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The Role Of Gender On University Students' Attitudes Toward Professional Psychological Help Seeking

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to investigate the influence of gender on university students' attitude towards help seeking. Participants of this study were composed of 572 Middle East Technical University students (264 female, 308 male). Participants were selected by a convenient sampling method. The data were obtained by using the scale of Attitudes toward Seeking Psychological Help - Shortened (Türküm, 2001) and a demographic information form.

One-way analysis of variance and one-way analysis of covariance were used to analyze the data. The findings of the study indicated that gender has an effect on help seeking attitude after controlling the faculty and age variables. In addition, female students were found to have more positive help seeking attitude than male students.

Key Words: help seeking attitude, gender, psychological help, psychological counseling

Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Profesyonel Psikolojik Yardım Almaya İlişkin Tutumlarında Cinsiyetin Rolü

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, cinsiyetin üniversite öğrencilerinin psikolojik yardım almaya ilişkin tutumlarına etkisini incelemektir. Bu çalışmanın örneklem grubunu 572 Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi öğrencisinden oluşmaktadır (264 kız, 308 erkek). Katılımcılar uygun örnekleme yöntemiyle seçilmiştir. Bilgiler, Psikolojik Yardım Almaya İlişkin Tutum Ölçeği-R (Türküm, 2001), ve demografik bilgi formuyla toplanmıştır.

Elde edilen verilere, tek yönlü varyans analizi ve tek yönlü kovaryans analizi uygulanmıştır. Bulgular, öğrencilerin cinsiyetinin, yaş ve fakülte değişkeni kontrol edildiğinde psikolojik yardım almaya ilişkin tutumlarını etkilediğini ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, bulgular kız öğrencilerin, erkek öğrencilerden daha olumlu yardım alma tutumuna sahip olduğunu da göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: yardım alma tutum, cinsiyet, psikolojik yardım, psikolojik danışmanlık

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adult is a person between the ages of 18 and 35 as young adulthood or between the ages of 35 and 55 as adulthood (Erikson, 1950). In the period of young adulthood, individuals seek intimacy and try to find mutually satisfying relationships by marriage and friends. In the period of adulthood individual want to be generative and wants to produce something that contributes to the betterment of society (Erikson, 1950). However, trying to accommodate different developmental stage tasks brings adults' life various kinds of daily life problems (Kinnunen, Feldt, Geurts, & Pulkkinen, 2006; Komiya, Good, & Sherrod, 2000) like acquiring new skills, coping with new academic issues, facing with the demands of family, social network and academicians, getting used to a new sense of self (Humphrey, 1982; Grayson & Meilman, 1992; Bayram & Bilgen, 2008). Although, handling these various kinds of difficulties might require professional help, few individual seek professional help (Güneri, Aydın & Skovholt, 2003). In the study of Cameron, Leventhal and Leventhal (1993) findings indicated that many of the individuals who finally sought medical treatment (38%) consulted another person to "find out what to do," and 50% of those who sought treatment were told to see a counselor by a significant other. In the literature many studies investigates the reasons of reasons of not seeking help and attitudes toward help seeking was found as one of the most significant factors that affecting help-seeking behavior (Vogel, Wester, Wei & Boysen, 2005). Attitude is defined by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object". Thus, attitude toward help seeking can be defined as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to seeking professional help.

Beside from examining attitude, understanding the dynamics that influence individuals' attitudes toward seeking psychological help have become an important topic in the psychology field. Among many factors, gender was found as a significant predictor of attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help (Nam et al., 2010; Sheffield, Fiorenza & Sofronoff, 2004). Several studies have reported that gender makes a significant contribution to the attitudes towards help seeking. In a study which involved Chinese college students ($N = 995$), it was found that although gender was a significant predictor of attitude, the influence of gender difference remained the same for the professional help seeking behavior, in other words it was found that males and females were equally unlikely to seek professional help for psychological problems, however by explaining Asian cultural norms like stigma attached to mental health services and cultural reluctance to disclose personal problems, possible explanations for these findings were given (Hsiaowen, 2008).

