

## Summary

# Demographic, Individual, and Environmental Factors as Predictors of Intention to Seek Psychological Help

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The research studies revealed that people who might benefit mostly from psychological help were less likely to seek it (Ciarrochi & Deane, 2001; Koydemir, Erel, Yumurtacı, & Şahin, 2010; Lang, 2005; Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005; Topkaya & Meydan, 2013). It was found that there were some demographic, individual and environmental factors that influence intention to seek psychological help in the research studies that examined the discrepancy between the need for psychological help and the received help actually (Cepeda-Benito & Short, 1998; Porcari, 2009; Vogel, Wester, Wei, & Boysen, 2005).

Gender and previous help-seeking are the main factors related with the demographic factors. The results of the studies demonstrated that females were more likely to receive psychological help when compared to males (Biddle, Gunnell, Sharp, & Donovan, 2003; Sanchez & Atkinson, 1983; Topkaya & Meydan, 2013). Moreover, the results also showed that people who received psychological help previously were more likely to receive it than the people who did not receive such help before (Atkinson, Lowe & Matthews, 1995; Biddle et al., 2003; Vogel & Wester, 2003; Vogel et al., 2005).

The stigma is emphasized to be the main factor associated with not seeking psychological help in the literature (Corrigan, 2004). Self-stigma, one of the types of stigma and individual factor, can be defined as the reduction of an individual's self-esteem or self-worth caused by the individual self-labeling herself or himself as someone who is socially unacceptable for seeking psychological help (Vogel, Wade, & Haake, 2006). Self-stigma for receiving psychological help which is the one of the main factors related with help-seeking was negatively associated with psychological help-seeking (Vogel, Wade, & Haake, 2006; Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007).

Perceived behavioral control is another individual factor associated with psychological help-seeking. Ajzen

(1991) linked it to the Bandura's (1977; 1978) self-efficacy notion (as cited in Hartong, 2011). Cellucci, Krogh and Vik (2006) found that higher self-efficacy facilitated the psychological help-seeking. Bicil (2012) found that there was a positive relationship between self-efficacy and intention to seek psychological help.

Psychological distress is another individual factor associated with psychological help-seeking. The studies demonstrated that there were mixed results regarding the role of psychological distress in the intention to seek psychological help. For example, Vogel and Wester (2003) found that psychological distress was not a significant predictor for psychological help-seeking. On the other hand, there are also studies reporting a significant and positive relation between psychological distress and help-seeking intention (Vogel & Wei, 2005; Vogel & Armstrong, 2010).

Attitudes towards the psychological help-seeking that is the last individual factor associated with psychological help-seeking included in the study was determined to be the best predictor of intention to seek psychological help (Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994; Cramer, 1999; Kelly & Achter, 1995; Porcari, 2009). Donatelli (2010) reported a significant positive relationship between attitudes towards psychological help and intention to seek psychological help. In another study, it was revealed that positive attitudes towards psychological help-seeking predicted help-seeking intention (Erkan, Özbay, Cihangir-Çankaya, & Terzi, 2012a).

It can be said that public stigma for receiving psychological help is the primary environmental factor that affect the intention to seek psychological help. Topkaya (2011a) and Bicil (2012) found that public stigma for receiving psychological help was related with the intention to seek psychological help. When a person perceive more public stigma for receiving psychological help, he/she are less likely to receive psychological help. Social network stigma which can be evaluated as another envi-

ronmental factor that affects intention to seek psychological help has been a new research topic in the literature. The results of the studies show that social network stigma negatively affect psychological help-seeking intention. For example, Ludwikowski, Vogel and Armstrong (2009) found that there was a negative correlation between social network stigma for receiving psychological help and attitudes towards career counseling.

Another environmental factor that affects psychological help-seeking intention is perceived social support. It was noticed that the lack of perceived social support leads to increased psychological help-seeking intention. For example, Cepeda-Benito and Short (1998) found a significant relationship between low level social support and high level intention to seek psychological help.

The last environmental factor that affects psychological help-seeking intention is practical barriers. This factor includes how to reach services, the costs of those services and the time spent for those services (Kung, 2004). The findings of the studies showed that practical barriers negatively related to intention to seek psychological help (Lee & Hadeed, 2009; Rothi, 2006; Walsh, Scaife, Notley, Dodsworth, & Schofield, 2011; Wu, Kviz, & Miller, 2009; Zinzow et al., 2013).

More than the 70% of the youngsters and adults do not receive psychological help all over the world (Thorncroft, 2007). In studies carried out with Turkish undergraduate students (Erkan, Özbay, Cihangir-Çankaya, & Terzi, 2012b; Topkaya & Meydan, 2013), it was found that the psychological help seeking intention of the students was low. In another study, Koydemir et al., (2010) found that psychological services were seen to be utilized for only severe issues and these services were not used adequately even they were available. These findings suggest that we need to know more about the factors that are associated with psychological help-seeking intention. (Biddle et al., 2003). Therefore, the aim of the current study was to investigate the role of gender, previous psychological help-seeking experience, self-stigma, self-efficacy, psychological distress, attitudes towards psychological help, social stigma, social-network stigma, perceived social support and practical barriers in the psychological help-seeking intention.

## Method

### Participants

The participants of the study were recruited from two urban universities in Aegean region of Turkey. In total, 295 women (58.3 %) and 211 (41.7 %) men undergraduate students participated to the study. The mean age of the participants was 20.80 ( $SD = 1.63$ ). Of the participants, 19.8 % (100) has received psychological

help from a mental health practitioner and 78.7 % (398) of them has never received psychological help before.

