



A Study on Emotion and Mental Health Help Seeking Behavior among Adolescents

*Shagun Talwar, Master's in psychology, Psychological Counsellor, Amity International School,
Mohali, India.*

Email ID- shaguntalwar97@gmail.com

Abstract

Adolescence is a period of immense growth and changes in everyone. Every adolescent develops in various domains including emotions. During this time the teenagers go through a lot of emotions and increasingly become aware of them. Family, siblings, and friends affect the maturity of positive as well as negative emotions which are developed during this period. The purpose was to study emotion and mental health help seeking behavior among adolescents. The study was conducted on 60 adolescents between the age of 13- 17 years. The study revealed positive and negative emotions of adolescents are negatively correlated but they do not impact their mental health help seeking behaviors. Studies reveal that most of them are hesitant to go beyond their close-knit groups to ask for help.

Keywords: Adolescents, Emotions, Mental Health Help Seeking

INTRODUCTION

During puberty children go through a spurt of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes. It is a period of transition from childhood into adulthood. Apart from all these changes, adolescents are vulnerable to different kinds of negative life events (Ge et al., 1994), and experienced an intense number of emotions (Saikia, 2019). Adolescents find it difficult to manage their emotions. They also end up being in conflicts with their elders, peers etc. and heightened stress (Saikia, 2019).

After years of being stable statistics show that since 2012 anxiety and depression in high school teens have been increasing. Stress related to economic stability in families can aggravate these concerns. Females have been proven to be at more risk as compared to the males (Schrobsdorff, 2016).

Adolescents have various kinds of burden during the years of puberty related to their studies, communication, attachment, and self- recognition. The changes in the environment make them more bewildered and tense due to the lack of maturity in their cognitive skills. Excess of such stressful stimuli leads to poor mental health among the teenagers (Li et al., 2014).

Despite a lot of efforts from various organizations working towards the mental health of humans, the mental health stigma acts as a barrier to seeking mental health help. People still believe that people with mental health problems face a lot of discrimination and judgments from society. Teens with mental health concerns particularly become a victim of bullying, experience discrimination among peers, have a fear of being judged by teachers, anticipate the negative responses of the parents and relatives and experience a low self-esteem.

Emotions

Webster (2023) defines emotions as “a conscious mental reaction (such as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as strong feeling usually directed toward a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes in the body.”

Gerrig and Zimbardo (2006) defined emotions as “a complex pattern of bodily and mental changes that includes physiological arousal, feelings, cognitive processes, visible expressions (including face and posture) and specific behavioral reactions made in response to a situation perceived as personally significant.”

Self-report measures reveal that in teenagers’ difficulty in managing emotions and feelings, is associated with adolescent anxiety and depression (Young et al., 2019). Research conducted on adolescents with an experience of rejection previously and mild or high emotional affective states, discovered that emotional awareness does not lead to emotional attachment with parents rather it facilitates emotional attachment and regulation with peers (Said et al., 2020).

Mental Health

“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community” as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022).

Keeping in mind the prevalent internet culture among teens, a study was conducted on 74,980 Korean adolescents who took part in the ‘Korea Youth Risk Behavior’ web-based survey. It revealed that there was prevalence of potential internet addiction and internet addiction among them, at 14.8% and 3% respectively. In addition to this, both the genders who had a potential for

internet addiction disclosed suicidal tendencies, depressive mood states, medium to high stress, medium or more happiness or being involved in substance use. This all affected their mental health (Yoo et al., 2014). Bullying in person doubles the chances of suicide in adolescents but cyberbullying increases the chances by threefold (Boschert, 2013).

Mental Health Help Seeking Behavior

As defined by New Freedom Commission on Mental Health in 2003, Mental Health Stigma is “a cluster of negative attitudes and beliefs that motivate the general public to fear, avoid, and discriminate against people with mental illnesses.”

Detailed interviews among 57, 8th grade students discovered that the apprehension of unfavorable responses from parents, friends and school administration regarding mental health help seeking, play an important role in the comfort and readiness of teenagers to communicate their mental health problems (Chandra & Minkovitz, 2007).

A study conducted on 666 secondary school students aged between 13 to 19 years collected data for anxiety and depression. The results revealed that as compared to boys, girls were more anxious whereas boys were more likely to report depressive mood states. In addition to this anxiety and depression led to lower academic achievement (Khesht-Masjedi et al., 2019).

A focus group research based on refugee adolescents between the age of 13-17 years from Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iran, Iraq, Liberia, Serbia, and Sudan revealed that the teens were hesitant to ask for help for their psychosocial concerns beyond their close peers, probably because of the range of individual, cultural and service-related hurdles (De Anstiss & Ziaian, 2009).

Mental Health Help Seeking Intention

Professional help-seeking intention (PHSI) is defined as the subjective possibility of an individual to seek help from mental health professionals (MHPs) (Wei, 2017).

Factors that contribute to mental health help seeking attention are being a woman, a high quality perceived social health, more mental health awareness and a person with good high-level education (Yu, 2015).

