

Attitude Towards Psychological Counselling Among Undergraduate Students in Nepal

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Abstract

Background: Counselling is when a trained professional helps someone work through personal challenges. It is a type of therapy that involves a trained professional listening to a person and helping them deal with emotional and psychological issues. In 2022, 55.8 million adults in the United States received mental health treatment or counseling, including talk therapy, which is also known as counseling or psychotherapy.

Objective: The objective of the study is to assess the attitude toward psychological counseling among undergraduate students in Nepal.

Methodology: A cross-sectional descriptive design study was conducted among 145 students. A lottery method from Simple Random Sampling was used for the selection of the study area and total enumerative sampling was used to select sample units. Data was collected using the Attitude towards seeking professional psychological help Scale- Short form¹ to assess attitude and a self-developed questionnaire was used to determine demographic data. Data analysis was done using a statistical program for the social science (SPSS) version 20, which includes descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (chi-square and Fischer exact test) to assess the association between socio-demographic variables and family factors with attitude towards psychological counseling. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Committee (IRC) of the institute. Approval was taken from the respective college before conducting the research. Informed consent was taken from the respondents before collecting data.

Result: The mean age of the respondent was 20.4 years and S.D was 1.196. Among 145 respondents, most of them (59.3%) were female, and all of them were married. Most of them (71.7%) had a nuclear family. Almost all parents were literate (mother = 92.4%; father = 97.2%). The findings of the study reveal that the majority of respondents 68.3% had positive attitudes and 38.7% negative attitudes and there is no significant association between socio-demographic variables and family factors with attitude towards psychological counseling.

Conclusion: The study concluded that the majority of the students had positive attitudes. There is no significant association between socio-demographic variables and family factors with attitude towards psychological counseling. Concerning the findings, colleges can ensure that psychological counseling services are easily accessible to all students.

Keywords: Psychological Counseling; Psychotherapy; Perception

Abbreviations

ATSPPH-SF: Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short Form; WHO: World Health Organization

Introduction

Background

Mental health is a fundamental aspect of overall health and well-being, enabling individuals to thrive and contribute meaningfully within their communities. When people come across a problem or feel concerned, help-seeking behaviors involve actively seeking assistance from different sources, such as reaching out to others through communication [2]. Primarily, personal and societal stigma, along with the accompanying negative attitudes, serve as significant indicators for reduced tendencies to seek mental health support [3]. Other factors such as one's perceptions, mindset, gender, age, marital status, understanding of mental health, and accessibility also play a role in influencing behaviors related to seeking help for mental health issues [4].

A cross-sectional study conducted in Singapore found that age, ethnicity, marital status, education, and income were all especially linked to attitudes regarding seeking psychological assistance [5]. In a descriptive study conducted in Columbia revealed that women had more attitudes toward psychological counseling than male [6]. Individuals displayed a favorable inclination 92.2% towards seeking psychological support for instances of sexual harassment followed by experiences of depression and challenges in romantic relationships [7].

A study conducted in the United States found that the period from 2009 to 2015 played a significant role in the willingness to seek help from mental health professionals in the future. During this period, among 454,029 participants, the attitude tends to increase in seeking professional help in the future, over the years 2009 (67.1%) to 2015 (73.7%) [8]. A descriptive cross-sectional study conducted at the Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Kotelawala Defence University, Srilanka encompassed a total of 109 females and 68 males to identify the attitudes towards psychological guidance and counseling, more than half of the population displayed negative attitudes across three domains: psychological openness, indifference to stigma, and help-seeking behavior [9].

Self-disclosure was the most important factor that influenced willingness to seek psychological help [10]. Previous psychological treatment plays an important role in gaining a positive attitude toward seeking psychological help [10], Males had more stigma for seeking psychological help and a lower amount of stigma among widows and divorced than among single or married participants [11].

From the above studies, it has been found that mental health is a serious growing problem, so psychological counseling or professional help-seeking behavior will be one of the measures to manage mental health issues. Many factors like age, marital status, educational status, and ethnicity were linked with negative attitudes towards psychological counseling in other countries. There have been limited numbers of research to find out the attitude toward psychological counseling in Nepal.

