



# Student's Mental Health Help-Seeking Attitude and Its Implication to Higher Education Management

Farah Aulia<sup>(✉)</sup>, Rahayu Hardianti Utami, Elrisfa Magistarina, and Rizal Kurniawan

Universitas Negeri Padang, Padang, Indonesia  
farah\_aulia@fip.unp.ac.id

**Abstract.** University students have a higher vulnerability to experience various mental health problems, therefore attitudes about mental health services are an important component in supporting campus efforts to support students' mental health. This study aims to describe university student attitudes regarding mental health services. The research participants were 998 university students in Sumatera and Java. The measuring instrument used is the Mental Health Help Seeking Attitude Scale (MHSAS). Data analysis showed that 91% of students showed positive attitude towards mental health services and 14% showed a negative attitude. This finding has implications for universities management to further improve literacy related to student mental health services as an effort to prevent mental health problems.

**Keywords:** mental health · help-seeking attitude · higher education

## 1 Background

Mental health and well-being are the main issues in the WHO's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) which were proclaimed 2018–2030 [1]. WHO describes mental health as a state of well-being in which each individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. The WHO explains mental health not only about the absence of mental disorders, but in a positive perspective mental health is seen as a condition of subjective well-being, self-efficacy, autonomy, competence and recognition of an individual's intellectual and emotional potential. Through an understanding of one's abilities, one is able to cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and meaningfully, and can make a positive contribution to society. In this perspective, efforts to support mental health are not only related to overcoming mental disorders, but increasing the competence of individuals and communities and enabling them to achieve their life goals.

This mental health issue gets the main emphasis in the 2013–2030 comprehensive mental health action plan for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). One of the main objectives of the action plan is to implement strategies for promotion and prevention

in health. Data in Indonesia, Basic Health Research (Riskesdas) in 2018 also shows that there is an increase in the number of adolescents over 15 years who experience emotional disorders by 9.8% compared to 2015 which was only 6% [2]. This condition illustrates that mental health is a problem that needs attention at this time. The increasing number of sufferers of mental emotional problems, especially in adolescents until today, certainly needs to be treated so that it does not have a long-term impact and affect the quality of life of Indonesian people in general.

Previous research has shown that the emergence of mental disorders begins in early adulthood [3]. In the developmental perspective, students are in early adulthood who are faced with a number of developmental tasks that need to be completed, such as career choices, intimacy in relationships, self-discovery and other tasks [4]. This developmental task if not completed will interfere with the next stage of development. In addition, students also have a vulnerability to mental health problems due to various pressures faced in the university environment such as academic, psychosocial, financial problems and other pressures [5, 6]. Mental health problems that do not get proper treatment will lead to academic failure, use of illegal drugs and poor social relations [7, 8]. Given the importance of these factors, a program that focuses on the mental health of students on campus is urgently needed. Poor student mental health will have an impact on student functioning on campus, such as academic success [8], social relations [7], and productivity [9]. Therefore, efforts to identify, prevent, promote and intervene are carried out by the campus become an important part of preventing the long-term effects of these mental disorders [10]. However, in reality there are quite a number of obstacles in this effort, including stigma related to mental health problems, the lack of awareness of the campus for efforts to support mental health and from the internal side of students themselves help-seeking attitudes for mental health problems are also a challenge.

Help-seeking behavior is any action or activity undertaken by a teenager who considers himself/herself to be in need of psychological help, affective assistance or health or social services, with the aim of meeting this need in a positive way. This includes seeking help from formal services—for example, clinical services, counsellors, psychologists, medical personnel, traditional healers, religious leaders – as well as informal sources, which include peer groups and friends, family members or kinship groups and/or other adults in the community [11]. Help-seeking attitudes are very important because a number of research shows that help-seeking attitudes are predictors of a person's intention to seek help and future help-seeking behavior [12]. Seeking help becomes a very important part when someone has mental health problems. In the concept of Planned Behavior Theory, attitude is a factor that can indirectly influence a person's behavior to seek help through intentions, and it starts from the intention to seek help and actual help seeking behavior. Therefore, if you want to promote help-seeking behavior, the first thing to do is improve one's attitude about help-seeking [13]. However, most people refuse to seek help or have a negative attitude towards seeking help even when they have poor mental health problems [14].

A number of studies have found factors related to help-seeking attitudes, including: social support, gender and race [15–17]. This study aims to describe the mental help-seeking attitudes of students. It is hoped that knowing how students' attitudes about

seeking help for mental health problems can help the campus to determine appropriate policies in preventing mental health problems and promoting campus-based mental health.

