

STIGMA, ATTITUDE, PERCEIVED RISKS AND BENEFITS IN HELP SEEKING BEHAVIORS AMONG COUPLES WITH MARITAL ISSUES

Dr Nazia Iqbal¹, Farhat Jan², Aliya Shabbir³

^{1,2,3}international Islamic University Islamabad

Corresponding Author: *

Dr. Nazia Iqbal

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ABSTRACT

The current study aims to explore help seeking behavior among couples with relationship issues by assessing the role of stigma, attitude, perceived risks and benefits, based on explanatory sequential design. In the first phase (quantitative), the sample of 150 couples (N=300) with relationship issues were approached. Data was collected using standardized instruments. Stigma was assessed using Self-Stigma of Seeking Psychological Help scale (Vogel, 2006). Attitude towards help seeking using Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Help (Allyn, 1995), Perceived risks and benefits was measured by Disclosure Expectation Scale (Vogel & Wester, 2005), marital satisfaction by using Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale and to measure help seeking behavior General Help Seeking Behavior (Rickwood, 2005) was used. After data analysis with SPSS-23, results showed that attitude was significant predictor of help seeking behavior. Results indicated that Stigma was significant moderator in relationship between attitudes towards help seeking behavior. Stigma was significant moderator in relationship between attitude towards help seeking and marital satisfaction. Findings revealed that perceived risks and benefits did not significantly moderate the relationship between attitude towards help-seeking and help-seeking behavior, nor the relationship between attitude towards help-seeking and marital satisfaction. In second phase (qualitative), interviews were conducted with five couples (N=10) having relationship issues. Thematic analysis was used, after initial coding themes and sub-themes were generated based on responses which were stigma, psycho-social and economic factors, mental health literacy and positive attitude towards help seeking behavior. The study concluded that couple's help seeking behavior is greatly influenced by stigma, and attitude.

Keywords: Stigma, Attitude, Perceived Risks, Help Seeking Behaviors, Couples, Marital Issues

INTRODUCTION

Marriage has been described as the most fundamental and vital human bond. It provides the fundamental framework for starting a family and raising children (Raymo, 2015). Couples are playing significant role in not only family building but also in healthy community building alternatively nation building. A healthy community and nation needs healthy couples so that the nation have more and more healthy

children both physically and psychologically. Literature revealed that married couple problems lead lack of fondness, lack of fun together, lack of communication, personality conflict, lack of appreciation, loneliness, over commitment, financials problems, lack of privacy, dependence on each other, physical and sexual problems, adjustment problems, addiction and substance abuse, emotion and psychological issues, and over expectation (Duncan, Larson & McAllister, 2014).

Stigma is defined as a practice in which an aspect labels a person as dissimilar and degraded in a certain community setting (Bos, Pryor, Reeder, & Stutterheim, 2013). Attitude towards help seeking defined as the favorable or unfavorable intent to seek psychological help services provided by any professional counselors who are specifically educated and trained to deal and offer guidance in terms of people's problems (Picco, 2016). Fischer

and Turner (1970) supposed that an individual's attitude towards having help motivate him towards seeking professional help, this theory considered as the keystone for studying help-seeking intentions.

Marital satisfaction is understood as an overall positive feeling towards the marital relationship (Bradbury, Beach & Fincham, 2000). According to Vijayanthimala & Kumari (1997), it refers to a partner's contentment with their marriage. According to Rickwood and Thomas (2012), help-seeking is considered an adaptive coping strategy, where individuals seek external support to address mental health issues. Help-seeking is a process of using sources in order to get support, advice, help in reaction to problem, any life experience, acute stress, trauma, mental health issues, or personal and interpersonal issues (Gourash, 1978). Perception about seeking help is based on factors such as stigma, some don't want to being called patient, some got afraid from therapeutic procedure, Some individuals do not seek help due to psychosocial and economic factors that influence help-seeking behavior (Lyu, 2020).

