

Mental Health Knowledge and Help-Seeking Behaviour among Psychology Students at Nusa Cendana University

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Abstract. This study addresses mental health as a global health challenge that requires serious attention, particularly among university students. The primary objective is to examine the relationship between mental health knowledge and help-seeking behaviour among psychology students at Nusa Cendana University. Using a quantitative approach, the sample in this study consisted of 217 students. The study employed proportional sampling and two measurement scales: the Adolescents' Mental Health Knowledge Questionnaire to assess mental health knowledge, and the General Help Seeking Questionnaire to measure help-seeking behaviour. The results indicate a significant relationship between mental health knowledge and help-seeking behaviour, with a p-value of 0.000 (below 0.05). The correlation between the two variables was 0.435, indicating a moderate positive correlation. This suggests that lower levels of mental health knowledge are associated with lower levels of help-seeking behaviour.

Keywords: *mental health knowledge, help-seeking behaviour, psychology student*

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengangkat isu kesehatan mental sebagai tantangan kesehatan global yang membutuhkan perhatian serius, terutama dalam kalangan mahasiswa. Tujuan utamanya adalah untuk mengetahui hubungan antara pengetahuan kesehatan mental (Mental Health Knowledge) dan perilaku mencari bantuan (Help Seeking Behaviour) di kalangan mahasiswa Psikologi Universitas Nusa Cendana. Dengan pendekatan kuantitatif, sampel dalam penelitian ini berjumlah 217 mahasiswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan proportional sampling dan dua skala pengukuran: Adolescents' Mental Health Knowledge Questionnaire untuk mengukur pengetahuan kesehatan mental, dan General Help Seeking Questionnaire untuk mengukur perilaku mencari bantuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara pengetahuan kesehatan mental dengan perilaku mencari bantuan, ditunjukkan dengan nilai signifikan 0,000 (di bawah 0,05). Korelasi antara kedua variabel adalah 0,435, yang menunjukkan korelasi sedang dan positif. Ini berarti bahwa semakin rendah pengetahuan tentang kesehatan mental, semakin rendah pula perilaku mencari bantuan.

Kata kunci: *Mental health knowledge, help-seeking behaviour, mahasiswa psikologi*

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Introduction

The issue of mental health has become a global concern, regarded as a health challenge that requires more serious attention. According to the Ipsos Global Health Service Monitor Survey (2023), 44% of respondents from 31 countries worldwide, including Indonesia, consider mental health to be the most worrying health issue. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as “a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community” (WHO, 2023). Therefore, individuals experiencing mental health problems are likely to face difficulties in adapting to the stressors in their lives, which can ultimately lead to significant stress levels (Klanker et al., 2013).

Mental health issues in Indonesia mainly impact adolescents and young adults (McLafferty et al., 2017). University students, especially those aged 18-25, are considered a vulnerable group as they are in the stage of emerging adulthood (Santrock, 2019). This stage is characterised by transitional challenges, such as academic adjustment, independent decision-making, and complex social interactions (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020). Cheng et al. (2018) reported that approximately 50% of university students meet the criteria for mental disorders during their studies. However, few students seek professional help, often due to a lack of knowledge, negative perceptions of services, or a desire to manage the problems.

Mental Health Knowledge plays a crucial role in help-seeking behaviour. According to O'Connor et al. (2014), individuals with good mental health knowledge are more capable of recognising early symptoms, selecting appropriate care, and managing disorders effectively. This can refer to choosing effective treatment from professional support sources. Mental health knowledge enables individuals to identify mental health issues early and seek appropriate help (Tay et al., 2018). Conversely, ignorance about mental health issues is one of the reasons individuals fail to receive professional help and care (Jones & Lee, 2019). However, other studies

suggest that knowledge of mental health does not always influence help-seeking behaviour. For instance, Sumayku (2021) found that mental health literacy does not always affect the intention to seek help, indicating that other factors influence this behaviour.

One group of people with good mental health knowledge is students from psychology majors. According to Lipson et al. (2019), psychology students have a broader understanding of mental disorders, interventions, and effective coping strategies. Meanwhile, Santrock (2019) states that psychology students, as future professionals, will help individuals and communities understand, provide support, and address psychological issues. Despite having good knowledge of mental health, some psychology students still face difficulties in accessing mental health services or feel uncomfortable seeking help when experiencing psychological problems (Tambascia, et al., 2020).

Stigma and negative perceptions often hinder individuals from seeking psychological help. According to the WHO (2023), stigma, discrimination, and human rights violations are frequently experienced by individuals with mental disorders. Vidourek et al. (2014) also indicate that students tend to associate mental health issues with weakness or incapacity, which exacerbates their fear of seeking support. The delay in seeking help can worsen mental disorders, such as depression, making them more difficult to treat over time (Tay et al., 2018).

