ATTITUDES TOWARD SEEKING PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP SCALE IN EGYPT: ITS FACTOR STRUCTURE AND RELATIONSHIP TO ISLAMIC BELIEFS AND BEHAVIORS

Mark M. Leach*, Asma Jana-Masri, and Paul E. Priester

ABSTRACT

The majority of literature on attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help has focused on Western, predominantly U.S. samples, though attitudes toward counseling differ globally. Due to the paucity of literature with a Muslim sample this study assessed the factor structure of the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS) in Egypt, and its relationship to Islamic beliefs and behaviors. Exploratory factor analysis revealed one factor consistent with the original four-factor instrument, though four factors were found. Reliability analyses supported use of the long version, rather than short version of the instrument. Islamic beliefs were negatively correlated with the ATSPPHS and Islamic behaviors were positively correlated. Implications for ATSPPHS use in Egypt and other Islamic countries are discussed.

Keywords: Attitudes toward seeking psychological help, Muslim, Egypt, factor analysis.

Attitudes toward seeking psychological help has been a much-investigated topic in the U.S. among researchers interested in determining factors associated with successful and unsuccessful treatment outcomes. Factors that inhibit help-seeking such as fear of treatment, stigma, fear of emotions, and self-disclosure concerns (Hinson & Swanson, 1991; Komiya, Good, & Sherrod, 2000) are salient in the literature, as are issues related to symptom severity, gender, self-esteem, and awareness of services (Al-Samadi, 1994; Good & Wood, 1995; Komiya et al., 2000; Nadler, Maler, & Friedman, 1984). Attitudes toward mental health influence the probability that services will be sought and the length of time that individuals stay in treatment (Khan, 2006; Leaf, Bruce, Tischler, & Holzer, 1988; Mojtabai, Olfson, & Mechanic, 2002).

* Author Note: The authors would like to gratefully thank Professor Soliman, Department of Psychology University of Tanta, Tanta, Arab Republic of Egypt for his assistance in this project.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Mark M. Leach, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Dr. #5025, Hattiesburg, MS, 39406–0001, USA, or E-mail m.leach@usm.edu.
A recent study in the U.S. comparing National Comorbidity Survey samples from 1990–1992 and 2001–2003 found more acceptance of mental health seeking in the recent sample than the previous sample. For example, the more recent survey found participants’ attitudes more open to seeking professional help, less embarrassment acknowledged if others knew they were seeing a counselor, and more comfort in talking about emotional issues with a professional. Age is also influential, as younger individuals overall are more accepting of counseling than older individuals (Mojtabai, 2007). Overall, the stigma historically associated with seeking mental health counseling appears to be decreasing, while acceptance of and needs related to mental health services have increased over the past two decades.

However, when considering other salient factors such as cultural variables the literature becomes less clear. A growing number of studies have investigated psychological assistance attitudes among a variety of ethnic group members in the U.S., as culture influences counseling acceptance. For example, older Korean Americans who have resided in the U.S. for shorter time periods reported lower levels of counseling acceptance than longer term residents. Mak and Zane (2004) reported that Chinese Americans with stronger somaticization scores were more willing to disclose their emotional concerns than those with lower scores. Studies have also been conducted with a variety of other ethnic groups including African Americans (e.g., Matthews, Corrigan, Smith, & Aranda, 2006) and Latinos (Gonzalez, Alegria, & Prihoda, 2005). With the exception of gender differences which are rather stable (women are generally more accepting of mental health services than men), the research literature is mixed in terms of the level of acceptance of counseling among ethnic groups in the U.S.

A number of cultural factors contribute to acceptance levels of counseling. Stigma associated with mental illness, trust and confidence concerns related to the mental healthcare system, and level of emotional expressiveness and interpersonal openness have been cited as related to mental healthcare seeking acceptance (Paniagua, 2005). Readers will note that stigma has been a key reason associated with not seeking mental health treatment regardless of ethnic group, but persons of color in the U.S. generally have more negative perceptions of counseling than Whites, and the reasons vary (Gaw, 1993). For example, many African Americans have reservations about seeking counseling due to cultural mistrust (e.g., Thompson, Bazile, & Akbar, 2004). Much has been written about the Asian, Hispanic, and Native American communities