

Full Length Research Paper

Psychological help-seeking attitudes of helping professional candidates and factors influencing them

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This study was designed as descriptive to identify psychological help-seeking attitudes of helping professional candidates and factors influencing them. The research population consisted of 447 first and fourth grade students studying in the Departments of Psychological Counselling and Guidance, Psychology or Nursing at Ondokuz Mayıs University. 365 of them who was reached, and accepted to participate in the research constituted the sample group. "Personal Information Form" and "Attitudes toward Seeking Psychological Help Scale" developed by Türküm (2004) to analyze psychological help-seeking attitudes were used as data collection tools. In data analysis, after descriptive analysis, the student t-test was applied to compare the mean values of two groups in normal distribution; analysis of variance (ANOVA) and factorial ANOVA were used to compare the mean values of more than two groups; and Tukey's test was run for post hoc analysis. This research indicated that psychological help-seeking levels of helping professional candidates were statistically significant in terms of gender, department, and experience of receiving psychological help before, but not of grade. Thus, the findings derived from this study should be considered when planning activities related to psychological counselling for students in this group.

Key words: Counsellor, psychologist, nurse, psychological counselling, helping professions.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals have different attitudes and beliefs about overcoming psychological problems. There are several factors influencing psychological help-seeking behaviour. To cope with emotional problems, people prefer sharing them with a friend or family member rather than seeking help from a professional. Some individuals easily consult a professional while some feel discomfort to do this. Its most important reason is the anxiety about being labelled (Özbay, 1996; Türküm, 2001; Bostancı, 2005). This is associated with the society's negative attitudes toward mental disorders and the use of mental health services (Halter, 2004). An individual's such negative attitude is explained by their irrational beliefs. An individual's irrational beliefs define the meanings and comments they

attribute to their experiences, and their emotional and behavioural responses (Türküm, 2003). However, an individual must realize their positive or negative responses to events. They must be aware of damages of such negative responses (Özmen and Önen, 2005).

It is obvious that individuals do encounter difficulties throughout their lives. Similarly, university students experience several problems they need to cope with and have some responsibilities they need to take. Young people studying at university are expected to act like an adult, to effectively solve the problems they encounter as well as to succeed academically. They may need psychological help to overcome difficulties arising during this process (Akaydin, 2002; Aluede et al., 2006; Özbay et al.,

2011). Seeking psychological help means that individuals utilize different sources of support to deal with difficulties (Oliver et al., 2005). In the study conducted on university students in Malaysia, Salim (2010) stated that only 9.3% regarded psychological help positively although their academic, personal, social or psychological problems increased.

In Turkey, there are many publications analyzing psychological help-seeking attitudes in relation to protecting and improving individuals' mental health in the field of public health, however, the number of publications on psychological help-seeking attitudes of psychologists, counsellors and nurses as helping professionals are limited (Çankaya, 2008; Çankaya and Duman, 2010, Özbay et al., 2011, Erkan et al., 2012).

Factors such as unfavourableness of managers or environment, feelings of insecurity, and not being sufficiently educated, and negative attitudes toward seeking psychological help influence the way counsellors perform their duty (Can, 2002). However, counsellors are today expected to be individuals who can improve themselves, be satisfied with their jobs and productive, use effective coping strategies, adapt themselves to existing conditions, and have healthy personalities while helping their clients adapt to changing living conditions (Aysan and Bozkurt, 2004). Not only counsellors but also psychologists play active roles in personal adjustment problems of individuals. It is largely important to know nursing candidates' levels of psychological help-seeking behaviour as they have also active roles in protecting and improving physical health as well as mental health (Oran and Turgay, 2006). It is deemed important that nurses who have a major part in health improvement and behaviour change define their own attitudes while performing their roles. Attitude change involves a process (Çankaya, 2008). Thus, identifying attitudes of nursing candidates when they are still students will be helpful to develop programs for changing students' attitudes.

Professions of psychological counselling and guidance, psychology and nursing are among helping professions the purpose of which is to help people. Individuals from such professions are expected to have positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help as they interact face-to-face with people.

In Turkey, each profession mentioned above requires four-year (eight-term) undergraduate education. Psychology department undergraduate programs aim to show theoretical and conceptual approaches and scientific methods in different fields of psychology as well as to bring learning, application and communication skills. Departments of psychological counselling and guidance train psychological counsellors who will serve to promote emotional, social and mental development of kids especially in educational institutions. Departments of nursing are committed to train nurses who determine health care needs of individual, family and society;

protect and improve health; are equipped with knowledge and skills to provide professional treatment and rehabilitation services; and have a broad world view and the power of scientific thinking as well as respect for ethical values.