### Measures

A demographic data form, Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale, General Self-Efficacy Scale, Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale, Attitudes toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale, Social Stigma Scale for Receiving Psychological Help, Perceptions of Stigmatization by Others for Seeking Help Scale, The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, Practical Barriers in Help-Seeking Scale, and Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory were used to collect data in the present study.

### Data Collection and Data Analysis

Demographic data from and other scales were administered to the voluntary undergraduate students in their classes by the researcher. It took twenty minutes for participants to fill the instruments. Hierarchical regression analyses were utilized in the data analysis procedure.

## Results

The results from the first step of hierarchical regression analysis showed that gender ( $\beta = .300$ ,  $t = 7.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and previous help-seeking experience ( $\beta = .195$ ,  $t = 4.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ) accounted significant amount of variance on intention to seek psychological help  $R^2 = .144$ ,  $F_{2,503} = 42.456$ ,  $p < .001$ .

In the second step, entering self-stigma associated with psychological help-seeking, self-efficacy, psychological distress, and attitudes towards psychological help-seeking resulted in a significant increase in the amount of explained variance,  $\Delta R^2 = .080$ ,  $F_{6,499} = 23.901$ ,  $p < .001$ . Psychological distress ( $\beta = .232$ ,  $t = 5.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and attitudes towards psychological help-seeking ( $\beta = .132$ ,  $t = 2.83$ ,  $p = .005$ ) were significant predictors of intention to seek psychological help.

In the third step, entering public stigma associated with psychological help-seeking, social network stigma, perceived social support, and practical barriers did not result in a significant increase in the amount of explained variance,  $\Delta R^2 = .003$ ,  $F_{10,495} = 14.463$ ,  $p < .001$ . None of the variables in this model was significant predictors of intention to seek psychological help.

## Discussion

The aim of the study was to investigate how well some demographic (gender, previous help-seeking experience), individual (self-stigma, self-efficacy, psychological distress, attitudes towards counseling), and environ-

mental (public stigma, social-network stigma, perceived social support and practical barriers) factors predicted the intention to seek psychological help.

The results of the study demonstrated that gender, previous help-seeking experience, psychological distress, and attitudes towards psychological help significantly predicted intention to seek psychological help, whereas self-stigma, self-efficacy, public stigma, social-network stigma, perceived social support and practical barriers did not predict intention to seek psychological help.

Gender and previous help-seeking experience have been unique predictors of intention to seek psychological help. This finding was in line with earlier research findings (Erkan et al., 2012a; Vogel & Wester, 2003; Vogel et al., 2005). Consistent with the literature, both females and people who had previous help-seeking had more positive attitudes towards psychological help. This result of the study reveals that mental health professionals might benefit from people who have received psychological help before.

The results of the study showed that psychological distress significantly predicted intention to seek psychological help. This result was consistent with the previous research findings (Brown, 2011; Cramer, 1999; Donatelli, 2010; Vogel & Armstrong, 2010; Vogel, Gentile, & Kaplan, 2008a; Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2008; Vogel & Wei, 2005; Topkaya, 2011a). Based on this finding, one may speculate that when psychological distress increase, psychological help-seeking intention also increases and, psychological distress is an important factor that play role in the help-seeking.

The findings of the study indicated that help-seeking intention was predicted by attitudes towards psychological help-seeking. This finding was similar to previous research findings (Bathje & Pryor, 2011; Cepeda-Benito & Short, 1998; Erkan et al., 2012a; Kelly & Achter, 1995; Vogel et al., 2005; Vogel & Wester, 2003). This finding reveals that people who have positive attitudes towards psychological help-seeking are more likely to seek help. In a study conducted by Kaplan, Vogel, Gentile, and Wade (2012), the authors developed a program that aimed to alter attitudes positively. The results of the study demonstrated that people participated to the program had positive attitudes towards psychological help. In the same vein, psychological help seeking can be increased among Turkish college students by developing these kinds of programs. Also, help seeking behavior

might be increased by conducting studies aiming at informing public about psychological help-seeking.

One of the interesting findings of the study that self-stigma for receiving psychological help was not unique predictors of psychological help-seeking intention. This result was not consistent with the past researches (Vogel, Wade, & Haake, 2006; Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007). The low but significant relationship between the two variables should not be ignored. Therefore, this finding should be taken cautiously and should be investigated in other research studies.

The results of the study showed that self-efficacy did not predict help-seeking intention. Although, self-efficacy was not found to be unique predictor of help-seeking intention, the findings indicated that when self-efficacy increased, the help-seeking intention decreased.

Moreover, the findings of the study revealed that public stigma was not unique predictor of intention to seek psychological help. The finding was also not consistent with the previous research findings found in Turkey before (Bicil, 2012, Topkaya, 2011a). Age can be the reason for this finding. More research is needed to understand the role of public stigma in the help-seeking in Turkey.

The findings of the study demonstrated that there was not a significant relationship between social network stigma and psychological help-seeking intention. Other research studies should be conducted both in Turkey and abroad including social network stigma in order to understand the role of it in help-seeking.

The results indicated that perceived social support was not unique predictor of intention to seek help. Similarly, practical barriers were not found to be unique predictor of intention to seek psychological help. These findings were not in line with past researches (Bicil, 2012; Constantine, Wilton, & Caldwell, 2003; Cramer, 1999).

One of the limitations of the study was to conduct this study with students from one region and two different universities. Conducting a similar study with participants from diverse regions and ages can be useful. Also, using different methods and instruments might be useful for evaluating the role of individual and environmental factors in the psychological help-seeking. As a conclusion, researchers and clinicians should put emphasis on demographic and individual factors more when compared to environmental factor in order to increase help-seeking behavior.