Introduction

- The prevalence of mental health issues among college students has increased steadily in recent years, with one in three first-year college students reporting a mental health problem in the past year (Bruffaerts et al., 2018).
- Consequences to students can be devastating in terms of academic, interpersonal, and other aspects of functioning.
- Those who seek help for mental health on campus and continue to participate in on-campus counseling are more likely to have greater academic retention than their peers who cease attending after their first visit (Lee, Olson, Locke, Michelson, & Odes, 2009), or those who are referred off-campus for support (Schwitzer et al., 2018).
- One variable that could impact the likelihood of having a high help-seeking orientation (HSO) for counseling is whether students know the location of their campus counseling center. This variable has not previously been considered in studies focused on HSO of college students.

Methods

- Participants were 1,272 undergraduate, (mean age = 22.33, age range: 17-61 years) enrolled at nine public urban colleges all part of the same city university system.
- As part of a larger study to measure mental health literacy, we administered a questionnaire comprised of multiple-choice questions generated by experts in psychopathology and higher education. A demographics section gathered background information related to mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviors.
- Help-seeking orientation (HSO) was measured using a 6-item dichotomous sub-scale with a maximum score of 6 (0 = No ‘yes’ boxes checked; 6 = All ‘yes’ boxes checked); we adapted this scale from a previously validated measure.\(^5\)
- Help-seeking attitudes are defined as willingness to take advantage of resources such as personal counseling, time management, and stress management (Sheu and Sedlacek, 2004). We also coded for no knowledge, versus correct, and/or incorrect knowledge of counseling center location.

Help-Seeking Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help-Seeking Items</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would consider taking advantage of the following mental health services at my college:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Test Anxiety Resources</td>
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<td>- Stress Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Time Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would consider seeking help for the following mental health problems at my college:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Drug and Alcohol Counseling</td>
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<td>- Personal Counseling</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Mental Health Awareness Training</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Results

- Students who knew the correct location of their college counseling center scored highest on HSO (M=4.24, SD=1.71), students who incorrectly identified the location scored second highest (M=4.23, SD=1.85), and students without knowledge of counseling center location scored lowest (M=3.71, SD=1.98). These group differences were significant, even when controlling for age (F(2)=7.62, p<.001).
- Simple effects (Tukey) revealed significant differences between yes/correct vs. no and yes/incorrect vs. no (p<.01 and p<.05, respectively).
- Females made up the majority among groups who correctly or incorrectly identified counseling center location (75% and 73%), but made up about half of those who said they did not know its location (χ²(4)=22.4, p<.001).
- Psychology majors were overrepresented in the groups that identified (either correctly or not correctly) the counseling center location, relative to students who did not know (χ²(2)=63.2, p<.001).

Discussion

- Past research has indicated that factors such as low stigma and positive perceptions of access to care are associated with a propensity towards mental health help-seeking attitudes and behaviors. Unfortunately, college students often do not solicit low or no-cost professional support from campus-based professionals.
- Our results suggest that one variable, not previously examined, which could impact the likelihood of having a high HSO is whether students know the location of their campus counseling center.
- Thus, the study has further strengthened confidence that facilitators of a positive HSO include knowledge about the physical location of campus-provided mental health care. Students who know where their counseling center is located may be more open to actually availing themselves of such services.
- Future research may design and then examine the effectiveness of educational interventions that provide information not only about the location of the counseling center but about the nature and potential benefits of its many services.

References


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