Article 2

Quantifying the Influence of Gender on Mental Health Seeking Attitudes

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of gender on mental health seeking attitudes, acknowledging the critical yet overlooked role of mental health in society. Utilizing a quantitative correlational research design, the study focuses on 60 grade 12 students from Dalubhasaang Politekniko Ng Lungsod Ng Baliwag. The research instrument, a Likert-scale questionnaire, delves into gender-related societal issues affecting mental health seeking behaviors. Analysis employs descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests, and Pearson's R correlation coefficient using SPSS. Findings indicate that male students exhibit more negative attitudes toward mental health seeking than their female counterparts, aligning with societal expectations related to gender norms and masculinity. The study establishes a significant relationship between gender and mental health seeking attitudes, highlighting the need to address gender disparities in mental health support. The results prompt recommendations for future research to include a more extensive participant pool, refined survey questions, and the exploration of evolving attitudes over time. Additionally, the study suggests the inclusion of diverse gender identities in future research and advocates for educational initiatives to raise awareness about mental health issues and offer support avenues for students, especially males. Overall, this research contributes valuable insights for mitigating the impact of gender disparities on mental health seeking behaviors, emphasizing its significance for individuals, communities, and mental health practitioners.

Keywords: Gender Differences in Mental Health, Gender Inequality, Gender Stereotypes, Gender Stigma, Mental Health, Mental Health Seeking Behavior, Mental Health Stigma

Introduction

One of the most neglected aspects of health in the world is mental health. Kovacevic (2021) states that nearly 1 billion people worldwide suffer from a mental illness today wherein nearly 3 million people lose their lives to drug misuse each year. Suicide occurs once every 40 seconds, and by the age of 14, over 50% of mental health illnesses already begin developing.

Apparently, mental health being one of the greatest issues in the society, it is scandalous that 35-50% of people with severe mental health disorders in the Global North still receive no treatment and that figure roughly doubles to 76-85% for people living in the South (Roberts, 2018). There are a number of reasons why mental health is still disregarded in modern society: associated stigma, the belief that mental health disorders are "luxury goods" rather than illnesses, the fragmented and outdated service model that places the majority of mental health services in psychiatric hospitals, and severe lack of preventative mental health services and human resources. In spite of all that, one reason that prevalently prevents mental health seeking behaviors is the thing that people would and would not expect at all—gender.

Gender related societal issues such as gender stereotyping, gender inequality, sexual discrimination, misogyny, toxic masculinity, and many more have continuously affect a variety of aspects on people's lives particularly

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behavior, education and job access, ambitions and attitudes about relationships, freedom, and fundamental human rights. Unfortunately, even in mental health, issues in gender difference have made their way to cause a problem. Coveney (2022) articulates that socially constructed differences in roles and responsibilities, status, and power between men and women contribute to differences in mental health, health-seeking behavior of those affected, and responses of the health sector and society as a whole.

The first step into an effective treatment for mental health problems is the ability of the affected to come forward and seek help for him/herself. According to Velasco et.al (2020), mental health seeking behavior referred to the individual's searching or actively looking for help with their concerns in their mental health; it included informal help, which is from family or close friends, and formal help from those practitioners of the field such as psychologist, guidance counselor, etc. However, willingness to seek help may be related to factors, such as perceived gender stereotypes and help-seeking stigma or whether the individual sees the act of seeking help as a form of taking control or a form of giving up control to someone else (Farrimond, 2019). As Everett (2017) emphasizes, there are several factors that can be related to negative attitudes towards help-seeking including stigma, lack of resources, lack of knowledge about mental health, but the notorious one is the belief in gender stereotypes.

As we all know, the societal stigma regarding gender states that men are often told to act stronger, less vulnerable, and less emotional, while women are typically viewed as more emotional, sensitive, and dependent Dekin (2020). When weaved with the concept of mental health seeking behavior, there comes the fact that men have more negative views towards help-seeking because needing support, especially for emotional concerns, is not consistent with masculine stereotypes (Hunter, 2017). In this case, the infamous gender divide in the practice of seeking help for mental health problems has only made mental health to be more elusive to manage.

