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A Study on Self-Concealment, Perceived Social Support and Mental Health Help Seeking Behaviour among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Self-concealment is a psychological term that describes people's propensity to keep their emotions, thoughts, and sentiments hidden from others, even while they are dealing with serious difficulties. Another crucial element of young adults' experiences with mental health is perceived social support. Young individuals' self-concealment, perceptions of social support, and activity in search of mental health assistance all interact in complicated and nuanced ways. On one hand, self-concealment encourages an environment of emotional isolation and self-reliance, which may discourage people from seeking out professional assistance. On the other hand, a sense of social support can be a strong motivator for getting assistance by offering a safety net of comprehension and compassion. The present study aimed to investigate the correlations and gender differences in self-concealment, perceived social support and mental health help seeking behaviour among young adults (30 males and 30 females). Standardised tools were used such as Self-Concealment Scale (Larson & Chastain, 1990), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988) and Mental Help Seeking Attitude Scale (MHSAS) (Hammer et al., 2018). No

significant correlations were found among self-concealment, perceived social support and mental health help seeking behaviour. However, significant gender differences were found in mental health help seeking behaviour among males and females. The study recommends that by creating supporting and open environments helps in building strong relationships which are helpful in reducing self-concealment tendencies and by promoting mental health education and awareness among young adults helps in declining stigma related mental health and normalising seeking mental help.

Keywords : *Self Concealment, Perceived Social Support, Mental Health Help Seeking, Young Adults*

INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood is a significant time of a life that is mainly characterized by multiple transitions and developments, typically adulthood spans from the late teens and to the late twenties. This particular time period is of exploration, self-discovery and establishing one's own identity. They experience profound changes in various aspects of their lives including education, career, relationships, and personal growth. These individuals go through complex emotions and sometimes young adults indulge in self-concealment that simply refers to the act of intentionally hiding or withholding personal information, feelings, or thoughts from others. There are many factors due to which young adults indulge in self-concealment such as fear of judgment, negative evaluation, criticism or rejection from others. Young adults mostly strive to fit in and to be accepted by their peers or social groups. To gain acceptance, they choose to hide, and try to conform to what they perceive as acceptable. Moreover, past betrayals, judgments and breaches of trust lead to enhanced acts of self-concealment.

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Perceived social support refers to an individual's subjective perception of the availability and adequacy of support from their social network, including family, friends, and other significant relationships. It is the extent to which individuals believe that they have access to social resources that can help individuals to cope with stress, solve problems and meet their emotional and practical needs. It plays a vital role in an individual's well-being, resilience, and overall mental health. The perception of social support is subjective and it may vary from person to person.

Mental health help-seeking behaviour refers to the actions and attitudes individuals adopt when they seek support, treatment, or professional assistance for mental health concerns. It encompasses the various steps individuals take to address their mental health needs and the factors that influence their decision to seek help. Though there are many factors that can affect mental health help seeking behaviour such as stigma, negative attitude towards mental illness and stereotypes; as many individuals hesitate to seek help due to fear of judgment, social excursion or negative stereotypes that are related to mental health illness.

Self-Concealment

According to Larson and Chastain (1990), self-concealment is defined as "predisposition to actively conceal from others personal information that one perceives as distressing or negative. Self-concealment comprises three aspects: tendency to keep secrets to oneself, not sharing personal, painful secrets or negative thoughts about oneself and worrying about the leakage of concealed personal information." Moreover, Derlega and Chaikin (1977) advocated "the process of self-concealment as special instance of boundary regulation in the maintenance of privacy." Further, "self-concealment can also be viewed within a model of self-presentation or image

management in which social interactions present opportunities to disclose distressing or negative personal information" (Schlenkar, 1980).

A study was conducted by Masuda et al. (2012) to investigate the relationship of mental health stigma and self-concealment with professional psychological services among African American college students. A total sample of 163 African Americans was used. The results demonstrated that both mental health stigma and self-concealment are related to professional psychological assistance. In another research, 245 young adults whose age range lies between 18-25 years were studied to examine the relationship between self-concealment and suicidality via two mediators that are unmet interpersonal needs and help-seeking attitudes. The outcomes of investigation concluded that there was a significant positive relationship between self-concealment and suicidality. Though it was also found that self-concealment is related to more negative attitude towards professional psychological help seeking however, these attitudes were not significantly associated to suicidality (Hogge & Blankenship, 2020).

Perceived Social Support

Perceived social support refers to the "subjective judgment that an individual believes they can obtain respect, support, and understanding when they need help" (Lakey & Cassady, 1990 ; Prescher et al., 2022). According to Gurung (2006), perceived support refers to "a recipient's subjective judgment that providers will offer (or have offered) effective help during times of need". Perceived social support is also defined as the availability of people who makes one feel cared about, valued and loved (Sarson et al., 1983).

