküm, 2005), having previous psychological help experience (Güç, 2015; Kakhnovets, 2011; Kim, 2007; Sezer ve Gülleroğlu, 2016; Türküm, 2005) and knowing someone who has received psychological help (Güç, 2015; Vogel et al., 2007) are important variables related to attitudes toward psychological help-seeking as demographic variables. Stigma and self-concealment are other important variables associated with attitudes toward psychological help. Studies show that perceived stigma (social stigma and self-stigma) (Barney et al., 2006; Vogel et al., 2006; Vogel et al., 2007; Vogel & Wade, 2009; Vogel, Wester & Larson, 2007; Portt, 2020; Topkaya, 2014) and self-concealment (Hogge & Blankenship, 2020; Kelly & Achter, 1995; Özbay et al., 2011; Serim & Cihangir-Çankaya, 2015) negatively associated with the attitudes towards psychological help. Psychological distress is the other variable relevant to attitudes toward psychological

help. Studies show that those with high psychological distress receive more psychological help (Azizoğlu, 1993; Cramer, 1999).

Additionally, culture is important in understanding the attitudes towards seeking psychological help. Values and individualism-collectivism are some of the variables related to the attitudes toward psychological help-seeking (Choi ve Miller, 2014; Kim ve Omizo, 2003; Yalçın, 2016). The cultural structure in Turkey shows the characteristics of a transition period with a modern-traditional structure, but the importance of values such as family and religion is still preserved (Aluş, 2015; Çelik, 2009). In addition, people commonly use some religious and traditional resources for psychological problems in Turkey (Güleç, Yavuz, Topbaş, Ak ve Kaygusuz, 2006; Ünal, Kaya ve Yalvaç, 2007; Yalvaç, Kotan ve Ünal, 2015; Yalvaç ve ark., 2017).

The rate of receiving psychology help of psychology students is also low similar to the community sample (Thomas et al., 2014). However, there are studies showing that educational interventions reduce stigmatization and negative attitudes towards mental health (Costin & Kerr, 1966; Mino et al., 2000, Pinfold et al., 2003; Thornicroft et al., 2016). Psychology students were included in the study, as it is thought that increasing the knowledge of psychology students about mental health will increase their positive attitude towards receiving psychological help.

Since early diagnosis is very crucial for treatment success in mental disorders, it is important to understand the variables related to the attitudes toward psychological help in terms of interventions. Therefore, it was aimed to compare the psychology students and the community sample in terms of attitudes toward psychological help and related psychological variables in this study.

Author's Notes: Some of the research findings were presented as a poster presentation at the XVI. European Congress of Psychology (ECP).
Address for Correspondence: ¹M.A. Cansel Dinar, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, 06760 Çubuk / Ankara.
E-mail: canseldinar@gmail.com

Method

Participants

470 adults consisting of a community sample from Turkey (147 female and 82 male) and psychology students (197 female and 44 male) participated in the study.

Measures

Demographic Information Form

The form created by researchers included information of demographics and previous experiences about psychological help.

The Scale of Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help-Shortened

The scale is shortened form of the Scale of Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help, which was developed by Türküm (1997) to measure attitudes towards receiving psychological help (Türküm, 2001). The scale consists of 18 items in a 5-point Likert type. Increasing scores indicate positive attitudes towards psychological help-seeking. In this study, Cronbach's alpha score of the scale was found .84 for psychology students and .90 for the community sample from Turkey.

Self-Stigma of Seeking Psychological Help Scale

The scale was developed by Vogel, Wade, and Haake (2006) in order to measure the individual's perception of self-stigmatization of psychological help-seeking and was adapted in Turkish by Acun-Kapıkıran and Kapıkıran (2013). The scale items are in a 5-point Likert type. Increasing scores indicate that the perception of self-stigma is high toward receiving psychological help. In this study, Cronbach's alpha score of the scale was found .82 for psychology students and .73 for community sample from Turkey.

