An Investigation into the Psychological Model on Young People's Help-Seeking Behaviours

Louise O' Kane[1] and John Hyland[2]

[1] University of Ulster, Magee
[2] Dublin Business School

Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate a psychological model on young people's help-seeking behaviours. A quantitative cross sectional design was used with a sample of 185 adolescents (M=93, F=92) from one secondary school in Leinster (age range 13-17 years). Self-reported questionnaires were administered to measure gender differences and the effect of young people's knowledge and understanding of mental health, their resilience, self-esteem and general health on help-seeking behaviours.

Regression and partial correlation analyses revealed the model to be a significant predictor in help seeking. Self-esteem was identified as a significant moderator between knowledge and a) understanding of mental health and help-seeking behaviours, and b) resilience and help-seeking behaviours. No gender differences in help-seeking were found.

A subsequent concern from the data was a clear absence of awareness among young people regarding youth mental health support services available to them, which further suggests that these services are not being used. Potential reasons as to why young people are and would not seek help were identified which include pride, lower or lack of self-esteem, shame and self-helping.

Introduction

Adolescence is the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. It has been defined as 'the no-man's land' between being a child and entering adulthood (Kraus, 1980). However, adolescence has begun much earlier and is finishing much later than in previous generations (Arnett, 2004). It is a time where young people are experiencing a vast range of issues such as self-identity, self-worth, increased independence and further development of family and peer relationships (Dawes, Tarter & Kirisci, 1997).

Research has shown that mental distress is part of being a young person and it is not something that can be totally absent in young people (Michaud & Fombonne, 2005).
Despite the growing body of knowledge in youth mental health there are several gaps in the research. The general picture is that youth mental ill health is still on the increase (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012).

In this study the main aim was to extend current knowledge about mental health literacy among adolescents. It also investigated whether a protective factor such as self-esteem acts as a 'moderator' between knowledge of mental health, coping, and general health on help-seeking behaviours.

Such findings could provide valuable data to the ongoing development of youth mental health research and inform how mental health services provide and deliver information to young people. Such results may further assist in developing school based interventions that promote and support help-seeking among young people.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: Knowledge of mental health, self-esteem, resilience, gender and general health will predict help-seeking behaviour.

Hypothesis 2: Self-esteem will act as a 'moderator' between knowledge of mental health, resilience and help-seeking behaviour.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a significant difference between males and females in help-seeking behaviour.

Methods

A cross sectional, quantitative design was used. This current study was carried out with one secondary school in the Leinster Region. The sample consisted of 185 adolescents with an age range of 13-17 years of age (M=93, F=92). Convenience sampling was adopted for the study.

Questionnaires used to test the hypotheses included:
- **Knowledge and Understanding towards Mental Disorders** (Siu, Chow, Lam, Chan, Tang & Chui., 2012) to assess the basic knowledge of the participants on mental disorders and evaluate their attitudes, potential stigmas and myths about mental disorders.
- **Resilience Appraisal Scale** (Johnson, Gooding, Wood, Taylor, Pratt & Tarrier., 2010) was selected to measure psychological resilience. The three subscales were social support, emotion coping and situational coping.
- **Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Inventory** (1965) was used to assess global feelings of self-worth and self-acceptance through positive and negative feelings about the self.
- **The General Health Questionnaire** (Goldberg, D & Williams (1988) was selected to measure general mental health. It was used to measure two areas- the inability to carry out normal functions and the appearance of new and distressing experiences.
- **Willingness to Seek Help Questionnaire** (Mackenzie, Knox, Gekoski & MaCauley, 2004) was chosen to investigate participants' attitudes to seeking help for a mental illness. It measured 3 concepts- psychological openness, help-seeking prosperity and indifference to stigma.

A letter of invitation to participate and an assent form was given to participants prior to taking the questionnaire and a debrief sheet was provided following participation.

Results

Descriptive Statistics
The age range of participants was 13-17 years old. Descriptive Statistics were used to explore the distribution of the sample on associated variables of knowledge and understanding of mental health (KUMH), self-esteem, resilience, general health (GHQ) and attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help.

Table 1 outlines the descriptive statistics of the variables in the current study.

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
KUMH	44.54	6.67	31	61
Self-esteem	16.49	5.05	4	30
Resilience	17.36	3.27	8	28
GHQ	44.81	6.99	24	61
Attitudes	50.50	9.65	21	78

Inferential Statistics:

Multiple regression was conducted to test the first hypothesis, that the model of knowledge and understanding of mental health, resilience, self-esteem, general health and gender will predict help-seeking behaviours.
Results suggested that the model significantly predicted help-seeking behaviour, explaining 30% of the variance (R^2 = .30, $F_{(5, 178)}$ = 16.19, $p < .001$).
Specifically, three variables significantly predicted help-seeking, knowledge and understanding of mental health (β=.31, p<.001, 95% CI = .269-.634), Self-esteem (β=.31, p<.001, 95% CI= .301-.902) and General health (β=-.178, p=.007, 95% CI= -.908- -.145). Therefore hypothesis 1 was partially accepted.

Results

Sobels test was conducted to determine whether Self-esteem acted as a mediator between both knowledge and understanding of mental health and psychological help-seeking behaviour, and resilience and help-seeking behaviour. Self-esteem was found to mediate the relation between KUMH and help seeking (3.47, p < .001), but not the relationship between resilience and help seeking (-1.24, p > .05).