Several studies have demonstrated a connection between stigma and help-seeking behavior. Vogel conducted a study in 2006 to explore the influence of stigma in relationship between attitude and help seeking behavior, the findings showed that a person having higher stigma has negative attitude towards help seeking behavior. There is rich literature available which showed that attitude is predictor of help seeking behavior. According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) attitudes has influence on help seeking behavior. There are many research work which have consistently proved that attitude is one of the important predictor of psychological help seeking behavior (Bayer & Peay, 1997; Vogel

et al., 2005). A different study explored the role of perceived risks and benefits as a mediating variable between attitudes toward help-seeking and help-seeking behavior, examining 821 participants. This finding showed that perceived risks and benefits play role as mediator between attitudes and help seeking behavior (Shaffer, Vogel & Wei, 2006). Kepler (2015) conducted a study to explore the connection between couple therapy, premarital therapy and marital satisfaction, by using cross sectional research design asked three questions as well as self-report measure of marital satisfaction from twenty-seven individuals. The data was investigated by using chi-square analysis. The conclusions were non-significant on all three questions but the results reported a prevalence based on responses that the couples take part in couple therapy were having more marital satisfaction than those who didn't seek help.

Rationale of the study

Help seeking behavior is most significant phenomenon to study in any psychological field, as in other countries there is much work done on this but in Pakistan there is need to study (Hussain, 2019). The previous literature available mainly focused on help seeking behavior among individuals but not much available on couples There should be studies which identify the phenomenon in couples so that people will get to know about this particular issue and have better understanding regarding the factors which are related to facilitate or hinder help seeking behavior among them (Fleming & Cordova, 2018). The current study is imitative towards finding the barriers specifically role of stigma, attitude, and perceived risks and benefits among couples. By doing this research, the researcher will take at least initiative to assess these issues to plan further implications to deal with them. The study will be unique in the way that it will not only assess the help seeking behavior quantitatively but also qualitatively.

Objectives

The objectives of the present study are as follow:

- To investigate the role of attitude and stigma in help seeking behaviour among couples.
- To examine the role of perceived risks & benefits about counselling on help seeking behaviour among couples.
- To examine the moderator role of stigma and perceived risks and benefits in relationship between attitude towards help seeking and help seeking behaviour and then attitude towards help seeking and marital satisfaction among couples.
- To explore the hindering and facilitating factors in help seeking behaviour among couples through qualitative phase.
- To study the effect of demographic variables like gender, age, family income, number of children, duration of marriage, premarital counselling, among sample in relation to stigma, attitude, perceived risks and benefits, and help seeking behaviour among couples.

Hypothesis

The hypotheses of the study are as follow:

- There is positive relationship between stigma and perceived risks, attitude and anticipated benefits, help seeking behaviour and marital satisfaction.
- There is negative relationship between stigma and anticipated benefits, as well as between help-seeking behavior and marital satisfaction, and anticipated risks and help seeking behaviour, and help seeking behaviour and marital satisfaction.
- Attitude is predictor of help seeking behaviour among couples.
- Attitude towards help seeking is predictor of marital satisfaction.
- Stigma and Perceived risks and benefits are moderator in relationship between attitude towards help seeking and help seeking behaviour among couples.
- Stigma and perceived risks and benefits are moderator in relationship between attitude towards seeking help and marital satisfaction among couples.

METHOD

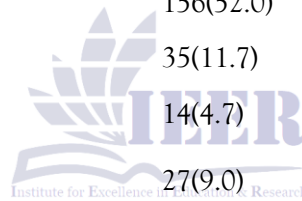
The study was based on explanatory sequential design in the first quantitative phase, data was collected from 150 couples (N=300) with relationship issues by using standardized instrument. Self-Stigma of Seeking Psychological Help Scale (SSOSH) was used to measure attitude towards help seeking, Attitude Towards Seeking Psychological Help- Short Form (ATSPPH-SF) was used to measure perceived risks and benefits. Disclosure Expectation Scale (DES) was used to measure marital satisfaction. Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) was used and to measure help seeking behavior. General Help seeking Questionnaire-Original version (GHSQ) was also used. The participants were also given with demographic sheet including age, gender, family system, marital status, premarital education, and duration of marriage, number of children, family income, and marriage type. In the initial phase of the study the permission letters from the authors of the instruments was taken. Then after data collection, data was analyzed by using SPSS-23. Then after analyzing quantitative data, interviews were conducted with five couples (N=10) having relationship issues. The data was analyzed by using the technique known as thematic analysis in which after initial coding, themes and sub-themes were generated based on responses.