Social Stigma Scale for Receiving Psychological Help

The 5-item scale was developed by Komiya, Good, and Sherrod (2000) to measure the level of perception toward social stigma due to receiving psychological help was adapted in Turkish by Topkaya (2011). The scale items are in a 4 point Likert type. Increased scores indicate that the individual's perception of social stigmatization towards psychological help is high. In this study, Cronbach's alpha score of the scale was found .74 for psychology students and .82 for community sample from Turkey.

Self-Concealment Scale

The 10-item scale was developed by Larson and Chastain (1990) in order to measure the level of concealment of negative personal informations from others was

adapted in Turkish by Terzi, Güngör, and Erdayı (2007). Rising points indicate a high degree of self-preservation. In this study, Cronbach's alpha score of the scale was found .86 for psychology students and .90 for community sample from Turkey.

Multi-Dimensional Social Values Scale

The scale was used to assess social values which defined as basic judgments about society were developed by Bolat (2011). It consists of 6 subscales and contains 42 items. Subscales of family, religious, traditional, scientific values were used in this study. Cronbach's alpha score of the subscales, which were used in this study, ranged between .55 and .78.

Brief Symptom Inventory

Brief Symptom Inventory is the short form of Symptom Check List-90 Revised and measures severity of psychological distress (Derogatis and Melisaratos, 1983). The 53-item scale was adapted in Turkish by Şahin and Durak (1994). It is scored as a 5-point Likert type and consists of five subscales (depression, hostility, anxiety, somatization, interpersonal sensitivity). In this study, Cronbach's alpha score of the subscales was found to range between .74 and .93 in this study.

Procedure

Ethics committee approval was obtained from the university before the data of the research were collected. Informed consent for the research was provided to the participants and those who approved were included in the study voluntarily.

Results

Differences in Scores of Attitudes Toward Psychological Help According to Demographic Information of Participants

Differences in attitudes toward psychological help according to demographic variables (gender, educational level, the place where someone lives most, previous experience and knowing someone who have experience psychological help, the source of receiving psychological help, previously applied treatment method) were compared by t-test, Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test.

For psychology students, those who had previously received psychological help ($Mean = 4.29, SD = .35$) had more positive attitudes towards psychological help than those who did not receive ($Mean = 4.14, SD = .41$), ($t(239) = 2.71, p < .05$). Those who knew someone ($Mean = 4.23, SD = .37$) who had previously received psychological help had more positive attitudes towards psycho-

logical help than those who did not know ($Mean = 4.09$, $SD = .44$), ($t(236) = 2.50$, $p < .05$). In terms of other demographic variables, no statistically significant difference was found for the attitudes to seeking psychological help in psychology students.

For community sample from Turkey, the attitudes toward psychological help of women ($Mean = 4.16$, $SD = .58$) were more positive than men ($Mean = 3.78$, $SD = .66$), $U = 14926$, $Z = -5.17$, $p < .05$. Those who knew someone ($Mean = 4.15$, $SD = .58$) had previously received psychological help had more positive attitudes towards psychological help than those who did not know ($Mean = 3.78$, $SD = .67$), $U = 18130.5$, $Z = -4.51$, $p < .05$. A statistical difference was found between the groups according to the treatment method applied, *Chi-square* (3, $N = 66$) = 12.68, $p = .005$. Tamhane's T2 test was applied to examine which groups the difference was. Those who have the treatment with psychotherapy ($Mean = 4.49$, $SD = .45$), have more positive attitudes toward psychological help than those who have the treatment with pharmacological treatment ($Mean = 3.76$, $SD = .62$). In terms of other demographic variables, no statistically significant difference was found for the attitudes to seeking psychological help in a community sample from Turkey.

Differences in Scores of Study Variables For Psychology Students and Community Sample From Turkey

Differences between psychology students and community sample from Turkey were compared by Mann-Witney U test for attitudes toward psychological help-seeking and psychological variables. It was found that psychology students ($Mean = 4.18$, $SD = .40$) had more positive attitudes toward psychological help-seeking than the community sample from Turkey ($Mean = 4.03$, $SD = .63$), $U = 24452$, $Z = -2.14$, $p = .03$. Psychology students ($Mean = 2.02$, $SD = .54$) perceived more social-stigma than the community sample from Turkey ($Mean = 1.77$, $SD = .60$), $U = 20757$, $Z = -4.68$, $p = .000$. Psychology students ($Mean = 1.02$, $SD = .59$) had more psychological distress than community sample from Turkey ($Mean = .92$, $SD = .75$), $U = 23066.5$, $Z = -3.08$, $p = .00$.

