



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Perceived stigma and help seeking behavior among Indian Men

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 22(01), 432–440

Publication history: Received on 25 February 2024; revised on 06 April 2024; accepted on 08 April 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.22.1.1089>

Abstract

This study delves into the intricate relationship between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men. The study also explores the difference among Indian Men pursuing Under graduation and Post graduation with regard to Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior. A sample of 200 Indian men, encompassing individuals pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate courses was part of the study. Statistical techniques like Correlation analysis and Independent Samples t Test were employed for data analysis. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior. Moreover, the study compared the differences in Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior between undergraduate and postgraduate education levels. Results indicated no significant difference between the two education levels with regard to Perceived Stigma or Help Seeking Behavior.

Keywords: Perceived Stigma; Help Seeking Behavior; Indian Men; Intricate relationship

1. Introduction

“Mental health is said to be the basic right of a human being” says World Health Organisation. It also states that development on a personal, social, and economic level depends on an individual’s mental health. The developing risk for mental health conditions is associated to the detrimental environmental and economical elements like inequality, poverty and few others. The increase in stress due to these facets in today’s world is causing severe physical as well as mental distress among individuals. While the physiological distress is being noticed by the bodily symptoms, the psychological distress is being unnoticed most of the times. The symptoms of mental distress are being attributed to the physiological illness and therefore being ruled out in some scenarios. But there are times when the mental distress is getting addressed by the individual but then being ignored. In some other cases it is seen that people address their mental distress and take support or help from their loved ones. In very few cases we see people getting professional help from mental health practitioners.

The concept of psychological wellbeing or mental health was way before introduced and brought into light in the developed countries especially the Western nations. In fact, the field itself was given birth there. When it comes to a country like India, there are several cultural, societal, religious, gender, economic, social and other barriers which contribute to less psychological awareness and education. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has also stated that these factors greatly influence the mental health of Indian population. Understanding the need for psychological help and seeking help it is attributed to several factors in which stigma plays a crucial role. As a culturally rich society with many stereotypical thought patterns and behaviours individuals tend to hesitate from seeking help (Hindustan Times, 2022). Gender being another major factor contributing to the biases should also be brought into the light.

Erving Goffman (1963) has defined stigma as an “attribute that is deeply discrediting.” In a study conducted by Kristin D. Mickelson (2001) that primarily focused on the importance of perceived stigma, social support and depression has defined perceived stigma as how someone interprets their own negative emotions toward the stressors such as guilt,

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humiliation, or deviance and projects these emotions onto other people. In simple terms individuals subjective awareness and perception of the unfavourable attitudes, assumptions, and stereotypes that others hold about a specific attribute, condition, or identity that the individual possesses is referred to as perceived stigma. Various intrinsic and extrinsic qualities and abilities of an individual such as self-esteem, general quality of life, and mental and emotional health can all be significantly impacted by perceived stigma.

The negative setbacks that occur to an individual due to perceived stigma are more highlighted and studied in the field of science. Therefore, researchers frequently look at perceived stigma to understand its impact and create mitigation techniques for its negative impacts. Stigma perception is inherently subjective. Instead of the objective reality of those attitudes, it is about how a person perceives and interprets the attitudes and behaviors of others. The same traits may be perceived differently by two people. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that perceived stigma is closely linked to poor results for mental health. People who feel stigma more strongly and frequently have increased stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and low self-esteem levels. These lead numerous detrimental effects, such as avoiding social events and medical services, may result from this. And this ascent the need to educate and work on the concept of perceived stigma among the individuals. Additionally, researchers look at the coping strategies people use to handle perceived stigma. Others may absorb unfavourable attitudes about themselves, while some people may learn resilience and adaptive methods to safeguard their self-esteem. All this is based on the perception of a person and how it reflects within them. When someone have many stigmatized identities, perceived stigma can be very complicated. Here comes the actual need to guide and help them.

The American Psychological Association (APA) defined help seeking behaviour as an act of looking for or asking for support from others through authorized or unauthorized means, which include mental health services. The authorized or formal ways of seeking help can be from the medical or psychological care to confiding in friends or family which can be looked in terms of unauthorised or informal help. This can be measured through self-report questionnaires, interviews, or observational studies, where individuals are asked about their decisions and actions that are related to seeking help. The responses for these questions and items in these measuring tools are completely based on how an individual perceives seeking help. In order to understand the obstacles that prevent people from seeking help researchers have made it a common subject of psychological study on help seeking behavior. These obstacles or behaviours that may prevent a person from getting treatment may include stigma, fear, lack of awareness and access to healthcare, and cultural norms. As important as it is to look for help during a physical illness, it is also crucial to seek help for any kind of psychological problems. Usually all the psychological problems might be involved with emotions which are very perplex and subtle in nature. While going through certain distress or a problem an individual might not be able to tackle or deal with them appropriately. In such situations seeking help at least from the nearby close ones is really essential. Delaying help-seeking can have a big impact on health outcomes because early intervention is frequently essential.