RESULTS

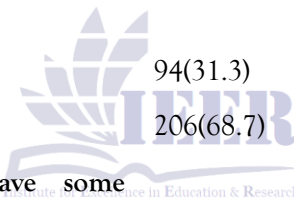
A series of statistical analysis were carried out to test the formulated hypotheses and to fulfill the objectives of the study. At the initial stage, the data was examined to identify outliers and calculate descriptive statistics. The analysis included mean, standard deviation, alpha reliability estimates, t-tests, correlation, regression, and moderation. The analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-23). The below are the results of the study.

Table 1
 Frequencies and Percentage of Demographic Variables of the Participants (N=300)

Variables	f(%)
Age (in years)	
18-30	177(59.0)
31-40	82(27.3)
41-50	25(8.3)
51-69	06(2.0)
Gender	
Male	150(50.0)
Females	150(50.0)
Education	
FA/FSc	12(4.0)
BA/BSc	56(18.7)
MSc/BS	156(52.0)
MPhil/MS/Diploma	35(11.7)
PhD	14(4.7)
MBBS/Doctors	27(9.0)
Occupation	
Employed	215(71.7)
Unemployed	85(28.3)
Family income	
10,000-50,000	123(41.0)
60,000-100000	111(37.0)
110000-200000	20(6.7)
210000-above	146(15.3)
Religion	
Islam	292(97.3)
others	08(2.7)
Family system	
Joint	109(36.3)



Nuclear	191(63.7)
Duration of marriage	
1-10	248(82.6)
11-20	32(10.6)
21-30	18(6.0)
31-above	02(0.6)
Premarital counseling	
Yes	63(21.0)
No	237(79.0)
Number of children	
0	109(36.3)
1-3	175(58.3)
4-7	16(5.3)
Marriage type	
Love	94(31.3)
Arrange	206(68.7)
In your married life if you have some disagreement or relationship issues with your partner, did you seek any kind of psychological help during that phase?	
Yes	56(18.7)
No	244(81.3)
When will you prefer to seek help?	
Understanding issues	80(26.7)
Physical intimacy issues	18(6.0)
Conflicts	56(19.7)
Children related issues	33(11.0)
Family issues	90(30.0)
Financial issues	20(6.7)
None of these	0(0)



Which help did you prefer most?

Psychiatrists	3(1.0)
Psychologists	35(11.7)
Spiritual healer	38(12.7)
Medical doctor	18(6.0)
Friends	52(17.4)
Family	143(47.3)
Online services	10(3.3)

What factors hinder you in help seeking behavior?

Social	55(18.3)
Financial	21(7.0)
Familial	32(10.7)
Partner disagree	33(11.0)
Personal	104(34.7)
Not available resources	10(3.3)
Lack of faith on therapy	45(15.0)

Table 1 showed the frequencies and percentages of sample distribution across the demographic characteristics.

Table 2

Cronbach alpha and descriptive statistics on Measures of the study (N=300)

Scales	k	α	M	SD	Range		Skewness	Kurtosis
					Actual	potential		
SSOSH	10	.60	26.2	5.19	10-45	10-50	.019	.685
ATSPH	10	.57	16.3	4.61	0-34	10-40	-0.47	1.126
DES	8	.76	24.7	6.19	8-40	8-40	-.252	.509
GHSQ	20	.87	81.0	15.90	20-127	20-140	-.089	1.183
RDAS	14	.66	38.9	9.26	6-64	14-70	-.160	.805

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha, k= No of items, M=Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, SSOSH= Self Stigma of Psychological Help Seeking, ATSPH= Attitude Towards Seeking Psychological Help, DES = Disclosure Expectation Scale, GHSQ= General Help Seeking Questionnaire, RDAS= Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

Table 2 presents the Cronbach's alpha along with descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, range, kurtosis, and skewness values. Cronbach values shows the good reliability of GHSQ and DES, and satisfactory reliability for

SSOSH, ATSPH, and RDAS. The scale values suggest that the scores of the study instrument fall within a normal distribution, making it suitable for further analysis.