Help-seeking behaviour refers to the actions individuals take to seek assistance or support related to mental health issues from external sources, such as health professionals (formal support) or friends and family (informal support) (Hammer & Spiker, 2018). Students, particularly those in adolescence and early adulthood, tend to seek informal support from friends and family before considering formal help from professionals when dealing with psychological issues (Pedrelli et al., 2015). However, seeking professional help remains essential to prevent more severe risks, including suicide (Rickwood et al., 2014).

An initial survey conducted by the researcher from February 18 to 24, 2024, with psychology students aged 19-22 through Google Forms, revealed that out of 60 students (45 females and 15 males), nearly half (48.33%) admitted that they did not have sufficient knowledge to address the mental health issues they were experiencing. Additionally, the survey results indicated that 65% of psychology students preferred to suppress their problems or deal with them on their own. These findings form the basis for this study.

Method

This study employs a quantitative design and was conducted from May to June 2024 within the Psychology program at Nusa Cendana University. The respondents were active students from the Psychology Study Program, Faculty of Public Health, Nusa Cendana University, spanning the 2020–2023 academic cohorts, and within the early adulthood age range of 18–24 years. Data collection initially took place face-to-face with 161 participants to ensure their understanding of the survey items, after which a Google Form link was distributed via social media applications. A total of 217 respondents participated in the study.

The Adolescents' Mental Health Knowledge Questionnaire was adapted by Kaligis et al. (2022) from the Mental Health Literacy and Help-Seeking Behaviour scale developed by Kutcher and Wei. The Mental Health Knowledge scale has a content validity index (S-CVI) of 0.87, indicating that 87% of the items were deemed understandable. The reliability coefficient is 0.521. The Adolescents' Mental Health Knowledge Questionnaire consists of 13 items, with participants receiving a score of 1 for correct answers and 0 for incorrect or unknown responses.

The General Help Seeking Questionnaire was developed by Wilson et al. (2005) to measure the intention to seek help when facing emotional and stress-related problems. The subscale used in this study is the Help-Seeking Intentions subscale for emotional problems. The reliability coefficient for the subscale is 0.7 (Cronbach's

alpha) and 0.86 (test-retest). The validity of the help-seeking intention scale was established by correlating it with actual help-seeking behaviour, resulting in a positive and significant correlation ($r(218) = 0.17, p < .05$). This scale was adapted into Indonesian by Indriyawati et al. (2022), with a calculated validity coefficient of $r = 0.2072$ and a reliability coefficient of 0.84 (Cronbach's alpha).

Result

Description of participants based on gender and faculty can be seen in the table below:

Table 1.

Gender of Participants

Gender	Amount	Percentage (%)
Male	46	21,20 %
Female	171	78,80 %
Total	217	100%

Table 2.

Semester of Participants

Semester	Amount	Percentage (%)
Semester 2	36	16,6 %
Semester 4	61	28,1 %
Semester 6	56	25,8 %
Semester 8	64	29,5 %
Total	217	100%

Table 3.

Mental Health Knowledge Score Category

Category	Score	Amount	Percentage (%)
Low	1 – 7	98	45,2 %
Moderate	8-9	82	37,8%
High	10-13	37	17,1%
Total		217	100%

Based on table 3, the results indicate that the majority of respondents fall into the moderate category, with a tendency toward a lower level of mental health knowledge.

Table 4.

Mental Health Knowledge Categories Based on Gender

Category	Gender (%)	
	Male	Female
Low	20 (43,5%)	78 (45,6%)
Moderate	20 (43,5)	62 (36,3%)
High	6 (13%)	31 (18,1%)
Total	100%	100%

Based on the results in Table 4, the findings indicate that there is no significant difference in mental health knowledge between males and females.

Table 5.

Mental Health Knowledge Categories Based on Semester

Category	Semester (%)			
	2	4	6	8
Low	14 (38,9%)	27 (44,3%)	25 (44,6%)	32 (50%)
Moderate	15 (41,7%)	20 (32,8%)	23 (41,1%)	24 (37,5%)
High	7 (19,4%)	14 (23%)	8 (14,3%)	8 (12,5%)
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 5 shows that eighth-semester students tend to have the lowest mental health knowledge compared to students in other semesters, with 50% reporting this level.

Table 6.

Help Seeking Behaviour Score Categories

Category	Score	Amount	Percentage (%)
Low	1 – 30	2	0,9 %
Moderate	31 – 50	145	66,8%
High	51 - 70	70	32,3%
Total		217	100%

Table 6 shows that the results indicate the majority of respondents fall into the moderate category, with a tendency toward higher levels of mental health knowledge.

