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# Help-Seeking Behavior: Willingness, Type, and Stigma

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Although many people seek help for various reasons, many people do not seek the help they need. In Raunic and Xenos (2008) study they found that even when there are services available very few students --especially those classed as "vulnerable"--sought help. This study looked at whether males or females were more likely to feel there was a stigma or shame for seeking help. This study also examined whether or not people were more likely to seek help from a trained therapist or someone they trust, like their friends or family. Finally, this study looked at whether there were any differences in willingness to seek help depending on the type of problem. Were people more likely to seek help for depression, sexual abuse, or domestic abuse; or were they likely to treat each the same. The key component of this study was to look at various factors to determine how they affect willingness to seek help. One, is there a stigma or shame attached to seeking help for sexual abuse, domestic violence or depression. Two, are you more likely to seek help from a trained therapist or someone you trust. Finally, are there any differences in willingness to seek help depending on the problem depression, domestic violence or sexual abuse?

## Method

A sample of 113 undergraduate general psychology students participated in this study using Experimentix, an Internet based subject pool management system. The in-

formation was gathered through a 7 question survey developed by the author. These seven questions were part of a larger omnibus survey consisting of a total 221 questions. Participants were tested in two groups and were given 50 minutes to complete the survey, but finished within 45 minutes. Upon completion of this survey each student received class credit for participation.

## Results

A two-way analysis of variance was used to look at interaction between willingness to seek help for domestic abuse, depression and domestic violence. There is a significant negative relationship between seeking help for sexual abuse and depression  $F(1,94)= 5.64, p= .020$ . There was no difference in those seeking help for domestic violence and depression  $F(1,94)= .74, p= .392$  and no interaction between sexual abuse, domestic violence on seeking help for depression  $F(1,94)=.00, p= .991$ . Perceived stigma or shame did not affect college students willingness to seek help  $r(96)= .21, p= .039$ . Students prefer to seek help from someone they trust over a trained therapist,  $r(106)= .22, p= .022$ .

## Discussion

This study found that people do not feel there is a stigma or shame attached to seeking help for sexual abuse and domestic violence. It also indicated that participants are more

## Abstract

The present study examined three help-seeking behaviors: willingness to seek help, influence of type of disorder, and stigma attached to seeking help. One hundred and thirteen college students participated in the study by responding to a seven-question survey. Perceived stigma or shame for seeking help for sexual abuse or domestic violence did not affect college student's willingness to seek help. When responding to questions regarding the importance of seeking help from someone they trust or from a trained therapist; the results indicated that college students prefer to seek help from someone they trust rather than from a trained therapist. This study looked at willingness to seek help for depression, sexual abuse and domestic violence. There were no gender differences; participants seek help for domestic violence and depression equally. There is a negative relationship between seeking help for sexual abuse and depression, indicating willingness to seek help for depression decreased as willingness to seek help for sexual abuse increased. This study showed that there is no stigma or shame attached to seeking help for sexual abuse or domestic violence among the college students that participated. The results also showed that college students preferred to seek help from someone they trusted as opposed to a trained therapist.

willing to seek help from someone they trust instead of a trained therapist. The study also looked at the difference in willingness to seek help for depression, sexual abuse and domestic violence. Although there was no difference in willingness to seek help for depression and domestic violence, there was a difference in response to the items on willingness to seek help for sexual abuse and depression. Participants who were more likely to seek help for sexual abuse were less likely to be willing to seek help for depression. While the study indicated willingness to seek help, this does not necessarily translate into actual seeking of help. In future studies it might be beneficial to look at whether there is embarrassment in regards to seeking help in general and expand to other specific areas that might be affected by these feelings. Furthermore, it might be worthwhile to look at the interaction of various types of issues such as, depression or anxiety and who they seek help from friends, family or trained therapist. Finding a more diverse participant base could help determine if affects caused by ethnicity (different roles of people, family relationships, etc.) affect help-seeking behavior.