## 2 Methods

### Participants

The participants in this study were 998 students from various universities in Sumatera. The average age of the respondents was 20 years with the lowest age being 17 years and the highest age being 28 years. Participants consisted of 409 men and 589 women. A total of 232 respondents came from the science department and 766 people came from the social humanities department. The participants involved also came from various generations. A total of 390 people were from the freshman class, 247 from the sophomore class, 249 from the juniors and 112 from the seniors. For more complete results, see Table 1.

### Research Instruments

This study uses a questionnaire and a scale to obtain data from the field. Questionnaires are used to obtain demographic data of respondents such as gender, majors, region of origin, generation and age. While the scale is used to obtain data on attitudes towards mental health services. The scale used is the mental help seeking attitude scale (MHSAS) which consists of 8 items. The higher the score obtained, the more positive the attitude towards help-seeking, while the lower the score, the more negative the attitude towards

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistic

	F	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	409	40.8%
Women	589	59.1%
<b>Major</b>		
Soshum	766	76.8%
Science	232	23.2%
<b>Cohort</b>		
<i>Freshman</i>	390	39.1%
<i>Sophomore</i>	247	24.7%
Junior	249	24.9%
Senior	112	11.2%
<b>Help-seeking Attitudes</b>		
Positive	959	91.9%
Negative	39	8.1%

help-seeking. MHSAS scale reliability is = .95. In addition, participants were also asked whether they already had services for mental health on campus. Data retrieval is done online through Google Form which is distributed in several campuses on the island of Sumatera. The research data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to see the description of the research respondents. In addition, this study also uses t-test and analysis of variance to see differences in attitudes towards mental health services based on gender, majors and class. Paired test for further testing of analysis of variance is using the Tukey approach. Data analysis was carried out with the help of JASP software version 0.16.3.0.

### 3 Analysis

The results of data analysis showed that in general, for the category of attitudes towards mental health professional services, most of the participants had a positive attitude, 91.9%, only 8.1% had a negative attitude. More complete results can be seen from Table 1.

Table 2 is the result of several different tests of attitude variables towards mental health services based on gender, majors and cohort. From the results obtained, it can be seen that there are differences in attitudes towards mental health services for students based on gender  $t = 5.03$  ( $p < .001$ ) where women have more positive attitudes towards mental health services than men. However, based on the majors, it can be seen that there is no difference in attitudes towards mental health services for students  $t = 1.67$  ( $p > .05$ ) which means that both respondents from the science department or from the social humanities department have the same attitude towards mental health services. The results of the analysis of the variance of mental health service variables based on the generation obtained significant results  $F = 9.82$  ( $p < .001$ ). The results of the pair test using the

**Table 2.** T test Analysis

Variable	Mean	N	T test
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	41.98	409	t = 5.03*
Women	44.74	589	
<b>Major</b>			
Social	43.38	766	t = 1.67
Science	44.38	232	
<b>Cohort</b>			
<i>Freshman</i>	42.62	390	F = 9.82
<i>Sophomore</i>	45.92	247	
Junior	42.57	249	
Senior	44.26	112	

\* 0.01 Sig

Tukey approach found that there were only two significant pairs, namely the freshman class and the sophomore class, where the sophomore class had a more positive attitude towards mental health services than the freshman class. In addition, the sophomore class also showed a higher score than the senior class. From these results, it can be said that the sophomore class has a more positive attitude score towards mental health services compared to the freshman and junior batches.

Regarding the question of whether mental health services are available on campus, 86% of respondents answered not yet, 8% said they did not know, and 6% answered they did not know.

## 4 Discussion

This study found that participants generally had a positive attitude towards help-seeking related to mental health problems. This means that if students experience mental health problems, students have a positive attitude to seek professional services that can help overcome their problems. This is in line with research which states that attitude becomes an important component and influences a person's efforts to seek professional help when he feels he is experiencing mental health problems [12]. Although there are those who say that there is no agreement on a clear definition of help-seeking behavior, but help-seeking involves an individual's active and adaptive efforts to overcome problems by using external sources of help [11]. This finding is an important input for universities in particular located on the island of Sumatra to be able to provide professional services that can support the mental health of students. Because not all universities have special attention to the availability of professional services to help students' mental health.

By gender, women appear to have more positive attitudes regarding help-seeking than men. This finding is consistent with previous research which states that women are more receptive to receiving professional help than men [17–19] Women are considered to have more openness to their psychological conditions compared to men [20]. On the other hand, this poses a challenge to efforts to increase men's more positive attitude towards help-seeking mental health problems. In addition, adjustment in the world of campus may also be one of the things related to attitudes towards seeking help from mental health services. This can be seen from the data that students who are in the middle of the study period have a more positive attitude towards help-seeking mental health compared to freshmen and senior students. Another finding is that most students feel that there are no mental health services they can access on campus. This implies that the university needs to provide mental health services that are clear and accessible to students.