Erazo (2020) in his study found out that gender role beliefs were the most significant predictor of mental health attitudes and norms. The more traditional gender role beliefs the more stigmatizing mental health attitudes held. The less traditional gender role beliefs the more likely to feel there are stigmatizing norms. Thus, the stigma surrounding mental illness can be worsened when combined with the stigma surrounding gender and gender identity.

In addition, Kohoe (2022) states that mental health stigma is one thing, but another is stigma related to gender and stereotypes. Men show emotions less frequently than women, are reluctant to admit vulnerability, and seek professional assistance far less frequently. The way that men approach the subject of mental wellness has been negatively impacted by gender norms. Many people think that emotional and physical toughness are intertwined. Therefore an "unbreakable" and "strong" facade must constantly be present, even in the face of internal challenges. Men may be reluctant to talk openly about their depression, anxiety, or other mental illnesses because they feel they should "be a man" and "man up."

Lastly, Pattyn et.al (2018) asserts that seeking help for mental illness may constitute a gendered role conflict among men since help seeking is associated with femininity. It is expected that men will recommend reliance on self-care options to other men, and in cases in which professional treatment is recommended, they will prefer medication to psychotherapy. It is also concluded that men will report greater stigmatizing attitudes. Men rate tranquilizers as more helpful for other males than that women do for other females. Furthermore, males seem to ascribe more shame and blame to the situation. The gender gap in mental health service use is

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due not only to men and their negative attitudes toward help seeking, but also to structured social norms that are reconstructed in interactions.

For this reason, in order to understand what actions should be taken to encourage people who are experiencing emotional distress to seek the help they need, it is important to understand the relationship between gender and psychological help-seeking attitudes. Hence, the influence of gender on the mental health seeking attitudes was investigated in this work. This study provided significant knowledge to alleviate the distressing effects of gender disparities that continue to serve as a hurdle in the rehabilitation of mental health. Therefore, the study was of great benefit for society especially for the people experiencing mental health problems and the people around them who hope to help them.

Research Questions

This study centered on the influence of gender on the mental health seeking attitudes among students. The researcher settled upon answering the following questions:

1. How may the socio-demographic profile of the respondents be described in terms of sex?
2. Is there a significant difference between the mental health seeking attitudes of male and female respondents?
3. Is there a significant relationship between gender and mental health seeking attitudes of the respondents?

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative research design specifically correlational design to evaluate the relationship of gender towards the mental health seeking attitudes of CLSU students. According to Cherry (2022), a correlational study is a type of research design that looks at the relationships between two or more variables without the researcher manipulating or controlling any of the variables. A correlation refers to a relationship between two variables. Correlations can be strong or weak and positive or negative. Sometimes, there is no correlation.

Research Respondents

The respondents of this study were collected through the process of stratified sampling, in which the population was divided into two subgroups: male and female. The researcher then used random sampling techniques in each subgroup whereas thirty (30) male and thirty (30) female grade 12 students of Dalubhasaang Politekniko Ng Lungsod Ng Baliwag were selected with a total of sixty (60) respondents.

Research Instrument

This study used a 10-item close-ended researcher-made survey questionnaire to determine the relationship between gender on the mental health seeking attitudes of students. The scale utilized in the questionnaire

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was the Likert Scale, a scale used to measure opinions, attitudes, or behaviors (Bhandari and Nikolopoulos, 2020). The questionnaire included a 4-point Likert scale wherein the respondents chose between (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Agree; and (4) Strongly agree in stating their answers and opinions about the questions or statements in the questionnaire regarding the influence of gender on mental health seeking attitudes.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher employed an online surveying method for data collection in order to be able to carry out this study, The URL of the survey questionnaires run via Google forms was sent through email or messenger to the target respondents. In order to confirm that they are the intended respondents, it was necessary for the respondents to sign in and respond in the survey using their individual email accounts. The survey form also came with instructions to assist respondents in filling out the questionnaire for clarity, consistency, and completeness. The researcher guaranteed that all data and responses collected from respondents were handled in the most confidential manner and privacy.