Hence, the study is intended with the objectives to find out the attitude toward psychological counseling among undergraduate students in Nepal.

Rationale

- Globally, in 2019, about 970 million individuals, constituting one out of every eight people were affected by a mental disorder, with anxiety and depressive disorders being the most prevalent. However, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these numbers significantly in 2020, with a notable 26% rise in anxiety disorders and a 28% increase in major depressive disorders within just one year [12].
- As university life is the transitioning phase to adulthood counseling provides a safe place to cope with personal challenges.

- There are limited studies to explore the attitude toward psychological counseling among undergraduates in Nepal.
- The findings of the study will be helpful to the college in conducting awareness programs on mental illness and the importance of psychological counseling.

Conceptual framework

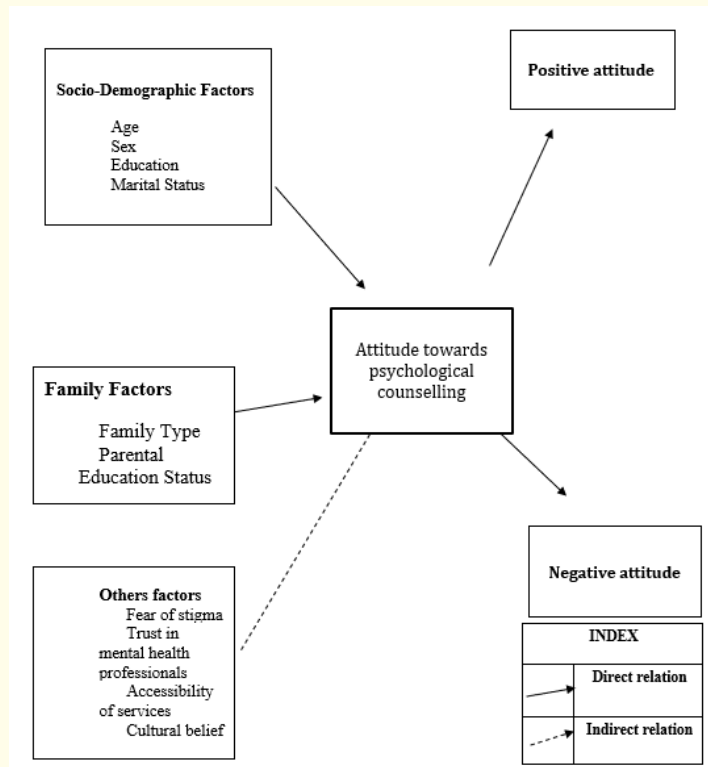


Figure 1: Conceptual framework regarding attitude towards psychological counselling.

Materials and Methods

Study design

A cross-sectional descriptive study design was used to assess attitudes toward psychological counseling.

Study method

Quantitative non-experimental study methods were used for the study.

Study area

The research study was conducted at Universal College which is located at Maitidevi, Kathmandu. It was established in 2054 B.S.

Study population

The study population consisted of students in Universal College’s BBA 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years. The total number of BBA 1st year students was 35, 2nd-year students were 35, 3rd-year students were 37, and 4th-year students were 38. The total number of BBA students was 145.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria

- i. Students studying in BBA 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year were included in the study.
- ii. Only Nepalese citizens were included in the study.

Exclusion criteria

- i. Students receiving psychological counseling or therapy were excluded from the study.