It is believed that determining attitudes toward professional psychological help at early ages contributes to remove the obstacles to seeking psychological help (Baltacı, 2012). Thus, it will be useful to determine what psychological help-seeking attitudes of first-grade students with no knowledge and skills of psychological help are and what factors influence them.

An individual's existing attitude influences help-seeking behaviour, therefore, identifying psychological help-seeking attitudes of counsellor, psychologist and nursing candidates and analyzing factors influencing them when they are still students will be helpful to protect and improve students' mental health. It is also important in terms of persons students will serve after being graduated as helping professionals. It is hoped that results from this study will provide insights and recommendations for future research on how to develop training programs to protect mental health of students studying in the said departments and alter their attitudes.

AIM OF THE SURVEY

This study aims to examine psychological help-seeking attitudes of helping professional candidates and factors influencing them. For this purpose, answers to the following questions will be explored.

1. Is there a significant difference between psychological help-seeking attitudes of students and grade and department?
2. Is there a significant difference between psychological help-seeking attitudes of students and gender?
3. Is there a significant difference between psychological help-seeking attitudes of students and experience of receiving psychological help before?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This research was planned to identify psychological help-seeking attitudes of first and fourth grade students studying in the Departments of Psychological Counselling and Guidance (PCG), Psychology (Psych), and Nursing (Nrs), and factors influencing their attitudes. This is a descriptive research. Descriptive research investigates an existing circumstance as it is (Karasar, 2006). Independent variables of the research are department, grade, gender, experience of receiving psychological help before, education level of parents, and perception of economic status and academic achievement. Dependent variable of the research is psychological help-seeking attitude.

Study group

The population consists of first and fourth grade students studying in the Departments of Psychological Counseling and Guidance and Psychology at Samsun Ondokuz Mayıs University and in the Department of Nursing at Samsun School of Health in the fall semester of 2011. The average age of the students from 17 to 25 years of age was 20.30 ± 0.10 . 67.4% (n=246) of the students involved in this research were female, 32.6% (n=119) were male, 15.5% (n=53) were first graders from the department of psychology, 14.2% (n=52) were fourth graders from the department of psychology, 16.7% (n=61) were first graders from the department of nursing, 16.7% (n=61) were fourth graders from the department of nursing, 21.4% (n=78) were first graders from the department of psychological counselling and guidance, 16.4% (n=60) were fourth graders from the department of psychological counselling and guidance.

2.2% of the students perceive their academic achievement as low, 70.4% as medium, and 27.4% as high. Examining education levels of mothers of the students, 63.3% are primary school graduates, 13.2% are secondary school graduates, 15.1% are high school graduates, and 8.5% are university graduates. 33.2% of the students' fathers are primary school graduates, 14.8% are secondary school graduates, 27.9% are high school graduates, and 24.1% are university graduates. 5.2% of the students perceive their economic status as low, 92.3% as medium, and 2.5% as high.

Data-collection tools

Personal Information Form consisting of questions about students' grade, department and gender, and whether they received psychological help before or not; and Attitudes toward Seeking Psychological Help Scale to analyze psychological help-seeking attitudes were used as data collection tools.

Attitudes toward seeking psychological help scale -SF (ATSPHS-SF)

The Attitudes toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short Form developed by Fischer and Turner (1970) was translated into Turkish by Türküm (2001, 2004). The 10-item, 5-point Likert Scale was used to assess individuals' attitudes toward seeking help. Factor analysis applied to the data obtained from 481 university students in scale revision yielded 18 items representing two factors accounting for 52.6% of the total variance.

The first factor included 12 items related to positive views on getting psychological help; the internal consistency coefficient and average item-total correlation for the first factor were .92 and .67 respectively. The second factor included negative views on getting psychological help; the internal consistency coefficient and average item total correlation for the second factor were .77 and .54 respectively. The internal consistency for the total scale was .90. Comparing female and males students in terms of their scores it was discovered that female students' scores are greater than male students' score.

The ATSPHS-SF scores of those students who had an experience of getting psychological help and those who did not were compared using t-test to examine the distinctive validity of the scale, which resulted in a significant difference in favour of those who had the experience. Comparing students who got psychological help in terms of whether they were satisfied or not, a significant difference was similarly discovered in favour of those who were satisfied. These results support the distinctive validity of

the scale.