Scope and Limitations

The study was conducted to assess students' attitudes when it comes to mental health seeking. The researcher randomly chose 30 male and 30 female respondents who are students of Dalubhasaang Politekniko Ng Lungsod Ng Baliwag. The main parameter of the study was to determine the influence of gender on mental health seeking attitudes.

As for the limitation of the study, the researcher run into one difficulty upon conduct. The researcher had trouble collecting a larger data due to time constraints, which resulted to only having a total of 60 respondents to answer the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The researcher applied descriptive statistics to calculate the mean and standard deviation of the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics in order to process and analyze the data. To compare the difference of the score of the male and female respondents, independent sample t-test was used. The researcher also utilized Pearson's R correlation statistics to measure and assess the influence of gender on mental health seeking attitudes. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) with the significance level set to 0.05 was also employed to process, analyze, and facilitate the collected data and to look for any potential logical inconsistencies within the dataset and the data per se, as well as to perform any necessary data cleansing.

Results

This chapter contains the results yielded from the study. It presents the gathered data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, the difference between male and female students' attitudes on mental health seeking, and the relationship between gender and mental health seeking attitudes. Tables with corresponding analysis and interpretation regarding those data were provided to address the posed objectives of the study.

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Table 1	Socio-demographic Characteristics (Sex)	
Sex	**N**	**%**
Male	30	50.00%
Female	30	50.00%
Total	60	100.00%

Table 1 shows the number of respondents which consisted of 30 Male and 30 Female respondents, both accounting 50% with a total of 60 respondents (100%).

Table 2	Statistics of the Scores Between Groups (Male and Female)			
	Gender	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Mental Health	Female	30	21.3667	5.74446
Seeing Attitude	Male	30	24.7667	6.26255

Table 2 shows the group statistics between the total scores of Male and Female. According to the data, the mean score for females is 21. 37 with 5.74 standard deviations, while the mean score for males is 24.77 with 6.26 standard deviations. The results showed that males have higher scores than females which means that males have more negative attitudes on mental health seeking than females.

Table 3	Independent Samples T-test of Male and Female Students' Scores on Mental Health Seeking Attitudes			
	F	***t*-value**	**df**	**P**
Mental Health Seeking Attitude	0.192	-2.191	58	0.032

Table 3 shows the results of the independent samples t-test on male and female. The results included the test statistic derived from Levene's test (F), as well as the t-value, degrees of freedom (df), and P-value (P). After adding up the scores of the male and female students, an independent sample t-test was run in SPSS to determine which group scored higher. The statistical result indicated t (58) =2.191, and the p-value was 0.032 suggesting that there was a statistically significant difference between the scores of male and female students.

Table 4	Correlations between Gender (Male, and Female) and Mental Health Seeking Attitudes	
		Gender
	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	60
	Pearson Correlation	0.277*
Mental Health Seeking Attitude	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.032
	N	60

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Table 4 shows the relationship between gender and mental health seeking attitudes. The Pearson's R correlation statistics, denoted by the letter r, is 0.277, and its p-value is 0.032, as seen in the table (r (60) = 0.277, p=0.032). The fact that the p-value for gender and mental health seeking attitude is 0.032, which is lower than the 0.05 confidence level, implied that there was a statistically significant relationship between gender and mental health seeking attitude.

Discussion

This chapter provides the discussion of problems relative to the study, implications for the interpretation of the results, conclusion, and recommendations. The outcomes of the study have provided insights about the influence of gender on mental health seeking attitudes.