Sampling technique

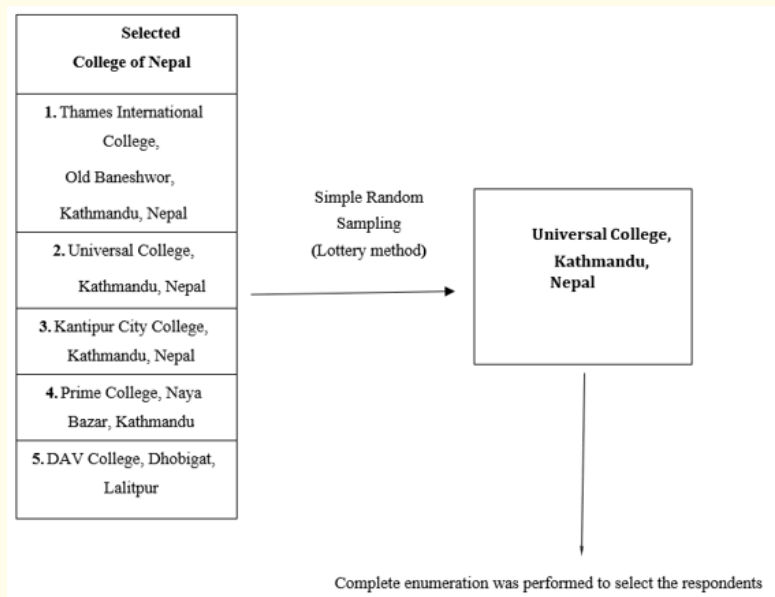


Figure 2: Sampling strategy.

Sample size

145 samples were used for this study.

Research instruments

A structured standard tool (ATSPPH-SF) [1] was to assess attitudes toward psychological counselling.

The questionnaire was in English version. The questionnaire will consist of:

- Part I: Questions related to socio-demographic factors.
- Part II: Likert scale related to attitude towards psychological Counselling.
- Part III: Question related to family factors.

Permission was granted for the ATSPPH-SF [1] tool by the author through e-mail.

Validity and reliability

Validity

In order to ensure the quality of the research, the validity of the instrument was maintained by extensive reviewing of the literature with the research advisor, and teacher. The instrument was developed in English version. The opinion of the research advisor was obtained to verify both comprehensibility and simplicity.

Reliability

The reliability of the instrument was established by pre-testing it on 10% of the total population i.e. 15 respondents with similar characteristics such as college students studying in their Bachelor's 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year in Nobel College. No modification was done on the basis of the test after consulting with the research advisor and subject teacher. Internal consistency of the ATSPPH-SF [1] was calculated using Cronbach's α value. The reliability of the measurement of the ATSPPH-SF was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.84$). Cronbach's alfa test was done ($\alpha = 0.75$).

Data collection procedure

The permission was obtained from the administration of Nobel College and also permission from selected authorities was taken. After getting formal written permission from Universal College, data collection was done. The objective of the study was made clear to the respondent and informed verbal and written consent was taken before administering the questionnaire by the researcher. They were informed about voluntary participation and their right to quit at any time during the research. Students from particular years 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year were divided into two groups in separate classes and each day a particular year will be taken for data collection. Instruction was given not to discuss about questionnaire while answering the questionnaire. A total of 15-20 minutes was taken for each group of respondents for data collection. Data was collected by using a self-administered questionnaire. The total duration of data collection was taken 2 weeks. Data was not collected during public holidays and Saturdays. Absent students were followed up, the next day.

Data analysis and scoring procedure

All the data was checked rechecked and also reviewed daily for competency, consistency, and accuracy. All the data was coded, entered, edited, and organized using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, SPSS 20. The analysis and interpretation were done based on the objective of the study using descriptive statistics such as (frequency, percent, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistical methods (chi-square test and Fischer exact test) to assess the association, and data was presented on the tabular form.

Scoring procedure

ATSPPH-SF includes the 5 questions in which indicate the presence attitude if endorsed positively, while the rest of the 5 questions (2, 4, 8, 9, 10) indicate attitude when endorsed negatively which was measured by a 4-point Likert scale:

- 0 = Disagree
- 1 = Partly disagree
- 2 = Partly agree
- 3 = Agree.

Items were summed up to form a total score (0-30).

The total maximum score was 30 and the minimum score was 0 using the transformation score formula i.e. $\text{Score} - \text{Minimum} / \text{Range} * 100$ percentage was calculated.

