Mental Health Services and its Usage on Campus Across Class Ranking and Gender

Savannah R. Floyd

College of Charleston

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess whether freshmen were less likely than upperclassman to utilize mental health services. It also assessed whether women were more likely than men to utilize mental health services. The data was collected via survey in which participants self-reported on the questions. The participants were from a college campus and randomly approached on the street. We found that freshmen were less likely than upperclassman to seek out these services, but men did not differ from women.

Keywords: mental health, class level, sex differences

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Stigmas surrounding mental health have always been a societal issue and seeking help for these illnesses has been an even greater one. These stigmas have made finding help seem weak and therefore makes an important issue like mental health seem trivial. Mental health is not taken as seriously as other illness one could physically see. Furthermore, there are complexities within these stigmas. There is a gender issue, as male attitudes are far less in favor of seeking these kinds of services than women due to the separate gender expectations that are put on by society (Fischer & Turner 1970). There is also a common issue of whether or not young adults attending college are aware of the services regarding mental health that are provided to them, as these young adults, specifically freshmen, are facing some of the toughest years of their academic success (Ryan, Marley, Still, Lyons, & Hood, 2017; Zhou et al., 2015). This academic success relies heavily on the involvement of the freshmen on campus, and this pressure could cause plenty of stress in the students' life (Arboleda, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen 2003).

Mental health has become a serious issue across undergraduate and graduate campuses. This may stem from the fact that "…half of adult mental disorders begin during adolescence" (Prochaska, Le, Baillargeon, & Temple, 2016, p. 692). This is an important fact, as freshmen in college are predominantly eighteen year olds who have just entered adulthood. Combine this with the fact that college brings on a new form of stress to students that many of them have not experienced before, and serious mental health concerns can arise (Zhou et al. 2015). Institutions have begun to realize the amount of pressure being brought upon these students is causing immense stress and sometimes other forms of mental illness (Ryan et al. 2017). There is a constant pressure to do well in school while maintaining a social life that must always appear as though it is perfect. Combine this with a stigma of not being able to talk about some possible

deeper feelings, and it can be the cause for a lot of mental health issues going unnoticed. A main cause for this is the availability of services for these issues. Most colleges across the country offer some form of mental health services for free on their campuses, but the stigmas combined with the awareness of these services may be hindering its usage. Zhou et al. (2015) found that these services not being utilized could hurt the academic success of the student as they continue their time in college after freshman year. Freshman year is a critical time for students, as they are beginning adulthood and taking on new responsibilities they did not before have, and this could be affecting their mental health.

There is, then, the added stigma of sex differences. According to Fischer and Turner (1970), women seek out mental health services far more often than men. This could be due to the fact that in our present society, it is more acceptable for women to admit to having mental and emotional issues as these are viewed as "feminine" according to stereotypes (Fisher & Turner, 1970). Therefore, men showing signs of mental illness or admitting to needing the help of mental health services may be thought of as weak making men less likely to get the help they need.

We wanted to understand the likelihood students at colleges know about, and possibly use, the mental health services they are provided. Specifically, we wanted to assess whether there is a difference between the awareness of freshmen compared to the awareness of the other grade levels. Are freshmen less likely to seek out mental health services than all the other class levels? This was interesting to us as the first year of college is a big adjustment for many, so being made aware of the services on campus for them may be crucial. We wanted to further our question to that of sex differences as well. We were curious to see if women were more likely than men to use these services, as the sex difference stigma is also a common issue amongst people seeking out help for mental health. Do women utilize the help provided to them more often than men?

Overview and Hypothesis

The present experiment was designed to address the following questions: Are freshmen more or less likely than upperclassmen to seek out help for mental health services? Are men more or less likely than women to seek out help for mental health services? We hypothesized that freshmen would be less likely than upperclassmen to seek out this help, and men were less likely than women. A survey was formed to collect the data, and the results of the survey were what was measured as the dependent variable.

Methods

Participants

A college in the southeast was chosen as the site for data collection. 55 participants (30 women and 25 men, 18 freshmen and 37 in all other class levels) were students recruited randomly across campus at locations previously decided on by researchers where foot traffic was estimated to be best. Participants were age 20.04 on average (SD = 3.12); 10.9% were African American, 1.8% Asian or Asian American, 1.8% Latino, and 85.5% Caucasian. 32.7% of participants reported being freshmen while 67.3% reported as being a part of all other class levels. All participants were interviewed in a natural setting, with ten participants being randomly selected from each location. Participants were compensated with candy.

Design

Two independent variables were studied in this research: sex and class level. No manipulation occurred as this was a self-report survey study, so data was defined based on what was reported by the participants. Since this study aimed to assess the likelihood of uses of mental health services provided on campus, the dependent variable was the self-reporting of awareness.