Furthermore, various studies have affirmed that females have more positive attitudes towards psychological help seeking compared to males (Ang, Lim, Tan & Yau, 2004; Barwick, deMan & McKelvie, 2009; Kartalova- O'Doherty & Doherty, 2010; Koydemir-Özden, 2010; Leong & Zachar, 1999; Mackenzie, Gekoski & Knox, 2006; Nam et al., 2010; Svensson, Nygard, Sorensen & Sandanger, 2009; Türküm, 2005). Studies showed that not only gender but also sex role orientation has an influence on attitudes towards help seeking

(Johnson 2001; Türküm, 2005). Johnson (2001) found that femininity has an influence on the confidence of professionals' abilities to help with psychological problems. In the study of Türküm (2005), the positive help seeking attitudes of androgynous students who had both femininity and masculinity personality traits were found higher compared to both masculine and undefined students. In the same study the help seeking attitudes of feminine students were found to be more positive than both masculine and undefined students.

In a study done with 137 male college students from Midwestern University in the United States whose age range from 17 to 66 (Levant, Wimer, Williams, Smalley & Noronha, 2009), it was found that the masculinity variables which are greater endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology, conformity to masculine norms, and a higher degree of gender role conflict had an influence on attitudes towards seeking psychological help. In the same study masculinity variables were associated with negative attitudes towards seeking psychological help.

Ang et al. (2004) found different results compared to the other studies which confirm the influence of sex role orientation on attitudes towards help seeking and they found that masculinity did not significantly affect help-seeking attitudes. Moreover, they found that students with low femininity scores had less positive attitudes towards professional help-seeking than students with high femininity scores, especially with regards to being stigmatized and more sensitive about the opinions of others. Another study was conducted by Judd, Komiti and Jackson (2008) to understand why being female assisted help seeking behavior. They found that women had higher rates on help-seeking for mental health problems than men. They also affirmed that this difference might be a reflection of gender role differences. In the same study they have asserted that men's social status, greater control and decision-making power may influence acceptance of a diagnosis of mental disorder and their difficulty in expressing feelings and emotions may influence their help seeking for psychological problems (Amit, Brian, Murray & Jitender, 2009; Chan & Hayashi, 2010; Judd et al, 2008).

The age difference was also found to be another factor that influences the help seeking behavior (Shea & Yeh 2008). There are many contradictory findings about the effects of age on help seeking attitudes. In the literature, whereas some studies have found that older people have low intentions to seek help (Westerhof, Maessen, De Bruijn & Smets, 2008) and negative attitudes towards help seeking (Lebowitz & Niederehe, 1992), other studies have concluded that older individuals are associated with more positive attitudes toward help seeking compared to younger individuals (Mackenzie et al, 2006; Svensson et al., 2009).

In a cross national study, which was carried out with the participation of 262 Muslim-women, it was found that younger participants, whose age range from 19 to 20, had less positive attitudes towards seeking professional help than older ones, whose age range from 21 to more than 22. In the same study, researchers attributed this difference to insufficient knowledge about mental health problems and less awareness about the availability of mental health services (Al-Krenawi, Graham, Dean, & Eltaiba, 2004). In a recent study, which involved Turkish university students, it was reported that students between the ages of 24 and

28 had more positive attitudes than students aged between 17 and 19 (Koydemir-Özden & Erel, 2010).

However, in all these studies, variables were taken separately, thus there is no information about the role of confounding variables in the relationship of gender and attitude towards help seeking.

In the literature, there is no study that directly examines the relationship between gender, age, faculty and attitudes toward help seeking. To fill these gaps in the help-seeking literature and to enhance the knowledge about the direct relationship between gender and attitudes toward help seeking this study will be conducted. Thus, research questions were composed as follows;

Is there a statistical difference in attitudes toward seeking psychological of university students with gender, age and faculty?

Is there a statistical difference between males and females in attitudes toward seeking after age and faculty were controlled?

In summary, in the light of literature, it can be said that attitudes have an important role in psychological help seeking behavior and numerous factors has an effect on it. For that matter, this study will examine the effect of gender on attitudes toward help seeking of university students after controlling effect of age and faculty.

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

The target population was determined as university students in Ankara. The sample size was calculated as 500 by using Cochran's formula (Cochran,1977). Participants were selected from Middle East Technical University in Ankara. The participants were selected by using the convenient sampling procedure. The sample size was reduced to five hundred seventy two from seven hundred fifty because of unanswered items in the scales. Therefore, the sample of the present study consisted of five hundred seventy two undergraduate students from thirty departments of the five faculties of the university. The sample included 308 male (53.8%) and 264 females (46.2%) students (see table 1).