Table 3

Correlation between Stigma, Attitude, Anticipated risks, Anticipated benefits, Help Seeking Behavior and Marital Satisfaction (N=300)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
SSOSH	-	-.41**	.16**	-.13**	-.11	-.26**
ATSPH		-	-.17**	.31**	.13*	.15**
AR			-	.23**	-.001	.14*
AB				-	.21**	.14*
GHSQ					-	-.07
RDAS						-

Note: SSOSH= Self Stigma of Psychological Help Seeking, ATSPH= Attitude Towards Seeking Psychological Help, AR= Anticipated Risks, AB= Anticipated Benefits, GHSQ= General Help Seeking Questionnaire, RDAS= Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale. ** The correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$, while * indicates that the correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$.

Table 3 indicating the significant negative relationship between stigma and attitude towards help seeking, significant positive relationship with anticipated risks, significant negative relationship with anticipated benefits, and significant negative relationship with marital satisfaction ($p < .01$), there is non-significant relationship negative relationship between stigma and help seeking behavior. A significant negative relationship was found between attitude toward help-seeking and anticipated risks, while a significant positive relationship was observed with anticipated

benefits, help-seeking behavior, and marital satisfaction. There is significant positive relationship between anticipated risks and anticipated benefits, non-significant negative relationship with help seeking behavior, and significant positive relationship with marital satisfaction. The table also showing significant positive relationship between anticipated benefits and help seeking behavior, and significant positive relationship with marital satisfaction. Then there is non-significant negative relationship between help seeking behavior and marital satisfaction.

Table 4

Regression coefficients of Attitude towards Help seeking and Help Seeking Behavior (N=300)

Variable	B	B	SE
Constant	73.12***		3.37
ATSPH and GHSQ	.47*	.13	.19
R ²	.018		

Note. B= Unstandardized regression coefficients; SE= Standard Error, * $p < 0.05$

Table 4 depicting the regression analysis, that attitude is significant predictor of help seeking behavior. The β coefficient for the interaction term (attitude towards seeking help \times help-seeking behavior) is significant. The positive β value for

the interaction effect suggests that the relationship is predicted to follow a positive direction. The table results show that these findings align with the study's hypothesis, confirming that attitude is a significant predictor of help-seeking behavior.

Table 5

Regression coefficients of Attitude towards Help seeking and Marital Satisfaction (N=300)

Variable	B	β	SE
Constant	33.97***		1.95
ATSPH and RDAS	.31**	.15	.12
R ²	.023		

Note. B= Unstandardized regression coefficients; SE= Standard Error, **p< 0.01

Table 5 depicting the regression analysis, that attitude towards help seeking is significant predictor of marital satisfaction. The β value for the interaction term (attitude towards seeking help X marital satisfaction) is significant. The β value for the interaction effect is positive indicating that the relationship revealed prediction in positive direction. The R² value of indicated 23% variance

in the marital satisfaction by attitude towards help seeking behavior. The result of the table indicated that results are consistent with hypothesis of the study that attitude towards help seeking is significant predictor of marital satisfaction among couples.

Indirect effect of stigma on help seeking behavior through attitude towards help seeking is analyzed by regression analysis (moderation).

