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AN EXAMINATION OF ATTITUDES TOWARD HELP-SEEKING AND

ATTRIBUTIONS MADE FOR A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM BY

AN UNDERGRADUATE ADOLESCENT POPULATION

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology at Massey University

Penelope J. Maxwell
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ABSTRACT.

The aim of the present study was to examine the help-seeking attitudes held by an adolescent undergraduate student population using the modified version of the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale, (ATSPPH). An investigation was also held into the type of attributions made as to the cause of a psychological problem and the particular help-source chosen to deal with this problem. Four hundred and forty-four hostel resident undergraduate students participated in a three component descriptive study within a quasi-experimental design which included a pre-test pilot study group, a main study matched group and a control group. The results obtained showed that this particular adolescent population held less positive help-seeking attitudes than a wider heterogeneous population. Both females and those subjects who had a prior contact with psychological professionals held more positive pro-help attitudes than either those who had no prior contact and male subjects. Two thirds of the subjects made external (situational) attributions as to the cause of the psychological problem and one-third internal attributions. The majority of subjects from the two attribution groups chose a friend as the preferred help-source to deal with a psychological problem. Help-source significantly discriminated the help-seeking score on the ATSPPH scale with those with less positive attitudes choosing a friend as the preferred help-source whereas those with more pro-help positive attitudes chose a psychologist or psychiatrist. Informal and formal help-sources were defined and the stated preferences of subjects in the present study were evaluated in relation to the mental health resources currently available. Changes that the psychological professionals themselves may need to consider in matching supply to demand were also discussed.
For Jacqueline and Robert James
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABSTRACT</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>HELP-SEEKING</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>ATTITUDES</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>ATTRIBUTIONS</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>HELP-SOURCE</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informal Help-sources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal Help-sources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>THE PRESENT STUDY</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitude Measure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attributions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Objectives and Hypotheses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>METHOD</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subjects and Sampling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethical Issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>RESULTS</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attributions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help-source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCES 73

APPENDICES 95
LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1
Total number and sex of subjects within each phase.

TABLE 2
Mean help-seeking global attitude score and factor sub-scale scores on the ATSPPH for 235 subjects with and without prior contact.

TABLE 3
Male and female subject numbers within the contact categories.

TABLE 4
Mean help-seeking attitude and factor scores for female subjects with and without prior professional contact.

TABLE 5
Mean global attitude score for subjects with and without prior professional contact by help source.

TABLE 6
Numbers of subjects within each help-source classified by attribution type.

APPENDIX C
TABLE C-1
T-test comparing the pilot study and matched main study group across total global attitude score and factor sub-scales.

TABLE C-2
T-test comparing pilot study and control group across global attitude and factor sub-scale.

TABLE C-3
T-test comparing matched main study group and control group for global attitude and factor sub-scales.

TABLE C-4
T-test comparing males and females for global attitude and factor scores for the ATSPPH questionnaire.
TABLE C-5
Summary ANOVA table for global attitude by contact criteria and help-source.

TABLE C-6
Summary ANOVA table for Factor 1, (NEED) for contact criteria by help-source.

TABLE C-6A
Factor 1, (NEED) mean scores for subjects by contact criteria and help-source.

TABLE C-7
Summary ANOVA table for Factor 4, (CONFIDENCE) by contact criteria and help-source.

TABLE C-7A
Factor 4, (CONFIDENCE) mean scores for contact criteria by help-source.

TABLE C-8
Chi-square contingency table for attribution type by contact criteria.

TABLE C-9
Chi-square contingency table for attribution type by male and female subjects.

TABLE C-10
ANOVA table for global attitude score by attribution type.

TABLE C-11
ANOVA table for global attitude score by attribution type and contact criteria.

TABLE C-12
ANOVA table for global attitude score by attribution type and help-source.

TABLE C-13
Means and standard deviations for the present study and Surgenor's (1985) sample.

TABLE C-14
Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlation coefficients for the ATSPPH questionnaire items and total score.
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1
Overview of processes in help-seeking. (Wills, 1982).

Page

6
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Supplement to the Present Study Section

APPENDIX B
Supplement to the Method Section

APPENDIX C
Supplement to the Results Section