Difference Between Males and Females' Attitudes Toward Mental Health Seeking

Based on the acquired data on descriptive statistics, males appeared to have higher scores (M=24.77, SD=6.26) than females (M-21.37, SD=5.74) in terms of their attitudes toward mental health seeking. Male respondents answered 'strongly agree' and 'agree' more than female respondents on the survey. This signifies that male students prefer not seeking mental help and they have more negative attitudes on mental health seeking than female students. On the other hand, female respondents answered 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' more than male respondents on the survey. This indicates that female students prefer seeking mental help and they have more positive attitudes on mental health seeking than male students.

In support of this, Oliver et.al. (2020) suggests that male students are less likely to seek mental help as compared to female students. Moreover, Wendt and Shafer's (2018) study suggested that men are less prone than women to display positive help-seeking attitudes, particularly related to common mental health issues as men often express less emotion than women do, are hesitant to express weakness, and seek mental health help much less frequently than do their female counterparts.

In addition, the statistical result on the independent sample t-test of male and female' scores on mental health seeking attitudes (t (58)=2.191, p=0.032) suggested that there was a statistically significant difference between the scores demonstrating that male and female students certainly have different attitudes in terms of mental health seeking.

Relationship Between Gender and Mental Health Seeking Attitudes

The influence of Gender and the Mental Health Seeking Attitudes of the students appeared to have a statistically significant relationship (p=0.032) based on the acquired data. Female students have more positive mental health seeking attitudes while male students have more negative mental health seeking attitudes. As suggested in the study of Otten et.al. (2021), it is stated that mental health seeking attitudes of people is attributed to gender differences wherein mental health seeking between males and females depends on gender roles, gender identity, gender relations, and institutionalized gender. These results further implied that the students' willingness to seek mental help certainly depends on their gender.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the study along with the researcher's comprehensive analysis, it is concluded that:

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1. There was an equal number of respondents for the male and female population achieved in the study; 30 male and 30 female grade 12 students of Dalubhasaang Politekniko Ng Lungsod Ng Baliwag with a total of 60 respondents. The accuracy of the number of respondents assisted the researcher in more proportionate results corresponding to the specificities of the study and to achieve their desired findings.
2. There was a significant difference between the mental health seeking attitudes of male and female students. Using descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test, the researcher concluded that male students have more negative attitudes on mental health seeking than female CLSU students who have more positive attitudes on mental health seeking.
3. There was a significant relationship between gender and mental health seeking attitudes of the students. Using the Pearson's R correlation coefficient test, the researcher determined that gender certainly influences the mental health seeking attitudes.

Recommendations

In light of the data and inferences drawn from the results, the researcher came up with the following recommendations:

1. Future researchers should aim to have a higher number of respondents in order to gather more accurate results.
2. Future researchers should provide a better set of questions in the survey to derive more accurate answers and responses from the participants.
3. The researcher believes that further study should be carried out on the topic in the years to come in order to determine and evaluate whether or not the results shift with time.
4. The inclusion of various gender identities, such as those of members of the LGBTQIA+ community, is something that researchers of the future may want to consider in order to broaden the scope of their studies.
5. As an effort to raise people's consciousness of mental health issues, the university may hold an online seminar and program at the beginning and end of each semester.
6. Students, particularly male students, who are afraid to seek mental health care should be offered the opportunity to participate in free online consultations.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The researcher followed ethical standards such as informed permission, privacy, and debriefing when collecting the responses and identities of the participants. Since they had the option to participate or not in the study, participants were not compelled to take part. Those who consent to participate in the study were sent a survey questionnaire along with information about the study's objectives and methods. However, the participants were informed by the researcher that they have the option to withdraw from the study or refuse to participate, and that doing so will not compromise their confidentiality, even if they have already completed the informed consent form. Moreover, the participants were given the assurance by the researcher that whatever information they submitted would only serve the purpose of the study and would remain anonymous.

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