A study was conducted by Loannou et al. (2019) on interrelationship between perceived social support, depressive symptom, stress and self-esteem among 344 young adults in Cyprus,

aged 17-26 years. The consequences of research were that perceived social support from family and friends was significantly related to reducing depressive symptoms. Moreover, self-esteem fully mediated the relationship between social support and depressive symptoms. In addition to this, Gayman et al. (2011) did a longitudinal study for 8 years on 1,267 young adults in Miami-Dade County, Florida; to examine the significance of early adolescent family experiences on perceived family social support. The outcomes of the study stated that early negative family experiences were related with lower perceived social support from friends and family.

Mental Health Help Seeking

According to Rickwood and Thomas (2012) help seeking behaviour is defined as "any action of energetically seeking help from the health care services or from trusted people in the community and includes understanding, guidance, treatment and general support when feeling in trouble or encountering stressful circumstances." Further, Cornally and McCarthy (2011) advocated that "help seeking refers to the factor that leads to a person seeking assistance for a potential or actual problem. They also asserted that help seeking comprises four components, namely; antecedents of seeking help, defining the attributes of seeking help, consequences of seeking help and finally, empirical referents of seeking help."

Vanheusden et al. (2009) conducted a study on 2,258 young adults in south-west Netherlands among which 830 adults confirmed having mental health problems during the past year. The result confirmed that higher levels on the intra psychic scale and treatment control scale were related with higher likelihood of mental health service use. However, higher levels of personal control indicated lower likelihood of mental health service use. In another study by Saunders et al. (1994), a sample of 17,193 students was collected, among which 24.9% students

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identified themselves as having serious mental problems. Students who decided to seek professional mental help were associated with a history of abuse, physical health, suicidal ideation, and gender. And students who obtained mental health aid were related to suicidal ideation, informal help-seeking behaviour, interaction between race and socioeconomic status and parental marital status.

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to investigate the correlations and gender differences in self-concealment, perceived social support and mental health help seeking behaviour among young adults.

Hypothesis

- There will be a significant negative correlation between self-concealment and perceived social support.
- There will be a significant positive correlation between self-concealment and mental health help seeking behaviour.
- There will be a significant positive correlation between perceived social support and mental health help seeking behaviour.
- There will be significant gender differences in self-concealment, perceived social support and mental health help seeking behaviour.

Sample

The sample consisted of 60 young adults (30 males and 30 females) between the ages of 18 -25 years. The sample was collected from Punjab.

Measures

Self-Concealment Scale (Larson & Chastain, 1990)

The 10 items making up the Self-Concealment Scale used in the data analyses. Scale items refer to a) a self-reported tendency to keep things to oneself, b) possession of personally distressing secret or negative thoughts about oneself that have been shared with few or no other person, c) apprehension about the disclosure of concealed personal information. The test is based on a 5 point Likert scale, with options ranging from "strongly disagree (1)" to "strongly agree (5)." The internal consistency of Cronbach alpha is 0.83 and test-retest reliability revealed a strong correlation (r = 0.81).

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988)

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) is a short instrument designed to measure an individual's perception of support from 3 sources: family, friends and a significant other. It contains 12 items rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale with scores ranging from "very strongly disagree" (1) to "very strongly agree" (7). The MSPSS has proven to be psychometrically sound in diverse samples and to have good internal reliability and test-retest reliability, and robust factorial validity.

Mental Help Seeking Attitude Scale (MHSAS) (Hammer et al., 2018)

The Mental Help Seeking Attitude Scale (MHSAS) is a psychological assessment tool designed to measure an individual's attitudes toward seeking professional help for mental health

issues. This scale aims to understand the various factors influencing people's willingness to seek therapy or counselling when faced with mental health challenges. The scale typically consists of a series of statements or questions related to beliefs, feelings, and perceptions about mental health professionals and services. Higher scores on the MHSAS indicate more positive attitudes toward seeking mental health help, whereas lower scores suggest more negative or ambivalent attitudes. The MHSAS has been validated through empirical research, showing good reliability and validity.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Google forms. Each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants.

Analysis of Data

Scoring for all the given tests was done as per the scoring instructions given in the manuals. The raw scores were tabulated and subjected to various statistical analyses. Keeping in view the objectives of the study, statistical analysis such as Mean, Standard Deviation, Correlation Analysis and T test were conducted. Correlation analysis was carried out to test the relationship between the variables. Moreover, t-test was used to reveal gender differences in variables. Before carrying out statistical tests, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were checked. Moreover, the responses that emerged through the semi-structured interview schedule were analysed qualitatively.