Measures

The Fisher and Turner (1970) study was referenced to create a scale in the survey. The participants would answer 10 questions that had a scale of 0-3 to answer with, with 0 being "Disagree", 1 being "Partly Disagree", 2 being "Partly Agree", and 3 being "Agree." The participants would self-report this scale on the survey. There were 10 deceptive questions utilized and 10 questions used to collect the data totaling twenty questions on the whole survey as well as questions asking demographic information, including how long they have been a student. They were then asked three questions where they were to respond "yes" or "no" to awareness of academic advising, counseling services, and tutoring services.

Procedure

This study was quantitative as it collected data, but was a self-report survey style assessment. No manipulation occurred, and participants were randomly selected off the street from various locations. These locations were decided upon by the researchers beforehand.

The questions in the survey were thought out and formed by the researchers before data collection. The filler questions were questions asking to rate other services at the school. Participants were therefore made to believe they were filling out a survey about the satisfaction of the services provided by the school. The scale of 0-3 (Fisher & Turner, 1970) was utilized and decided upon as researchers believed it would warrant the most truthful answers from participants, yet create an easy way for them to fill out the survey quickly. Interviews were conducted with pen and paper.

The researchers approached the students on the street each time asking if they had a moment to fill out a survey about services provided at the college. If they consented, they were handed a consent form to read over, then given the survey and a pen and clipboard. If they did

not, they were not further pressured to take the survey. Once done, the researchers handed them the debriefing form to read over which contained the contact information of the head of the research as well as information about the mental health services provided at the college. Surveys were immediately put into an envelope and the data was later organized onto a spreadsheet. Participants were offered candy as compensation.

Results

A 2 (Sex) X 2 (Class Level) between-subject's analysis of variance was conducted to analyze whether gender and class level had an effect on the likelihood of seeking out help for mental illnesses. There was no significant effect between sex and the likelihood of seeking help, $F = 1.21$, $p = .28$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. This indicates that men ($M = 1.70$, $SD = .55$) and women ($M = 1.89$, $SD = .48$) were just as likely to seek out mental health services. There was, however, a significant effect between class level and likelihood of seeking help, $F = 9.97$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 = .16$, indicating that there was a difference in likelihood to seek out mental health services between freshmen and all other class levels. Specifically, freshmen ($M = 1.5$, $SD = .34$) were less likely than all other class levels ($M = 1.95$. $SD = .52$) to seek out help. There was no significant interaction between sex and class level, $F = .09$, $p = .77$, $\eta^2 = .01$. It's important to note that 100% of participants reported being aware of the services provided on campus.

Discussion

Our goal in this study was to find whether or not freshmen were more or less likely to use mental health services on their campus, and whether or not men or women differed in this usage. Based on our data, we can infer from our statistics that freshmen were less likely than all other class levels to use the mental health services, but there was no difference between men and women. Our findings somewhat support our hypothesis, as we did hypothesize that freshmen

were less likely to use mental health services than all other class levels. It did not, however, support our hypothesis that men would be less likely than women to utilize mental health services.

The data of the class levels suggests there could be a stigma surrounding freshmen as they come into college. As these young adults are entering college, it is critical they accept any help given to them during this new stressful time. There could possibly be a pride issue occurring, as freshmen have gained a new found independence where seeking out mental health services is an admittance to help. This is possible, as all participants did note they were aware of services provided on campus. All other class levels could possibly accept that they do need some help, as their classes are getting harder and their schedules more intense. Admitting to needing mental health services may come easier to all other class levels. They have had some time at the college now and are more comfortable with their surroundings, so exploring the mental health services provided may not be as stigmatized to them. They have possibly met people that have utilized these services and they therefore realize it may be acceptable to seek out help.

There was no difference in men and women seeking out help, which did not support our hypothesis. While this data is accepted, there are a few things that may have brought about these results that could be adjusted in future studies. More women than men were surveyed which may have affected the results we obtained. Not having an equal number could affect the data. This happened due to the random way in which we collected our data. We picked people off the street, and although we did attempt to ask a variety of gender and race, it was not exact. There were also an exceptional number more of all the other classes than the freshmen. This may have affected our data of accepting our hypothesis. This could have been due to the time of day or locations we chose. If collection were done again where more time was warranted, a more formal

way of giving out the survey could have been created, with people coming to us rather than us seeking them out on the street. This would make people more likely to answer the questions honestly, than they would on the street when they may feel rushed as they are on the way to class.

We did design our study somewhat similarly to Fischer and Turner (1970) as they explored a related question on sex differences in seeking out mental health services. They used a 0-3 scaling system in their survey, as we did, but they were successful in finding a difference between sexes in likelihood of seeking out mental health services. Their method of collecting data was more concrete than ours, so an approach similar to theirs in which the surveys were administered in a formal setting could affect the amount of questions we ask and the likelihood of more truthful answers.

Our results should still be taken positively even though we did not find an effect of sex on likelihood of seeking help. These results are important as we did find an effect of class level on the likelihood of seeking out mental health services. Based on the past research mentioned, this is a crucial time for young adults as they enter the world, so making sure their mental health is at its best is what is most important (Ryan et al., 2017). If they are struggling and not utilizing these services, colleges need to be made aware so they can better equip themselves with the task of communicating this information.

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