Table 6

Regression Analysis Examining the Interaction Effect of Attitude towards Help Seeking and Stigma on Help Seeking Behavior (N=300)

Variables	Help Seeking Behavior		
	B	SE	95 % CI
Constant	115.51***	16.22	[83.43,147.45]
Attitude towards Help Seeking	-1.71*	.88	[-3.45,.033]
Stigma	-1.47***	.55	[-2.57,-.38]
Attitude towards Help Seeking x Stigma	.07***	.013	[.01,.13]
Low Stigma	-.09	.29	[-.67,.47]
Moderate Stigma	.28	.21	[-.14,.72]
High Stigma	.66***	.25	[.17,1.17]
R ²	.04		
F	4.20***		

The table above presents the results of the moderation analysis. The B value for the interaction term (Attitude towards help-seeking X Stigma) is significant, indicating that the moderator plays a strong role in the relationship between attitude and help-seeking behavior among couples. The interaction effect of attitude

towards help-seeking and stigma accounted for 4% of the variance in help-seeking behavior. These findings align with the conceptual model of the study, which positions attitude as the predictor, help-seeking behavior as the outcome, and stigma as the moderator.

Table 7

Regression Analysis Examining the Interaction Effect of Attitude towards Help Seeking and Perceived risks and benefits on Help Seeking Behavior (N=300)

Variables	Help Seeking Behavior		
	B	SE	95 % CI
Constant	51.22***	14.60	[18.94,83.50]
Attitude towards Help Seeking	1.41	1.01	[-.53,3.41]
Disclosure Expectation Scale	.93	.66	[-.38,2.24]
Attitude towards Help Seeking x Disclosure Expectation Scale	-.04	.04	[-.12,.04]
R2	.03		
F	3.45**		

The table above shows the results of the moderation analysis. The B value for the interaction term (attitude towards help-seeking × disclosure expectation scale) is not significant. These results are inconsistent with the conceptual

model of the study, which considered attitude as the predictor, help-seeking behavior as the outcome variable, and perceived risks and benefits as the moderator.

Table 8

Regression Analysis Examining the Interaction Effect of Attitude towards Help Seeking and Stigma on Marital Satisfaction (N=300)

Variables	Marital Satisfaction		
	B	SE	95 % CI
Constant	65.25***	9.18	[47.17,83.32]
Attitude towards Help Seeking	-.89	.50	[-1.83,.09]
Sigma	-1.03***	.36	[-1.66,-.41]
Attitude towards help seeking x Stigma	.03**	.01	[.00,.07]
Low Stigma	.16***	.21	[-.44,.21]
Moderate Stigma	.12***	.26	[-.18,.31]
High Stigma	.14	.31	[-.03,.53]
R2	.08		

F

4.24**

Note. **p<.01, ***p<.001

The above table showed the results of moderation analysis. The B value for the interaction term (Attitude towards help seeking X Stigma) is significant. This indicated that the moderator has a strong influence in a relationship between attitude towards help seeking and marital

satisfaction among couples. The results presented in the table are consistent with the conceptual model of this study, where attitude is used as a predictor, marital satisfaction as the outcome variable, and stigma as the moderator.

Table 9

Regression Analysis Examining the Interaction Effect of Attitude towards Help Seeking and Perceived risks and benefits on Marital Satisfaction (N=300)

Variables	Marital Satisfaction		
	B	SE	95 % CI
Constant	25.08**	9.41	[6.55,43.60]
Attitude towards help seeking	.48	.58	[-.66,1.62]
Disclosure Expectation Scale	.37	.38	[-.37,1.13]
Attitude towards help seeking x DES	-.008	.02	[-.05,.03]
R2	.05		
F	5.32***		

The above table showed the results of moderation analysis. The B value for the interaction term (attitude towards help-seeking × disclosure expectation scale) is not significant. Therefore, the results presented in the table are inconsistent with the conceptual model of this study, which uses attitude as a predictor, marital satisfaction as the outcome variable, and perceived risks and benefits as the moderator.

were generated based on the responses, after initial coding themes were generated and then sub-themes were find out which were categorized into two categories as hindering factors and facilitating factors in help seeking behavior based on couple's responses.