Table 1 : Means and Standard Deviations for ASPH-S

	<i>ASPH-S</i>		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender			
Female	308	71.63	9.14
Male	264	64.90	9.58

As shown in table 1, females ($M = 71.64$; $SD = 9.14$) scored higher than the males ($M = 64.90$; $SD = 9.58$) on attitudes toward seeking psychological help. The group, whose age 18 ($M = 72.18$; $SD = 11.08$) had the most favorable help-seeking attitudes, although the means of the classes were close to each other.

The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 26 years old ($M = 20.75$; $SD = 1.46$). As to the faculties of the participants, 26 (4.5%) of the participants were from the faculty of architecture, 50 (8.7%) were from the faculty of economics and administrative science, 62 (10.8%) were from the faculty of arts and science, 211 (36.9%) were from the faculty of engineering and 223 (39%) were from the faculty of education. The age of students ranged from 17 to 26 (see table 2).

Table 2 : Means and Standard Deviations for ASPH-S

	<i>ASPH-S</i>		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Faculty			
Architecture	26	67.46	9.70
Economics and Administrative Sciences	50	69.72	9.13
Arts and Sciences	62	70.16	8.47
Engineering	211	65.36	9.08
Education	223	70.94	10.48
Age			
18	44	73.11	10.90
19	68	71.11	8.33
20	98	68.44	9.26
21	217	68.00	10.04
22	97	67.27	9.51
23	27	65.63	10.76
24	13	64.546	10.63
25	5	69.60	10.97
26	3	66.00	20.07

The students of the Faculty of the Education ($M = 70.94$; $SD = 10.48$) scored higher than the students of the other faculties and students of the Faculty of the Engineering had the lowest mean score ($M = 65.36$; $SD = 9.08$) among all faculties.

2.2 Instruments

Sociodemographic Information Form: The form will include demographic questions about age, gender and faculty. The Attitudes toward Seeking Psychological Help—Shortened (ASPH-S): The ASPH of Fischer and Turner (1970) which was developed to measure attitudes toward help seeking adapted to Turkish participants by Türküm (2004) will be used. The ASPH-S has 18 items which are asked to be rated on five- point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). High scores indicates high positive attitude toward seeking psychological help (Türküm, 2004). The reliability coefficient of the scale was found as in the scale .88 for the total scale and subscales .76 for the first factor that include seven items which indicates confidence in taking psychological help, .77 for second factor that include seven items which indicates beliefs about getting psychological help, .76 for third factor that include seven items which indicates endurance against labeling , and .68 for fourth factor that include six items which indicates self disclosure (Türküm, 2004). Test-retest reliability was .99. Discriminative validity analysis was found sufficient by examining the difference between two groups which were formed with students who has received psychological help and who did not. The results showed significant differences between two groups (Türküm, 2004).

2.3 Procedure

Ethical permission to carry out the research was obtained from the local education authority. Also permission from the METU Human Ethic Committee and organizations was taken to do research. After providing voluntary participation, confidentiality, and to protect rights to privacy, participants were informed that participation is voluntary and anonymous. After completing an informed-consent sheet, questionnaires (demographic questions and ATHS-S) were given to participants

3. Results

In this section, before conducting the analysis; the accuracy of data entry, missing values and the assumption of parametric and non-parametric tests were investigated. The missing values were excluded declining sample size from 625 to 572. Before the investigation process, assumptions were checked for each analysis. Data was analyzed using SPSS 18.0.

In order to understand the characteristics of the sample, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentage) of the data were presented. In the second step, a series of initial analysis were conducted to explore whether gender, age and faculty were related to attitude towards psychological help seeking. Among the variables studied, gender was examined with one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Moreover, because faculty and age were not satisfied parametric analysis assumptions, the faculty was examined by using the Mann-Whitney U test with the age was with Spearman's Rank Order correlation. Finally, for the main analysis the effect of gender on help seeking attitude was checked after controlling aging and faculty variables was checked with one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA).

To decrease the probability of making a Type I error alpha level will be fixed at 0.05. The data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (Green, Salkind, 2008).

3.1 Gender and Students' Help Seeking Attitude

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the effect of gender on students' attitude toward help seeking. A significant effect of gender was found on the help seeking attitude of students $F(1, 572) = 73.64$, $p = .00$. and it is smaller than 0.05. The summary of the ANOVA results presented in table 3. Furthermore, the effect size was computed for gender and it was found as $\eta^2 = .11$ which indicates moderate effect, according to Cohen's (1988) criterion (see table 3).

