

# Predicting Help-Seeking: Internalized Stigma and Psychological Flexibility in an Anxious Sample

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## Introduction

- College students often report unfavorable help-seeking attitudes regarding mental health concerns (Czyz et al., 2013)
- Two-thirds of students with mental health concerns do not seek treatment, further increasing symptoms and negatively impacting help-seeking attitudes (Ryan et al., 2010)
- Low help-seeking behavior frequency is associated with low psychological flexibility (PF) and high internalized stigma (Masuda et al., 2017; Schomerus & Angermeyer, 2008)
- No research has evaluated such relations in a single model

## Hypothesis

High internalized stigma and low psychological flexibility will predict low help-seeking attitudes

## Method

### Participants

- 173 students with positive anxiety screens
- $M_{age} = 20.07$ ;  $SD_{age} = 2.94$ ; Range: 18 – 38

### Measures

- Patient Health Questionnaire-4, Anxiety Subscale (Kroenke et al., 2009)
- Internalized Stigma of Mental Illness Inventory (Ritscher et al., 2003)
- Acceptance & Action Questionnaire-II (Bond et al., 2011)
- Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help-Short Form (Fischer & Farina, 1995)

### Method

- Online survey battery

## Results

Table 1  
Correlation Matrix, Descriptive Statistics, and Measure Reliabilities

Measure	1	2	3
ATSPPH	-		
ISMI	-.20*	-	
AAQ-II	.10	.54**	-
<i>M</i>	17.14	1.85	27.38
<i>SD</i>	5.60	0.44	9.04
<i>α</i>	.93	.80	.89

Note. ATSPPH = Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help; ISMI = Internalized Stigma of Mental Illness Scale; AAQ-II = Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II  
\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .001$

Anxious individuals who report high internalized stigma and high psychological flexibility report lower help-seeking attitudes relative to those with low internalized stigma and psychological flexibility



## Results Continued

Table 2

Stepwise Multiple Regression Predicting Help-Seeking Attitudes

Predictor	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Step 1		.04		
ISMI	-0.20		.007	[-4.46,-0.71]
Step 2		.07		
ISMI	-0.37		<.001	[-6.83,-2.52]
AAQ-II	0.31		<.001	[16.03, 24.14]

Note. ATSPPH = Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help; ISMI = Internalized Stigma of Mental Illness Scale; AAQ-II = Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II

## Discussion

- High internalized stigma associated with low help-seeking attitudes: Individuals with high self-stigma may view treatment negatively or be afraid to seek help
- High PF predicted low help-seeking attitudes: Individuals who flexibly respond to situations may perceive less need for treatment
- Education/prevention programs that reduce mental health stigma may increase positive help-seeking attitudes

### Limitations

- College sample, cross-sectional data, lack of control for anxiety severity

### Future Directions

- Community sample, longitudinal design, control for symptom severity, examination of additional mental health concerns

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