Analysis of Predictive Variables According to Attitudes Towards Psychological Help: Logistic Regression

Logistic regression analysis was applied to examine the psychological variables that predict psychological help seeking attitudes. The logistic regression model of the sample of psychology students was significant, *Chi-square* (8) = 94.31, $p < .000$. The model explained 43% of the variance and correctly classified 75% of the

cases. Results of logistic regression analysis are shown in Table 5 and classification table is shown in Table 6. Whereas higher self-stigma, social-stigma and self-concealment were associated with decreased attitude toward psychological help-seeking; higher scientific values associated with increased attitude toward psychological help-seeking.

The logistic regression model of the sample of community sample from Turkey was significant, *Chi-square* (8) = 96.24, $p < .000$. The model explained 46% of the variance and correctly classified 76% of the cases. Classification table is shown in Table 7. Whereas higher self-stigma and social-stigma were associated with decreased attitudes toward psychological help-seeking; higher scientific values associated with increased attitudes toward psychological help-seeking.

Discussion

In this study, it was aimed to compare the attitudes towards psychological help-seeking in terms of psychological variables and some demographic variables in psychology students and a community sample from Turkey.

Whereas women's attitudes towards psychological help-seeking were more positive in the community sample from Turkey, there was no difference for gender in the attitudes toward psychological help-seeking in the psychology students. Psychology education may have contributed to reducing biases related to gender roles in attitudes toward psychological help-seeking.

According to the findings of the study, psychology students had more positive attitudes toward psychological help-seeking than the community sample from Turkey, although the rates of getting psychological help in both groups was almost equal. This might indicate that increasing knowledge about mental disorders causes a positive change in the attitudes toward seeking psychological help, but additional interventions might be needed for behavioral change.

Self-stigma and social stigma were found to be the predictor of attitude toward psychological help-seeking in both psychology students and the community sample. An unexpected finding of the study was that psychology students had higher level of negative social stigma toward psychological help than the community. The possible reason for this finding that psychology students may have the perception that they need to solve their problems on their own because of the field they study, so they may feel inadequate due to their psychological distress, which may lead to being perceived stigma about psychological help. Stigma was one of the important barriers to seeking psychological help for both groups. However, in

line with the findings in the literature, it is thought that there may be a difference between these two groups in terms of the reasons for stigma.

Whereas self-concealment was a predictor variable for psychology students, it was not for the community sample. The fact that psychology students, one of the other findings of the study, perceived higher level of social stigma may explain the tendency to conceal themselves. For this reason, studies on the causes of stigma may provide a roadmap to reduce the tendency to conceal themselves.

The finding of the study showed that scientific values predict the attitudes of receiving psychological help. This finding may indicate that evidence-based awareness-raising activities can be successful to increase psychological help-seeking.

The other finding of the study that psychological distress did not predict the attitude of psychological help and psychology students had more psychological distress than the community sample from Turkey. However, the participants did not consist of a clinical sample, so the individuals' distress levels were low. For this reason, it may be more useful to investigate psychological distress by comparing two different groups as community sample and clinical sample.

In summary, knowledge related to attitudes toward psychological help-seeking is important for developing effective intervention in mental health services. Findings of the study -especially stigmatization-related- may provide a basis for mental health professionals to their interventions which provide to eliminate barriers of seeking psychological help. There are requirements for the studies regarding cultural variables in this field in the Turkish sample to understand attitudes toward psychological help.

Limitations of the Study

This study has some limitations. Some groups had quite a small size. Thus, the sample might not represent every segment of the community sample from Turkey. Secondly, non-parametric analyzes were used in the research. This is considered to be a limitation of the study, as parametric tests are statistically more powerful.