



Mental Health Help-Seeking Intention Among U.S. College Students

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INTRODUCTION

- Over 50% college students meet diagnostic criteria for mental health disorder and 25% screen positive for suicidality.¹⁻²
- Previous studies largely focus on previous mental health behaviors and utilization history. This fails to explain how most students will fare as most students have no previous experience in professional mental health care when they enter college.³⁻⁴
- Help-seeking intention asks an individual whether they would seek professional mental health help in a future scenario when they are in distress. This detects a distressed student's likelihood to pursue *future* help.⁵

What sociodemographic, mental health, and campus characteristics predict help-seeking intention?

METHODS

- **Participants:** 64,079 undergraduate students from the National College Health Assessment, a cross-sectional survey
- **Measures:**
 - **Sociodemographic:** age, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, insurance status
 - **Campus:** region, type, and campus culture
 - **Mental health:** distress level (KESSLER-6), suicide risk (SBQR), and past help-seeking history
- **Outcome:** "if in the future you were having a personal problem that was really bothering you, would you consider seeking help from a mental health professional?" (yes/no)
- **Analytical Strategy:** multilevel logistic regression

RESULTS

Mental Health Help-Seeking Intention				
Characteristic	Model 1 (excluding help-seeking history)		Model 2 (including help-seeking history)	
	AOR	99% CI	AOR	99% CI
Sexual Orientation				
Heterosexual	1	1.00 - 1.00	1	1.00 - 1.00
Gay	2.49	2.04 – 3.07	2.01	1.63 – 2.49
Lesbian	1.31	1.07 – 1.62	1.01	0.82 – 1.26
Bisexual	1.67	1.52 – 1.84	1.35	1.23 – 1.49
Questioning	1.4	1.19 – 1.64	1.22	1.04 – 1.45
Pansexual	1.71	1.39 – 2.12	1.31	1.06 – 1.63
Queer	2.49	1.91 – 3.29	1.78	1.35 – 2.38
Asexual	1.14	0.88 – 1.49	1.02	0.78 – 1.35
Other	1.4	0.96 – 2.09	1.16	0.79 – 1.77
Race and Ethnicity				
White	1	1.00 - 1.00	1	1.00 - 1.00
Asian	0.73	0.68 – 0.78	0.93	0.86 – 1.00
Black	0.76	0.66 – 0.88	0.87	0.75 – 1.01
Hispanic	0.81	0.74 – 0.87	0.96	0.89 – 1.04
Multiracial	0.87	0.78 – 0.98	0.92	0.82 – 1.04
Native American or Pacific Islander	0.75	0.64 – 0.89	0.82	0.69 – 0.97
Campus Culture				
Negative	1	1.00 - 1.00	1	1.00 - 1.00
Positive	1.55	1.42 – 1.70	1.71	1.55 – 1.88
Suicide Risk				
Negative	1	1.00 - 1.00	1	1.00 - 1.00
Positive	1.07	1.00 – 1.14	0.79	0.73 – 0.85
Help-Seeking History				
Never			1	1.00 - 1.00
Within 12 months			7.43	6.77 – 8.17
Beyond 12 months			2.22	2.06 – 2.39

** Both models also control for age, gender identity, college region, college type, and mental health distress level.

DISCUSSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- The strongest predictor of help-seeking intention was help-seeking history. Getting people connected with preventative mental health care is critical.
- Help-seeking intention was persistently elevated for many sexual minority groups, even after controlling for help-seeking history.
- Poor help-seeking intention among many racial and ethnic minority college students was driven by the lack of help-seeking history. Campus must continue to expand their contact with mental health care.
- Suicide risk was positively associated with help-seeking intention but this association reversed after controlling for help-seeking history. Help-seeking history influenced the help-seeking intention of persons with high suicide risk in important ways.

A CALL TO ACTION

Nunchi Health is a global nonprofit that provides free mental health programs for college students inclusive of all identities. We get people connected to the basics of mental health education and peer support.



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