Table 7.

Help Seeking Behaviour Categories Based on Gender

Category	Gender (%)	
	Male	Female
Low	1 (2,2%)	1 (0,6%)
Moderate	33 (71,7%)	113 (66,1%)
High	12 (26,1%)	57 (33,3%)
Total	100 %	100 %

Table 7 shows that females exhibit higher help-seeking behaviour, with 33.3% more than males.

Table 8.

Help Seeking Behaviour Categories Based on Semester

Category	Semester (%)			
	2	4	6	8
Low	-	-	2 (3,6%)	-
Moderate	22 (61,1%)	41 (67,2%)	40 (71,4%)	42 (65,6%)
High	14 (38,9%)	20 (32,8%)	14 (25%)	22 (34,4)
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 8 shows that the majority of students exhibit help-seeking behaviour in the moderate category, with a tendency toward higher levels.

Table 9.

Help Seeking Behaviour Categories of Support Option

Type of Support	Support Option	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Social Support	Close Partner (Spouse, Boyfriend/Girlfriend, etc.)	79	14,91%
	Friends	56	10,57%
	Parents	103	19,43%
	Relatives/Other Family Members	22	4,15%
Professional Support	Mental Health Professionals (Psychologists,	90	16,73%

	Counselors, Social Workers)		
	Phone Helpline 119	28	5,03%
	Doctors	44	8,18%
Spiritual Support	Religious Leaders (Priests, Pastors, Imams, Monks)	27	5,02%
No Help-Seeking	No Help-Seeking	20	3,78%
Other Sources	I will seek help from a source not listed above (Social media, strangers, journaling, and worship/prayer)	54	12,20%
Total			100%

The data in Table 7 shows that the most frequently sought source of support by respondents is social support, with the highest percentage being parents at 19.81% and partners at 15.20%. Only about 3.85% of respondents indicated that they felt no need to seek help.

Discussion

This study involved 217 active students from the Psychology program at Nusa Cendana University, aged 18-24 years, from the 2020-2023 cohorts. The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between mental health knowledge and help-seeking behaviour among psychology students at Nusa Cendana University. Based on the Pearson product-moment correlation test, the significance value between mental health knowledge and help-seeking behaviour was 0.000, which is less than 0.05, indicating a significant relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, the Pearson correlation between mental health knowledge and help-seeking behaviour was 0.435, which indicates a moderate positive correlation. This suggests that as mental health knowledge decreases, help-seeking behaviour also decreases.

Research by Puspitasari et al. (2021) explains that students with limited or insufficient knowledge about mental health tend to avoid seeking professional help. This is often associated with a lack of trust in the effectiveness of mental health

services and the belief that seeking help indicates weakness. A study by Iswanto et al. (2020) in Indonesia found that low mental health literacy is directly related to a reduced help-seeking behaviour. Consistent with the research by Sari and Wijayanti (2021), students with limited knowledge of mental health tend to view mental health issues as something that does not require serious attention. This limited knowledge also leads to a lack of awareness regarding the importance of professional treatment and therapy, reducing the intention to seek help. These studies highlight how a lack of knowledge about mental health can influence students' behaviour in seeking help, often accompanied by stigma and a lack of trust in professional interventions.

The results of this study indicate that 45.2% of psychology students have low knowledge of mental health. This finding suggests that psychology students, who should ideally have a broader and deeper understanding of mental health, predominantly possess low levels of knowledge. This could be attributed to the fact that most psychology students underwent online learning for several semesters during the COVID-19 pandemic. The eighth semester students experienced online learning for four semesters, while sixth semester students had online learning for two semesters. Only the second and fourth semesters did not involve online learning. The study shows that students in the second and fourth semesters had higher mental health knowledge, with 19.4% and 23% respectively, compared to those in the sixth and eighth semesters.

Eighth-semester students have the lowest level of knowledge, with 50% exhibiting low mental health knowledge. This low level of knowledge among eighth-semester students can be attributed to their experience with online learning since the beginning of their studies, spanning four semesters, compared to lower-semester students who had more face-to-face interaction during their learning process. This finding is supported by research by Bettinger et al. (2017), which found that students who took courses online had lower academic performance compared to those who

participated in in-person classes. Additionally, students who learn online tend to face more difficulties in understanding the material.

Research by Kusuma and Hamidah (2020) indicates that many students in Indonesia perceive online learning as less effective compared to face-to-face learning, particularly in terms of understanding material that requires more detailed explanations and direct interaction. Herliandry et al. (2020) highlight the challenges of online learning, including limitations in facilities, connectivity, and interaction, all of which affect its effectiveness. They argue that face-to-face learning provides a more interactive and effective learning experience. A study by Cavanaugh and Jacquemin (2015) shows that students who attend in-person classes achieve better academic performance. One reason for this is the direct interaction in the classroom, which helps students understand the material more easily and feel more actively engaged in the learning process.