Correlation coefficient obtained by administering the scale to 50 students twice 10 weeks apart was .77. ATSPHS-SF consists of 18 items, each of which was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, and total scores range from 18 to 90. A high score indicates a more positive attitude toward getting psychological help (Türküm, 2004).

Procedure

Attitudes toward Seeking Psychological Help Scale was applied in one lesson collectively to 365 first and fourth grade students studying in the Departments of Psychological Counseling and Guidance and Psychology at Samsun Ondokuz Mayıs University and in the Department of Nursing at Samsun School of Health in the fall semester of 2011. The students were provided explanation about the aim of this study and the importance of giving sincere answers. They were also informed that data would be analyzed collectively and answers would be kept confidential. Only voluntary students were enrolled in the study. The application of the scale was completed approximately in 20 to 25 min.

Data analysis

The collected data was analysed using SPSS for Windows Version 15. First, the normality assumption of scores was checked. They were normally distributed. Therefore, parametric statistical tests were conducted. The data was collected for three factors which were departments (3 different departments: psychological counselling and guidance, psychology, and nursing), 2 different genders (male and female) and two different grades (first and fourth) by survey technique. The experimental design was (3x2x2) factorial design. Factorial analysis of variance was used to evaluate the results (Bayram, 2013). After the multiway-ANOVA, TUKEY multiple comparison tests were used to compare pair-wise means. Two independent groups were compared by using Student t-test. The descriptive statistics $\text{mean} \pm \text{SE}$ was used for continuous variables. For categorical variables, cross-classification chi-square statistics was used and frequencies and percentages were given as descriptive statistics. The significance level $\alpha = 0.05$ was used in all hypothesis testing.

FINDINGS

A three factor factorial experiment was run to analyze whether psychological help-seeking attitudes of helping professional candidates differ by their grade and department. Table 1 shows the results. Table 1 indicates that psychological help-seeking attitudes of the students are statistically significant according to the variable grade and department ($p < 0.001$).

Interactions Department x Gender, Grade x Gender, Department x Grade and Department x Grade x Gender were not found significant ($p > 0.05$). This indicates that different genders do not demonstrate different behaviours in either different departments or grades. There are two significant main effects. Psychological help-seeking attitudes of the students differ by department and gender.

Tukey's test was run to determine between which departments the difference in the students' scores on the

Table 1. The three factor factorial experiment results for psychological help-seeking attitudes by grade and department (N = 365).

Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	P
Department	2962.842	2	1481.421	22.739	<0.001
Grade	4.719	1	4.719	0.072	0.788
Gender	1241.609	1	1241.609	19.058	<0.001
Department * Grade	70.228	2	35.114	0.539	0.584
Department* Gender	105.810	2	52.905	0.812	0.445
Grade * Gender	3.83E-08	1	3.83E-08	0.000	1.000
Department*Grade* Gender	121.795	2	60.897	0.935	0.394
Error	22997.594	353	65.149	-	-
Corrected total	28346.537	364	-	-	-

Dependent variable: ATSPHS

Table 2. Tukey's test results in regard to the departments in which psychological help-seeking attitudes differ.

Department	\bar{X}	Department	Mean differences	Std. Error	p
Nursing	69.71	PCG	-5.043	1.083	$p<0.001$
		Psych	-8.084	1.234	$p<0.001$
PCG	74.76	Psych	-3.041	1.168	$p<0.001$
Psych	77.80	PCG	3.041	1.168	$p=0.05$

Table 3. Distribution of the psychological help-seeking attitude by gender (N = 365).

Gender	N	\bar{X}	SE	p
Female	246	78.28	0.798	<0.001
Male	119	71.95	1.190	

Attitudes toward Seeking Professional Help Scale was. The results from Tukey's test are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 indicates that the mean attitude scores for each group are different ($p<0.001$). The highest score ($\bar{X}=77.80$) belongs to the students of Psychology Department, the second highest score ($\bar{X}=74.76$) to the students of PCG, and the lowest score to the students of Nursing Department. Thus, it is safe to say that psychological help-seeking attitude levels of the students of Psychology Department are at a higher level.

Table 1 shows that psychological help-seeking attitudes of helping professional candidates differ by gender. Accordingly, the mean attitude scores in terms of gender are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 indicates that psychological help-seeking levels of female students ($\bar{X}=76.16\pm 8.69$) are more positive and more significantly different ($p<0.001$) than the ones of male students ($\bar{X}=72.02\pm 8.47$). This finding clearly shows that psychological help-seeking attitudes differ by gender and females are more willing to seek psychological help.