A study was conducted on Chinese community to check the professional help seeking intention towards depression which came out to be low. Various factors such as professional help seeking attitude, awareness about depression, and family dynamics contributed to the results. Whereas the mental health stigma and the intensity of depressive symptoms acted as obstacles for professional help seeking intention (Li et al., 2022).

PURPOSE

The purpose is to study emotion and mental health help seeking behavior among adolescents.

HYPOTHESIS

There will be a relationship among emotions experienced by adolescents on their behavior of seeking mental health help.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 60 adolescents from India between the ages of 13-17 years.

Measures- The following measures were used-

1. Positive affect and negative affect schedule for children- PANAS-C is a 27 item self-report questionnaire for children that assesses the various emotions experienced by them over past few weeks. The scale was developed by Dr. David Watson and Dr. Lee Anna Clark of the University of Notre Dame. The adolescents were asked to rate each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Not much or not at all) to 5 (A lot). Items were summed to obtain total score.

2. Mental Help Seeking Attitudes Scale- MHSAS is a 9 item self-report instrument which evaluates the overall stance of seeking assistance from mental health professionals if they are having a psychological concern. The respondents had to respond on a Likert scale of 3, 2, 1, 0, 1, 2, 3. Where 3 was the extreme opinion e.g. useless or useful. The scale was developed by was developed by Dr. Joseph H. Hammer, Dr. Michael C. Parent, and Douglas A. Spiker. Items were summed to obtain total scores.

3. Mental Help Seeking Intention Scale- MHSIS is a 3 item self-report instrument which is designed to measure the intent of seeking support from a mental health professional when faced by a mental health concern. The scale was examined by Dr. Joseph H. Hammer and Douglas Spiker. The respondents were asked to rate each item on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (Extremely unlikely) to 7 (Extremely likely). Items were summed to obtain total scores.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through google forms. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information to elicit their honest responses without any fear or inhibitions. Standardized psychological tests were administered to participants.

RESULTS

Table 1

Showing Mean & Standard Deviation of all variables (N= 60)

	Positive affect C	Negative affect C	Mental Seeking Scale	Help Attitudes	Mental Seeking Scale	Help Intention
N	60	60	60		60	
Mean	33.2	40.1	51.5		14.6	
Standard deviation	10.5	12.6	12.8		5.65	

Table 2*Correlation Matrix*

	Positive affect C	Negative affect C	Mental Seeking Attitudes Scale	Help Seeking Intention Scale	Mental Seeking Attitudes Scale	Help Seeking Intention Scale
Positive affect C	—					
Negative affect C	-0.289	*	—			
Mental Seeking Attitudes Scale	0.137	0.141	—			
Mental Seeking Intention Scale	0.170	0.031	0.619	***	—	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

There is a significant negative correlation between positive affect and negative affect ($r = -0.289$, $p < .05$). There is a significant positive correlation between Mental Help Seeking Attitudes Scale and Mental Help Seeking Intention Scale ($r = 0.619$, $p < .001$). However, there was no correlation between Positive and Negative emotions, and Mental Help seeking attitude and mental help seeking intention scale.

A systematic review about various studies conducted on children and adolescents with mental health difficulties. The study revealed that when teens self-stigmatize themselves it leads to more confidentiality and escaping from help (Kaushik et al., 2016).

A qualitative study revealed that various obstacles that intervene with the utilization of available mental health help which are, stigma among the parents, existing beliefs in society, lack of awareness, using mental health as the last option and convenience of availing services (Randol, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Adolescents go through a wide range of developmental changes during puberty which affects various aspects of their lives such as social, physiological, psychological etc. Keeping in mind today's generation of teens, they have become even more sensitive and fragile to their environment, social media access adds up to the stimuli available to them that may affect their mental health. The purpose of the study was to study emotion and mental health help seeking behavior among adolescents. It was hypothesized that there will be an effect of the various emotions experienced by adolescents on their behavior of seeking mental health help.

Standardized measures were used to assess emotions, mental health help seeking attitude scale and mental health help seeking intention scale. The data was collected from 60 adolescents from India between the ages of 13-19 years through google forms. The study revealed a negative correlation between the positive and negative affect, which was obvious as when our positive emotions increase the negative ones will decrease and vice versa. The scales of emotions had no correlation with the mental health help seeking attitude scale or the mental health help seeking scale which could mean that still a lot of work needs to be done to spread awareness about seeking help for their mental health. Various factors such as support from family members, fear of judgment by peers and other people, and the stigma of mental health contribute to the attitude and intention to seek help among adolescents.

It is the need of the hour to sensitize teens about mental health problems, making them realize that it is important to talk about their feelings, and also to make them realize the actual essence of using vocabulary such as depression, bipolar disorder, OCD, etc. Schools should conduct regular sessions with teens in small groups where they can express their opinions freely without any judgements from peers. The educators, counselors and parents must work in collaboration to create a safe space for adolescents to ask for help when required and build resilience among them.

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