It was hypothesised that there would be a statistical difference between males and females on help-seeking behaviours. The results of the t-test analyses found that males (M= 49.98, SD=9.08) and females (M=51.04, SD=10.22) were not observed to significantly differ with respect to help-seeking behaviours (t (183) = .75, p>.05).

Table 2: Knowledge of mental health support services
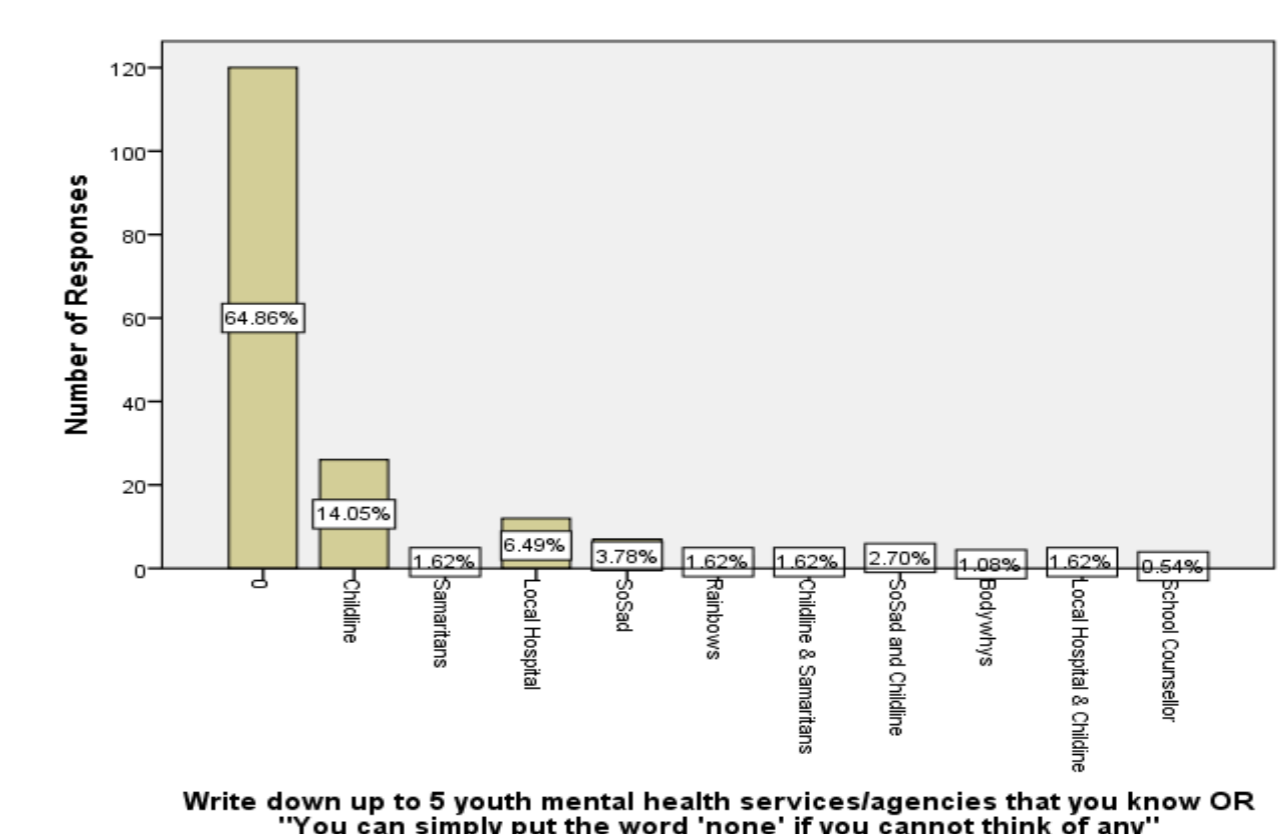
29.7% of students identified 'shame', 'embarrassment' and 'pride' as reasons for not seeking help. Other barriers to help seeking included 'Being judged/Stigma' (28.1%), Feeling stupid/Scared of being laughed at (17.3%), choosing self-help (13%), Money/Time (4.3%) and not knowing who to tell (4.3%)

Conclusions

The findings suggest that adolescents' attitudes towards seeking help are significantly predicted by their knowledge and understanding of mental health, their self-esteem levels and general health. Self-esteem was also found to mediate the relationship between knowledge and understanding of mental health and help-seeking.

In addition, there was an absence or very low awareness among this sample of young people on the vast number of available services in Ireland relating to youth mental health. Qualitative questions revealed barriers such as stigma, embarrassment, pride, and fear of being judged remain a concern for young people.

Results partially supported previous research but there needs to be a further exploration into issues of mental health knowledge and the role of self-esteem regarding help-seeking behaviours.

One practical implication of this study relates to the subject of self-esteem as a 'protective' factor related to attitudes towards seeking help. It provides insight into the predictors of help-seeking and informs psychological research into what young people's attitudes towards help-seeking are.

A study such as the current one suggests that these drives for positive youth mental health and changing views and perceptions about mental health could perhaps become more focused on factors such as 'self-esteem' coupled with reassessing the language and main focus in mental health literacy being expressed to young people.

References

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