A score below 50% was considered a negative attitude and a score equal to 50% was considered a positive attitude toward psychological counseling.

Correspondingly,

Let x equal to cut-off score.

$$\text{So, } x - 0 / 30 - 0 * 100 = 50$$

Solving this equation x was 15.

The sum total of the score was done then it was classified as positive and negative attitude towards psychological counselling by comparing it with the cut-off point.

Scores equal to or more than 15 were classified as positive attitude towards psychological counselling.

Scores less than 15 were classified as negative attitude towards psychological counselling.

Ethical consideration

- Ethical approval was taken from the Institutional Review Committee (IRC) of Nobel College.
- Permission was granted for the study area by providing an official letter from office head.
- A verbal and written informed consent was taken from the respondents.
- Confidentiality was maintained by not disclosing the information to other.
- Anonymity was maintained by not disclosing the identification of respondents through coding system and data was used for research purpose only.
- Instruction was given not to discuss about questionnaire while answering the questionnaire.
- Respondents dignity was maintained by respecting the rights of the respondent without discriminating according to race, caste, abilities, and other factors.

Results and Discussion

Part I

Findings related to socio-demographic variables

Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age (in completed year)		
≤20 years	113	77.9
21+ years	32	22.1
Mean age score	20.45 ± 1.196	
Sex		
Male	59	40.7
Female	86	59.3
Educational level		
BBA 1 st year	35	24.1
BBA 2 nd year	35	24.1
BBA 3 rd year	37	25.5
BBA 4 th year	38	26.2

Table 1: Respondents’ association on socio-demographic variables (n = 145).

Table 1 shows majority 77.9% of the respondents were from the age group 19 - 20 years with a mean age of 20.45 years with a standard deviation of ±1.196 and more than half were females 59.3% and almost one-third were 26.2% in 4th year and all of them were unmarried.

Part II

Findings related to attitude towards psychological counselling

Statements	Disagree f (%)	Partly Dis-agree f (%)	Partly Agree f (%)	Agree f (%)
If I believed I was having a mental breakdown, my first inclination would be to get professional attention.	46 (31.7)	39 (26.9)	34 (23.4)	26 (17.9)
The idea of talking about problems with a psychologist strikes me as a poor way to get rid of emotional conflicts.*	13 (9)	35 (24.1)	45 (31)	52 (35.9)
If I were experiencing a serious emotional crisis at this point in my life, I would be confident that I could find relief in psychotherapy.	25 (17.2)	19 (13.1)	63 (43.4)	38 (26.2)
There is something admirable in the attitude of a person who is willing to cope with his or her conflicts and fears <i>without</i> resorting to professional help.*	41 (28.3)	53 (36.6)	30 (20.7)	21 (14.5)
I would want to get psychological help if I were worried or upset for a long period of time	22 (15.2)	21 (14.5)	44 (30.3)	58 (40)
I might want to have psychological counseling in the future.	33 (22.8)	19 (13.1)	46 (31.7)	47 (32.4)

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A person with an emotional problem is not likely to solve it alone; he or she is likely to solve it with professional help.	21 (14.5)	30 (20.7)	59 (40.7)	35 (24.1)
Considering the time and expense involved in psychotherapy, it would have doubtful value for a person like me.*	24 (16.6)	51 (35.2)	48 (33.1)	22 (15.2)
A person should work out his or her own problems; getting psychological counseling would be a last resort.*	46 (31.7)	42 (29)	33 (22.8)	24 (16.6)
Personal and emotional troubles, like many things, tend to work out by themselves.*	42 (29)	40 (27.6)	30 (20.7)	33 (22.8)

Table 2: Respondents' attitude towards psychological counselling (n = 145).