Phase 2: Qualitative analysis

It was explanatory sequential mix-method research, so in the first stage quantitative phase was done in which data was collected from 150 couples (N=300) by using developed instruments and after collecting it, data was analyzed by using SPSS-23. Then in second phase qualitative data was collected by interviewing 5 couples (N=10) by using interview guideline developed based on quantitative findings to expand the first phase findings. Interviews was conducted from Kulsum International Hospital as there came couple for relationship issues. After collecting data, thematic analyses were done in which first of all initial codes

DISCUSSION

The current study aims to determine couple's attitude towards help seeking, help seeking behavior, stigma, perceived risks and benefits and marital satisfaction among couples. The alpha reliability of Attitude Towards Seeking Professional help was ($\alpha = .57$) a study conducted in Pakistan, reported .61 reliabilities for the same scale (Sultan, 2012). The alpha reliability for Self-Stigma of Seeking Psychological Help ($\alpha = .60$), for Disclosure Expectation Scale, ($\alpha = .76$), for General Help Seeking Behavior Questionnaire ($\alpha = .87$) and for Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale, ($\alpha = .66$).

The first objective of the study was to explore the relationship between attitude, stigma, perceived risks and benefits, help seeking behavior and marital adjustment, which was accepted. The

results showed positive and negative relationships between study variables. Results indicating the significant negative relationship between stigma and attitude towards help seeking, significant positive relationship with anticipated risks, significant negative relationship with anticipated benefits, and significant negative relationship with marital satisfaction ($p < .01$), there is non-significant relationship negative relationship between stigma and help seeking behavior. Then there is significant negative relationship between attitude towards help seeking and anticipated risks, significant positive relationship with anticipated benefits and help seeking behavior, and marital satisfaction. There is significant positive relationship between anticipated risks and anticipated benefits, non-significant negative relationship with help seeking behavior, and significant positive relationship with marital satisfaction. The table also showing significant positive relationship between anticipated benefits and help seeking behavior, and significant positive relationship with marital satisfaction. Then there is non-significant negative relationship between help seeking behavior and marital satisfaction (Table 3).

The second hypothesis of the study was that attitude towards help seeking will be predictor of help seeking behavior among couples, which was accepted showed in the table section of the study. The results showed that positive or negative attitude predict help seeking behavior significantly. The positive attitude will lead to strong help seeking behavior and negative attitude leads to weak help seeking behavior among couples. The findings were also supported by previous literature as in 2019 an indigoes research was done by Hubbard and Harris to discover the factors which facilitate and hinder help seeking behavior among couples, by reviewing literature and make critical understanding of literature, the finding showed that attitude is one of the most significant factor in help seeking behavior.

The third hypothesis of the study was attitude towards help seeking will be predictor of marital satisfaction which was accepted. The results showed that positive attitude towards help seeking will leads towards high marital satisfaction and

negative attitude towards help seeking will lead to low marital satisfaction. Hubbard and Harris (2019) reported that there are many researches that showed that husband and wife both are willing to get help if they suffering from low level of relationship contentment. There is also help seeking behavior high if one of them having depressive experience, (Doss, 2009), a latest Danish study reported same findings in females (Trillingsgaard, 2018).

The fourth hypothesis of the study was that stigma and attitude towards help seeking will be predictor of help seeking behavior among couples that was accepted. The results indicated that stigma is significant moderator in relationship between attitude. The findings were also supported by available literature. Another study conducted by Hubbard and Anderson by in 2020 to explore the help seeking behavior among couples by using health belief model. The findings of the study showed that stigma was associated with negative attitude towards formal help seeking behavior among couples.

The fifth hypothesis of the study was stigma and perceived risks and benefits will be moderator in relationship between attitude towards help seeking and marital satisfaction. The results showed that stigma is significant moderator between attitude towards help seeking and marital satisfaction which was accepted. The hypothesis is also supported by the previous literature. The study was conducted only among educated people who were having the ability to read English language, because the available scales were developed by western publication and in English language and it takes huge resources to translate five scales in Urdu language. The study recommends the need to establish mental health strategies based on community to enhance positive attitude towards seeking help, and help seeking behavior among public. Moreover, the findings of the study may assist practitioners working in the areas of mental health to get better understanding about public beliefs and perception towards mental health issues and to establish local strategies to find the gaps in daily clinical practices.

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