Research has found that coping mechanisms and the behavior of seeking assistance are linked together. Seeking assistance can be a primary coping mechanism for certain individuals and an alternative for others. In a way personality of an individual also comes into play while we talk about the role of coping mechanisms in seeking help. The type A personality people are found to be less interested in seeking help for any emotional or mental problem even though they are said to be showing high competitiveness in general life (Marleny Panis, Yeni Damayanti, et al. 2021). The study of help-seeking can also be influenced by our understanding of how people handle difficulties. The factors like social context, cultural norms, and values all have a big impact on how people behave while seeking assistance. Researchers look at how cultural influences affect beliefs about asking for help and the accessibility of services that are responsive to cultural differences.

Daniel Eisenberg et al., (2009) worked on “Stigma and Help Seeking for Mental Health among College Students”. A random sample of 5,555 students from 13 different universities participated in the survey. The study discovered a strong negative correlation between personal stigma and help-seeking behavior. Students who had higher levels of personal stigma were less likely to feel the need for support and less likely to go for nonclinical or psychotropic medication or therapy as a form of support. It showed that personal stigma, influenced by various personal characteristics, plays a crucial role in discouraging students from seeking help for mental health issues.

David L.Vogel et al., (2014) studied “Referring Men to Seek Help: The Influence of Gender Role Conflict and Stigma”. The results of the study, which involved 216 male college students and used structural equation modelling, show that males who support more restrained emotionality are less likely to suggest that their friends and relatives who are having mental health issues get treatment. Men who support more limitations on male affection also tend to support more stigma against mental illness, which lessens their desire to recommend others for assistance. This emphasizes how

traditional gender norms and stigma must be addressed in order to increase access to mental health services, especially for men.

2. Methodology

2.1. Statement of the problem

The present study aims to find the relationship between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men. The study also makes an effort to examine and compare the difference between undergraduate and postgraduate education levels in both the Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior.

2.2. Objectives of the study

- To find out if there is any relationship between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men.
- To find out if there is any difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Perceived Stigma.
- To find out if there is any difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Help Seeking Behavior.

2.3. Hypothesis

- H01: There is no significant relationship between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men.
- H02: There is no significant difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Perceived Stigma.
- H03: There is no significant difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Help Seeking Behavior.

2.4. Operational Definition

Perceived Stigma-Perceived Stigma refers to an individual's subjective awareness and interpretation of the negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes held by others towards a particular characteristic, attribute, or identity associated with that individual. This perception of stigma can be based on various factors, such as one's race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, mental health condition, or any other characteristic that might make them a target of societal bias or discrimination.

Help Seeking Behavior- Help Seeking Behavior refers to the actions, thoughts, and intentions of individuals when they recognize a need for assistance or support to address a psychological, emotional, or behavioral issue. It encompasses a wide range of actions, from reaching out to friends or family for advice to seeking professional help from therapists, counsellors, or healthcare providers.

2.5. Research Design

The current study employed a Quantitative Correlational Research Design to examine the relationship between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men.

2.6. Variables

- Perceived Stigma
- Help Seeking Behavior

2.7. Demographic Variables

Education Qualification

2.8. Population

Indian Men who are currently pursuing their Undergraduate or Postgraduate course.

2.9. Sample

The sample for the current study comprises 200 Indian Men (N=200) between the age group of 18-25. The samples include Indian Men who are currently pursuing their Undergraduate or Postgraduate course (PG=72, UG=128).

2.10. Sampling Technique

The current study used a non-probability sampling technique which included convenience sampling method.

2.10.1. Inclusion criteria

Men currently pursuing undergraduate or postgraduate course.

2.10.2. Exclusion criteria

Men who do not belong to Indian nationality.

Men who cannot read and write

2.11. Tools Used For Study

Perceived Stigmatization Questionnaire (PSQ)- The PSQ is a 21-item questionnaire designed to measure perceived stigmatization among people with visible differences. The items were on a 5-point Likert type scale. It was developed in the US and it has shown good validity among both pediatric and adult burn survivors. The questionnaire has an overall scale score and three subscale scores that measure 'absence of friendly behavior', 'hostile behavior', and 'confused/staring behavior'. Internal consistency ranged from .60 to .88.