The limitation of this study is that the data submitted is in the form of a description and has not been able to explain the factors that can support help-seeking attitudes to students. However, the findings of this study provide fresh air for the university that a positive attitude towards seeking professional help regarding mental health problems will support students' behavior to actually seek help when they experience problems. This will certainly be able to prevent mental health problems from continuing to become more severe conditions and disrupt the functioning of students. On the other hand, universities should be able to make policies or programs that target campus-based student mental

health interventions and promotions, starting from identifying or mapping students' mental health problems, developing promotional programs, determining appropriate referral channels for professionals, and ensuring availability related professional personnel such as counselors, psychologists or psychiatrists by building networks with professionals.

**Acknowledgments.** Acknowledgment is addressed to Rector and Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat, Universitas Negeri Padang, who have funded the implementation of this research.

## References

1. World Health Organization, "Fact sheet on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Health targets," 2018.
2. Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, "Laporan\_Nasional\_RKD2018\_FINAL," 2018.
3. R. C. Kessler *et al.*, "Lifetime Prevalence and Age-of-Onset Distributions of DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication," *Arch Gen Psychiatry*, vol. 62, no. June, pp. 593–602, 2005.
4. S. Koydemir-Özdena and Ö. Erelb, "Psychological help-seeking: Role of socio-demographic variables, previous help-seeking experience and presence of a problem," in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2010, vol. 5, pp. 688–693. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.07.166>.
5. A. Furnham, R. Cook, N. Martin, and M. Batey, "Mental health literacy among university students," *J Public Ment Health*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 198–210, Dec. 2011, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/17465721111188223>.
6. W. Larcombe *et al.*, "Prevalence and socio-demographic correlates of psychological distress among students at an Australian university," *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 1074–1091, Jun. 2016, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.966072>.
7. W. C. Kessler and A. F. P. D. A. M. Stability, "The Social Consequences of Psychiatric Disorders, III: Probability of Marital Stability," 1998.
8. R. C. Kessler, C. L. Foster, W. B. Saunders, and P. E. Stang, "Social Consequences of Psychiatric Disorders, I: Educational Attainment," 1995.
9. P. S. Wang *et al.*, "Telephone Screening, Outreach, and Care Management for Depressed Workers and Impact on Clinical and Work Productivity Outcomes A Randomized Controlled Trial." [Online]. Available: <https://jamanetwork.com/>
10. K. Zivin, D. Eisenberg, S. E. Gollust, and E. Golberstein, "Persistence of mental health problems and needs in a college student population," *J Affect Disord*, vol. 117, no. 3, pp. 180–185, Oct. 2009, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2009.01.001>.
11. D. Rickwood and K. Thomas, "Conceptual measurement framework for help-seeking for mental health problems," *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, vol. 5, pp. 173–183, 2012. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S38707>.
12. J. L. Burris and M. A. Andrykowski, "Physical and mental health status and health behaviors of survivors of multiple cancers: A national, population-based study," *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, vol. 42, no. 3, pp. 304–312, Dec. 2011, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-011-9290-0>.
13. P. Chen, X. J. Liu, X. Q. Wang, B. X. Yang, J. Ruan, and Z. Liu, "Attitude Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Among Community-Dwelling
14. "Population in China," *Front Psychiatry*, vol. 11, May 2020, doi: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.00417>.

15. Y. Naganuma *et al.*, “Twelve-month use of mental health services in Japan : Finding from the World Mental Health Survey 2002-2003,” *Psychiatry Clin Neurosci*, vol. 60, pp. 240–248, 2006.
16. S. Nagai, “Predictors of help-seeking behavior: Distinction between help-seeking intentions and help-seeking behavior,” *Japanese Psychological Research*, vol. 57, no. 4, pp. 313–322, Oct. 2015, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpr.12091>.
17. M. Aldalaykeh, M. M. Al-Hammouri, and J. Rababah, “Predictors of mental health services help-seeking behavior among university students,” *Cogent Psychol*, vol. 6, no. 1, Jan. 2019, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2019.1660520>.
18. F. T. L. Leong and P. Zachar, “Gender and opinions about mental illness as predictors of attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help,” *British Journal of Counseling and Guidance*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 123–131, 1999.
19. H.-B. Sheu and W. E. Sedlacek, “An Exploratory Study of Help-Seeking Attitudes and Coping Strategies Among College Students by Race and Gender,” *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, vol. 37, pp. 130–143, 2004.
20. R. P. Ang, K. Ming Lim, A. Tan, and T. Yee Yau, “Effects of Gender and Sex Role Orientation on Help- Seeking Attitudes,” 2004.
21. C. S. Mackenzie, W. L. Gekoski, and V. J. Knox, “Age, gender, and the underutilization of mental health services: The influence of help-seeking attitudes,” *Aging Ment Health*, vol. 10, no. 6, pp. 574–582, Nov. 2006, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607860600641200>.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

