Understanding Help-Seeking Intentions Amongst Canadian Adolescents
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BACKGROUND
Youth help-seeking behaviour has been associated with a reduction in long term effects of bullying, dating violence and substance misuse, like low academic achievement and life satisfaction (Leach & Rickwood, 2005; Zartaloudi & Madianos, 2010; Ballon, Kirst & Smith, 2004; Bolden & Fallon, 1995; Waddel et al., 2005). Unfortunately, many youth struggle in accessing help resources when they are required (Zartaloudi & Madianos, 2010). Creating cost-effective strategies to predict help-seeking intentions can assist educators in understanding the need and/or impact of help-seeking promotion initiatives in their classrooms.

THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR
The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1991; see Figure 1) postulates that attitudes towards a behaviour, society’s beliefs about a behaviour and perceived ability to control a behaviour can be used to predict behavioural intentions. In help-seeking, this can mean that norms, like gendered stereotypes and factors that influence our control over our behaviour, like finances, can be used to predict intentions to seek help.

Hypothesis: perceived behavioural control, attitudes and beliefs regarding help-seeking behavior would predict help-seeking intentions of youth in circumstances as they relate to social, emotional or mental health issues.

METHOD
School districts across Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario participated in a help-seeking questionnaire as part of a larger study on the evaluation of a healthy relationships program. Students had the option of accessing the survey online or in paper format.

PARTICIPANTS
- N = 142 students, age: 11 - 17 (M =13.24, SD = 1.26).
- Ethnic background: Caucasian (71.1%), First Nations, Inuit or Metis (9.9%); the remainder identified as Asian (2.8%), African (2.1%), Arab (1.4%), or other (7.0%).
- Gender: 44.4% identified as male (N = 63), 47.2% identified as female (N = 67), and 8.4% did not disclose their gender or reported as "other" (N = 12).

MEASURES AND DESIGN

Independent variable: Behavioural control, attitudes and beliefs (13 items).
- The Barriers to Adolescents Seeking Help Questionnaire (BASH; Kuhl, Jarkon-Horlick & Morrisey, 1997; modified) was used to evaluate two components of the TPB: attitudes and subjective norms towards help-seeking. Example: “Even if I wanted to, I wouldn’t have time to seek professional help for my mental health” and “I can work out my own problems” (Kuhl et al., 1997).
- Items intended to measure perceived behavioural control were developed by the researchers. Example: “I am unlikely to visit a mental health professional because of how much money it costs”.

Dependent variable:
- The General Help Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ; Wilson, Deane, Ciarrochi & Rickwood, 2005; modified) was utilized to measure reflections of participants’ intentions to seek help from formal or informal sources when experiencing personal, emotional or social problems. 7 options were listed: parent/guardian, school support, community support, mental health professional, medical professional, other, or no intention to seek help, in a yes/no format. Responses were grouped and dichotomized: a “yes” response to any question that listed a source of help was coded as 1, while no intention to seek help was coded as 0.

RESULTS

Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA) were conducted to investigate the structure of a 12-item help-seeking measure (one item was dropped due to cross loading) consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour framework. A three-factor solution emerged and explained 53% of the observed variance. The first component contained items consistent with lack of behavioural control (Cronbach’s α = .78). The second component reflected attitudes and beliefs regarding help-seeking behavior (Cronbach’s α = .60). The third factor had two items load and due to low reliability (Cronbach’s α = .39), it was removed from further analyses.

Binary logistic regression analyses were conducted to investigate if the factors that emerged from the EFA could predict self-reported intentions to seek help (yes vs. no). See Table 1 for results of logistic regression analyses.

TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Wald Chi-Square</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>.277</td>
<td>.599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (female)</td>
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<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural Control</td>
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<td>.672</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes &amp; Beliefs</td>
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<td>9.934</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

- As part of the model, gender predicts intentions to seek help whereby girls are more likely than boys to seek help. This may be due in part to gendered stereotypes regarding help-seeking behaviour (Addis & Mahalik, 2003).
- After adjustment for age, gender and lack of behavioural control, societal norms congruent with help-seeking and positive attitudes towards help-seeking behaviour predicted intentions to seek help.
- As part of the model, lack of behavioural control (e.g., lack of finances) is not associated with intentions to seek help in this sample.
- Therefore, attitudes and beliefs appear as a stronger predictor of intentions to seek help compared to lack of behavioural control.

IMPLICATIONS

- Societal norms and attitudes towards help-seeking behaviour can be used to predict adolescent intentions to seek help.
- The results suggest that help-seeking promotion initiatives should target the societal norms and beliefs that youth have regarding help-seeking behaviour, such as stigmaization and gender role socialization.

REFERENCES

Addis, M. E., & Rickwood, D. J. (2010). The Impact of School Bullying on Adolescents’ Psychosocial Resources and Help-Seeking (2), 77–78.