The results of the help-seeking behaviour study indicate that psychology students exhibit help-seeking behaviour in the moderate to high range, with 66.8% in the moderate category and 32% in the high category. However, they tend to seek support from close relationships, such as parents, partners, friends, and relatives (49.06%), more frequently than from professional support (29.94%). This finding is supported by Rasyida (2022), whose research shows that social support from family and peers is often preferred by students before seeking professional help. Susilowati et al. (2020) further explain that strong social support can enhance students' confidence in sharing their problems and strengthen their decision to seek further assistance if necessary. This is in line with the Help-Seeking Theory, which posits that individuals often seek support from close ones first due to the comfort and trust they feel (Rickwood et al., 2014).

The preference for social support over professional help may be influenced by the collectivist culture still upheld by students. A study by Zheng et al. (2021) shows that in collectivist cultures, such as those in Japan and Indonesia, the emphasis on

maintaining social relationships makes individuals more reluctant to seek support from outside their close social groups, such as professionals. In contrast, in individualistic cultures, such as those in Western countries, individuals are more likely to seek professional help due to fewer concerns about disrupting social relationships. Research by Way and Lieberman (2022) supports this, showing that in collectivist cultures in Asia, individuals are more likely to seek emotional support from family members, parents, and close friends rather than from professionals. This is due to values of interdependence, a focus on social harmony, and strong interpersonal relationships. Empathy and concern for others greatly influence the decision to seek support within close-knit groups.

Furthermore, a study by Yamaguchi and Akutsu (2014) shows that in collectivist cultures in Asia, individuals are more likely to seek help and confide in their parents or friends due to stronger emotional bonds and a greater sense of solidarity. In collectivist cultures, maintaining social harmony and avoiding burdening others within one's close social group is of utmost importance. This explains why individuals prefer seeking support from their close-knit group rather than turning to professionals. This behaviour is linked to values of interdependence and solidarity, which encourage individuals to preserve close relationships and reduce anxiety about disrupting social connections.

This phenomenon can be explained using John Bowlby's attachment theory, which suggests that strong emotional bonds formed between an individual and their primary caregiver (usually parents) during childhood influence how a person seeks support. Students with secure attachment to their parents tend to feel more comfortable sharing their problems with them, as this bond provides a sense of security, emotional support, and deeper understanding (Lawrentia & Sokang, 2024).

The results from table 7 on help-seeking behaviour show that females tend to seek help more frequently (33.3%) in the moderate category compared to males (26.1%). This finding is supported by Wati and Setiawan (2019), who found that

females are more likely to seek help than males, which may be influenced by factors such as social stigma and parenting patterns. Social and cultural norms also contribute, as females are often encouraged to be more open and expressive about their emotions and problems, while males are frequently pressured by societal expectations to appear tough and avoid displaying emotional weakness (SAMHSA, 2024).

Based on the data in Table 8, second-year students (semester 2) exhibit a higher help-seeking behaviour at 38.9% compared to students in other semesters. This is consistent with the results of the mental health knowledge assessment, where second-year students demonstrated the second-highest level of mental health knowledge, after the fourth semester, compared to the sixth and eighth semesters. This indicates that mental health knowledge influences help-seeking behaviour among students. This finding aligns with the research by Iswanto & Ayubi (2023), which suggests that an increase in mental health literacy contributes to a higher likelihood of help-seeking behaviour among individuals.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates a significant relationship between mental health knowledge and help-seeking behaviour. The findings reveal that 45.2% of psychology students have low mental health knowledge, 37.8% have moderate knowledge, and only 17% have good knowledge. Eighth-semester students had the lowest level of knowledge (50%) due to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, while second-semester students exhibited higher help-seeking behaviour (38.9%) and better mental health knowledge. This suggests that mental health knowledge influences help-seeking behaviour, and the collectivist culture impacts help-seeking from close contacts, such as parents and close friends.

Suggestion

For future policy and program development, the university should incorporate mental health awareness initiatives into the curriculum. The university

should prioritize creating a supportive environment that reduces stigma and encourages students to seek professional help and enhances their knowledge of mental health. Students are encouraged to be more open in enhancing their mental health knowledge and to seek professional assistance as a positive step toward personal well-being, free from the influence of stigma or collective cultural norms. Future researchers are recommended to conduct qualitative studies to explore further the factors influencing mental health knowledge and help-seeking behaviour, such as cultural factors.

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