Independent Samples t Test was used to analyse whether psychological help-seeking attitudes of helping professional candidates differ by the status of receiving psychological help before or vice versa. The analysis results are shown in Table 4.

According to Table 4, students' scores of psychological help-seeking attitudes significantly differ by the experience of receiving psychological help before or vice versa [$t(363)=2.98$, $p=0.003$]. The mean attitude score of the students who received psychological help before ($\bar{X}=77.91\pm 1.06$) is more positive than the ones who did not receive psychological help before ($\bar{X}=74.07\pm 0.50$). This finding may be interpreted in a way that the students who received psychological help from an expert counsellor before have more positive attitudes toward receiving psychological help than those who did not receive psychological help before.

Table 4. Distribution of the psychological help-seeking attitude by the status of receiving psychological help before.

Status of receiving psychological help	N	\bar{X}	SE	df	t	p
Yes	54	77.91	1.06	363	2.98	0.003
No	311	74.07	0.50	-	-	-

DISCUSSION

This study examined the psychological help-seeking attitudes of the helping professional candidates in terms of grade and department, gender, and the experience of receiving psychological help before or vice versa. Analyzing the relationship of psychological help-seeking attitudes with these variables, the results were discussed in the light of the related literature.

The research findings revealed that the students' psychological help-seeking attitudes were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) according to the variable of department. The research found that the mean attitude scores for the students from each three department were different from each other ($p < 0.001$). The highest scores of psychological help-seeking attitudes were received by the students of Psychology Department ($X = 77.80$) who were followed by the students of PCG ($X = 74.76$) and Nursing ($X = 69.71$), respectively.

However, in addition to students studying psychology or psychological counselling and guidance, nursing students will also be responsible for protecting and improving mental health of individual, family and society as well as planning, performing and assessing care services for the purpose of curing in case of illness. The main duty of nurses is to help protect and improve health. A nurse who provides health education herself must demonstrate such health behaviours in order to be a favourable model (Oran and Turgay, 2006). Nurses' behaviour while providing healthcare will be shaped by their attitudes. Thus, knowing psychological help-seeking attitudes of nurses when they are still students is critical to prevent potential future problems and to determine positive and negative health behaviours. A reason why nursing students had the lowest score of psychological help-seeking attitude may be their preference for seeking help from family or a friend when they undergo psychological problems. Erkan et al. (2012) discovered that 49.2% of the university students involved in their study sought help from their friends when they had emotional problems. Research suggested that students preferred sharing their psychological problems first with their peers (Atik and Yalcin, 2011). In the light of the related literature, it is possible to say that the finding from this study is partly confirmed. Nurses' attitudes toward psychological help may be affected by their psychological state or the way how their present culture and

environment consider psychological help-seeking.

Although nursing students are reported to suffer mental distress, to have difficulty in coping with their problems and to need counselling (Lo, 2002; Tully, 2004; Aylaz et al., 2007), the number of studies on the psychological help-seeking attitudes of nursing students in the related literature is limited (Çankaya, 2008). It is believed that analyzing help-seeking attitudes of nursing students and factors influencing them will be helpful in protecting and improving students' mental health since existing attitudes influence help-seeking behaviour. Arslantaş et al., (2011) stated that 57.1% of the participants sought help from a family member who is a nonprofessional source to solve their problems. It may be concluded that society's value judgements influence people not to consult professional sources of help due to their problems.

In this research, the students studying psychology or psychological counselling and guidance had higher scores than nursing students. This may particularly be attributed to the fact that psychosocial topics (crisis, stress, coping, mental health, adaptation etc.) taught in line with the curriculum positively influence the beliefs of psychology and PCG students about counselling and counsellor. The privacy policy that becomes firm with the increasing literature knowledge also positively influences help-seeking attitudes of psychology and PCG students. Research on adolescents indicated that the trust on the helping body is a critical factor on help-seeking behaviour (Wilson and Deane, 2001).

Although each three department emphasises in training process the importance of understanding individuals and helping them know themselves and become aware of their potentials, the research found that psychological help-seeking attitudes of the students differed by department. The reason for this difference is how much students internalise these ideas. When considering in this context, it may be said that whether students adopt psychological help is critical. In addition, society's expectations from such helping professionals as well as students' expectations from their own professions may be another reason for this difference. Although both department of psychology and department of psychological counselling and guidance provide students with training in protection and improvement of mental health, for PCG students, guidance outweighs counselling. On the other hand, in their training, nursing students concentrate on treatment services for the purpose of protecting and

improving individual's physical health.