General Help Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ)- The General Help Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ) was developed to assess intentions to seek help from different sources and for different problems. The questions cover two different domains namely suicidal and personal-emotional. Respondents rate how strongly they agree or disagree with statements using a 7-point scale (1= extremely unlikely; 7= extremely likely).

2.11.1. Procedure

Google forms were made as the data will be collected in online mode. And then, a briefing about nature and purpose of the study was explained to the participants. The participants were assured that all information taken from them will be kept confidential. Then the participants were asked whether they wanted to participate in the study or not, and consent was taken. The demographic detail of the participant is collected first. Then PSQ, GHSQ were individually administered to all the participants to determine the perceived stigma and help seeking behavior among Indian men. After the completion of the questionnaire, the scoring of all responses was done and the results were interpreted and discussed.

2.12. Statistical tools used

The statistical techniques used for the data analysis in the study are Correlation analysis and Independent Samples t Test. Correlation is a kind of statistical measure which expresses the extent to which two variables are linearly related and Independent Samples t Test helps to compares the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different.

2.13. Ethical Considerations

- The data collection has begun only after getting the final approval by the research guide who guided in conducting the research.
- The participants consent was taken before collecting the data from them.
- Confidentiality of data collected is maintained.

3. Results

The aim of the research was to study the Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men. The study was conducted on 200 men belonging to Indian nationality.

Table1 Relationship between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior

Variable	M	SD	r	sig
Perceived Stigma	60.26	10.459	1	0.000
Help Seeking Behavior	34.28	10.328	0.272**	0.000

**p<0.01

H01- There is no significant relationship between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men

Table shows the relationship between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men. The mean and standard deviation of the Perceived Stigma has found to be 60.26 and 10.459 respectively. In Help Seeking Behavior mean of 34.28 was found with a standard deviation of 10.328. The correlation coefficient between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior was found to be .272**. From the table it can be observed that there is a significant positive correlation between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior which indicates that the increase in every unit of the Perceived Stigma will lead to an increase in Help Seeking Behavior. Hence the null hypothesis which says that “there is no significant relationship between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men” – was rejected.

Table2 Difference between undergraduate and postgraduate education levels on Perceived Stigma.

Variable	N	Undergraduate		Postgraduate			t	p
		M	SD	N	M	SD		
Perceived Stigma	128	60.59	10.345	72	59.65	10.690	0.610	0.543

** p>0.01

H02: There is no significant difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Perceived Stigma.

Table shows the difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Perceived Stigma. In Perceived Stigma mean of 60.59 was found with a standard deviation of 10.345 among undergraduate level men. Among postgraduate men the mean of 59.65 was found with a standard deviation of 10.690 for Perceived Stigma. The calculated t value for Perceived Stigma between two levels is .610 with corresponding p value of .543 From the table it can be observed that there is no significant difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Perceived Stigma. Hence the null hypothesis which says “there is no significant difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Perceived Stigma” – was accepted.

Table 3 Difference between undergraduate and postgraduate education levels on Help Seeking Behavior.

Variable	N	Undergraduate		Postgraduate			t	p
		M	SD	N	M	SD		
Help Seeking Behavior	128	34.45	9.623	72	33.97	11.540	0.310	0.757

** p>0.01

H03: There is no significant difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Help Seeking Behavior.

Table shows the difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Help Seeking Behavior. In Help Seeking Behavior mean of 60.59 was found with a standard deviation of 9.623 among undergraduate level men. Among postgraduate men the mean of 33.97 was found with a standard deviation of 11.540 for Help Seeking Behavior. The calculated t value for Help Seeking Behavior between two levels is .310 with corresponding p value of .757. From the table it can be observed that there is no significant difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Help Seeking Behavior. Hence the null hypothesis which says “there is no significant difference between

Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Help Seeking Behavior” – was accepted.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men and it revealed that individuals with Perceived Stigma showed Help Seeking Behaviour. The findings indicated a significant positive correlation between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior, in other words as Perceived Stigma increases Help Seeking Behavior increases, which aligns with the earlier studies that there is moderate positive correlation between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior. However, seeking assistance was seen among college level teachers while their perception towards social support is high in a study (Harikrishna M, et al., (2022)). Some other contributing factors such as gender role conflict, norms, societal labels and masculinity act as barriers in perceiving oneself and seeking help (Rachel Wahto, MS et al., (2014)).