Negative statement.*

Table 2 shows 31.7% disagree the statement “If I believed I was having a mental breakdown, my first inclination would be to get professional attention” where 35.9% agree the statement “The idea of talking about problems with a psychologist strikes me as a poor way to get rid of emotional conflicts”. The statement “If I were experiencing a serious emotional crisis at this point in my life, I would be confident that I could find relief in psychotherapy” has been partly agreed by 43.4% where 36.6% partly disagree the statement “There is something admirable in the attitude of a person who is willing to cope with his or her conflicts and fears *without* resorting to professional help”. Almost half of the respondents 40% agreed “I would want to get psychological help if I were worried or upset for a long period of time” and 32.4% agreed to have psychological counseling in the future where 40.7% partly agree the statement “A person with an emotional problem is not likely to solve it alone; he or she is likely to solve it with professional help”. The statement “Considering the time and expense involved in psychotherapy, it would have doubtful value for a person like me” were partly disagreed 35.2% and 31.7%, and 29% disagreed the statements “A person should work out his or her own problems; getting psychological counseling would be a last resort” and “Personal and emotional troubles, like many things, tend to work out by themselves” respectively.

Part III

Findings related to family factors

Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Types of family		
Nuclear family	104	71.7
Joint family	41	28.3
Mother's educational status		
Can read and write	134	92.4
Cannot read and write	11	7.6
If can read and write (n = 134)		
Basic level	61	45.5
Secondary level	40	29.9
Higher level	33	24.6
Father's educational status		
Can read and write	141	97.2
Cannot read and write	4	2.8

If can read and write (n = 141)		
Basic level	38	27
Secondary level	49	34.8
Higher level	54	38.2

Table 3: Respondents' association on family factors (n = 145).

Table 3 shows most of families were identified as nuclear 71.7%. In terms of educational attainment, nearly all mothers 92.4% and fathers 97.2% could read and write. Among those literate, almost half of the mothers were from basic level and 38.2% fathers had higher level. Importantly, all respondents reported good parent-child relationships (100%), suggesting a uniformly positive perception in this aspect of family life.

Part IV

Findings related to level of attitude towards psychological counselling

Level of attitude	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Negative attitude (>15)	46	31.7%
Positive attitude (≤15)	99	68.3%

Table 4: Respondents' on level of attitude towards psychological counselling (n = 145).

Table 4 shows almost two-third 68.3% exhibited a positive attitude, while 31.7% exhibited a negative attitude. This indicates that the majority of the participants had a positive attitude.

Part V

Findings related to association between socio-demographic factors and level of attitude towards psychological counselling

Variables		Attitude Level		Chi-square (χ^2)	p-value
		Negative attitude	Positive attitude		
Age	19-20	33	80	1.502	.220
	21-23	13	19		
Sex	Male	21	38	.688	.407
	Female	25	61		
Educational level	1 st year	9	26	2.120	.548
	2 nd year	12	23		
	3 rd year	10	17		
	4 th year	15	23		

Table 5: Association between socio-demographic factors and level of attitude towards psychological counselling (n = 145).

p-value <0.05.

Table 5 shows that there is no significant association between socio-demographic factors and attitude toward psychological counseling.

Part VI

Findings related to association between family factors and level of attitude towards psychological counselling

Variables		Attitude level		Chi-square (χ ²)	p-value
		Negative attitude	Positive attitude		
Types of family	Nuclear family	35	69	.632	.427
	Joint family	11	30		
Mother’s educational status	Can read and write	42	92	.118	.743**
	Cannot read and write	4	7		
If can read and write, level of education	Upto basic level	15	46	2.373	.123
	Secondary and above	27	46		
Father’s educational status	Can read and write	43	98	3.557	.094**
	Cannot read and write	3	1		
If can read and write, level of education	Upto basic level	11	27	0.59	.808
	Secondary and above	32	71		

Table 6: Association between family factors and level of attitude towards psychological counselling (n = 145).

*Fisher’s Exact Test** p-value < 0.05.*

Table 6 shows there is no significant association between family factors and attitude toward psychological counseling.

Discussion

This study aims to assess the attitude towards psychological counseling of students of Universal College. A cross-sectional study with a structured, self-administered questionnaire was used to obtain information on respondent level of attitude towards psychological counseling.