Psychological help-seeking attitudes of helping professional candidates were not found significant according to the variable of grade ($p>0.05$). In other words, there was no statistically significant difference between the psychological help-seeking attitudes of first and fourth graders. Research found that help-seeking levels of first and second graders were lower (Çankaya, 2008). However, Oliver et al. (2005) concluded that help-seeking levels increased with age. Thus, it may be said that the finding from this study is not supported by the related literature. This finding may be related to general viewpoint of the students from each three department on psychological counselling. It may be interpreted that there was no difference between their viewpoints on psychological help-seeking although the first and fourth graders received training on this topic. However, it may be recommended that this finding be re-evaluated with candidates of a different helping profession.

The research finding revealed that psychological help-seeking levels of female students were more positive and significantly different than the ones of male students. Özbay et al. (2011) suggested that female students had more positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help than male students. Similar findings were reached when the related literature was analysed (Özbay, 2011; Türküm, 2005; Kahveci, 2001; Kalkan and Odaci, 2005; Tishby et al., 2001; Chang, 2007; Czuchta and McCay, 2001; Mahmoud and Zawawi, 2011). These results are associated with the fact that women express their emotion much better than men (Goleman, 1998). It is safe to say that the findings derived from other studies support the findings of this research, and women are more willing to seek psychological help than men. Thus, gender is an important factor on psychological help-seeking attitude.

This research revealed that there was a significant difference between psychological help-seeking attitudes of the students receiving psychological help before and those who did not ($p=0.003$). In the related literature, there are studies consistent with this finding and showing that students receiving psychological help before are more willing to seek psychological help and have more positive attitudes than those who did not receive psychological counselling before (Erkan et al., 2012; Türküm, 2005). In their study on 256 university students, Fleishman (2009) discovered that the students who had received psychological help before and the ones studying psychology had more positive ideas about psychological help-seeking. In fact, another finding derived from this study indicated that the helping professional candidates who had received psychological help before had higher scores on psychological help-seeking attitudes. Bowen and Richman (1991) suggested that the individuals who experienced psychological counselling before developed a belief that psychological counselling was helpful. As the

analysis of the related literature, this research also indicated that the students who had received psychological help before had positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help. This may be explained by the fact that the students receiving psychological help before had positive experiences of the psychological counselling process. Moreover, the feeling of being well understood by the professional from whom the students received help positively influences their psychological help-seeking attitudes.

Conclusion

The research discovered that psychological help-seeking attitudes of the students were statistically significant in terms of department, gender and the experience of receiving psychological help before, but not in terms of grade.

In terms of the variable of department, first and fourth grade students from the departments of psychology, and psychological counselling and guidance had higher psychological help-seeking attitudes. Therefore, they will probably not have trouble in consulting a professional when they need. Lower scores of first and fourth grade nursing students suggest that they need to be followed more closely. In this regard, practical trainings under the name of awareness-raising may be suggested to enable students with lower psychological help-seeking attitudes realize themselves and their bias, and question themselves. Thereby, psychological problems of students may be noticed; however, psychological help-seeking may take time.

According to the research result, both gender and the status of receiving psychological help before have significance on help-seeking attitude. Therefore, these findings obtained should be considered when planning activities related to psychological counselling with students in this group.

In conclusion, helping professional candidates are likely to meet persons who need psychological help both during their university education and their professional lives after graduation. Helping professionals' providing healthy guidance and psychological counselling to individuals who need psychological help may change in direct proportion to the viewpoint on counselling processes.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The most important limitation of this study is the sampling group that consists of university students. Some major limitations of this research require attention at the point of result generalization. These limitations are:

- (1) Data was collected only from the helping professional

candidates who were first and fourth grade students in the departments of psychology, psychological counselling and guidance, or nursing. Generalizing the findings obtained from this relatively homogeneous group may not reflect the wider reality. Therefore, future research may be conducted on students from different groups of helping professions. Factors influencing psychological help-seeking attitudes of first and fourth grade students may be examined. In order to evaluate the efficacy of the student training on psychological help, a longitudinal study involving students from each department from the first year at university to the graduation may be recommended;

(2) in the research, independent variables of department, grade, gender and the experience of receiving psychological help before were used. The relationship between psychological help-seeking attitudes and such variables as personal traits, parental attitude, social support, attachment styles, etc. of helping professional candidates may be researched;

(3) the third limitation is that the research participants were volunteers, but not chosen through a systematic sampling.

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