RESULTS

Table 1

N, Mean and Standard Deviation

	Gender	Self-Concealment	Perceived Social Support	Mental Health Help Seeking Behaviour
N	Male	30	30	30
	Female	30	30	30
Mean	Male	29.3	60.5	45.3
	Female	31.2	66.5	54.5
Standard Deviation	Male	7.97	19.3	10.5
	Female	8.59	11.2	11.0

Table 2

Correlation Matrix

	Self-Concealment	Perceived Social Support	Mental Health Help Seeking Behaviour
Self-Concealment	—		
Perceived Social Support	-0.172	—	
Mental Health Help Seeking Behaviour	0.117	0.190	—

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

Table 3

Independent Samples T-Test

		Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference
Self-Concealment	Student's t	-0.903	58.0	0.370	-1.93	2.14
Perceived Social Support	Student's t	-1.474 [a]	58.0	0.146	-6.00	4.07
Mental Health Help Seeking Behaviour	Student's t	-3.289	58.0	0.002	-9.13	2.78

DISSCUSSION

On the basis of correlation statistical analysis, the results depicted that there is a negative correlation between self-concealment and perceived social support (r=-0.172), moreover, a positive relationship was observed between self-concealment and mental health seeking behaviour (r=0.117), along with, perceived social support and mental health help seeking behaviour (r=0.190). However, all the results were statistically non-significant, hence leading to the rejection of the hypotheses.

Alternatively, t-test was also used to study the differences among males and females in the variables that are being studied. No statistically significant differences were observed in self-concealment and perceived social support among males and females, thus resulting in rejecting our hypothesis that there will be significant gender differences between self-concealment and perceived social support.

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In contrast to this, statistically significant differences were observed in mental health help seeking behaviour among males and females (t = 0.002). Thus, accepting our hypothesis which states that there will be significant gender differences in mental health help seeking behaviour. However, it was observed that females were higher on mental health help seeking behaviour as compared to males. The results on present study are consistent with the past study conducted by Havik et al. (2017) which demonstrated that females were better in awareness regarding mental health services and seeking for mental health help as compared to males. Likewise, results of another study depicted that females were more keen and favourable preferences to seek help regarding mental health than males (Mackenzie et al., 2006).

CONCLUSION

Self-concealment is a psychological term that describes people's propensity to keep their emotions, thoughts, and sentiments hidden from others, even while they are dealing with serious difficulties. Another crucial element of young adults' experiences with mental health is perceived social support. Young individuals' self-concealment, perceptions of social support, and activity in search of mental health assistance all interact in complicated and nuanced ways. On the one hand, self-concealment encourages an environment of emotional isolation and self-reliance, which may discourage people from seeking out professional assistance. On the other hand, a sense of social support can be a strong motivator for getting assistance by offering a safety net of comprehension and compassion. The present study aimed to investigate the correlations and gender differences in self-concealment, perceived social support and mental health help seeking behaviour among young adults (30 males and 30 females). Standardised tools were used such as Self-Concealment Scale (Larson & Chastain, 1990), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet

et al., 1988) and Mental Help Seeking Attitude Scale (MHSAS) (Hammer et al., 2018). No significant correlations were found among self-concealment, perceived social support and mental health help seeking behaviour. However, significant gender differences were found in mental health help seeking behaviour among males and females. The study recommended that by creating supporting and open environments helps in building strong relationships which are helpful in reducing self-concealment tendencies and by promoting mental health education and awareness among young adults helps in declining stigma related mental health and normalising seeking mental help.

Recommendations

Self-concealment refers to the tendency to actively hide or withhold personal thoughts, emotions, or information from oneself and others. Here are some practical and effective ways to reduce self-concealment. The best thing is to develop self-reflection, as it is important to introspect. Start practicing mindfulness or journaling to become more aware of thoughts. Try to create a supportive environment that encourages openness and authenticity. Building relationships on trust helps one to express their innermost thoughts and emotions without any sense of judgment and rejection.

Enhancing perceived social support can provide numerous benefits such as improved mental health, enhanced resilience and many more advantages. Some strategies that can help to improve perceived social support are by strengthening the existing relationships by investing your time and effort into nurturing personal relationships. This could be done by communicating, engaging in activities with others, being a good listener, expanding social networks and by showing genuine interest in other's lives.

Improving mental health help-seeking behaviour is essential for individuals to address their mental health concerns and accept appropriate support. By promoting mental health education and creating awareness about the importance of seeking help can enhance the mental health help seeking attitude among people. Reducing stigma and normalizing help-seeking behaviour can encourage individuals to seek assistance when needed. of judgment, discrimination and rejection helps them to seek help when they require it.

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