The demographic findings of the present study revealed that among 145 respondents, the age group 19-20 years was 77.9% with the mean age of the respondents being 20.45 years and the standard deviation was ± 1.196, 59.3% were female and 26.2% were in 4th year. All of the respondents were unmarried.

The findings of the study revealed that most of the families are nuclear. The findings revealed that almost all mothers can read and write. Among mothers who can read and write, almost half of them have education up to the basic level. Almost all 97.2% of fathers can read and write, while 2.8% cannot; among those who can read and write, one-third 38.2% have education up to a higher level. All of the respondents have good relationships with their parents.

Level of attitude towards psychological counselling

The findings of the present study revealed that most of them 68.3% of the respondents have a positive attitude towards psychological counseling. The findings of the study are supported by the study conducted in Bhopal, India (n = 103) [13] where 75.7% had a positive attitude toward psychological counseling. In contrast, a study which was conducted in Pakistan showed 56% have a negative attitude

towards psychological counselling [14]. This may be due to a lack of understanding about the benefits and process of counseling or due to privacy concerns and cultural issues as in the Muslim community mental health problems might be viewed as a weakness or a lack of faith, leading individuals to rely on religious or spiritual remedies rather than seeking professional help. The fear of being judged or misunderstood by family, friends, and the community can prevent individuals from openly discussing their mental health issues or seeking professional help.

Association between socio-demographic variables and level of attitude towards psychological counselling

The present study showed that there is no significant association between sex and attitude ($p = 0.407$). Similarly, the findings of the study are supported by a study conducted in Pakistan ($n = 246, p = 0.99$) [3] and another study which was also conducted in Pakistan ($n = 316, p < 0.081$) [14] showed there is no significant association between sex and attitude. In contrast, a study conducted in Tanzania ($n = 740, p \text{ value} = 0.003$) [6] and Thailand ($n = 415, p = 0.001$) [15] showed there is significant association between sex and attitude towards psychological counselling. This contradiction, may be due to individual differences, personal experiences as individuals who have experienced trauma or abuse may be more likely to seek help due to the significant impact on their mental health. However, they may also avoid seeking help due to fear of reliving traumatic memories or distrust in healthcare providers.

The present study showed that age is not significantly associated to attitude ($p = 0.220$). The similar finding of the study is supported by a study conducted in India which showed age is not associated ($n = 103, p = 0.781$) [13] to attitude. In contrast, study conducted in Pakistan revealed that age was associated to attitude ($n = 316, p = 0.001$) [14]. The association between age may not be linked due to individuals of any age with higher mental health literacy are more likely to have positive attitudes toward counseling, while those with lower literacy may have negative or indifferent attitudes.

The present study showed that educational level was not associated with attitude ($p = 0.637$). The supporting findings for the current study was conducted in Maharakham University, Thailand showed that educational level were not significantly associated ($n = 415, p = .202$) [15].

In contrast, a study conducted in Pakistan [14] ($n = 316, p = 0.001$) showed that educational level were significantly associated with attitude towards psychological counselling. It may be due personal experiences with mental health issues or witnessing family and friends seek counseling can shape attitudes more significantly than educational level.

Association between family factors and level of attitude towards psychological counselling

Family factors were not statistically associated with attitude towards psychological counselling. There is no sufficient supporting or contrast literature for the present findings.

Limitation of the Study

The research was conducted in only one school with a small scale which cannot be generalized to other groups of people.

Conclusion

The study concluded that two-thirds of the students have positive attitudes and one-third have negative attitudes. There is no significant association between socio-demographic variables and family factors with attitude towards psychological counseling.

Recommendation

- There can be sessions for parents to educate them about mental health and the importance of psychological counseling. This can help create a supportive home environment for students seeking counseling.

- It will be better to organize workshops and seminars to educate students about the benefits and process of psychological counseling to maintain the positive attitude of the students.
- A similar study can be conducted on a large scale.
- A comparative study can be conducted between colleges with and without counseling services.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest exists.

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