Table 3: ANOVA Results For Gender on Students' Attitude towards Help Seeking

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Between Groups	3688.92	4	922.23	9.95	.00	.11
Within Groups	52539.51	567	92.66			
Total	56228.43	571				

One way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate effects of gender on help seeking attitude. Subjects were divided into two groups according to their gender; female ($M=71.64$, $SD=9.14$) and males ($M=64.91$, $SD=9.58$). Thus, it can be concluded from the mean difference of males and females in attitude toward help seeking, females have a more positive attitude than males. The mean difference was given in table 1.

3.2 Faculties and Attitude toward Help Seeking

The Kruskal-Wallis statistic was calculated to determine whether the distribution of the responses to the Attitude toward Help Seeking scale varied statistically significantly according to the nominal characteristic of the sample.

Table 4: Kruskal-Wallis Test Significance Scores for Attitude toward Help Seeking

<i>Kruskal- Wallis Test</i>				
Groups / Faculty	<i>N</i>	Mean Rank	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Architecture	26	277.94		
Eco. and Adm. Science	50	311.82		
Arts and Science	62	305.75	41.75	.00*
Engineering	211	230.29		
Education	223	329.65		

* $p=.05$

Table 4 indicates that there is a significant difference in the medians, $\chi^2(4, N=572) = 41.75$, $p = .00$. Because the overall test is significant, pairwise comparisons among the three groups were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the three groups, controlling for Type I error across tests by using the Bonferroni approach. The results of these tests indicated a significant difference between the economic and administrative science faculty and engineering faculty, $z = -3.30$, $p < .05$, another significant difference was found between arts and sciences faculty and engineering faculty, $z = -3.26$, $p < .00$, and between engineering faculty and education faculty, $z = -6.14$, $p < .05$. The results are given in table 4.

3.3 Age and Attitude toward Help Seeking

A Spearman's Rank Order correlation was run to determine the relationship between age of students and attitude toward help seeking. There was a positive correlation between

age and attitude toward help seeking scores of students, which was statistically significant ($r_{(570)} = -.17, p = .00$). The presentation of the result can be seen in the Table 5.

Table 5: Spearman Correlation between Age and Help Seeking Attitude

Variable	Age
ASPH-S total score	-.17*

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.4 The Effect of Gender on Help Seeking Attitude, after Controlling Age and Faculty

The independent variables gender, age and faculty were shown significant effects on help seeking attitude. Thus, it is reasonable to conduct an analysis by controlling the effect of age and faculty in the relation of gender and help seeking attitude. In the next step, a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted for this study. The independent variable was gender and the dependent variable was the attitude toward help seeking and the covariate was the faculty and age. The ANCOVA result was found significant, $F(1, 572) = 57.23, p < .05$ (See Table 6). Furthermore, 9% ($\eta^2 = .09$) of the total variance in attitude toward help seeking was accounted for by the gender controlling for the effect of the age and faculty (see table 1). After controlling the age and the faculty effect size has decreased from .11 to .09, thus two point decrease can be attributed to the effect of age and faculty.

Table 6: ANCOVA Results For Gender on Students' Attitude towards Help Seeking

Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Corrected Model	6715.70a	3	2238.57	25.68	.00	.12
Intercept	14408.79	1	14408.79	165.30	.00	.23
Age	282.20	1	282.20	3.24	.07	.01
Faculty	2.52	1	2.52	.03	.87	.00
Gender	4988.53	1	4988.53	57.23	.00	.09
Error	49512.734	568	87.17			
Total	2742662.00	572				
Corrected Total	56228.43	571				

a. R Squared = .119
(Adjusted R Squared = .115)

To sum up, in the light of literature it is known that age, gender and faculty have a significant effect on help seeking attitude. This finding also supported in this study. However, as age and faculty are a confounding variable that cannot be considered separately from students personality profile, it is suggested to conduct an analysis while controlling the effect of age and faculty in analyzing the influence of gender on help seeking attitude. The inferential analysis showed that there is a significant mean difference between males and females when age and faculty was controlled.

4. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

4.1 Discussion

It was hypothesized in the present study that there would be a gender difference in help seeking attitudes of males and females. Significant differences were found between male and female subjects. This finding is in line with previous studies which found that gender itself is a significant predictor of attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help (Nam et al., 2010; Sheffield et al., 2004). Many studies in the literature affirmed that females have more positive attitudes towards psychological help seeking compared to males (Ang et al., 2004; Barwick et al., 2009; Gekoski & Knox, 2006; Kartalova-O'Doherty & Doherty, 2010; Leong & Zachar, 1999; Mackenzie, Türküm, 2005; Nam et al., 2010; Özden, 2010; Svensson et al., 2009). The findings of the current study also supported previous research on the effect of gender difference in attitudes toward psychological help-seeking and the results of the present study suggested that the attitudes to seeking psychological help in students were remarkably more positive for female students.

The reasons behind the difference between males and females in terms of their attitudes towards seeking psychological help were investigated in several other studies. The contrast in this respect is mostly attributed to the reflection of gender role differences (Amit et al., 2009; Chan & Hayashi, 2010; Judd et al., 2008). Researchers affirmed that men's social status (Judd et al., 2008), lack of motivation, stigma attached to expressing feelings, the fear of intimacy (Silverberg, 1986), and the lack of fit with the culture of masculinity (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Rochlen & Hoyer, 2005) may influence seeking help. However, these findings differed from those of Furnham and Andrew (1996) who studied with Asians and a Caucasian British sample; Atkinson and Gim (1989) whose participants were Asian-American; and Bee-Gates, Howard-Pitney, LaFromboise, and Rowe (1996) who worked with Native American-Indian high school students had all found that there were no significant differences between males and females with regards to the levels of attitudes towards help-seeking.

In the literature, there are many contradictory findings about age variability and its effect on attitude toward psychological help seeking. While some studies have found that older people have less favorable attitudes toward seeking psychological help than young people (Lebowitz & Niederehe, 1992; Vessey & Howard, 1993), other studies have concluded that older individuals associated with more positive attitude to help seeking than younger individuals (Al-Krenawi, Graham, Dean, & Eltaiba, 2004; Mackenzie, Gekoski & Knox, 2006; Svensson, Nygard, Sorensen & Sandanger, 2009). In the current study, the results of the correlation analysis indicated that attitude toward psychological help seeking is negatively associated with age. In the present study, findings revealed that younger students indicated a more positive attitude than older students.

In the present study the question of whether the faculty of students affects the students' attitude toward psychological help seeking was also analyzed. The results of the study supported the previous research on the effect of faculty on attitudes toward psychological help-seeking. Faculty of Engineering was found to have less positive attitudes toward help-seeking than Faculty of Education, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Faculty of

Economics and Administrative Science Faculty. The results of the study supported the previous research on the relationship age and attitudes toward psychological help-seeking (Kılıç, 2001; Çebi, 2009). This difference among faculties might be the result of the female population, because the numbers of female participants in other faculties are relatively higher than engineering faculty. Another reason of this difference might arise from being close to social sciences, while other faculties have more lecture and closeness to social science subjects, engineering faculty students have a less closeness to social science issues.

4.2 Recommendation

This study was carried out with students from METU. Therefore, future studies can be conducted to see if the findings of this study are consistent for other samples as well. Also, research in different Turkish universities could give more reliable and accurate results and conclusions about help seeking attitudes of all Turkish university students. Furthermore, the current study included participants whose age ranged between 18 and 26, thus, future researchers may consider including a wider range in their study.

Previous help seeking experience was accepted in the literature as one of the factors that has an influence on help seeking attitudes. Therefore, future research can focus on previous help seeking experiences as a variable in relation to help seeking attitudes and gender.

5. IMPLEMENTATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 Limitations

This study was carried out with students from METU. Therefore, future studies can be conducted to see if the findings of this study are consistent for other samples as well. Also, research in different Turkish universities could give more reliable and accurate results and conclusions about help seeking attitudes of all Turkish university students. Furthermore, the current study included participants whose age ranged between 17 and 26, thus, future researchers may consider including a wider range in their study.

Previous help seeking experience was accepted in the literature as one of the factors that has an influence on help seeking attitudes. Therefore, future research can focus on previous help seeking experiences as a variable in relation to help seeking attitudes, early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles.

5.2 Implementations

Realizing the effect of different variables on attitudes towards professional help seeking is the first step in understanding the reason of help seeking behavior and increasing the use of counseling service. Investigating the relationship between various factors and help seeking attitude may allow researchers to study other variables that have the greater amount

of variance associated with help seeking behavior and support researchers to develop better models of the relation among help seeking attitude and gender.

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