From the results obtained in this research most of the men mentioned about approaching a close friend or a family member for seeking help. But, very few have stated that they would go for a professional help or approach a mental health practitioner. This sets a stage for the lack of appropriate knowledge and awareness about seeking professional mental health services. The role of Asian culture in which myths and misconceptions play a definite role in shaping one's perceptions also reduce the need for seeking professional help when required (Nicola A. Cogan, et al., (2023)). It might also indicate that individuals are worried about being judged if their family or friends know about them seeking professional help. Many people don't talk openly about mental health issues in Indian community, which makes it hard for them to get help when they need it from a professional worker (Bridgit Philip et al., (2024)). Therefore, the study might help in addressing the lack of awareness and societal judgment towards professional help seeking, while also stretching its need for further research to dwell upon the factors influencing.

However, contrary to the expectations the study results showed that individuals' general Help Seeking was not negatively affected by Perceived Stigma. There might be various other reasons that influenced the results such as diverse population with varying educational levels and unique individual perceptions. The rising approach towards western systems and also broadening perspectives on several issues including mental health is seen. The accessibility of college counsellors, psychologists within the institutions which the education system has made mandatory for students gives an opportunity to them on thinking about importance and need for mental health. But how many students are actually approaching or utilizing the opportunity provided is a question. Fear of being judged or mishandle their thoughts and feelings by a stranger might pause them from approaching the professional. Therefore, they are more comfortable to talk about their feelings with a well know trusted person than to a stranger. This brings the need for psycho educating people about mental health on the concepts of trust, confidentiality and empathy while unmasking the negative perceptions on seeking mental health support from professionals in order to encourage professional help seeking.

There are few studies contradicting to the present research stating that men are reluctant to seek help. It was found that men's unwillingness to openly acknowledge and confront mental health difficulties was found to be influenced by societal beliefs of masculinity, which are frequently associated with ideas of strength and resilience. They were reluctant to seek professional help because they were afraid they would be shunned by society and treated with disrespect (Kumar et al., (2022)). Here comes the role of gender in the society. In a way it supports the present study findings on not seeking professional help but talking about their mental health issues amidst the four walls with their close family and friends. Masculinity, which is generally associated with being strong, is questioned if they seek help openly that is associated with being weak. With the vast and wide range of mental health awareness being spread in the present society, it is visibly seen that individuals are making an effort to seek help at least from the family and friends. This kind of help might be fruitful for few and may not for others. Therefore, more awareness and support is required to engage them in professional help seeking when required by reducing the stigma on gender.

The research findings along with the combined data from recent studies highlight how strongly Perceived Stigma affects Indian Men's Help Seeking Behavior. The results emphasize how intricately cultural norms, societal expectations, and personal conceptions of masculinity interact, making males reluctant to seek professional help for mental health issues. Fighting stigma requires multidimensional strategies that break gender stereotypes, encourage open conversations about mental health, and improve access to culturally appropriate mental health care.

The research aims to study the Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men. The research question of this study was: Is there a relationship between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men. The study measures Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men and tries to find significant differences

between undergraduate and postgraduate education levels among Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior. A total of 200 samples were collected, consisting of male population, undergraduate education level and postgraduate education level. They were all men belonging to Indian nationality. The hypothesis were as follows: H01: There is no significant relationship between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior among Indian Men, H02- There is no significant difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Perceived Stigma, H03- There is no significant difference between Indian Men with undergraduate level of education and Indian Men with postgraduate level of education on Help Seeking Behavior. The data was collected online and scored according to the manuals of both scales. Statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) software was then used for data analysis. After performing a normality test, it was identified that the present data was normal, leading to the use of parametric tests. The parametric tests were utilized for the study and Pearson correlation was used. Additionally, Independent sample t-test was also used.

A significant positive relationship was found between Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior. This would mean that an increase in one variable causes increase in the other variable as well. There were no much significant differences were found between undergraduate and postgraduate education levels on Perceived Stigma as well as Help Seeking Behavior. This gives an understanding that difference in educational levels does not have much impact on Perceived Stigma and Help Seeking Behavior.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, there are significant concerns regarding the association between Indian Men's Help Seeking Behavior and Perceived Stigma, which has a significant impact on mental health outcomes. Policymakers, mental health specialists, and community stakeholders can endeavor to create a supportive environment where men feel empowered to prioritize their mental well-being without fear of discrimination or judgment by understanding and addressing the root causes of stigma.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all those who helped me in completing my study. First and foremost, I would like to thank my esteemed research guide, Dr. Deepthi Vijayan, whose unwavering support, guidance, and profound expertise have been instrumental in shaping this dissertation. I appreciate your dedication, time, mentorship and I am profoundly grateful for your patience and encouragement.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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